

A LITTLE ENEMY.



THIS world is so large, and affords such ample space for all created things, that one always feels disposed to look with indignation on those who persecute animal life in any of its forms. Every creature is so beautiful in its way, and displays such wondrous instinct, that its destruction, setting aside

the cruelty, seems like a crime. Make this a rule, however, and in come the exceptions. The world is wide enough for animated nature, but all the same we find ourselves compelled to kill and slay, as the legal documents term it, and though one would not shed blood, it becomes a necessity—when we are attacked.

That is the point. There are so many creatures on this earth which will not be content with their own share of this world's surface, but continually invade that of their superiors, and that too in spite of the risks they run. The consequence is that we are forced to open a campaign against them, either to slay or drive them back.

Now perhaps the greatest nuisance in the country, for it is comparatively little seen in the greater towns, is that sleek, clean, clever, and smart-looking animal which is called at the head of this paper "A Little Enemy"—that is, the rat. Some people will be doubtless disposed to shudder and call it horrible, ugly, and the like; but, all the same, if examined without prejudice, a rat is a well-formed and far from ill-

looking animal, while though at times he may be an unclean feeder, in his personal ap-



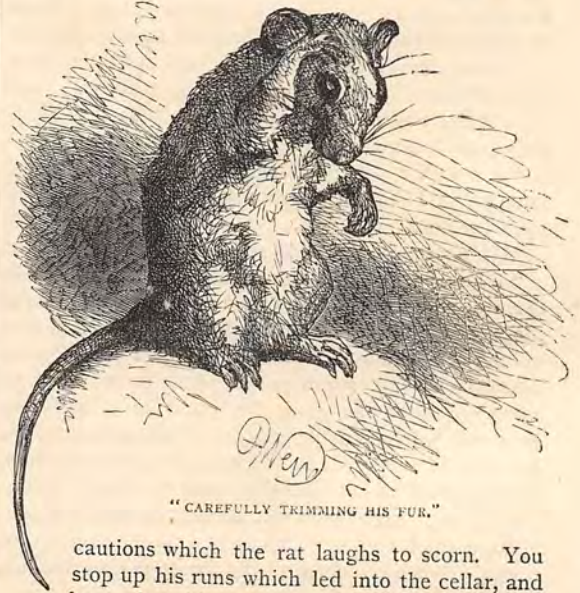
"HE MAKES HIS WAY IN BY THE EAVES."

pearance he is the pink of neatness, and I have seen a rat sit up like a cat and carefully trim his fur till

and clean and quite satisfactory to his feelings. In the warm weather rats are so little seen that the occupant of a country house, while finding occasional

old runs and marks of teeth, probably congratulates himself on their departure; but "bide a wee." Let the leaves fall, the heavy rains set in, and the cold blast sweep over the hills, and the rats that have been out in the fields and hedgerows, fattening on corn and fruit, nuts, and pleasant succulent roots, come back to the houses for shelter—and get it.

You say that you will not have him, and take pre-



"CAREFULLY TRIMMING HIS FUR."

cautions which the rat laughs to scorn. You stop up his runs which led into the cellar, and he makes his way up the side of the house and in by the eaves. You secure them, and he comes up the drain. You place gratings to your drains, and he will come in at the open door or window. Come he will somehow or another, and before long you are aware of his presence as he hunts his companions through the narrow passages behind the wainscot, races between the joists in the ceiling, gnaws away at the boards, and sets himself to work mischief incalculable. In one night a strong rat will gnaw off chips and wood-dust enough to fill a half-peck measure, and he is so indefatigable that sooner or later he makes his way through into the house, though perhaps for months all he asks of the place is its shelter, and he makes his runs with here and there snug nests of soft hay, wood, and paper for bachelor bed-rooms, or the nurseries of the married lady rats with their progenies already arrived or to come. These nests, or sleeping-places, are very curious and remarkably snug. Some that have been turned out of rat-holes will consist of several handfuls of nice dry material, and these dormitories are of course used by day, for it is by night that the business of the rat begins.

As a rule, beyond gnawing a hole or two, or making his way into the cellar, the rat leaves the contents of the house alone. It is only when provisions fail outside that he makes an onslaught on to the flour in sack or barrel, takes toll of the lard, tries the bacon, and

bodily carries off anything portable—for instance, such things as potatoes, about a couple of dozen of which have been known to be carried off from the larder in one night, and found two days afterwards tucked out of sight behind the woodwork of the scullery pump, evidently being intended as a store for the winter. It is in the outbuildings that the rat forages, however, for his sustenance. The corn-bin in the stable is a glo-



"THE RATS HAVE BEGUN ON THE NEW-LAID EGGS."

rious institution for him, and a sack of maize a treasure that he will soon spill through the great hole he makes in the strong sacking. Woe to the

half-bushel of walnuts, the peck or so of filberts, and that basket of cob-nuts saved for Christmas, and placed for safety in the upper loft!

The gnawing of wooden partition, door, or shutter has been touched upon; now follow further acts of mischief. Let him but gain a footing in the greenhouse, and he will diligently dig up and taste your hyacinth, amaryllis, narcissus, and crocus bulbs. If he likes the flavour, away they go to his hole; if he does not approve of them, they are left—dug up—spoiled. Apples in the store-loft are great favourites, but one evil of the rat is that he is so dainty. He does not take an apple and finish it, but neatly scoops out a hole in the side of one with his wedge-shaped, well-enamelled teeth, and then goes to another and another till perhaps a dozen are spoiled.

Being a country resident, you very probably have what are technically termed pits and frames, in which you tried to strike some cuttings of the succulent geranium, the pendent fuchsia, and various choice flowers, for the summer to come. Night falls. Enter rat. One night suffices for him to tear up, gnaw, and destroy a hundred well-rooted little plants, and as if in derision of the worker who prepared the warm bed of dead leaves upon which the cuttings were placed, he burrows into them, makes himself a snugger, and goes to sleep—but catch him if you can! Another night, and he has a turn at the sets of new potatoes—

choice Ashleaf—planted for forcing an early supply. Some he digs up and carries off, some he gnaws, and some he spoils by cutting off the growing shoots. What he leaves are not worth much; and so the game goes on till two of the pigeons are gnawed to death, and then, in despair, the pursuit is fiercely commenced, and the owner vows this day a rat must die.

But how? What is to be his fate? We have to deal with a little beast that is cunning and suspicious to a degree, though at the same time terribly stupid, and when you know his weak points his capture is not so hard. But all this you have to learn. Say, however, that the pursuit of the rat is determined upon, and the first idea is, buy a trap. Yes, but what sort? Oh, something humane, of course; so a wire trap is bought, with nice little holes for the rat to go in, to feast upon the bait placed ready—holes so constructed that he can enter, but not return. Bait it and set it. Bait and set a dozen of them, and examine them in the morning. Not a rat will go in.

Next the box-traps, made on the mouse-trap principle, half cage, half swing-door, are tried; but, no: thanks! rats don't like box-traps, and smiling a radiant smile they pass them by, and more pigeons are brutally murdered; and, would you believe it? the rats have certainly begun upon the new-laid eggs in the hen-house; so what is to be the fate of the spring chicks?

Those steel-tooth jaw-traps are hideous things; but there is no mercy now for the little enemy who has become a murderer, and if the steel-trap will guillotine him, that's to be his fate. So these are bought and set here, there, and everywhere, nice and handy to the runs of the rats, and morning after morning they are examined. But the result is that you ask yourself how you could be so foolish as to imagine that a rat would go and put his foot in a trap that should spring up and destroy his busy life. No, the little

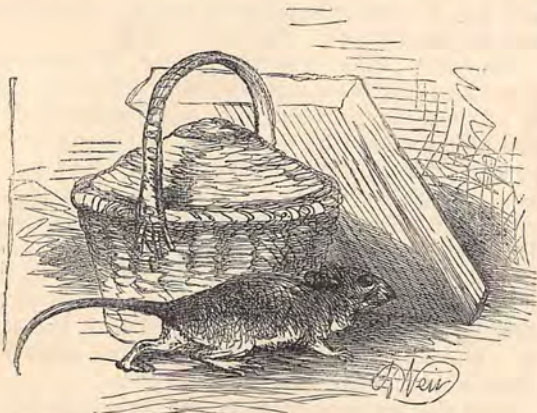


"NOT A RAT WILL GO IN."

enemy knows better; and at last, in a weak moment of despair, poison is bought—the deadly arsenic or fatal strychnine—and, being art-

fully mixed with meal and sugar, placed ready for the rats, with water close at hand for them to drink and die, so that they shall not expire and prove

noise in their holes. From that moment you have no peace. You fidget about your hands, and wonder whether any of the poison has been scattered on your clothes. You feel sure that some one may meddle



"HIS INQUISITIVE NATURE WILL LEAD HIM TO CREEP THROUGH."

with the deadly dose, portions of which you have wrapped up in paper, and so you go on, fearful lest the children should go near early next morning, or the cat or dog eat a poisoned rat; a hundred similar fancies haunt you, till you vow that you will destroy what poison is left, and never use it more.

Next morning you hurry away early to the out-buildings, to find most likely that the poisoned meal has been untouched; the rat is evidently of opinion that a mineral poison may disagree with him, and the vegetable one prove unpleasantly strong. Maybe, however, the poison has been touched, and a little screwed-up packet or two carried away before the rat tasted and found it not to his liking. And now where are those deadly packets gone? Who can say? Suffice it that their disappearance has made you terribly uncomfortable. Worse still, you want some apples for the house, and going to the apple-loft, find several with slight fresh gnawings through the skin. So slight are the gnawings that they can easily be cut out, you conclude, and placing them in the basket, are on your way back, when like lightning the thought flashes through your brain—suppose those apples have been gnawed by teeth that tasted strychnine?

What, then, is to be done? How is the cunning little creature to be caught?

The answer is simple: a man's brain is bigger than a rat's; set your cunning against his, and you will win. Here is one plan adopted by a gentleman I know, who had tried the usual traps in vain. In a store-room was a barrel of maize-flour, of which the rats were enormously fond, and their habit was to climb up to a shelf, run along it, leap down on the flour, and feast.

Good. My friend took another barrel, and of the head he made the trap. He took it out, and treating it as a globe, he made a wire north and south pole, which, when placed in corresponding holes in the

cask, allowed the lid to spin round easily on its pivots, and return directly to its natural horizontal position. When ready this cask was placed in the stead of the flour-cask, its head fixed firmly, and covered thickly with the sweet Indian-meal. The rats came, leaped down as usual, feasted, and went away. This was kept up for a couple of nights, fresh flour being placed on the head, and duly eaten. Then came the Nemesis. The next night that barrel was half filled with water, the head glued and thickly sprinkled with flour, and then left loose, swinging so easily that on the first rat leaping down there was a slip and a scramble, followed by a hollow splash, but the lid resumed its position, covering the drowning enemy, and placing itself ready to entrap the next.

For months that trick succeeded well, four and five rats being taken of a night, and the place was at last well cleared.

Good traps of the ordinary kind are of course useful, but they must be set with brains, as the painter's colours were mixed. Rats will not directly walk into them if placed ready; but as a rule, if you as it were say mentally to those noxious, mischievous vermin, "I have a trap, and you shall not get caught," they will probably go and get in. Set the trap however cunningly, and with whatever concealment you please, and they will not be caught; but hide that trap

somewhere at the back of a shelf, half covered with a board; place



"A BARREL OF MAIZE-FLOUR, OF WHICH THE RATS WERE ENORMOUSLY FOND."

it by the wainscot of a room, and lay a slate slanting over it; make a loop of the mat and place it beneath; a tube of a roll of oil-cloth—anything, in short, that suggests a narrow hiding-place, through which a rat can run, and the chances are that his secretive and inquisitive nature will lead him to creep through them; and if there be a trap set, he will be caught. No better plan could be adopted than to place

food of some kind shut up closely in a basket or hamper near the rat-runs, and let them work their way in. The next night repair the hamper to keep the rat out, but this time place the trap within. Many hours will not elapse before your wicker repairs shall have been destroyed, and the rat have received his reward.

Of one thing the reader may rest assured, and that is—rats are to be caught, but it requires some subtlety. The above are suggestions that might be, and can be, largely supplemented by those who take the trouble to think, and have the misfortune to be troubled by the little enemy.

GEO. MANVILLE FENN.



SEEDS, AND HOW TO GROW THEM.

BEFORE long, in the language of the old village folk, "we shall be able to get about a bit," now that the worst of the winter months are over. Ever since the end of November that poor dreary half-acre in front of the house which we call the flower-garden has looked so desolate; all this time, indeed, it has been wholly deserted except by the devotees of horticulture; and then a good many of us cannot afford to have a gardener all the year round, and say, with some reason, "What is the good of paying a man 3s. 6d. a day for gardening when, as far as we can see around us, the whole earth seems covered with six inches of frozen snow?"

But "the winter is past, the rain is over and gone," and in

this hopeful springtide we are anxious to be puddling about again in the dear old garden; so we will take a walk round, and see what there is to be done. There are our old friends the crocuses, whom nothing seems to daunt; and perhaps it was the sight of them on this early spring morning that quickened the idea within us to get out to work; and we remark by the way, with annoyance, how terribly the birds have been feeding on their petals. The next thing that strikes us is that there is plenty of space on the hard, battened-down mould between these crocuses and snowdrops and the green tops of the old perennials that are just beginning to make their welcome appearance above the ground. Then we say seed-time is coming on apace, and are determined to get in plenty of seeds this year, and thus by a little painstaking to have a gay summer display. Perhaps, our greenhouse or pit being by no means extensive, we are not very strong in bedding-out geraniums; and though we know that some seeds have to be raised in heat, there are others that can soon be safely sown in the open.

Just now we spoke of the hardened soil; this it is that must first be prepared, and of this, therefore, we must first speak. We are wishing, then, to ameliorate our soil. A clay soil is certainly a difficulty, but one that

nevertheless, with a little painstaking perseverance, can at all events partially be met. Such soil should have been before winter trenched or well turned over, in order to expose it as much as possible to the action of the frost; and then after the frosts have set in, the large lumps of soil should again be forked; and thus, after the dry spring winds have come, the upper surface will have got into a more *easily crumbled* state, and this is what we mean when we speak of the necessity of having a good "friable" soil. If this operation be persevered in year by year, the soil will undeniably be improved. Where the soil is a heavy one, avoid too, as much as possible, that perpetual *treading* upon it which is so often unnecessarily indulged in, for this tends again to consolidate the soil, which is the very thing you want to avoid; and seed sown in heavy and imperfectly prepared land is positively smothered up by great lumps of earth, through which the air has no power to penetrate, and thus your labour is lost, for the seed fails. For general gardening purposes the best soil is where neither clay nor sand *predominates*, but where there is a good natural mixture of the two—in other words, a deep free loam, where the earth is, when turned up, *fairly* loose, powdery, and of different colours. Then again, should the soil be too sandy, of course our object is to consolidate it more; and for this purpose, if they can be obtained, various kinds of marl or clay should be scattered lightly on the surface of the soil, and in dry weather it should be afterwards forked in. A peat soil, like a clay soil, requires good drainage. For the improvement of a clay soil after it has been turned in the manner we have already described, it is well to add such matter as very finely sifted coal or small charcoal; the charred remains of your bonfire, and sand itself, such as roadside or even sea-sand, are all to the purpose. Here, again, our object, by the introduction of these materials, is to *prevent the re-consolidation* of our broken-up clay lumps. Thus much, then, for this subject of the soil; but it will be apparent that its consideration was an important necessity before speaking of seed-sowing itself.

Seeds, as they of course vary in their nature, size, and properties, require to be put in at different depths. As a general rule, we may say that they ought to be covered over with that depth of soil equal to, or a little in excess of, their own thickness.

