



I FLUNG myself on the heath outside the house just now, with my friend the Editor. He edits a London literary journal, and disbelieves in everything.

He is critical and sceptical. When he inherits glory (as he surely must do in time, for his is the noblest and purest and best of souls at bottom, in spite of its gruffness), I believe he will gaze about him at the golden floor and the walls of chrysope, and murmur to himself, "Humph! Not all it's cracked up to be!" Yet he is as tender as a woman, and as simple as a child; though he has found out the fact that the world is hollow, and that the human doll is stuffed with sawdust.

We lay beside a clump of tall flaming rose-bay—fire-weed as they call it over yonder in America. There, in the great woodlands on whose lap I was nursed, a wandering child of the primæval forest, you may see whole vast sheets of that flamboyant willow-herb covering the ground for miles on bare glades in the pinewood. Most visitors fancy it gets its common American name from its blaze of colour; and, indeed, it often spreads like a sea of flame over acres and acres of hillside together. But the prosaic backwoodsman gave it its beautiful title for a more practical reason: because it grows apace wherever a forest fire has killed out

and laid waste the native vegetation. Like most of the willow-herbs, it has a floating seed winged with cottony threads, which waft it through the air on pinions of gossamer; and thus it alights on the newly burnt soil, and springs up again after the first cool shower. Within twelve months it has almost obliterated the signs of devastation on the ground under foot; only the great charred stems and gaunt blackened branches rise above its smiling mass of green leaves and bright blossoms to tell anew the half-forgotten tale of ruin and disaster.

Here in England the rose-bay is a less frequent denizen, for it loves the wilds, and feels most at home in deep rich meadow bottoms unoccupied by tillage. Now, in Britain these conditions do not often occur since the Norman conquest; still, I have seen vast sheets of its tall pink pyramids of bloom at John Evelyn's Wootton; while even up here on our heathery uplands it fights hard for life among the gorse and bracken. Its beautiful spikes of irregular flowers, wide open below and tapering at the top into tiny knobs of bud, are among the loveliest elements in the natural flora of my poor three acres.

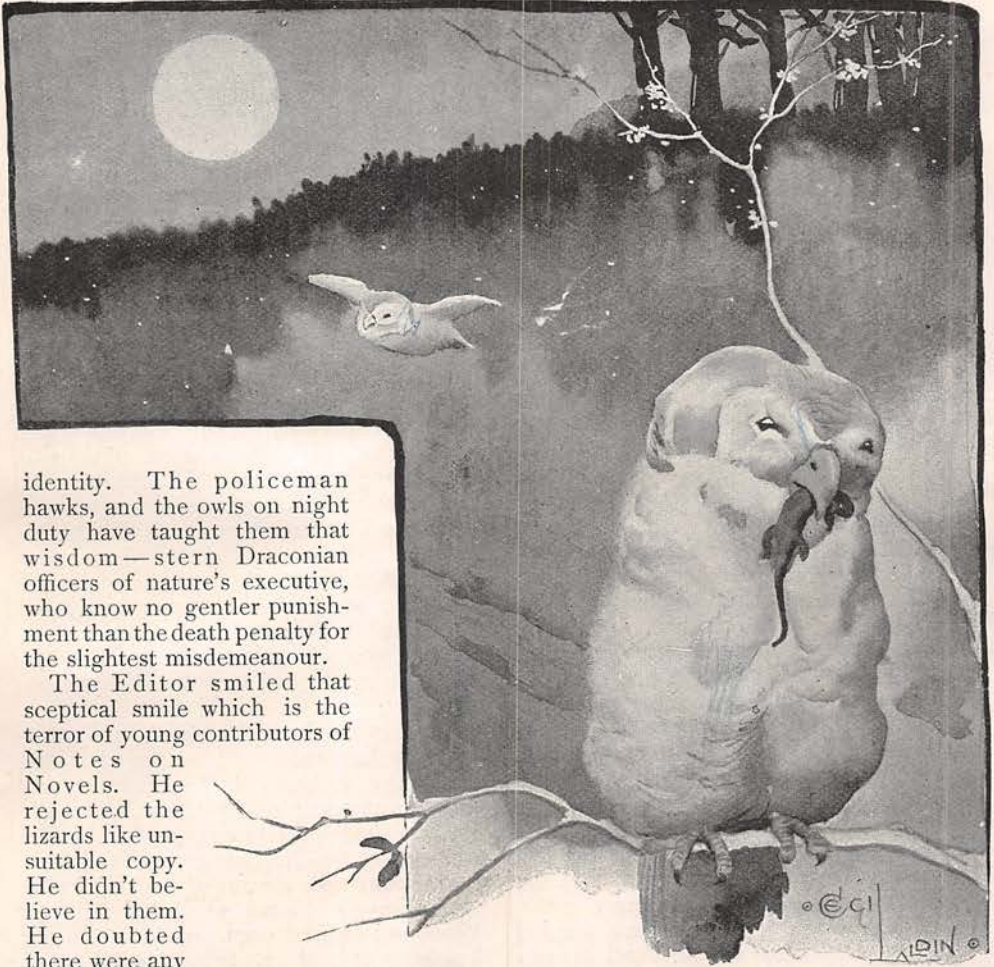
We were lying beside them, then, out of the eye of the sun, under the shadow of one bare and weather-beaten pine-tree, when talk fell by chance on the small brown lizards that skulk among the sandy soil of our hilltop. I said, and I believe, that the lizard population of the British Isles must outnumber the human by many,



many millions. For every sandy heath is just a London of lizards. They pullulate in the ling like slum-children in Whitechapel. They were about us, I remarked, as thick as Hyde Park demonstrators; only, instead of demonstrating, they prefer to lie low and conceal their

catch a lizard and show you." The Editor's face was a study to behold. Phil May would have paid him ten guineas for the copyright. "As you like," he answered, grimly. "Produce your lizards."

Fortune favours the brave. But I confess I trembled. Never before had I bragged;



identity. The policeman hawks, and the owls on night duty have taught them that wisdom—stern Draconian officers of nature's executive, who know no gentler punishment than the death penalty for the slightest misdemeanour.

The Editor smiled that sceptical smile which is the terror of young contributors of *Notes on Novels*. He rejected the lizards like unsuitable copy. He didn't believe in them. He doubted there were any on the heath at all. He had walked over square miles of English moorland, but never a lizard had he seen, out of all their millions. Imagination, he observed, was an invaluable property to poets and naturalists. It was part of their stock-in-trade. He didn't seek to deprive them of it. As Falstaff says, a man may surely labour at his vocation.

I was put on my mettle. For once in my life, I did a rash thing. I ventured to prophesy. "If you wish," I cried, "I'll

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and now I wondered whether Fortune or Nemesis would carry it. 'Twas two to one on Nemesis. Yet the gods, as Swinburne tells us in "*Les Noyades*," are sometimes kindly. We lay still on the heather—still as mice—and waited. Presently, to my great and unexpected joy, a sound as of life!—a rustling among the bilberry bushes! One sharp brown head, and then another, with beady black eyes as keen as a beagle's, peeped forth from



the miniature jungle of brake and cross-leaved heath in the bank beside us. I raised my lids, and looked mutely at the Editor. He followed my glance, and saw the tiny lithe creatures glide slowly from their covert, and crawl with heads held slyly on one side, and then on the other, into the open patch, on which we lay like statues. How they listened and looked! How they raised their quaint small heads, on the alert against the first faint breath of danger! I sat still as a mouse again, holding my breath in suspense, and waiting anxiously for developments. Then a miracle happened. Miracles *do* happen now and again, as once at Bolsena, to convince the sceptical. My hand lay motionless on the ground at my side. I would not have moved it just then for a sovereign. One wee brown lizard, gazing cautiously around, crept over it with sly care, and, finding it all right, walked up my sleeve as far as the elbow. I checked my heart and watched him. Never in my life before had such a thing happened to me—but I did not say so to the sceptical Editor; on the contrary, I looked as totally unconcerned as if I had been accustomed to lizards taking tours on me daily from my childhood upward. "Are you convinced?" I asked, with a bland smile of triumph. Even the Editor admitted, with a grudging sniff, that seeing is believing.

And, indeed, there *are* dozens of lizards to the square yard in England, though I

never before knew one of them to assail me of its own accord. I have caught them a hundred times by force or fraud among the heaths and sand-pits. The commonest sort hereabouts is the dingy brown viviparous lizard, which lays no eggs, but brings forth its young alive and tends them like a mother. It is an agile wee thing that creeps from its hole or nest during the noontide hours, and basks lazily in the sun in search of insects. But let a fly come near it, and, quick as lightning, it turns its tiny head, darts upon him like fate, and crunches him up between those sharp small teeth with the ferocity of a crocodile. We have sand-lizards, too, a far timider and wilder species; they bite your hand when caught, and refuse to live in captivity at the bottom of a flower-pot like their viviparous cousins. These pretty wee reptiles are often delicately spotted or branded with green; they lay a dozen leathery eggs in a hole in the sand, where the sun hatches out the poor abandoned little orphans without the aid of their unnatural mother. Still, they are much daintier in their colouring than the more domestic brown kind; and, after all, in a lizard I demand beauty rather than advanced moral qualities. I may be wrong; but such is my opinion. It is all very well to be ethical at Exeter Hall; but too sensitive a conscience is surely out of place in the struggle for life on the open moorland.

