

WHEN LITTLE BEAR VISITED SCHOOL

BY FRANCES MARGARET FOX

Once in midsummer when wild roses were blooming along the river bank behind the Three Bears' house in the forest and wild birds were singing from every thicket, Father Bear built a raft and took his family floating downstream. The raft was made of logs firmly fastened together. It was big and strong, and had three rustic chairs on it—a big, big chair for the big Father Bear, a middle-sized chair for middle-sized Mother Bear, and a wee, wee chair for wee Little Bear. There were also poles to keep the raft from bumping against the river bank: a rather heavy pole made just for huge Father Bear, a middle-sized pole for middle-sized Mother Bear, and a long, light pole for Little Bear.

Soon they were far from home, but it was afternoon before anything special happened. There was a bend in the river, and when the raft came swishing and tumbling round that bend the Three Bears saw a little log house on a hillside and many children playing outside the door.

At that very moment, bump! went the raft into the bank, and there it stuck among the willows!

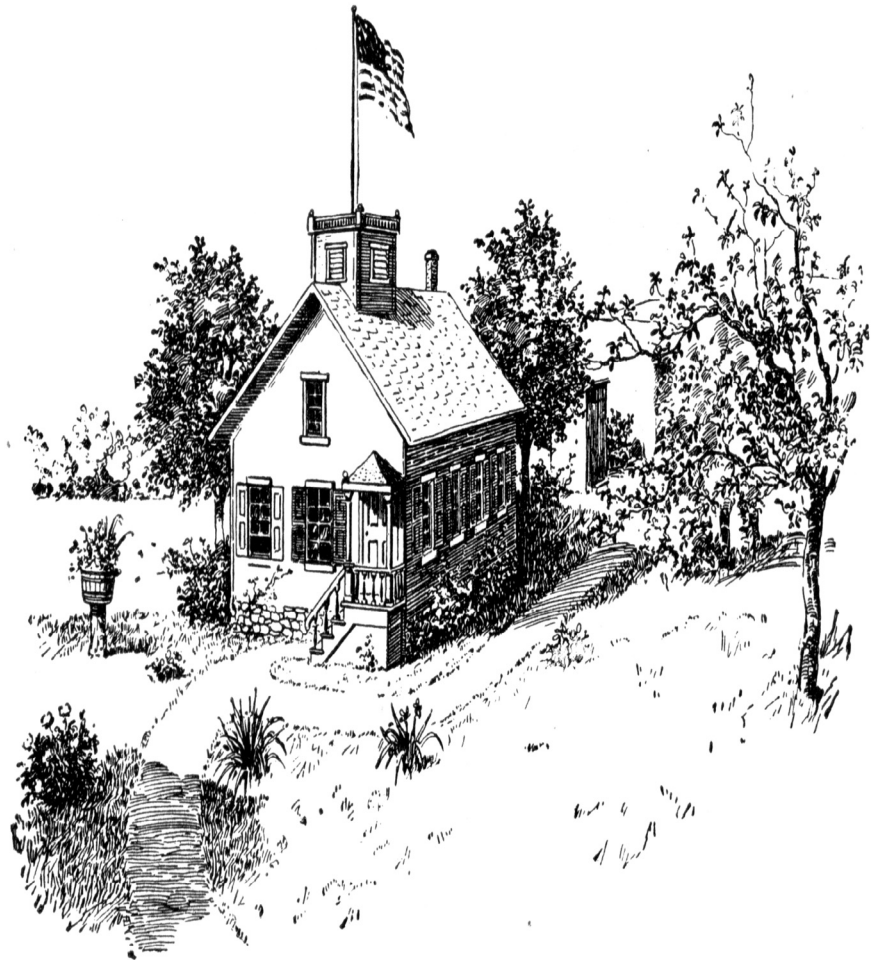
"Oh, please do not push the raft into the stream for a few min-

utes!" whispered Little Bear. "Let us watch the children!"

"Yes, let us watch the children," added Mother Bear.

So Father Bear, being willing to please his family, seated himself in his huge chair, and Mother Bear seated herself in her middle-sized chair. But Little Bear stood on his tippytoes in his little chair, so that he could see better.

"Oh, I wish those children would let me play with them!" cried Little Bear, as the



youngsters joined hands and danced round and round in a circle.

Plainly, the log building was a school-house, for a moment later out stepped the schoolmaster and began to ring a bell.

The children straightway formed in line, boys first, girls behind. Then they all marched into the schoolroom, saying, "Left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot," and their feet made a merry stamping.

After the children were all in the school-house and the door was closed, a song came floating through the open windows.

When the singing was over, and the only sounds that the bears heard were the song of birds, the lapping of the water, and the humming of bees, Little Bear said to his father and mother, "I see a little path leading from the river to the schoolhouse, and I see bushes beside one of the windows. If I will go softly, softly, and climb softly, softly into the bushes, may I go and peep into the schoolhouse and see the children?"

"Oh, I do not know about that!" began Mother Bear.

But Father Bear said, "Oh, let him go! Only, Son Bear," he added, "if one of the children should happen to see you, and should say 'Bear,' you run straight down to the raft, and we shall be ready to push into the stream and get away!"

So Little Bear crept softly up the path on the hillside, climbed softly into the bushes,

and peeped into the schoolroom. All the children were in their seats with their heads bent over books and slates. Then the teacher said sternly, "Primer class! Come forward!"

Two little girls and one little boy, with blue-covered books in their hands, went to a spot in front of the teacher's desk and stood with their toes on a crack in the floor. The little girls edged away from the boy as far as they could while the master looked at them. Little Bear was so much interested that he climbed closer to the window.

"Open your books," said the schoolmaster.

The three opened their blue-covered books.

"Joan, you may read the lesson first, if you please."

So Joan read, "I—see—a-cat."

"Good!" said the master. "Mary, you may read."

"I-see-a-cat," read Mary. She knew every word of that lesson.

"Now, Simon," spoke the master to the boy, "let us hear you read."

Little Bear was sure that Simon did not know his lesson. He was sure of it because Simon acted so foolish and looked so unhappy. He stood on one foot

and then on the other and twisted and squirmed until the girls giggled.

"Come, Simon," urged the master, "we are waiting." It happened that Little Bear felt

so sorry for Simon that he forgot all about himself, and leaned forward until his paws rested on the window sill. No one noticed him then, because bushes clustered close round that window and he had made no sound.

“Simon,” the master commanded at last, “read the lesson!”

“I-see,” began Simon, “I-see-a-” Then he looked up, but instead of saying “cat,” as the primer said, Simon, with eyes as large and round as saucers, dropped his book and cried, “Bear! I see a bear!”

Sure enough, he did. So did all the children. So did the master, because Little Bear was right up in the window, trying to tell Simon the word “cat”!

Down the hill ran Little Bear as fast as he could go, and scrambled on board the raft. Father Bear and Mother Bear used their poles and quickly pushed the raft into the middle of the stream, and away went all three of them, laughing. But Little Bear did not wish to visit school again that day-or that summer.