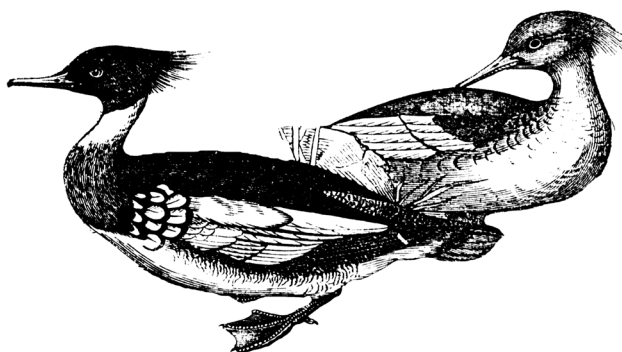


SEVEN O'CLOCK STORIES



Third Night: Noisy Folks



Do you remember what we were telling about last night when that little tongue told us to stop? The little tongue in the Clock-with-the-Wise-Face on the mantel?

Oh yes, the first cousins of the chickens who lived in the yard of the three happy children.

Their first cousins are called ducks. Most of them are white but a few are black. Their coats are very smooth, and the skin under them sends out little drops of oil like drops of perspiration. This keeps the water and the rain from wetting the ducks through and through. You have heard people say sometimes: "The way water runs off a duck's back." Well, now you know the reason why.

In rainy weather Hepzebiah wears a blue waterproof with a little hood but the ducks do not need anything like that. Their everyday coats of white and black are just as good. If the White Wyandottes cannot get under the chicken coop or the barn quick enough when it rains, their feathers are all mussed up but the ducks seem always dressed in their best.

Their bills are different from their relatives'. They are not short and pointed like the chicken's but broad and long.

And they have what are called web feet. Between the toes are pieces of skin, thick and tough like canvas. These web feet are like small oars or paddles. With them they can push against the water of the pond and swim quite fast.

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The ducks are very fond of the pond but their cousins think it a dreadful place.

“Cluck, cluck,” say the White Wyandottes, “what a foolish way of spending your time, sailing on the water when there are fat, brown worms to dig for in the nice earth!”

You see animals, like people, like different things. The world wouldn't be half so interesting if we all liked the same things, would it?

The other night Jehosophat felt very foolish when he came in to supper. His mother looked behind his ears and said: “Why you are just as afraid of the water as the chickens.”

Did you ever hear of such a thing!

Now the chickens have second cousins too. Their second cousins are the white geese.

They live on the other side of the tall fence that looks as if it were made of crocheted wire. Sometimes Jehosophat's father opens the gate in the fence and lets the geese wander down to the pond. A silly way they have of stretching out their long white necks and crying, “Hiss, hiss!” This frightens Hepzebiah who always runs away. Then the geese waddle along in single file, that is one by one, like fat old ladies crossing a muddy street on their way to sewing society.

Jehosophat says that the chickens have third cousins too,—the swans. There they are, way out on the pond, sailing along like white ships. Their necks are very long and snowy white and they bend in such a pretty way. And their soft white wings look something like the wings of the angels on the Christmas cards.

Jehosophat, Marmaduke, and Hepzebiah do not like one barnyard neighbour very much. It is the guinea-hen. She has a grey body, plump as a sack of meal, with little white speckles, a funny neck and such a small head with a tuft on top. She screeches horribly and Marmaduke calls her “Miss Crosspatch.”

But the turkey with his proud walk is just funny. And yet Farmer Green says he hasn't any sense of humour. Ask your father how that can be if he is funny.

“Mr. Stuckup” the children call the turkey. He walks along slowly, swinging from side to side. His feathers are brownish-black or bronze, and his tail often spreads out like a fan. He has the funniest nose. It is red and soft and long and flops over his bill on his chest.

He calls “gobble, gobble, gobble,” all the time, yet he does not gobble as much

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as the busy White Wyandottes all around him who are forever looking for kernels of corn or worms or bugs.

But who is this magnificent creature coming along over the lawn under the cherry-tree? Uncle Roger, who sails around the world in a great ship with white sails, gave him to the children. He brought him from a land very far across the seas.

He is the peacock and is all green and gold and blue. On his head is a little crown of feathers. His tail, too, can spread out like a fan the way "Mr. Stuckup's," the turkey's, does. But it is ever so much more beautiful. It is green and has hundreds of blue eyes in it. The three children call him the "Party Bird" for he is always so dressed up, but their father says he is "a bit of a snob." He means that he is vain and will not have much to do with his plainer neighbours of the barnyard—

"One, two, three, four, five, six, seven." There goes the clock again.

Tomorrow night, if you are good all day, we will tell you about the rest of the barnyard friends of the three happy children. Then the next night, about the exciting things that happened to them.

Good-night! Sweet Dreams!