THE BLUE BIRDS'

Winter Nest



LILLIAN ELIZABETH ROY

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Lillian Elizabeth Roy was an American author, born in New Jersey in 1868. She became known for fiction for young readers, especially the Polly Brewster books. Her extensive bibliography includes stories about friendship, outdoor activities and the experiences of girls learning to act with greater independence.

Series such as the Blue Birds and the Girl Scouts offered recurring characters and continuing adventures. Titles including *Natalie: A Garden Scout* and *The Woodcraft Girls at Camp* connect storytelling with practical interests. Gardening, travel and group activities become occasions for characters to learn through experience.

Roy also wrote beyond these familiar settings. *The Prince of Atlantis*, published in 1929, imagined the survival and migration of people from the legendary island. This range places her work within several kinds of popular literature rather than a single series. She died in 1932.

Readers can watch how a group reaches a decision and how responsibility is shared once a plan is under way. A useful skill may change a character's standing among friends, while a disagreement can expose different expectations of cooperation. These small changes often give continuity to a longer adventure. A portrait has been omitted because no reliable likeness was verified in the sources reviewed.

Biographical references: The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction and Project Gutenberg author bibliography. Full source records retained in the edition archive.

CHAPTER I

HOW AUNT SELINA FLEW

"Sally! I say, Sally! Come here!" cried a peevish voice, belonging to a querulous old lady who was huddled up on a couch in the bright morning room of her fine old mansion.

"I'se here, Miss S'lina—comin' straight an' fas' as mah laigs kin brings me!" replied a cheerful colored woman, bustling around, and moving some toast so it would not scorch.

"Are you quite sure you told Abe to meet the eleven-thirty train at Greenfields station? Just fancy how dreadful it would be to have Miss Ruth get off the train and not find anyone there to meet her!" complained Miss Selina, her face twitching with pain as she raised her hands to emphasize her remark.

"Laws'ee, Miss S'lina! Don' you be 'fraid dat I han't tended to eberyt'ing for little Miss Rufie's welcome! Leave it to ole Sally, what likes dat chile like her own kin!"

"Well, then, Sally, hurry with my toast and tea—and for goodness' sake, don't you bring scorched toast again! There, I can smell it burning this very minute! How many times must I tell you that I will not trust those electric toasters? The old-fashioned coal fire is good enough for me—and it would be for you, too, if it were not for your ridiculous ideas of being progressive and having all these electric fol-de-rols put up in the house. My house, too! Think of it! A servant to order these contraptions and use them in my very own home and make me pay for them, when I prefer the ways of my forefathers." Then utterly wearied with her long complaint, Miss Selina collapsed, and closed her eyes.

Sally, the old family servant who had lived all her days with the Talmage family at Happy Hills, had been a playmate of Miss Selina's; in fact, she had grown up with all the children of the "big house." She smiled indulgently at her mistress' words, as she bent over a fresh piece of toast.

"Pore chile—Sally knows a heap of time is saved 'twixt 'lectricity an' coal, an' she's goin' to cleave to the bestes' way ever foun' yit—an'

she knows what dem old rheumaticks is a-doin' to your temper," soliloquized the astute servant.

The toast was nicely browned, and the tea brewed perfectly, and Sally placed them on a dainty tray which she carried over to the couch.

"Want I should leave you alone, or he'p you break the bread?" asked Sally, soothingly.

Miss Selina opened her eyes and answered, "If I were sure you had Miss Ruth's room all ready, and everything else as it should be, I would let you pour that tea for me; but I suppose you have neglected half your work to be in here with me."

Sally's broad grin wrinkled the corners of her mouth, as she took the teapot and poured the fragrant beverage into a Japanese cup. At the same time her mind seemed to dwell upon a pleasant subject.

"Does you 'member, Miss S'lina, de las' time little Rufie visited us? Dat's de time she was all full of a plan for havin' some kin' of a bird's nest at home. I wonder ef she ever did fix it up?"

Miss Selina forgot to find fault for a few moments, as Sally's words caused her to remember the plan her grand-niece had talked over.

"Seems to me, her mother wrote something in a letter about a Blue Bird Nest they were going to start. But I haven't the slightest idea what it is. I should think they would build nests for robins and birds who are plentiful in our country places. Blue Birds are not very numerous in our woods."

"T'wan't for real birds—don' you recomember? It was jus' de name dey was goin' to use fer a li'l 'sociation like!" corrected Sally, as she held the plate of toast within reach of the invalid's hand.

"No, I don't remember! How should I?—with all this pain forever tying me into knots!" mumbled Miss Selina, as a toothsome morsel of toast entered her mouth.

Suddenly, the crunching of wheels on the gravel drive was heard, and Sally craned her neck to look from the window.

"There goes Abe now," she said.

The same day the Blue Birds of Happy Times Nest, at Oakdale, had become "Fliers," little Ruth Talmage, the favorite of the Nest, had received an invitation to spend a week at her Aunt Selina's house, and Abe was now on his way to the station to meet her.

Aunt Selina was an unpleasant old lady, and few of her relatives cared to visit her; so, when she had her attacks of rheumatism she generally had to spend her time on the couch with no one to amuse her. She had invited Ruth the previous Spring, and had enjoyed the little girl's visit so much, that she had sent for her now when helpless with another attack.

Of course, when the telegram came to Ruth's home, asking the little girl to visit Aunt Selina, the Blue Birds felt sorry for her, knowing what a miserable time Ruth would have. Then, too, Ruth's father was expected home that Saturday, and Ruth had not seen him for almost a year.

Ruth, however, was willing to sacrifice her own pleasure to help Aunt Selina—as every Blue Bird tries to follow the Golden Rule—so she left her playmates Saturday morning, with promises to write every day until she returned, and they, in turn, earnestly promised to explain to her father just why she went away the day he was expected home.

Now, Happy Hills, Aunt Selina's home, was several miles from Greenfields Station, and the country about this section of Pennsylvania was so beautiful and healthful that city people gradually settled upon estates and spent their summers there. Beautiful carriages and automobiles daily passed over the fine old road that divided Happy Hills in half. But no one had much of an opportunity to admire the place as high board fences had been built on either side of the road as far as the property fronted it.

Happy Hills was an old family estate comprising more than two thousand acres, half woodland and half cultivated fields and green pastures. A spring of clear water, hidden among the rocks of the highest hill at the back of the farm, furnished plenty of water for the noisy brook that tumbled from rock to rock on the hillside, and, after splashing in and out among the trees, ran like a broad ribbon through the green meadows.

The entire property was enclosed with a high fence, even the woodland being carefully hemmed in so no little children could get in to play in the brook, or pick wild berries and flowers that decayed in profusion year after year.

Sally was a trusted old housekeeper who had her mistress' confidence; Abe was her husband who had driven the Talmage coupé ever since he came North at the time of the Civil War.

Miss Selina had not always been so disagreeable. She had old-fashioned pictures of herself at the age of eighteen when hoop-skirts were the fashion, and the young women wore their hair in "water-falls." At that time a handsome young man was in love with her, but he was shot in the war, and she brooded over her loss so long that she lost all the sweetness of living. The older she grew the more disagreeable she became, until, not one of her relatives wanted to be with her, but managed to keep far from her complaining voice.

And for this old lady, Ruth had waived the anticipated home coming of her dear father!

Breakfast over, Sally propped Miss Selina up on the cushions and left her for a time.

After wondering how long it would take Abe to drive back from the eleven-thirty train, Miss Selina started to think of something she had been pondering the last few days. What should she do with her vast estate if she died? She had never made a will, for she abhorred the idea of dying and having any strangers in her home. But she couldn't take it with her, and she was nearing seventy years of age with all the signs of old age breaking over her defenceless head.

She tried to think of someone to whom she really wanted to leave her home, but there was no one. She generally sighed at this point and dropped the unpleasant thought. To-day, however, she wondered if her nephew and his wife could be plotting to get her property by having Ruth visit whenever she was invited. This idea seemed to take hold of her, and she frowned as she made up her mind to ask Ruth questions about her mother's intentions and opinions regarding Aunt Selina and Happy Hills.

Miss Selina had been so engrossed in her thoughts that the sound of carriage wheels on the drive failed to reach her. Therefore, it was with a start of surprise that she heard the door flung open and a happy child's voice cry:

“Aunt Selina! I’m here! Are you glad to have me?” while a pair of soft little arms were gently placed about her withered old neck and fresh little lips pressed her cheek.

The caress was such an unusual experience that Miss Selina forgot to wince or complain, and before she did remember, Ruth was bubbling over with news.

“What do you think is to happen to-day?—Oh! Aunt Selina, we all have new names at home; even mother is now called Mother Wings and I am Fluff. The other Blue Birds have names they chose for themselves, and Ned is an Owl, and prints our weekly paper called the *Chirp*. Now, instead of Aunt Selina, I want to call you a bird-name, too. May I?”

Aunt Selina smiled sympathetically at Ruth’s words, but, recalled to her condition by a twinge of pain, she moaned, “Child, poor old Aunt Selina would make a wretched specimen of a bird nowadays. The only kind I feel that I could represent truly is a raven—for it always croaks.”

Ruth laughed consolingly, but cried, “Oh, Aunt Selina, that is just because you feel blue with those old rheumatics. Mother says we always look at life through dark spectacles when we’re in pain, and we b’lieve the lovely world has lost all its brightness. Now, I’ve come to make you forget your blues and I *must* have a new name to say, because there is so *much* to tell you that I would lose time if I had to say ‘Aunt Selina’ every time. Besides, a new name will make you forget yourself.”

“What could you call me?” questioned her aunt, trying to fall in with the child’s whim.

“We’ll have to think! It isn’t as easy as it may sound to find a name to suit. We had a dreadful hard time to do it.”

“‘Fluff’ suits you beautifully. Who found it?” said the old lady interestedly.

“I chose two, but we can only have one. One was ‘Flutey’ the other ‘Fluff’; Ned and the Blue Birds liked ‘Fluff’ best, and they have called me by that name ever since we were christened in the Nest.”

“When I was a little girl like you I used to enjoy whistling about the place so much that father called me his little flute. I can still see the shocked expression of my aunt who visited us, when she heard

me running about whistling like a boy. She was a grand dame of society in New York, and *her* girls were doing embroidery and being taught how to curtsey and behave in the drawing-room." And Miss Selina smiled at Ruth who fully understood the remark and clapped her hands delightedly at her aunt who had been a hoyden so long ago.

"I just love to whistle, too. Ned says I can pipe higher and carry a tune better than anyone he knows!" declared Ruth, and aunt and grand-niece felt a common bond of unity.

Ruth was about to demonstrate her accomplishment to Aunt Selina, when her face puckered into a funny expression and her shoulders hunched up about her ears as they usually did when some secret thought gave her a surprise. She leaned over the couch and confidentially whispered, "Aunt Selina, I'll tell you what! We both love to whistle, don't we? Then, you shall be christened with my other name! You shall be 'Flutey,' eh?"

"Oh, dear child, it would be sarcasm to name me that now! Why, the only claim I have to that name would be because of my fluted skin. Just look at my neck and face!" said Aunt Selina.

"No such thing!" retorted Ruth. "I never saw any flutes on your face until this very minute when you made me see some little wrinkles. Your skin is soft and white, so don't you ever tell folks what you said to me, 'cause they won't see anything but a nice face."

Of course, Aunt Selina felt elated to hear such comforting words, but Ruth gave her no time to meditate.

"Do you like the name I, as your god-mother, give you?" laughed the merry little girl.

"Yes, indeed, it is fine, but we must keep it a secret. Just fancy Sally or Abe, or any of the servants, calling me 'Miss Flutey!'" And Aunt Selina laughed aloud just as the door opened and Sally popped her head through the aperture. Seeing the happy faces and hearing the unusual laughter, she immediately closed the door, without having been seen or heard. Out in the wide hall she lifted both arms high toward the ceiling and rolled her eyes devoutly upward as she murmured, "Praise be to the Lud, dat dat little tree is come wif healin' in its leaves." After this strange remark, Sally hurried out to tell Abe of the miracle.

Aunt Selina, in spite of her age, felt a childish delight in having a secret with Ruth, and after a few moments said, “I shall have to call you Fluff, and you must call me Flutey, I suppose, if we are to belong to the same Nest.”

“Yes, that’s the way,” replied Ruth, clapping her hands softly. “Now, let me tell you all the wonderful things we did this summer.”

Then began a recital of how the Blue Birds of Happy Times Nest started; about each member and her name; the nest in the old cherry-tree; how they had earned money to bring some poor children from the city to spend the hot weeks in the country; and, best of all, how they had interested all of the citizens of Oakdale in helping a hundred poor city children to spend a few weeks in the beautiful village of Oakdale.

At this moment a loud knock at the door caused Aunt Selina to sit up and call out, “Come in!”

“Shall you hab lunch in de dinin’ room, or serbed here?” said Sally.

“Lunch! Why, is it time—is it one o’clock?” gasped Miss Selina.

“Ya’as’m—pas dat hour, too,” replied Sally, smiling broadly at Ruth, who returned the good-natured feeling.

“Well, well; I feel much better, Sally,” admitted Aunt Selina. “Nothing like having young folks around when one feels blue, eh? I guess you’d better bring the lunch tray here, and Miss Ruth and I will picnic this noon.”

In a few moments the waitress brought in a huge tray while Sally followed with a folding table which she placed by the side of the couch.

A joysome hour passed in “picnicking” the lunch, then Sally rang for the maid to remove the dishes. After she had gone, Sally turned to her mistress and, with the familiarity of an old servant, said, “Miss Rufie shore is de bestes tonic you ebber took. You’se et more lunch, Miss Selina, dan I’se seen yo’ et in six mont!”

Then whisking a few tiny crumbs from the couch afghan, Sally gathered up the doilies and went out, smiling contentedly.

That afternoon worked a remarkable change in Aunt Selina. She forgot all about herself and her misery while listening to her grand-niece’s story of sacrifice for others.

She listened attentively to every word, until Ruth concluded with the words, “Now, we are planning some great work for our winter nest, but we don’t know just what we will choose.”

So impressed was Aunt Selina with the movement started by the New York Organization, that she determined to help the cause in every way she could.

In the evening with the help of a cane and Sally, Aunt Selina managed to reach the dining-room for dinner. “For,” said she, “it is a shame to keep Ruth cooped up in my morning room all day long.”

During dinner she marveled at the improvement in her physical condition and worried lest her ailments return suddenly. But Ruth reassured her.

“No, indeed, Flutey, we have so much to do and plan while I am here, that you won’t have time to think of getting sick again.”

Aunt Selina looked dumbfounded for a moment.

“Ruth, do you suppose that’s what ails me—nothing to do but think of myself all of the time?” said she.

“Flutey, not only with you, but with lots of folks!” replied Ruth, wisely. “You see, anyone who is busy and has something to do all the time never gets sick, because they haven’t time to worry ’bout themselves if they feel a bit of pain. Why, this summer I saw lots of beginnings of sickness stopped just because everyone had to get through their work for the city children. Even me: when mother told me that father—oh, oh—oh!” and Ruth doubled over her plate and giggled immoderately.

“Now what ails you, child?” inquired Aunt Selina, smiling in sympathy with her guest’s merry laugh.

“Oh, Aunt Selina, this goes to prove what I just said! Here I have been with you all day, so full of the story of our Nest and all we did, that I forgot to feel sorry for myself. Why, think of it! Father is expected home to-night, and I’m not there! When your telegram came asking me to come here, and mother told me father was expected the same day, I felt dreadfully bad about it, but mother said I might help the winter nest a great deal by coming to show you how to fly, so I really made up my mind not to feel sorry about not seeing father. And here I am all this time, forgetting my disappointment

about leaving home to-day, and now, laughing over it. Don't you see?"

Aunt Selina nodded her head comprehendingly as she said, "Yes, I see! Yes, I see what has been my undoing all these years. Child, you have done something for me that all my years have failed in showing me. God bless you, Ruth, for coming, and when I tell your father about it he will be proud of his little Blue Bird that brought such peace to me."

As she concluded, Aunt Selina's eyes were brimful of tears, but they were tears of gratitude, and such tears always wash away much of our stubborn selfishness.

Sally hovered about the table to be on hand to assist her querulous mistress if necessary and she, too, felt the effect of Ruth's words and silently praised God for the blessing.

After Aunt Selina and Ruth were comfortably seated in the soft easy-chairs of the former's bedroom, Ruth asked permission to write the letters she had promised the Blue Birds at home. Aunt Selina nodded cheerfully, and sat watching the little girl write until her eyelids drowsed slowly over her eyes.

The first and most important letter was written to Ruth's dear father and mother. The next to Ned, and the third to all of the Blue Birds of Happy Times Nest. Here, she wrote as she pleased and told them about her trip, how interested Aunt Selina seemed to be, about the secret name she had given the new Blue Bird and all of the fine things Aunt Selina was going to do just as soon as plans could be talked over. As the letter drew to a close, Ruth begged her friends to write every day and not undertake any important work until she came home.

The last letter took a long time to write and Aunt Selina was fully awake before Ruth had finished.

"Laws, Child! Do you know the time? What would your mother say if she knew I kept her daughter out of bed until after nine o'clock? If the letters are finished you must go straight to your room." And Aunt Selina rang for Sally.

That night as Ruth slept soundly, Aunt Selina lay thinking over all her grand-niece had told her. As she thought of all her wasted years and of all the wonderful good she might have done with her leisure

time and wealth, she turned her face to the wall and shed bitter tears of regret.

Then recalling Ruth's advice to fill her mind with something good and helpful, the old lady vowed to pick up the frayed ends of her life and ask Ruth how to use her money and time to create some lasting good for others. As she smiled contentedly over the idea of her grand-niece of tender years advising and helping her, an old lady of three score and ten, the Bible text flashed into her mind—"And a little child shall lead them."

Then Aunt Selina fell into a restful, health-giving sleep such as she had not had in years.

CHAPTER II

A SUNDAY WALK AND ITS RESULTS

Ruth was out-of-doors early the following morning, enjoying the sweet, crisp breeze with its odor of dew-laden meadows. After sniffing delightedly for a few moments, she skipped up and down the long veranda, calling to the birds and snapping her fingers at some curious squirrels. Sally heard the joyous child and came out to bid her a good-morning.

"Sally, what a beautiful farm Aunt Selina has! It looks lovelier this morning than ever, but it makes me sad when I think that no one can enjoy it except the folks that live here," said Ruth, in a tone of regret.

"Ya'as, Chile, I feels sorry dat Miss S'lina had dem high board fences put up to keep anjoyin' eyes from de propaty. An' den agin, I kin s'cuse de little chillern dat sneak fru de back fences jus' to pick wilets an' paddle in de brok up dere;" and Sally looked toward the inviting woodland, whence came the sound of running water.

"If Aunt Selina is to be a really truly Blue Bird she will remove whatever keeps others from enjoying what she has," commented Ruth, seriously.

A bell, tinkling from an upper room, summoned Sally hurriedly indoors, so Ruth sat down in a large wicker rocker to await her aunt's coming.

Sally soon came and told Ruth breakfast was ready and there sat Miss Selina welcoming her with a cheery smile!

"Do you feel as happy and free as a Blue Bird, Flutey?" asked Ruth, giving Aunt Selina a hearty embrace.

Unaccustomed to such healthy demonstrations of affection, she suffered her lace cap to be pulled over one ear while her other was uncomfortably doubled under Ruth's plump little arm.

"Yes, Fluff, I feel unusually well this morning. I slept like a babe all night," replied her aunt.

"That's the way all Blue Birds sleep. Not one of us would stay in bed a minute just because something tried to make us feel too tired or sick to get up early in the morning! You know, the Camp Fire Girls

receive honors for keeping free from illness, and some day the Blue Birds expect to join the bigger girls in their Camp Fires. So we begin to practice good health now," explained Ruth.

The breakfast passed quickly with not a sound or sigh from Aunt Selina about rheumatism. Sally was the most astonished of all, for it had become second nature with her mistress to talk about her pains and woes at all times.

"While I was waiting on the piazza, this morning, I planned to take you for a nice long walk," said Ruth.

"Why, my dear, I simply cannot walk out of doors. I could hardly hobble about the house this morning."

"Oh, I s'pose you couldn't walk very well, but I can walk and you can ride in the wheel-chair. I will push it, and we will go down the meadow path toward the summer-house," said Ruth.

Aunt Selina looked dubiously at Sally, but the latter was very busy placing some of the family silver in the chest, and her back was turned.

After a few moments' hesitation she said, "I never take that chair off of the porch, and I am afraid you are too little to push it."

"Oh, no, indeed I'm not. It won't hurt the chair, and even if it did, your pleasure just now is better than ten chairs!" decided Ruth.

After several weak attempts to turn Ruth from her purpose, Aunt Selina surrendered with a sigh.

As Sally left the room just then she chuckled to herself, "Dat chile will shorely 'juvenate Miss S'lina!"

After breakfast aunt and grand-niece went out on the veranda and Ruth soon had the chair down the steps and waiting for her aunt.

Aunt Selina felt a bit conscious at being wheeled like a baby, but Ruth was too merry to permit anything but joy to prevail.

Ruth turned the chair into a path that ran along the brook, and chatted merrily until Aunt Selina forgot herself in listening. At the end of the path stood a rustic summer-house from which could be seen the wide expanse of meadow and woodland. Having reached this spot, Ruth placed the chair so her aunt could look about and admire her beautiful lands.

“Flutey, don’t you ever go to church on Sunday mornings?” asked Ruth.

“The only church is so far away that I would have to drive for half an hour to reach it; then, too, it is not a denomination that I approve of,” she replied, coolly.

But a little thing like a cold reply or a curt tone never daunted Ruth when she was after any particular information.

“What is the difference between one denomination and another? I don’t exactly know the meaning of that word, but I know it means something about churches.”

“Well, some churches believe in worshipping God one way and some in another. These different beliefs are called ‘denominations.’ Now, all of our family were brought up to believe the Baptist manner of worship to be the only true one, and this church at Greenfields is Presbyterian. Of course, everyone knows that pre-destination is all wrong,” said Aunt Selina emphatically.

Ruth’s eyes opened wider and wider as she listened, for she had been taught a very simple faith. She had been told that to live and follow the “Golden Rule” was the highest form of obedience, and that it was true worship. So she answered quietly:

“I love Jesus, and I believe he taught everyone the same way, and I believe he just loved everybody the same way.”

“We will not discuss religion, Ruth. Just keep on thinking and doing as Mother has taught you.”

“Well, I was only going to say, that as we cannot go to church such a lovely morning, we might sit here and thank God for all these fields,” explained Ruth.

Aunt Selina looked about the land in the light of a new revelation.

“I was thinking,” continued Ruth, “how I should love to have this farm near Oakdale. I could come over so often to tell you what we are doing, and then, too, you could use all of that wonderful woodland for Blue Birds’ Camps in the summer.”

Aunt Selina looked across the fields and woods but said nothing, so Ruth continued.

“When the two Ferris children came out to Mrs. Mason’s farm, they were so happy to see real flowers and grass that they soon got well and strong. That made me wish that I had hundreds of farms

just like it where sick children could go and get well. That was one thing that made the Oakdale folks help get the hundred city poor children out to our country for a few weeks in August and the lovely time the children had made everyone wish to do bigger things this next summer. Nothing has really been planned yet, but everyone is trying to think of some way to do something. This morning when I saw this wonderful farm and so few folks to live on it, I just wished it was near Oakdale so a big crowd of poor children could enjoy it next summer."

As Ruth concluded and looked wistfully over the fertile land, her aunt sat thinking for a time, then answered.

"Fluff, I determined to be a Blue Bird with all of my heart and soul. Now, we can't move this farm over to Oakdale, but the city children can be moved out to this farm! You can do the planning from Oakdale, and I can look after them when they get here."

Ruth gasped in amazement at the splendid idea, then jumped up and down with delight while she shouted aloud.

"Oh, oh! Flutey! that is great! Why, just think of all the streets full of poor children who can enjoy these wonderful woods!"

Aunt Selina winced at the word "street children," but she spoke with determination.

"I suppose we would have to build some sort of little houses, or temporary camps for them to sleep in, and a long shed in which to serve the meals. It will need a lot of planning."

"Dear me, I wish we could run and ask mother about it," murmured Ruth, impatiently. "Now, if you were only visiting me instead of me being here with *you*!"

"If I had gone to you, you might never have had the idea of using these woods for the children," ventured her aunt.

"No, that's so," admitted Ruth. "And we can go back to the house and write all our plans down on paper and send them to mother, can't we?"

Aunt Selina consenting, Ruth wheeled the chair back to the house. When they reached the steps the invalid felt so strong that she lifted herself out of the chair and climbed up the low steps with only Ruth to lean upon.

“Why, I never felt a twinge in my joints all this time! I never knew rheumatism to disappear so quickly as it has this time,” she said, as she sank down in a low chair.

“Let’s hope it won’t come back again,” added Ruth. “If it stays away you could pack up and go to Oakdale with me, couldn’t you?”

Aunt Selina, who never visited and seldom left her home, looked horrified for a moment. But Ruth continued innocently,

“We could get all of mother’s advice for the farm plans besides seeing father and being home with him!”

Sally, who had seen Miss Selina coming up the steps without a cane, thought some miracle had been performed. So, wishing to hear all about it, she hurried out with the announcement that dinner was almost ready.

“Dinner! Why, Sally, we just finished breakfast. I’m sure I don’t want anything to eat so soon,” replied Miss Selina.

“It’s pas’ one o’clock, Miss S’lina, an’ you allus likes de meals to be on time,” ventured Sally.

“I’m sure I feel as if it was dinner time, ’cause I’m so hungry,” added Ruth, who always had a healthy appetite.

Aunt Selina laughed indulgently as she rose and limped slowly indoors.

Immediately after dinner Ruth hurried to the library and brought forth a pencil and paper. Meeting her aunt in the hall she said, “Now, we’ll sit down and put all of our plans on paper.”

The greater part of the afternoon was passed in this engrossing work.

That night Aunt Selina again sought her bed with a great sense of gratitude that she could enjoy the rest without any pain. She slept all through the night and awoke in the morning feeling strong and energetic. Almost every trace of her lameness had disappeared.

The mail lay upon a silver tray beside her plate, and she smiled as she handed two letters to Ruth.

“May I read them, Flutey?” asked Ruth, as soon as she had peeped at the post marks.

Aunt Selina nodded, and Ruth tore open the one from the Blue Birds first, saying in an explanatory tone, "I like to leave the best for the last."

The Blue Birds had written her because they promised to do so, but there had not been time for anything of importance to happen, so Ruth laid aside their short note and took up her mother's letter. The first sentence made her gasp, and at the second, she giggled outright. Aunt Selina waited patiently to hear the news.

"Just think, Flutey, I didn't miss father, anyway—and just see all we have accomplished by my coming here to you! Mother writes that she had a telegram from father late Saturday night, saying the steamer was detained at quarantine on account of some suspects in the steerage who seemed to have symptoms of yellow fever. He is not sure when they will get off, but he will wire mother each day they are detained."

Aunt Selina nodded understandingly, and Ruth continued: "Wish you and I could be there to welcome father when he comes! Flutey, you are so well this morning, *don't* you think you could go with me in our automobile, if we traveled very carefully?"

Her aunt was so aghast at the proposition that she failed to answer, and Ruth continued, believing that she was thinking it over.

"You see, Flutey, we really need to get to the Blue Birds and mother to talk over this fine farm plan, and I am sure the visit will do you a heap of good, for I have heard folks say that a change is a great thing when you have been sick and tired of the same things about you."

Still Aunt Selina said not a word, so Ruth returned to her letter to read it aloud. As she did so, her aunt sent a covert glance at Sally's direction to see what effect Ruth's invitation had had upon the old servant. But Sally, the wise, appeared not to have overheard a word.

Later, as Ruth stood beside her aunt's rocker on the veranda, she again broached the subject.

"Flutey, the air is so warm and balmy like it always is in Indian summer, and our car is so comfy, you wouldn't know but what you were in an easy chair. I don't see why you can't come home with me."

"Fluff, do you know, that I could almost say 'Yes, I will go,' for I think I would like to see all of your little friends, but I really wouldn't

know what to do with the house if I went away on a visit," said Aunt Selina.

"Goodness me! The house won't run away. What does it do when you are sick in bed and can't walk about to look after it? It can go on just the same when you are in Oakdale as when you are in bed," replied practical Ruth.

Never before had Aunt Selina been brought face to face with the fact that Sally was the actual manager. She began to feel a certain resentment against her faithful old servant, and then she thought what a relief it was to have someone upon whom she could depend.

"I never did ride in one of those machines, dearie. I have said that I never would. I always use my victoria, or coupé," she observed.

"You never rode in an automobile! Why, Flutey, you have the treat of your life waiting, then," exclaimed Ruth, surprised. "It only goes to show how careful we should be about saying things we are not sure of; now, you see, you are going to ride in an auto and so prove to yourself that you were wrong."

Ruth took for granted that the visit and method of traveling had been decided upon, and, after some more futile excuses, Aunt Selina was won over to considering going the next day if it were clear.

"But the sky looks cloudy, Fluff, and your mother may not spare the car to-morrow," she objected, making a last brave stand against the persistent little girl.

"Oh, no, those clouds are not rain clouds—they are wind and mother would borrow Mrs. Catlin's car if she had to go anywhere rather than disappoint me by not sending Ike with ours," replied Ruth, very certain of her mother's loving coöperation.

"Well, I shall have to break the news to Sally and see if she can spare me for a few days," sighed her aunt, tingling with anticipation at the unusual event, but loath to forego the hope that her presence was necessary at home.

"I'll run and ask her to come here at once, so we can telegraph mother about the car," said Ruth, as she ran to call Sally.

One never had to go far to find Sally, for wherever Miss Selina was, there would Sally be found hovering about, also. Ruth caught hold of the plump brown hand and dragged her out to the piazza.

When the important question was put before her, Sally was diplomatic enough to stand considering whether the household could possibly be managed without the mistress. After some time, she said, "If it t'want dat dis wisit is jus' what you need to put you on yer feet, I would say, 'I don' see how we'all kin manage.' But, seein' dat all de fruit is dun up an' de fall house-cleanin' not yet due, I adwise you to be shore an' go an' fin' healin' in de change of air."

Aunt Selina was so pleased at Sally's answer that she told her to help Ruth telegraph at once for the car. Sally bowed and hurried away to the telephone where the message was sent to Greenfields to be wired to Mrs. Talmage.

The rest of the day was spent in pleasant excitement, with Ruth and her aunt wondering what to pack in the small steamer trunk, while the whole household felt the unusual stir of their mistress' going away for a visit.

That evening an answering telegram came saying that Ike would leave Oakdale at dawn in the morning so as to get to Happy Hills by noon. If they were ready to start back at once they could arrive at Mossy Glen before night set in.

Ruth was so joyous over the happy termination of her visit that she could hardly stand still long enough for Sally to tie her hair ribbon. As for Aunt Selina, she looked from her bedroom windows before retiring, anxiously scanning the sky for any possible rain clouds. She felt as excited as a child over its first journey away from home. Seeing the sky a deep blue with myriads of stars gleaming down at her, she smiled and turned out the light.

Ike arrived earlier than expected, for he made record time from Oakdale.

"Ike, do the Blue Birds know I'm coming?" she asked.

"Sure thing, Miss Ruth," replied Ike.

"And Ned—did he miss me?" queried the little girl.

"Master Ned, he went 'round like a bear wid a sore head. He was just lost without the head of the Blue Birds," grinned Ike.

"And mother—and Ike, father? Did father wonder why I left without seeing him," half-whispered Ruth.

Ike dropped his wrench and stood up.

"Why, Miss Ruth, I forgot to tell you! Mr. Ta'mage ain't home yet. A wire came late last night saying he expected to get off the boat to-day, so they are looking for him this noon."

"Oh, oh, Ike! how could you keep such grand news from me all this time!" exclaimed Ruth, racing indoors to tell her aunt.

When Ike said he was ready to start, Aunt Selina and Ruth were helped to the comfortable seat and robes were tucked in about them, while the servants stood in a semi-circle about the car, smiling and nodding good-byes.

Ike honked the siren for the benefit of the servants, then started the easy-running machine.

Aunt Selina felt so very comfortable that she admitted the fact to Ruth.

"I never knew these cars were so easy-riding."

After passing a stretch of bad road Ike put on more speed and Aunt Selina leaned forward to admonish him.

"Don't go fast enough to be dangerous! Are we going about eight miles an hour?"

Ike smiled to himself as he heard the question.

"We're travelin' a bit more than eight, ma'am. I s'pose you are 'customed to that speed from drivin' horses?"

"Yes, that's it. I never like to go faster than that rate, but you are not going too fast, yet. Be sure to slow up going around corners—we might run into someone," she returned, settling herself comfortably back in the robes.

Ike promised to be most careful, but dared not hint at the actual speed they were traveling, and would have to keep up, to enable them to reach Oakdale before night.

With the sun shining brightly, and the beautiful autumn coloring in the foliage, the journey was most enjoyable.

About six o'clock the car reached Mason's farm and Ruth told her aunt that there the first little city children lived all summer. Next, the car passed Betty's home, but no one was in sight, although Ruth watched for Betty to appear. Mrs. Catlin's beautiful home on the hill was pointed out to the interested old lady, and then Ike turned off of the main road and drove along the woodland road that ran by the

swimming pool. Ruth told all about it, and hoped the Nest in the cherry-tree could be seen in the twilight.

Ike stopped under the old tree and Ruth spied all of the Blue Birds in the Nest. She jumped out to greet them and they ran down the steps to crowd about her. Aunt Selina was introduced and received a quaint little curtsey from each child. Then the children said good-night and Ike drove on to the house.

There, on the lower step, stood the long-looked-for father, and the moment Ruth saw him, she gave a cry of joy. Mrs. Talmage and Ned stood back in the shadow to enjoy Ruth's first sight of her father.

After the greetings were over, Aunt Selina was made to feel quite at home in the cheery library until dinner was announced. The travelers were too tired to dress for dinner, so they were soon seated about the table and the conversation naturally turned to Blue Bird talk.

Ruth went to bed soon after dinner, for the day had been tiresome, and Aunt Selina also felt the need of rest. She admitted that she enjoyed the trip very much, but her old bones felt the strain of the long day.

CHAPTER III

THE BLUE BIRDS' INSPIRATION

School was to re-open on Thursday, and the Blue Birds had but one day more of vacation in which to meet and plan for the Winter Nest. Of course, they could meet after school, or Saturdays, but it seemed more like a meeting to be able to have the whole day for planning.

By nine o'clock on Wednesday, therefore, they gathered in their Nest while Mrs. Talmage entertained Aunt Selina on the veranda with past doings of the children.

Mr. Talmage had to go to the city, and he said that Uncle Ben might come back with him for a few days' visit. Uncle Ben was his only brother, the one who had given Ned the printing outfit for a Christmas gift.

Ruth told the Blue Birds all about Happy Hills and Aunt Selina's plan for the city children.

"Now, how shall we manage to find the children that will need the country next summer?" asked Ruth.

"Did your aunt say who would look after so many children?" asked Norma.

"No, that is one of the things we shall have to talk over. We only got as far as deciding that the farm was great!" said Ruth.

"Indeed, it is a fine offer," said several little girls.

"I think we will have to get the opinion of the grown-ups about the whole plan," ventured Betty.

"Mrs. Talmage and Miss Selina are on the porch now—let's run over and ask them what they have thought of," suggested Edith.

As the others were of the same mind the Nest was deserted. Upon reaching the veranda, the Blue Birds were pleased to see that Mrs. Catlin was sitting there with the other ladies. As Mrs. Catlin was a powerful ally, she was always welcome when planning was to be done.

While the group on the piazza was deeply concerned talking over winter work and next summer's plans, Ned came out of the house and went down the woodland path toward the Starrs' home.

Meredith Starr and his chum, Jinks, were under an old apple-tree in the garden orchard, and Ned joined them.

"Aunt Selina's at the house, and what do you think?"

Meredith and Jinks shook their heads and Ned continued solemnly, "She's given Happy Hills to the Blue Birds for their poor children next summer."

"She has! My goodness, but they will have more than they can look after if they ever accepted such a place," cried Jinks.

"Oh, they accepted it, all right! They're just crazy about it. But the grown-ups will have to help it along. I suppose they'll have to have so much printing done that we'll be out of it after this winter," complained Ned.

"If you think that why can't we have some organization of our own?" asked Meredith.

"Yes! why wait to be invited out of the way by the Blue Birds? Get some club of our own going, and surprise them if they find us in the way," added Jinks.

"Oh, it takes a grown-up to help along such things?" objected Ned. "Why, where do you suppose these girls would have been if it hadn't been for mother's ideas and help?"

"I guess you're right," admitted the other boys, rolling over in the grass again, whence they had popped up their heads at Meredith's suggestion.

After a few moments' silence, however, Meredith sat up again and said tenaciously: "I don't see why we can't! Daddum would help us with his advice and your father, too, Ned. Jinks hasn't any grown-ups, but he can get some of the fathers of the Blue Birds interested in us."

"What could we do, or where would we start?" asked Ned.

"Well, first of all, don't let's call it 'The Owls!' That name may be all right for the editor of a paper, but I don't like it for a club," complained Meredith.

"We need a name that will sound so respectable that every mother will consent to having her boy join us," said Ned.

"We might call it 'Junior Boy Scouts,'" suggested Jinks.

"Then everyone'll expect us to do just as the Boy Scouts do, and the fact is we won't! We will have a sort of club for boys under twelve for the purpose of having a nice time, and helping them with their work or suggesting plans for outdoor sports," said Ned.

"If we could think of some name that would appeal to the mothers who are so interested in the Blue Birds!" said Jinks.

After many names had been laughed down, Meredith said, "Why not call ourselves 'The B. B. Club.' Everyone likes a secret society and the mothers can believe we are so fond of the Blue Birds that we wanted to keep their name for ourselves."

"Oh, but they will think we had to steal their name for want of finding one for ourselves," scorned Ned.

"Well, if you can find anything better, tell it!" exclaimed Meredith, vexed at his friend's laughter.

Just then, Jim, the handy man about Oakwood, joined the boys. He saw some signs of trouble and asked what they were doing.

Ned explained about Miss Selina and the Blue Birds, and his plan for the younger boys. Jim pondered for a few moments and then muttered, "Is there any bird you know that goes by those same initials—'B. B.'?"

Ned thought rapidly for a few minutes, then said, "Blue Jay, no, not that—Black Bird!"

"Bull Finch!" replied Jinks, laughing.

"Neither! What bird whistles like this?" and Jim imitated so naturally the notes of the Bobolink that the boys knew.

"Ho! Bobolink, eh?" shouted Ned, slapping Jim on the back.

"Where would the 'B. B.' come in on that?" asked Jinks.

"Would you divide it like 'Bo-Bolink'?" asked Meredith.

"Sure not! Just plain 'Bobolink Boys' to offset the Blue Bird Girls," answered Jim, as he rose to go on toward the barns.

"Hurrah, Jim! I think you're a life-saver," cried Ned.

"Three cheers for the god-father of the Bobolink Boys!" shouted Jinks, while the others cheered Jim.

"There's Don and another little chap—try the name on them and see what they say," suggested Jim, pointing toward the front driveway where two boys of about ten years could be seen.

"That's right. We'll see what they think of it all," returned Meredith, rising to whistle through his fingers to attract the boys' attention.

Immediately upon hearing the shrill call from his brother, Don turned in the direction of the apple orchard. As the two lads ran up, Ned constituted himself chief counsel.

"Don, how old are you?" was the first question.

"Nine, goin' on ten. Why?" answered Don.

"How old is your friend?" was the next question.

"I'm ten next month," replied the little fellow.

"What's your name?" asked Ned.

"Tuck. That is what everyone calls me, but the name they gave me when I was too little to know better, was awful—it's Reuben Wales. Just because my great grandfather had it, they made me take it, too." And poor little Tuck felt very much abused.

"Never mind, Tuck," laughed Ned, while the other boys rolled over in the grass to smother their laughter.

"I don't most of the time, but when someone has to know the real end of my name, I feel dreadful about it."

"Well, Tuck, we are planning a club for you boys and you can choose a new name if you join," consoled Jinks.

"What's the game, Jinks?" asked Don, eagerly.

"We hope to form an organization for boys under twelve to be known as Bobolink Boys," explained Meredith.

"What for—to build nests and then sew doll clothes, or make paper furniture?" growled Don, who had been greatly offended to think that his twin sister Dot would leave him for the Blue Birds.

The older boys who understood his attitude and its cause, laughed, but Meredith explained more fully.

"Just for the sake of having fine times and getting something going for the boys so the girls won't run the whole town. If we start a movement called Bobolinks we can demand help from the grown-ups just as the girls have done. We can manage to do something as big as the Blue Birds ever did, besides having our outings and games at a club-room."

"That sounds fine," ventured Tuck.

“Fine! Why, there’s my hand on it, Mete!” declared Don, as he thrust a grimy little hand under his brother’s nose.

Ned and Jinks laughed as Meredith looked doubtfully at Don’s hand before accepting it as a pledge.

“What’ll we do first?” asked Don, eager to begin.

“Tuck and you must ask as many nice boys as you know if they would like to join a club, and tell them what for,” replied Ned.

“How many can we ask?” questioned Tuck.

“Oh, about thirty, I guess. I can take charge of one Nest, Jinks of another, and Mete of another,” said Ned.

“All right, we’re in for it,” cried Don.

“We’ll report to-morrow afternoon—where?” asked Tuck.

“Better say at Jim’s cottage—up by the barn.”

The two younger boys ran away to seek members and the other boys looked at each other.

“Quick work, eh? We’re in for it now, so we’d better get some plans going,” laughed Meredith.

“We’d better go to your room and figure things out on paper,” advised Ned.

So the three boys who started the Bobolink Boys went to the house and locked themselves in Meredith’s den to make plans for the organization.

In the meantime, the Blue Birds had joined the ladies on the Talmage veranda and their conversation turned to the work to be done that winter.

“I wonder where Ned went,” said Mrs. Talmage as Ruth drew a low stool to her mother’s side.

“He went over to my house to see Mete,” replied Dot Starr. “Shall I go and bring him back?”

“Oh, no, it can wait. I just wanted him to hear some of our plans so he could print it in the next paper,” said Mrs. Talmage. Then she turned to the others.

“You see, Blue Birds, since Aunt Selina joined our ranks and proffered Happy Hills for next summer’s use, it gives us an entirely new incentive for work. We had rather expected to take matters easy

this winter, for school does not leave much time for other work. But we have afternoons and Saturdays."

"And Wednesdays, too, Mrs. Talmage! We all get out at two o'clock Wednesdays, you know," added Norma.

"If I could skip music that day, I could have a long afternoon with you," said May, hopefully.

"Well, if anyone who has studies at home for Wednesdays, could arrange to attend to them at another time, we could have every Wednesday afternoon for a regular meeting, too," admitted Mrs. Talmage.

Miss Selina was so interested in the children that she smiled when they did, and puckered her brow into a frown when they did. Mrs. Catlin amused herself watching the old lady and almost rocked off the steps in her enjoyment.

"One thing we must discuss to-day is a suitable nest for winter. We cannot occupy the one in the cherry tree much longer, for it is growing windy and cool. Then, too, there must be some home-work planned for each one to report at our meetings," said Mrs. Talmage.

"Won't there be any benefits or bazaars?" asked Ruth, who had visions of fun in the school-house assembly room.

"We will have to earn money in some manner to help the poor children, but that will have to be discussed later," replied Mrs. Talmage.

After an hour's discussion, Mrs. Catlin left with the parting injunction, "Call upon me for anything—I will be on hand."

Late in the afternoon Mr. Talmage returned with his brother who was the editor of a prominent magazine in New York. The Blue Birds had gone, and Ruth welcomed her uncle whose visits were always a source of pleasure to Ned and herself.

He sat down on the steps beside her and listened to her story of the wonderful work Ned's printing press had done that summer, and of the work required of it for the coming summer. Uncle Ben smiled as he listened.

"Ned will be walking in my footsteps soon, won't he?" said Uncle Ben, as Ruth concluded.

Before Ruth could reply her mother came out to welcome the visitor and tell him of Aunt Selina's presence.

“Aunt Selina! You don’t say so! Why, I haven’t seen her since my graduation from college,” remarked Uncle Ben, in pleased surprise.

“She is in her room dressing for dinner,” said Mrs. Talmage. “You will find a great change working in her. Why, just think of her offer of Happy Hills for the poor children next summer.” And she proceeded to tell the story of Aunt Selina’s desire to help the Blue Bird work.

“Now that Uncle Ben is here, maybe he can help us plan some way to earn the money for next summer,” suggested Ruth.

“I believe you can! What we need is to find some way of reaching the right children, and then to start some work that will bring us in a regular income during the winter, for it will take a heap of money to run a large place like Happy Hills with several hundred starved little children living there,” admitted Mrs. Talmage.

“As a man who is so mixed up in publishing, you would naturally expect me to know some way out of your troubles, eh?” laughed Uncle Ben. “Well, well, let me think it out.”

At that moment the dinner bell rang and no further opportunity was given for discussing ways and means.

So absorbing was the theme, however, that talk soon drifted around to the subject of farms, work and plans.

“You can get a list of names of poor children at the Bureau of Charity,” said Uncle Ben.

“That only records names of families who will apply for assistance; but the ones like the Ferris family, never are heard from in this way. Those are the children we want,” said Mrs. Talmage.

“When I return to the city I will see if there is any way of getting a list like you want. As for institutions—you can find all of the asylums and homes in the New York Directory. From them you can select numbers of crippled or sick children,” suggested Uncle Ben.

“Ben, do you believe circulars are a good means of letting people know what you want?” asked Mrs. Talmage.

“I can’t say that I do. In my experience I have found that a circular letter meets the same end as an undesirable advertisement. Most of them are thrown into the waste basket.”

“We need philanthropic women to help us next summer. Mrs. Starr offered me her woods at Oakwood if her family goes to Maine,

and Mrs. Catlin wishes to rent the Mason farm for children. So now, with Happy Hills on our list, we will need just the right kind who will love the work with us," said Mrs. Talmage.

"Better send someone to visit the women you hear about," advised Mr. Talmage.

"But I need to find the women first," returned Mrs. Talmage, plaintively.

"What's the matter with the *Chirp*? Can't we print a story in that and mail it to a list of folks in New York?" asked Ned.

"That sounds good to me! I should say the *Chirp* would do the work better than a letter or circular," said Uncle Ben.

"Yes, it does seem like a fine suggestion," admitted Mrs. Talmage. "We will talk it over this evening, Ned."

"Why, when the *Chirp* comes to my office," said Uncle Ben, "I generally drop all of my important work until I see what new scheme the children have worked up. I sit back and enjoy every word there."

"Maybe that is because your nephew edits it—sort of family pride in one who is following in your footsteps," teased Mr. Talmage.

"Not a bit of it! It is because the lad is original enough to fill a gap, and persistent enough to keep a good thing going. I haven't the least idea but that the Blue Birds would never have been heard of outside of their little Nest if it hadn't been for Ned and his *Chirp*," commended Uncle Ben.

"We are all certain of that," assented Mrs. Talmage.

"And we are very grateful to Ned for all he has done to help us along," added Ruth, smiling at her proud brother.

"Mother, you said you wanted to speak to Uncle Ben after dinner, but may I have him alone for a few moments before you get hold of him?" asked Ned, in a worried manner, as if Uncle Ben would be used up if the ladies talked to him first.

Everyone laughed, and Mrs. Talmage said, "Why, certainly, Son, if Uncle Ben is courageous enough to trust himself to your hands."

"I'm shaking in my boots already," said Uncle Ben, "for I'm sure some dark plot will be uncovered."

"Just wait and see!" laughed Ned, as he excused himself and ran to his den.

As the rest of the family rose to leave the table, Uncle Ben said in an aside to Mr. Talmage, “I believe that this farm idea will require a regular organization to take proper charge of its affairs. Just a few ladies and children cannot handle so important a task.”

“I think you are right, Ben,” said Mr. Talmage.

Ned was waiting for his uncle as he came down the hall, and catching hold of his hand, dragged him into his sanctum where the *Chirp* was printed each week.

Uncle Ben sat down in the one arm-chair and waited while Ned locked the door and pulled down every window shade.

“This is a great secret, you know,” explained Ned.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOBOLINK BOYS FOUNDED

"Now, Uncle Ben, we can make ourselves at home," said Ned, as he sat upon a box in front of his uncle.

"Oh, maybe you'd like to smoke, Uncle Ben?" continued Ned, recalling that most men liked an after-dinner smoke. "I shall never use tobacco myself, because I have studied just what effects it has on one's system, but I won't object to your smoking if you wish."

Uncle Ben threw back his head and laughed uproariously.

"Does that mean that you will sit calmly by and see me ruin my health with tobacco, and not interfere?" laughed he.

"Oh, no, you know I didn't mean it that way, although it did sound funny, didn't it?" replied Ned.

"Well, Son, I never smoke, either. I believe a man is a better thinker and cooler business man without it," said Uncle Ben. "But, tell me, what is the tremendous secret that made you lock the door and pull the blinds?"

"Here it is," whispered Ned, leaning over toward his uncle. "You see, when the Blue Birds started, I hadn't a thing to do, because the Starr boys were at camp and many of the other boys away with their families; so I undertook to print the *Chirp* for the girls. I liked it, too. But they are planning so much for next summer that it will take a regular printer to turn out their work. Their organization freezes out the boys, yet we helped in every way this summer."

Uncle Ben nodded comprehendingly.

"Well, this afternoon, we boys got together and said, 'What's to hinder us from getting up a club for boys under twelve?' We all thought it would be great, so we started, and have the name, but not the plans. What do you think of it?" asked Ned.

"You haven't told me enough about it to judge," replied Uncle Ben. "Have you founded the club for any purpose?"

"Oh, yes! We will gather all the little chaps under twelve years of age into one organization, and take them on hikes, teach them work, play games, and do other things," said Ned.

"And the name of this?"

"We thought that Bobolink Boys—B. B., you see—would be great as the initials stand for Blue Birds, too. Of course, we won't sew dolls' clothes, or bake cakes, but we will help the Blue Birds whenever we can, or be independent if we wish. The girls wear bird uniforms, but the boys will wear jumpers of a certain color, with stripes for grade. We haven't gone any further. Our first meeting was held in Starr's orchard this afternoon," grinned Ned.

Uncle Ben sat thinking very seriously for a long time, then he asked, "What about the *Chirp*? Drop it?"

"Oh, no! That's one reason we want something of our own to back us up. We can all help print the *Chirp*, and with the little boys to deliver them, or run errands, it will be easier for all of us. Then, if the girls get up some bazaar, or entertainment and we have to print cards, etc., it will be much easier."

"Then your plan is more for coöperation than competition?" asked Uncle Ben.

"Cooperation in everything a boy can help in, but not to belong to a Nest that has to do things the Blue Birds do," explained Ned.

Uncle Ben sat wrapped in thought, and Ned wondered what he was thinking of. Suddenly, the older man slapped his knee and chuckled with delight.

"Now what, Uncle? I know it is something good, from your face!" exclaimed Ned, eagerly.

"Yes, sir. I believe we can pull it off—we'll try, at any rate!" declared Uncle Ben, half to himself.

"Do tell me!" begged Ned.

"Ned, did you ever see our magazine come out? I mean did I ever show you over the whole plant, and show you what work it takes to produce a nice little paper book each month?"

"Once, when father and I were at your office, you took me over the place. I told you then that I wanted to be a publisher, and you laughed and promised to start me on the right track when I was a man. Last winter you sent me the printing press and told me to practice," said Ned.

"Yes, I know, but I wanted to see if you remembered. Now, I think I have a plan that will go a long way toward giving you elementary

experience in publishing, and at the same time provide just what your Bobolinks would like to do. It will help the Blue Birds along for next summer, and keep them busy to prevent the Bobolinks from making all the music." And Uncle Ben slapped his knee again, laughing as he thought of how the boys would unconsciously start a race between the two—Blue Birds and Bobolinks.

"I wish you'd tell me your idea!" coaxed Ned, impatiently.

"I haven't it all in shape to explain, yet, but I will hammer it together in some way to tell you to-morrow. Where do you boys expect to meet at your weekly, or daily meetings?" asked Uncle Ben.

"If there are but a few, I thought we could meet in this den of mine. But later, if there is a crowd, we might secure the Y. M. C. A. boys' room, or the reception room of the school," replied Ned.

"By Thanksgiving time you ought to be in working trim to assume any large work I might think of, eh?" asked Uncle Ben.

"Oh, surely! Long before Thanksgiving, I should think."

"Now, don't be too sure. Boys are just as hard to muster and understand as girls, and the plan that suddenly suggested itself for you boys to try out is a secret ambition that I have nursed ever since I went into the publishing business—and that was over twenty-five years ago. I have never had time to take it up alone, and never found anyone to whom I could trust so precious a hobby. I see how this combination of Blue Birds and Bobolinks might bring the idea to success, but I shall have to think it over before speaking further," explained Uncle Ben.

"Uncle, I surely am grateful for your confidence, and I shall be glad to know when you can tell us all," said Ned.

"I wish to talk the matter over with your father first, but you may call together some of the boys to-morrow afternoon and I will talk with them to see how many are willing and able to help."

"Well, I suppose I must wait, but I did hope we could organize our boys to-morrow at recess," said Ned, with an air of disappointment.

"What's to hinder your doing it?" asked Uncle Ben.

"How—until we know what we're going to do?"

"Oh, just make your plans broad enough to take in any ideas that come along," responded Uncle Ben, rising to go.

That night after everyone had retired, Uncle Ben took Mr. Talmage down the drive toward the woods. As they walked slowly along in the bright moonlight, they discussed various plans suggested by the ladies of the Blue Bird society. Uncle Ben led up, quite naturally, to the new organization of Bobolinks.

"Al, those boys are wide awake, all right! If we were to give them a boost now and then, there is no saying how great a philanthropic success this undertaking may be. It may grow so far out of Oakdale limits that the whole world may take part in it. I, for one, have decided to lend my support and see what comes of it," said Uncle Ben, seriously.

"Great Scott! Ben; you *must* be interested; I haven't seen you so enthusiastic over anything in years," laughed Mr. Talmage.

"You know how interested I have always been in the publishing work—even as a boy, like Ned is now. Well, one thing you, and no one else, ever did know, was the hope of being able some day to circulate a model magazine for children. I have known for years that the little souls craved something more than the wishy-washy stuff that is given them in the name of 'juvenile reading'—Heaven forgive the criminals! Why, our little ones of to-day are as wide awake as grown-ups, and they demand—unconsciously, perhaps—the same strong quality of bread and meat reading as adults have been digesting of late years. Educational, adventurous, interesting, work-a-day reading! But the books and magazines in the main have not advanced to meet the demand for better children's literature. I have long dreamed of just what I would like to give the children of to-day." And Uncle Ben lapsed into silence.

"I never gave the subject much thought, but I suppose you are right, Ben," admitted Mr. Talmage.

"That's just it!" cried Uncle Ben, excitedly. "No one ever stops to think about it, but keeps right on filling the minds of their children with stuff that never benefits them a particle. How many boys of to-day want to read 'Mother's Brave Little Man,' or 'Jerry the Newsboy'? Bosh! Boys of to-day want 'True Tales of an Indian Trapper,' or 'Boy Scout Adventures,' or good clean stories—school life, or outdoor sports. It's LIFE and HEALTH they want."

“Guess you’re right, Ben,” said Mr. Talmage, smiling at his brother’s denunciation of present-day literature for children.

“All right, then! Help me bring about a reform in this line. I have studied this problem from every point of view and I really believe that the growing youth of to-day would not acquire bad habits so readily if they were given some occupation that would thoroughly interest them. It’s worth trying, at any rate. Let’s fill them with some great plan or ambition and see how many children will fall into the snares and pitfalls of the past!”

Uncle Ben so inspired his brother with his enthusiasm that he, too, declared he would do all he could to help.

“Here’s a few women who accomplished wonders this summer with the little girls. We have a crowd of boys wasting their time day by day for want of something interesting to do. Let the fathers follow the mothers’ example and help their boys band together for some good cause!” said Uncle Ben.

“We’ll get the men together and propose it—they’ll see the value of the suggestion, just as I have,” promised Mr. Talmage.

“Well, Al, now that you’re interested, I have an especially fine plum to drop into your hands. Your own son was the one to start an organization of boys and name it Bobolink Boys.”

“My Ned!” exclaimed Mr. Talmage, joyfully. “That makes me very happy!”

“That is what he wished to tell me when we went to his den. He has organized a club for boys under twelve, just as the Blue Birds have done for girls, and the initials are the same—B. B.;—also, they wish to cooperate with the girls, whenever possible,” explained Uncle Ben.

“Well, well!” ejaculated Mr. Talmage, smiling to himself.

“When I heard Ned outline his plan I decided to encourage the movement if possible by confiding my pet plan to them to experiment on,” said Uncle Ben.

“When the fathers hear of this they will be as happy as I am. The problem of keeping a boy actively engaged in some uplifting work is a sufficient one. Ned and you seem to have solved it for Oakdale,” admitted Mr. Talmage.

"Think so! Then you get busy and gather the fathers together to-morrow night for a conference. We will see how many will agree to help along the work. I will donate all of my ideas accumulated during the past years."

"I'll telephone everyone I know the first thing in the morning. Where shall we meet—in the library?" asked Mr. Talmage.

"Yes, and if there are too many of us we will have to adjourn to a larger place," said Uncle Ben.

Before breakfast the next morning the Starrs' telephone rang, and Mr. Starr was informed that he was wanted at a meeting to be held in Talmage's library that night. Meredith and Donald knew nothing of Uncle Ben's talk with Mr. Talmage, but they felt sure the meeting had something to do with their plans.

Mr. Wells and Mr. Stevens were the next ones to be invited to the meeting, and after that a score or more of fathers were invited.

Uncle Ben, who had hoped to take a few days' rest in his brother's quiet country home, found himself very busy in working out his idea so that it could be simply presented to the meeting of boys and men. He spent the entire morning in jotting down ideas as they came to him.

Luncheon over, Ned caught Uncle Ben's hand and said, "You haven't forgotten the date we made, have you?"

"You wouldn't think so if you had seen me working all morning," complained Uncle Ben.

"That's all right then; we boys will meet you in the big empty carriage house this afternoon at three-thirty," nodded Ned.

"I'll be there!" laughed Uncle Ben, as Ned ran off.

The big room in the carriage house had not been used since the garage had been built.

Ned and Ike found some chairs in the store-room, and Simon provided several empty boxes. Long planks were placed across the boxes, making very good benches for the boys to sit upon. A large packing case stood a few feet in front of the benches to be used as the speaker's stand.

At three-thirty every boy who had expressed a desire to join the Bobolinks was there with expectant looks. Uncle Ben soon arrived

and took a seat by the large box. He spread his papers out in front of him in a very business-like way.

"Boys, I will go straight to the business under consideration this afternoon," said Uncle Ben, standing up the better to impress his audience.

"I think the first thing to do is to appoint a secretary."

Ned was selected, so he sat down behind the packing case to jot down his notes.

"Have you boys formed any kind of an organization?" asked Uncle Ben, turning to Ned.

"No, sir, not yet," replied Ned.

"Then let us attend to that now. You must have officers, and rules and by-laws for governing the boys and meetings. Now, I should suggest that we begin properly, and hold an election of officers."

Uncle Ben then told them the proper way to proceed, and the boys were greatly impressed with the importance of what they were doing. When the election was completed, Ned had been chosen President, Meredith Treasurer and Jinks Secretary.

"Now," said Uncle Ben, "with your permission I will preside at this meeting, instead of your new President. I will read to you what I have written on this paper:

"First: The undersigned have met together to form an organization to be known as Bobolink Boys.

"Second: The purpose of this organization is to provide a club for boys under twelve years of age, that will plan healthful sport, social meetings, and assist the Blue Birds in their work and play.

"Third: Meetings shall be arranged for by vote of members, and all other important matters shall be discussed and decided upon at these meetings.

"Fourth: An initiation fee of ten cents shall be charged each boy desiring to become a member of the Bobolinks, and dues of five cents a month shall be collected from every member. Should any member find it impossible to pay these costs he may be discharged from the obligation by filing an acceptable excuse with the treasurer.

"Fifth: A bank account shall be opened at the Oakdale National Bank and all funds deposited there. All bills must be paid by check signed by the treasurer and secretary.

"Sixth: Any member found deliberately breaking any of the rules and by-laws shall be expelled from the organization, after a meeting held to investigate the misdemeanor."

Uncle Ben looked up from the paper and said,

"Is that the plan of organization that you boys feel will cover what you want?"

"Oh, yes, that's fine!" cried several boys.

The others still felt too over-awed at the business-like terms just heard, to make any sign, favorable or otherwise.

"Well, if this paper is acceptable a motion to make it official will be received. I want to get to the principal thing for which we have gathered," said Uncle Ben.

"Now, I shall make some suggestions," continued Uncle Ben, after the outline had been accepted by a vote. "Are there any boys here who do not wish to become members?"

All of the twenty-three boys wished to become Bobolinks.

"Are there any boys present who cannot pay the initial fee and regular dues?" continued Uncle Ben.

None thought this impossible.

"After this you write down the names and addresses of every boy who applies for membership."

Ned made a note of it in his book.

"Now for a catechism: This is very important," said Uncle Ben, looking about at the boys. "And answer truthfully!"

"Ever smoke?"

"Ever drink?"

"Ever gamble?"

"Ever swear?"

"Ever steal?"

"Ever fight?"

"Ever play hookey?"

"Ever strike anyone weaker than yourself?"

“I noticed that most of the boys smiled when I said ‘hookey,’” ventured Uncle Ben, critically. “But let me tell you! ‘Hookey’ is an innocent-looking vice that leads to great trouble. It is the seed of being unreliable. A man who is unreliable is a failure in the beginning. So, boys, beware of ‘hookey’!”

The boys felt the serious import of the words and each vowed to forego the delight in playing hookey when fishing was good, or when baseball was being played in town ten miles away.

“Have any of you boys ever been in a printing plant and watched the process of turning out papers?” asked Uncle Ben.

Almost every boy raised his hand instantly in answer to this question, for what boy had not stood at the village printer’s yearning to set type or run one of the fascinating presses?

“Fine!” smiled Uncle Ben. “And now how many can set type or do small jobs on the press?”

Very few could do this, but the Starr boys and Jinks often helped Ned with printing the *Chirp* on his small press, and a few other boys knew something of the work.

“Well, I’ll have to explain to you what kind of work is required of a firm that prints papers or publishes a magazine. You may think this has nothing to do with your organization, but you will soon see,” said Uncle Ben.

As the speaker turned to take up several sheets of paper, a noisy chatter was heard outside the house and in another moment all of the Blue Birds, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Talmage, Mrs. Catlin, and Miss Selina, entered the room.

“In passing, we heard the harangue going on in here, and found out from Mr. Talmage that a secret meeting was under way. We would love to hear the motive and perhaps suggest an idea now and then,” laughingly said Mrs. Talmage.

The Bobolinks looked at each other, and Uncle Ben said, “Members, shall these intruders be ejected, or shall this organization extend the first courtesy to one we hope to assist in the future?”

The boys giggled, for the manner of presenting the case appealed to every one of them, and eliminated any feeling of intrusion from the Blue Birds.

“One item to be written in our by-laws must be: ‘Consider the ladies first,’” announced Ned, standing.

“The visitors are welcome!” said Uncle Ben, making a ceremonious bow.

“But please remember, visitors, this is a business meeting, not a social function, so I must ask the ladies to find their own seats and not disturb the gentlemen,” said Mr. Talmage.

The ladies were soon seated in a corner where Ike placed some boxes, and the Blue Birds squatted upon carriage robes spread out on the floor by Simon. When all was orderly again, Uncle Ben proceeded with his discourse.

CHAPTER V

UNCLE BEN'S BUSINESS TALK

"Ladies and gentlemen!" said Uncle Ben, bowing politely to each group; "You may not know that I have always had one hobby—something like my nephew here—and that is still, printing. My present position as editor of a magazine does not satisfy my craving for the printer's workshop, but it is as near as I can come to it, so I have bided my time until an opportunity like the present one offers.

"Before I confide to you what the present offer is, I wish to explain somewhat the working of a magazine plant. I believe it is necessary to tell you how much hard work is attached to the business, and some of the enjoyments when the magazine is ready to go out.

"The first thing is to have the right kind of a story, or article. To find this it is necessary to read many, many manuscripts. We employ 'readers' for this work of selecting what we can use. The manuscripts we cannot use are returned to the writers. After the first reader passes on a story, another reader goes over it, and if it seems suitable, it is handed to the editor. The editor decides whether or not to accept it. If accepted, he has to go over it very carefully. Sometimes words are changed, lines inserted, or whole paragraphs cut out.

"If the story needs illustrating an artist is sent for. If a soft-toned illustration is desired, the artist makes a 'wash drawing'—meaning a black and white painting done with brushes, as in a water color. The 'wash drawing' is then sent to the engravers and a 'half-tone' plate made for use in the magazine. 'Half-tones' are made of copper sheets with the picture photographed upon them.

"Sometimes we want an outline to illustrate the story. A pen and ink sketch is required for this, and is made about twice as large as it will appear in the magazine. This is reproduced on a zinc plate, and is called a 'line cut.'

"Then the story is given to the linotypers. A linotype machine is very interesting. It has a key-board almost like a typewriter. When a letter is struck on the board, a piece of brass containing the

impression of that letter moves into place just like a soldier starting to form a line. When the next letter is struck, the corresponding brass soldier hurries into place beside the first one. This continues until a whole line has been 'set.' Then the operator touches a lever, the line of brass pieces moves to a new position, and molten type-metal is poured into the mold which the brass pieces help to form. The lead at once hardens, and the whole line is ready for printing, in one solid piece. All of this is done very fast—much faster than I can tell you about it. It is hard to believe that a machine can do all these things so quickly and so accurately.

"When the linotype work is completed the printer places the lines of type on a 'galley.' Then the type is covered with ink, a piece of paper is laid on, and a heavy roller passed over it. This impression is called the 'galley proof.' If the linotyper has made any mistakes in spelling or printing, they have to be corrected.

"After the 'galley proofs' are corrected, the dummy—a blank-page book just the size the magazine will be—is made.

"Before us, are all the pictures and reading matter to be used. These are arranged and pasted into the dummy in the order in which they are to be printed. Sometimes a page has a little space left at the bottom, and this must be filled with a neat ornament or a verse. Sometimes an article is too long, and then it must be cut down and made to fit the allotted space.

"Thus, the whole magazine is 'dummied' with pages of cut-up galley proofs and picture proofs, until it looks more like a child's scrap book than a magazine model.

"This dummy goes back to the printer, who picks out the galley-type and measures it off to compare with the pages of the dummy. This done, he places the type in a form the size of the page, places the numeral of the page at the top or bottom, with the name of the magazine at the top—this is known as the 'running head,' as it runs along the top of each page throughout the book.

"The printer next makes a page proof. That is, he makes a proof of each page. These pages are sent into the editorial room again, and are gone over carefully and compared with the galley proofs; if everything is correct each page is 'O.K'd.' If, however, there are errors, note is made of it in the margin on the page proof.

"When all the pages are 'O.K'd.' the page forms are 'locked up' together, sixteen, thirty-two or sixty-four, in one big form, and arranged so that when the sheet of paper is printed and folded, the pages will come in the right order."

So Uncle Ben continued his talk about magazine making. He explained the workings of different kinds of printing presses, how some print directly from the type "made ready" on a flat bed, the paper being fed into the press in flat sheets, and how some of the big presses print from curved plates that fit around a big roller, the paper running into the press continuously from an immense big roll as wide as the press. He told about the wonderful folding and stitching machines, and many other interesting things.

During Uncle Ben's talk, everyone had been so interested that not a sound was heard. When he concluded, however, the tension relaxed and his audience began asking questions.

"This is most instructive, but I can't see where it helps the Bobolink Boys in their organization," said Mr. Talmage, quizzically.

At mention of the name "Bobolink Boys" the Blue Birds looked at each other, and then at their elders for information.

Uncle Ben saw their wonderment, and laughingly explained the plot. The girls were delighted, and had so much to say to one another that it seemed as if no further business could be attended to that day.

Uncle Ben, however, rapped loudly upon the box.

"We have many important things to attend to," he said, "and all are requested to sit still and listen. I am going back to New York in a few days, and in the meantime I should like to help start the boys on the right road to success. Now, what you all want to know is, 'How does my talk about magazines help the Bobolink Boys?'

"Well, this is the way: For the past half-score of years or more, I have longed to issue a magazine for young folks that could reach out into every plane of life; for the poor children in institutions; for the slum children; for rich children, for children in the city and children in the country—for every one of them!

"I would like to give so much instructive reading matter on its pages that the schools will circulate it among the pupils; I would like to have the pictures of the very best; I would like it to inspire boys and girls to read better books, and make them ambitious to make the

most of their chances; I would like it to teach them to make things and do things for themselves; in fact, I would like to make it the best and finest magazine ever published! But I haven't had time to experiment with my hobby and being an old bachelor I am afraid I do not understand children well enough to know how to write for them. The plan that I have been figuring out seems to fit most beautifully with the Blue Birds' and Bobolinks' work."

Uncle Ben hesitated a second, but not a sound was heard. Then he continued:

"Mother Talmage asked me last night about how much it would cost to send circulars to people who might be interested in the farms next summer. I propose that we start a children's magazine and use its pages whenever there is an announcement of importance. If you want donations of money or help of other kinds, ask for them through the pages of the magazine.

"With the Blue Birds to write articles each month telling other children what they are doing, or how to make the things they are being taught to make, and the Bobolink Boys to write the experiences of their daily work and play, and some of the grown-ups to contribute poems and stories, of course it would be necessary to have contributions also from some of our best writers, and I know I can get them for you."

The idea of such a stupendous undertaking made the children gasp, but Mr. Talmage said, "All you have said is fine, Uncle Ben, but who will set type, buy paper, print, bind and circulate such a magazine?"

"That's just the thing! Don't you see? My very great interest in this plan will compel me to help in every way and all the time, and the boys will be kept busy at profitable and interesting work. When all the manuscript is in, and turned over to me I will see that it is set, and the proofs sent back to the children. The Blue Birds will enjoy making the dummies, pasting in the pictures, and arranging the pages; and the Bobolinks can proceed to print the magazines. If you don't expect to use this carriage house for anything it may as well be turned into a print-shop. With all these boys to work, the printing ought to be great sport and not much trouble to get out a magazine."

The Blue Birds were clapping their hands in excitement while the Bobolinks jumped up, and in their eagerness, crowded about Uncle Ben, overwhelming him with so many questions that he was quite overcome.

Then Miss Selina stood up in the road-wagon, and after silencing the noisy crowd, made an announcement.

"I'll pay for the paper that will be needed for the experiment the first month!"

"Hurrah, hurrah! for Aunt Selina!" shouted Uncle Ben, and the rest joined in with such good will that Aunt Selina sat down and held her hands over her ears.

"I'll pay postage on a sample issue!" called Mrs. Catlin.

Again the joyous young publishers-to-be burst forth into cheers.

"What can I pay for?" laughed Mrs. Talmage.

"You'll soon find that you are paying the heaviest tax of all in overseeing the publishers," replied Uncle Ben.

"How soon can we start?" demanded the Bobolinks.

"What shall we write?" asked the Blue Birds.

Uncle Ben raised both hands for silence, and as soon as order was restored again, he spoke.

"We have just installed new machines in our printing plant in New York and intend selling the old ones to some small job printer who can use second-hand machines. Now, I can pick out a small press, stitcher, and other things that you will need, and ship them out here. You have electricity here, and a small motor will furnish the power. When you are ready to go to press, I will send out an experienced man from our shop to direct the work and see that everything is done properly. The addressing and wrapping can be done by all of you. Of course, as far as we have gone, it all sounds like great sport, but there is another side to this plan that must be thoroughly agreed upon before we go any further. If you start this undertaking, you will have to keep on with it. At a certain date each month your periodical must be ready for mailing. You will have to write and edit, and print, whether the skating is fine, or the gymnasium is at your disposal, or whether Thanksgiving dinner makes you feel lazy, or a toothache keeps you awake all night. Publishing work is very interesting, most

instructive, and profitable, but it is work, work, work, and not all play!"

"Oh, we know that, Uncle Ben," said Ned. "And we'll promise to take all of the consequences that go with the game."

The other boys seconded Ned's statement, and the Blue Birds eagerly agreed to the plan, so Uncle Ben really had no further objections to make.

"Oh, I can hardly wait to begin my page," cried Ruth.

"I'd rather see the magazine—maybe it will be a home-made looking thing!" exclaimed Dot Starr.

"It will not! Not with us boys to boss the plant!" bragged Don, her twin.

"If it is home-made, you'll have to do it all again," commented Uncle Ben.

"That is where Mrs. Talmage's work comes in," laughed Mr. Talmage.

"It will be a regular magazine, all right!" exclaimed Mrs. Talmage emphatically.

"We boys will see to it that no magazine is mailed that will make folks laugh at us," guaranteed Ned.

"I'm sure I placed my hobby in the right hands, for you children seem to take a pride in doing things well," commended Uncle Ben.

"And with a nephew stepping right in his uncle's footprints, why shouldn't things be done right?" laughed Mr. Talmage.

"Say, Uncle Ben, how long must we wait before we can begin?" asked Don Starr.

"Get as busy as you like to-morrow after school," replied Uncle Ben. "I'll run into town and attend to having the things shipped here as long as you have agreed to my plans; you boys may start making benches, tables, or whatever will be needed in the plant."

"They'll need a desk, some chairs, a table and a few other things," suggested Mr. Talmage, looking around. "It might be advisable for them to partition off a corner of this room for an office."

"I have a good roll-top desk in the store-room at home; it has never had any use since Mr. Catlin passed away. The boys shall have that," offered Mrs. Catlin.

“And I can spare that long table we used to have in the dairy before we installed the patent butter machines,” added Mrs. Talmage.

“In case I find any other pieces of Mr. Catlin’s office furniture I will send them over with the desk,” said Mrs. Catlin.

“About those machines, Ben! How much will they cost the boys?” asked Mr. Talmage.

“I thought of assuming the cost, and any time the publishers give up the work I can easily sell them in the city. The children can pay the freight charges, which will not be very heavy,” replied Uncle Ben.

“Then, there will really be no heavy expense to start with, will there?” asked Mrs. Talmage.

“No, but a tax of application and interest will be necessary,” smiled Uncle Ben.

“We will agree to pay all of that you want,” promised several of the boys.

The Blue Birds did not have much to say about the machines and workshop, but each felt that it was to be their very own magazine, so that their interest and pleasure in every new development were keyed to the top pitch.

“Betty, what page do you want to take charge of?” asked Norma, eagerly, as they left the carriage house.

“I think we had better defer discussing that part of the work until we can all sit down quietly and talk it over,” said Mrs. Talmage.

The men and boys remained with Ike to decide what boards and lumber would be needed for the morrow, so work could begin on their workrooms.

“Let’s have a sign for the front over the door,” suggested Jinks. “I’ll paint it at home.”

“Call it ‘Bobolink Boys Publishing Company,’” ventured Meredith.

“Oh, that wouldn’t be fair to the Blue Birds if they are going to help in the work,” said Ned.

“Name it ‘Blue Bird & Bobolink Company,’” said Uncle Ben.

This last suggestion struck everyone as being just right, but Mr. Talmage made a good amendment.

"Why not have a mysterious combination? Every mortal is interested in finding out a puzzle, or secret. The more elusive a thing is the more they chase it. Now, get folks guessing over your name and they will not forget you so soon. I just thought of the name of 'B. B. & B. B. Company.'"

"That's great, father, but we haven't thought of a name for the magazine," cried Ned.

"Add a few more 'B's' to the others," laughed Uncle Ben. "We'll name it the 'B. B. B. B.,' published by the 'B. B. & B. B. Co.'"

"What does 'B. B. B. B.' stand for?" asked Mr. Talmage.

"'*Blue Bird Bobolink Bulletin*,'" replied Uncle Ben.

"That's mystery enough, I'm sure," laughed Mr. Talmage.

After a few more remarks, the first meeting of the organization whose influence was to be far greater than had been hoped for by Uncle Ben, or the boys who had started it, was dismissed.

CHAPTER VI

BEGINNING THE WINTER WORK

It is needless to say that the moment school was dismissed the following afternoon every boy and girl who was interested in the new Publishing Company, ran toward the carriage house at Mossy Glen. The teachers, pupils, and even some of the members of the Board of Education had heard of the plans made the day before—for in a small community like Oakdale, news travels rapidly—and the men on the school board were as much interested in the success of the children's work as if it had been their own undertaking.

Ike had found some splendid pine boards, a number of two-by-four joists, plenty of odds and ends of railing, posts, moulding, and other trim that would make a boy delight in amateur carpentry work.

Nails, screws, hammers, saw, and tools of all kinds were provided, so that each boy could work without delaying or inconveniencing the others. Ike and Simon were to superintend the construction and show the boys how to put things together properly.

Uncle Ben and Mr. Talmage, who went to the city early in the morning to attend to the shipping of the machinery, had not yet returned.

The Blue Birds gathered merrily in their Nest in the cherry tree, with several little girls who had been away during the summer and were eager to join the Nest.

Miss Selina insisted upon walking along the path from the house when Mrs. Talmage started for the Nest and, upon arriving at the foot of the steps that led up to the Nest, looked up imploringly.

"Flutey, I believe you can get up here if I help you!" exclaimed Ruth, seeing her aunt's expression.

"Oh, no, dearie! What about the rheumatism in my ankles?" groaned Miss Selina.

"Leave it behind!" laughed Ruth, gayly hopping down from the Nest.

"I wish I could!" declared Aunt Selina, taking a firm hold on the handrail and trying to lift up her foot.

"Ouch! that hurt my knee-joint!" cried she.

"Flutey! That's no way to leave that rheumatism behind!" reprimanded Ruth. "Now, make up your mind to walk right up and forget the nasty little pain."

Mrs. Talmage and the Blue Birds were hovering over the railing of the Nest to advise the two at the foot of the steps. Dot Starr, with her usual bluntness and funny way of expressing herself, called down to Miss Selina:

"Flutey, you just feel those twinges in your joints because you're spoiled. Mumzie says I am always sicker if I let myself be fussed over and spoiled. *She* just says, 'Try to forget it.' Now, if you were me, you never would be down there a second, but you'd jump here two steps at a time. So, I say like Mumzie would, forget you're not me, and we'll see you pop up here like magic!"

Aunt Selina felt like rebuking Dot, but the children smiled sympathetically and knew Dot was sincere in her desire to help the old lady, so the invalid replied instead,

"Dot, that is just the trouble! I can't forget the habits of seventy years. I wish I could make-believe I was as young and spry as you are."

"If you wish, then you can! Remember the story of Sarah Crewe?" cried Ruth, helping Miss Selina to the next step.

"I saw an old lady up in Casco Bay town last summer who was older than you and she never had time to remember her age, because she had to work all day for other folks. She said she slept like a baby every night. Daddum said one reason she looked so young was that she hadn't time to worry about growing old," said Dot.

"If I had had to work for others instead of being pampered until I couldn't do a thing for myself, maybe I would feel as young as anyone," admitted Aunt Selina.

Meantime, without being conscious of the act, the old lady was being helped up the steps by Ruth, until, at the last words, she reached the top.

"Why, I'm up and never knew it!" she laughed.

"That's just the way to forget!" cried Dot, clapping her hands.

"And you've left your troubles behind as I told you to," added Ruth.

A chair was placed for Aunt Selina who looked about the Nest with keen interest.

"Mary Talmage, I just wager this was all your idea, wasn't it?" she commented, as she noted the sides of the Nest covered with straw matting, and the cute wicker table and chairs.

"Yes, Flutey, it was. But listen until we tell you how we found this Nest and the furniture," said Ruth, and all the Blue Birds chirped in to tell the story about the Nest and how the furniture was found hidden in unexpected places about the lawn and in the shrubbery.

Aunt Selina chuckled, but Mrs. Talmage spoke with some seriousness.

"Blue Birds, time is flying, and we must talk about our magazine."

Ruth then explained the presence of the children who wished to join the Nest. Mrs. Talmage looked sorry.

"Dearies, I would like to have you with us, but really I cannot take proper charge of more than I have at present. I want to do the work right and that will be impossible with too many in one Nest. But I have a suggestion to offer. Mrs. Catlin is so interested with us in the work that I am sure she will gladly start you in a Nest of your own. She has plenty of time, and a beautiful place, so you will be just as happy there as here. We can all meet when necessary and talk over affairs together. I will write a note to her and explain, then you can take it over."

"I know Mrs. Catlin! We live on the same street!" exclaimed one of the children.

"I guess we all know Mrs. Catlin, and like her; if we can't join Ruth's Nest, I'd like to be in one of Mrs. Catlin's," said another little girl.

After bidding them good-by as they ran across the lawn, the Blue Birds settled down to hear the plans for work on the magazine.

"I have some ideas which I would like to present to save time," said Mrs. Talmage.

"I apportioned a page to each one of you to edit and expect you to have the line of writing that best suits your ability.

"For instance," continued Mrs. Talmage: "To Dot Starr, who did the cut-out paper furniture so well at the school-house this summer when we made the paper doll houses for the city children, I gave a page called, 'What Can Be Made of Paper.'

"To Edith, who always makes such good candy, I gave the 'Candy Kettle.'

"To Betty, who is clever with her pencils, I gave the 'Drawing Lesson.'

"To Ruth, who loves housekeeping, I gave 'Household Hints.'

"To Norma, who likes to sew, I gave the 'Doll's Wardrobe.'

"To May, who takes such good kodak pictures, I gave the 'Camera Corner.'

"To Frances, who is an adept at puzzles and games, I gave 'Puzzledom.'

"There are besides many other pages to edit which I think will have to be done by the boys, and some grown-ups, so I just jotted down the names of the boys that I think are capable of doing it.

"I gave Ned a page for 'Domestic Animals,' Meredith Starr can have a page on 'Wild Animals,' and Jinks a page on 'Insects and Reptiles.'

"Then, there will be need for other articles which the other boys can supply, and they can all help with the publishing. I shall write to an old friend who was judge of the Juvenile Court for years, and most likely has very interesting stories to tell. Another well-known writer of children's books lives in Washington, D. C., and I feel quite sure of her interest when I tell her what our plans are. Besides, Uncle Ben knows people who will contribute, as he told us so."

"Oh, Mrs. Talmage, do you really believe the magazine will be so good that folks will subscribe for it?" questioned Norma.

"Why, of course! Didn't you hear Uncle Ben say that he would be ashamed to send anything less than a real magazine through the mail?—That we would have to do our work over again if it was poorly done?" said Mrs. Talmage.

"Just think! My name on a magazine page with my cut-out furniture on it!" cried Dot, hugging her sides.

"How many folks will get one, do you suppose?" asked Betty.

“The more the merrier,” laughed Mrs. Talmage.

“Mother Wings, how do people get a list of names where children want a magazine?” asked Ruth.

“Oh, different ways. Uncle Ben may have a list of families where there are children. I know dozens of friends who have children; Mrs. Catlin does, too. Then, there are the Wells, Stevens, Starrs, and so on: all families who know other families where there are children. Why, friends of mine in England and Germany will take this magazine if I send them a sample copy. And so a list grows when everyone tries to help.”

“If we are only printing this magazine to help along our farms for poor children I don’t see why anyone in Europe would want to take the paper,” said Dot.

“Don’t you be so sure about that, Miss Dot!” said Aunt Selina. “After this organization gets agoing I believe it will make such a stir that its light won’t ‘be hidden under a bushel’ very long. Only keep your magazine at high-water mark, and you will see a marvel before the year is over.”

Aunt Selina’s remark made such an impression on Mrs. Talmage that she suddenly realized how important their venture might turn out to be, providing everyone did their best.

A loud halloo coming from the direction of the carriage house called the Blue Birds’ attention to the open door. Mr. Talmage and Uncle Ben were standing there beckoning for the Blue Birds.

Aunt Selina found she could get down from the Nest quite nimbly, and all started toward the building which was to be known in the future as the “Publishing House.”

Inside, about twenty boys were sawing, hammering, and calling to each other while Ike and Simon bossed the work. At one side of the entrance the front corner of the large room had been measured off, and a partition about six feet high erected. This office had a wide window in front, and a closet on the side wall. The partition was of oak-stained ceiling boards that had been taken out of an attic chamber of the Talmage residence when that room had been refinished. The partition had a door to match, and the boys’ work was exceptionally good. Six boys were busy completing the nailing of

the partition and two more were so engaged upon hanging the door that the visitors were scarcely noticed.

"Hi, there! Jinks, start that screw, will you?" called Ned, trying to balance the door on his toes while the hinge insisted upon slipping out of the notch that had been made for it.

"I will, if you will stop wriggling the old thing!" replied Jinks, who had pinched his finger several times and had become wary of the unsteady door.

Ike saw the difficulty the boys were having and, while the Blue Birds stood watching the struggle, came over and offered to help them.

"This scene is as good as a vaudeville, Mary," laughed Uncle Ben. "That's why I wanted you to see it."

"Oh, I think they have done wonderfully well," replied Mrs. Talmage, with interest.

"They have, and Ben is so tickled with the boys' whole-hearted support of the plan, that he is having the time of his life," added Mr. Talmage.

The other boys had made a strong bench to sit upon, and a rude table with a board top.

The whole interior of the place was covered with sawdust, shavings, and pieces of timber. Planes and chisels were in constant demand, and hammers, screw-drivers and saws were all making a veritable bedlam of a noise, when Ike called "Time."

"Too dark to see what you are doing," he explained.

"Turn on the electric lights, Ike," said Ned.

"Better not—you boys have done far more than we thought you could and there is no use in 'driving a willing horse to death,'" advised Mr. Talmage.

As the boys dropped tools and stretched tired arms, or bent backs, they realized that the unusual work had made muscles ache.

"Get on your caps and coats, Bobolinks, and come out on the lawn to hear of my trip to the city," said Uncle Ben.

In a few moments the room was empty and the children crowded about Uncle Ben who sat cross-legged on the soft grass, while Ike placed chairs for Aunt Selina and Mrs. Talmage.

“Well, to start at the beginning, I took the eight-ten train this morning, and I was introduced to the Oakdale Commuters as ‘Uncle Ben of the Blue Birds and Bobolinks.’ That was reference enough for anyone. I was looked upon as a man to be envied and I even saw covert glances from some jealous eyes that looked me up and down and saw no especial favor to have boosted me in the estimation of the B. B. & B. B. Company.”

“Now, Uncle Ben, stop your fooling and tell us about the trip,” rebuked Ruth.

“I am, Fluff, but I want to begin at the right end of the story,” teased Uncle Ben.

“Oh, begin anywhere, only get somewhere!” cried Mr. Talmage, laughing.

With a sigh that indicated that he was misunderstood, Uncle Ben continued his story.

“Mr. Wells, Mr. Stevens, Mr. Starr, Mr. Wilson, and many other men you know promised to advise and assist the boys in every way possible.”

“What did Daddum say?” cried Dot, eagerly.

“Don’t interrupt, Dot!” admonished Meredith, sternly.

“Well, Mr. Starr offered a series of articles on his experiences in lumber camps, and, besides, he promised to take hold of any part of the plan in which we could use him,” replied Uncle Ben. “Mr. Wells has a book that will prove valuable for our undertaking. It is a directory of benevolent institutions and contains the names and addresses of every asylum or home in the country.”

“Why, Uncle Ben, that is exactly what we need to find our sick children for the farms, isn’t it?” said Ruth, happily.

Uncle Ben nodded his head and continued.

“Then, Mr. Stevens offered to have his solicitors try to secure some advertising for the magazine. His agency is one of the best in the city and I think his offer a fine one.”

At the idea of having advertisements appear in the magazine, the Blue Birds and Bobolinks looked at each other in surprise.

“We never thought of *that*!” ventured Ned.

"Sounds like real work, when you hear the words 'solicitors' and 'advertisements,' doesn't it?" commented Jinks.

"I've been trying to make you understand from the first that this will mean work as well as pleasure," insisted Uncle Ben.

"They'll all wake up to that fact soon enough, Ben—go on with your story," laughed Mr. Talmage.

"Mr. Wilson, who is connected with the Oakdale Paper Mills, then offered to donate enough paper to get out several months' issues, so I accepted that offer with delight, thinking you could make use of Aunt Selina's offer in some other way. Mr. Wilson is going to bring some samples of paper over to the Publishing House soon and let us make our selections. A man whom I just met offered to speak to the Manhattan Subscription Agency about taking subscriptions for you and giving the magazine a good position in their next catalogue."

"So much good luck actually turned Uncle Ben's head," laughed Mr. Talmage, during a moment's silence. "Why, he hardly knew what he went to the city for, and I had to guide him by the arm to show him the way to his office."

"Of course, my friends here know better than to believe any such scandalous tales about me!" replied Uncle Ben, looking at his brother as if to dare him to tease any more.

The children always enjoyed these make-believe quarrels between the two brothers, and Ned generally egged them on. To-day, however, he was too eager to hear about the trip to the city and so urged Uncle Ben to finish the story.

"We found the machinery that I think you can best use here, and had it prepared for shipment. Just as we were leaving the store-room a man came down with a load of type.

"'Where are you taking that?' I asked him.

"'Boss said to send it off to be melted down,' replied the man.

"'Just leave it on top of this packing case—I'll see that it is taken care of,' I told him, and he did as I said.

"Now, boys, all of that type is coming out here for you to work with. I had it charged to my account at the office, for it was a 'big find' to get hold of some type just at the time we needed it," concluded Uncle Ben, taking a long breath of relief.

"And now, I'll tell you of all the things Uncle Ben forgot to mention," laughed Mr. Talmage.

"When we left the stock-room and went to his office, he picked up the telephone and called up more friends than I ever thought he knew. Two or three of them were invited to lunch with us, and the others were told about the wonderful work the Oakdale children were planning. Every one of his friends was told to help along or suggest some way to boost the magazine. Of course, they had to promise."

Uncle Ben chuckled to himself as his brother told about the telephone experiences.

"Now, we come to the time when this crafty uncle of yours met his friends at lunch. What do you think his plot was? Well, just listen and I will tell you," and Mr. Talmage nodded his head warningly at his brother.

"One of his guests was Mr. Connell, the man that owns one of the largest engraving plants in the city. This Uncle Ben told his story in such an engaging way that that business man actually offered to turn out the plates you needed for the magazine at actual cost for several months. We all know what that means—several hundred dollars on the credit side of the ledger."

All eyes were turned toward Uncle Ben for confirmation of the great offer, and he nodded his head smilingly.

"One of the best business advisers I know in New York said that he thought you children had an unusually good idea for a successful business investment, and hoped that you would keep it up until you were adults and saw the financial benefit in it," said Uncle Ben, seriously.

The girls were pleased at this news, but the boys were hilarious to find that a clever business man approved of the plan they were working out.

"When will the machinery be here, Uncle Ben?" asked Ned.

"It is coming by freight and will take a few days, but you will be kept busy until then in finishing the shop-work," returned Uncle Ben.

"Yes, indeed, we will have to build some stands for type, too, with the boxful you got for us," answered Ned.

“We Blue Birds spent all of our afternoon engaging editors to take charge of the pages,” ventured Ruth, who thought the Blue Birds had been quiet too long.

“You’ll have to have all the pages ready to hand over to me by the tenth of October, you know; I’ll need about three days for making linotype and then you can have the proofs back,” said Uncle Ben.

“Oh, we will have everything ready long before the tenth,” laughed Mrs. Talmage.

“From the way the Blue Birds are working, I should say that each one will have about five hundred pages written by that time,” added Aunt Selina, smilingly.

“In that case, we will have to have each page add a notice at the bottom: ‘To be continued in our Nest.’”

CHAPTER VII

BLUE BIRD WISDOM AND BOBOLINK WORK

"There! my page is all done!" exclaimed Ruth, holding a sheet of paper away to admire the neatly written notes for "Household Hints."

"Mine's done, too, but I'm going to copy it over to-night to make it look neat as a pin," said Norma.

"Did you get any new candy recipes?" asked Dot eagerly.

The little Blue Bird who took charge of the "Candy Kettle" smacked her lips emphatically.

"I haven't started to ink the pencil lines of my cut-out paper furniture, but that won't take long," explained Dot. "I started with the kitchen because Mumzie said no good housekeeper would furnish a parlor if she had no kitchen equipment."

"I did my drawing lesson, but I haven't written the lesson telling the children how to make the picture," said Betty, with a worried look toward Mrs. Talmage.

"Plenty of time, dear," soothed Mrs. Talmage. "You know Uncle Ben said we would have until the tenth of the month."

The Blue Birds were gathered in the cherry-tree Nest after school, one day, waiting for the signal from the Publishing House which would tell them they might run over and inspect the huge pieces of machinery that had arrived that day from New York. Ike and Simon had to help the three truckmen as they placed rollers under the press and rolled it from the truck and into the room. The stitcher, cutter and other pieces were not so unwieldy to move and place. At noon, Ned saw the men struggling with the press and so refrained from going near the house, but he told the other Bobolinks, and immediately after school was dismissed a crowd of boys ran to their shop.

The Blue Birds had been enjoined to keep out of the way while the boys cleared things up and investigated the various pieces of machinery. It was a strain on their patience, however, to remain in

their Nest and listen to the laughs, exultant shouts, and sounds of satisfaction coming from the carriage house.

All things have an end, so Uncle Ben soon appeared at the wide doorway of the Publishing House and gave a shrill whistle for the Blue Birds. Instantly, seven little girls took flight down the steps and across the lawn, leaving Mrs. Talmage to assist Aunt Selina.

The Blue Birds ran in and looked about. The great, ugly, black machines with wheels, rollers and arms everywhere, did not impress them very favorably.

"Can't make head or tail of the thing!" scorned Dot.

"No one expects a girl to understand," replied her brother Don.

"I would be afraid of that dreadful looking knife!" shuddered Betty, standing at a safe distance and pointing to the wide blade of the paper cutter.

Then the children crowded about the stitcher while Uncle Ben showed the wonderful work the machine did.

The electric attachments had not yet been completed, so the demonstration of the machines had to be by gestures. But Uncle Ben was equal to it, and the children felt that they could almost *see* the machines running as they listened to his explanations.

"Well, Uncle Ben, I don't see how we can start this work without you superintending us," ventured Meredith.

"It all seemed simple enough when we were talking about printing a magazine, but this job is more than I can do," admitted Jinks.

"I am at home with my little press, Uncle Ben, but these big fellows make me want to run away from the contract we made with you," added Ned, seriously.

The Blue Birds and younger Bobolinks heard the older boys with anxious concern lest the entire plan should fail.

"I thought of just such a contingency and provided for it," replied Uncle Ben, with his optimistic manner. "I realize that you all go to school and afternoons after school do not give you much time to experiment on these machines, so I found two young men who used to do good work for us who were pleased to come out here for a few weeks and show you boys how to do things. They won't come until the galley proofs arrive, but then, they will help you get out the first issue and teach you everything there is to know about these

machines. They will take them all apart and teach you how to put them together again. A machine is like a man's valuable animal—if you pay no attention to its welfare, it does not last long enough to pay you for its keep."

"We'll look after our machinery all right, Uncle Ben," agreed Ned, with the look of the workman who truly loves his tools.

"I'm sure you will, and I hope the Blue Birds will have as much pride in turning out commendable articles for us to print," added Uncle Ben, looking at Mrs. Talmage.

"Oh, Uncle Ben, there's one question I want to ask—may we each sign our own name to our page or must we make up a pretend name?" asked Ruth.

"Why, sign your very own name, of course; that is one way of making you keep up to the mark. If you only had a pretend name on your page you might get careless and say, 'Oh, no one knows who it is, anyway, so I don't care if this story isn't as good as it ought to be.'"

Mrs. Talmage and Aunt Selina smiled, for they could see the wisdom of the remark.

"I guess my father will be proud to see my name in a magazine," boasted Dot Starr.

"All depends on what you tack your name to, Dot," laughed Meredith.

"It'll be fine, all right!" exclaimed Dot, nodding her head emphatically.

"Shall we have our names at the top or at the bottom of the pages, Ben?" asked Mrs. Talmage.

"Oh, please, Uncle Ben, do put them at the *top*! I am afraid no one will stop to read our names if you have them at the bottom," worried little Betty.

Everyone laughed, but Uncle Ben assured her that the name would be placed directly under the name of the article.

Then, while the Blue Birds watched the boys placing type in the cases, Uncle Ben sat down beside Mrs. Talmage and had a quiet talk about affairs in general.

In concluding he said, “Now don’t you worry if the children should neglect a page now and then, for I can turn in heaps of good stories and articles any time we may need them.”

“Oh, these children are so reliable that they would rather do without food or sleep than neglect anything that promises funds for next summer’s farms,” returned Mrs. Talmage.

“Glad to hear it, and hope they keep it up. Now, what pages have you provided for each month—and have you any to spare for some prominent writers who are friends of mine and feel deeply interested in this venture?” asked Uncle Ben.

“Oh, yes!” replied Mrs. Talmage. “We have seven pages taken by the Blue Birds and four by the Bobolinks. Then there is a story Aunt Selina has been thinking of writing, and a page for music that her friend in New York will contribute. Mrs. Catlin promised to give us some tale of adventure each month and that will take two pages. So, let me see—that takes up, in all, sixteen pages. How many pages shall we have in the magazine?”

“About forty-eight is the usual size for such a paper,” replied Uncle Ben, figuring out Mrs. Talmage’s number of pages and making a memorandum of the balance remaining for use.

“Gracious! then we will have to find much more manuscript than I thought,” worried Mrs Talmage.

“No, I do not think so—that is what I want to find out to-day. A very good friend of mine who had charge of Field’s Museum for four years, so heartily endorsed this plan that he offered to supply a page article on plant life each month. His name alone is valuable to a paper, and it will certainly give weight to our magazine. Then, besides him, a very close friend, who has been connected with a prominent book concern for more than twenty years, called me up to say that this idea was just what he has been hoping for. Both he and his wife are eager to assist in some way. I suggested that they supply a page on bird life and give us some valuable hints about our feathered friends. This man has published numerous books on the subject of birds and is just the one to speak with authority. The moment I mentioned it, he accepted my invitation; so we have two renowned writers for most interesting and instructive pages each month,” said Uncle Ben.

“Why, how wonderful!” exclaimed Aunt Selina, who had been silent during the conversation. “I don’t see how you ever accomplish such miracles!”

Mrs. Talmage looked at Uncle Ben and said, laughingly, “Maybe it’s because we never take ‘no’ for an answer. We keep at an idea until it is hammered into everyone’s heart and mind.”

“And the moment our friends have it well hammered in they get so interested in succeeding that others are sought by them and the same story hammered into another head and heart,” added Uncle Ben.

“Well, I’m hammered and rooted in the work, and am anxious to have friends in it, too. Is that the way you do?” asked Aunt Selina.

“That’s just it! and before anyone else knows what’s going on, dozens of folks are working on the same idea,” replied Mrs. Talmage.

“Mary said something about a story that you wished to contribute, Aunt Selina—what is it?” asked Uncle Ben.

“An experience I had in the Civil War when I was visiting my old school chum, Rebecca Crudup. You have never heard any of my tales of that visit, but I assure you they are exciting.”

“And you were there! Why, Aunt Selina, your manuscript would be valuable to any magazine! I wish you would let me read it before you turn it over to the Blue Birds,” said Uncle Ben eagerly, the business instinct for new material for his magazine pushing the Blue Birds’ magazine into the background.

“You may see it after it is published in the children’s paper,” quietly replied Aunt Selina.

Uncle Ben took the rebuke in the right spirit, and said, “Is your friend alive to-day?”

“She was until last year, but her daughter is the musician I wish to get ‘rooted’ in this work for a music page. I haven’t her studio address, or I would have written to her about this.”

“Give me her name and the last address you knew of, and I will locate her as soon as I get back to the city,” offered Uncle Ben.

Uncle Ben wrote the name and late address in a book then turned to the ladies with a suggestion.

“Aunt Selina’s story will surely take more than the two pages you spoke of, so why not make a serial story of her Civil War experience?”

“Splendid! That is just the thing,” cried Mrs. Talmage.

“I could make it as long as you wanted it to run, for Rebecca visited me after the war and told me plenty of her wild adventures after I returned home from the South. Why, my coachman, Abe, was one of the Crudup slaves. He says they all stuck close to the family, for they loved them and wanted to remain, but Mr. Crudup lost most of his wealth in the war and had no place or means for so many servants,” related Miss Selina.

The children had made a thorough inspection of the machinery and type by this time and had joined the grown-ups.

“What was that you were telling mother, Aunt Selina?” asked Ned, who overheard the word “war” and was interested.

“Why, we just discovered that Aunt Selina had a very exciting time in the South during the Civil War and she is going to write it up for your magazine,” explained Uncle Ben.

“Oh, goody, goody!” exclaimed a chorus of voices.

“It’s strange that you never told us any of those stories, Aunt Selina,” ventured Mrs. Talmage.

“Oh, it all happened so long ago, dearie, that I never thought anyone would be interested. Besides, it turns to a page of my life that I always wanted to keep closed,” sighed Aunt Selina.

The others, respecting her reticence, changed the subject. Uncle Ben smiled at her and made a comforting remark.

“Aunt Selina, when we finish our first year’s work I am going to write a most interesting treatise and call it, ‘Aunt Selina’s Recipes for Youth.’”

“What do you mean?” she questioned.

“Just what I said,” replied he, laughing. “Since you have taken an interest in this work you have grown years and years younger in looks and actions.”

“Ben, you’re making fun of me!” declared Aunt Selina.

“No, he’s not, Aunt Selina; you really are looking fine,” said Mrs. Talmage.

“Aunt Selina, isn’t that what I prescribed for you at Happy Hills?” cried Ruth, exultantly.

“Yes, Fluffy, you did, and all the glory of this old conquest belongs to you,” admitted Aunt Selina, patting the little girl upon the head.

Just then, an expressman drove up and spoke to Ike.

“Right to the front door—that is the B. B. & B. B. Publishing Company’s shop,” replied Ike with pride.

Uncle Ben signed for the safe delivery of a large flat box and the children crowded about to watch Ned and Jinks open it.

The box was marked “Glass” and “Handle with Care,” so Ruth ran over to her uncle to inquire about it.

“Do you know what is in it?” asked she.

“I believe it is the box that failed to arrive with the other things,” he replied, smiling.

“Do tell what it is,” persisted Ruth.

“Why? You’ll soon see, and it would spoil the surprise if I told you,” said Uncle Ben.

Ruth skipped back to the circle formed about the case watching Ned take out the nails very carefully. Soon Jinks and he had the top boards off and then started to lift out the excelsior. This disposed of, a flat paper parcel was seen. Ned lifted it out, and seeing another one underneath, Jinks took it out also. Meredith and Don looked to see if there were any more, but excelsior seemed to fill the bottom of the box.

“Who has a knife?” asked Ned, not finding his own in his pocket.

“Here, here! hurry up and cut the twine!” shouted Don.

Ned took Don’s knife with the broken blade and rusty handle, and smiled as he hacked away at the twine. After several vigorous efforts the string parted and several hands hurried to tear off the heavy paper.

A large picture of Benjamin Franklin, in a heavy oak frame, came out from its wrappings.

“Oh, isn’t that fine!” cried several voices.

“Just our man, isn’t he?” laughed Ned, pleased as could be.

“If I had a head like that I could invent machines, too,” grumbled Don, feeling of his round little head in disgust.

While the others laughed at the remark, Meredith turned to the other parcel which Jinks held on the floor. The twine was soon cut and the papers taken off to reveal the strong features of Abraham Lincoln.

"Ho, that's best yet!" cried the boys who felt a deep admiration for the man whose picture stood before them.

Mr. Talmage and Mrs. Catlin came in during the exhibition of pictures, and the former said, "Just what you needed to complete the office appearance."

"Yes, indeed, Uncle Ben, and we thank you heaps and heaps!" exclaimed Ned, carrying his picture into the office.

Jinks followed and Don started to drag away the box that stood in the midst of the circle of children.

"Better see if there are any more!" called Uncle Ben, warningly.

Don dropped upon his knees and sought in the excelsior.

"Oh! here's some more and I almost threw them away!" he cried, as he dragged forth several small packages.

Upon being opened they proved to be a number of pictures of famous publishers and inventors of printing machinery.

"Won't they look just great, though!" came from several pleased boys.

"Why, come to think of it," said Mrs. Catlin, "my husband has a number of fine plates of machines and things of that kind. He was connected with the Vivla Machine Company, you know, and they manufactured presses and printers' tools. They might look well if added to this collection."

Everyone agreed that the more the better, and then Dot remembered that Mrs. Catlin had not seen the office and machinery.

"Walk right over and see how officey our office looks with your desk and table," she cried.

"And Mrs. Talmage sent in the chairs," added Betty.

"And my mother sent the carpet," added Norma, pointing to the green rug.

"And father says we may have his typewriting machine and table here when he's away from home," said Ruth, eagerly.

Mrs. Catlin praised the arrangement, and then asked to be shown the wonderful machinery that was to do such great work.

"Dear me, I heartily regret that I am not a little girl so that I might glory in this office and work," sighed Mrs. Catlin, coming back to the grown-ups.

"You don't have to be 'little,' Therese," laughed Mrs. Talmage. "You are one of this juvenile club as surely as if you were but ten. Why, you couldn't pass the place without coming in to ask for news."

"To tell the truth, I was going to the village, but I heard the happy shouts away out on the road and so I just wanted to know the cause," confessed Mrs. Catlin, smiling.

"I hope I may live a few years longer to see the results of this work," sighed Aunt Selina.

"You will, Flutey, you will!" cried Dot, enthusiastically. "What Uncle Ben told you was really truly true!"

"And just think, Mrs. Catlin, Flutey is going to write a long serious story for our magazine all about the war that she was in!" cried Betty Stevens.

The grown-ups smiled at Betty's idea of a "serial" story, but Mrs. Catlin looked surprised.

"Why, I never knew you were from the South?"

"I'm not, but I was visiting there during an exciting time, and Ben thinks my experience will make a readable story," replied Aunt Selina.

Mrs. Catlin looked at the aged lady with interest and said how much she would like to hear the tale. Suddenly, however, she slapped her gloved hands together and spoke.

"Now, what reason is there that I should not have some pages in this magazine?" she asked.

"Show us any good reason for taking our space and you may have it," teased Mrs. Talmage.

"Then put me down for another serial. I have a collection of short stories that Mr. Catlin wrote of his adventures in Alaska. It does not seem much like an adventure to go to Alaska nowadays, but forty years ago it was as if one were leaving this hemisphere for the

unknown. Some of his tales are intensely interesting," said Mrs. Catlin.

"Why, friends, we are getting so many notable articles and writers together that we will soon have to raise the subscription price," laughed Mr. Talmage.

"That reminds me that we never thought of a charge. We ought to decide what subscription price we wish to ask," said Uncle Ben.

"Has anyone thought of that?" asked Mrs. Talmage, looking about at Blue Birds and Bobolinks.

Heads were shaken and Ned asked, "How can we tell how much to charge until we know what the magazine will cost?"

"I can help you figure that out, I think," offered Uncle Ben, sitting down at the table and taking paper and pencil from the drawer.

"Figure how much five hundred—or say, a thousand will cost," ventured Ned.

"A thousand! Where will you send them?" cried Jinks.

"I should say, figure on five thousand—or ten," said Uncle Ben, quietly.

"What!" gasped several boys.

"Yes, because ten thousand will not cost much more than three hundred."

"How's that?" asked the boys.

"Plates, linotype, lock-up, make-ready, will cost as much for one magazine as for one thousand. The only extra cost in getting out a quantity is in paper, ink and time. Now, I firmly believe that we will be able to send out ten thousand by the time you have them ready."

"Well, Uncle Ben, it sounds *awful* big to us, particularly as we haven't one single subscription, yet," said Ruth.

"Here—here, Fluff, don't let that bother you!" said Mr. Talmage, throwing a five-dollar bill upon the table.

"And here's for ten more!" laughed Aunt Selina, taking a twenty-dollar bill from her purse.

"Here's for five orphan asylums," added Mrs. Catlin placing a ten-dollar note on the table.

"How now, Fluff—where are your blues, eh?" teased Uncle Ben.

The children saw the crisp notes lying on the table and felt the joy of a successful start.

"From what Aunt Selina and Mrs. Talmage offered, it looks as if the price should be two dollars per year. Now, let us figure out how close we come to that," said Uncle Ben.

After counting up cost of production plus cost of mailing, it was decided that two dollars would be a just price, but there would be little profit unless more money could be gotten for advertising, or some saving made.

"Guess we've about completed our business for to-day," ventured Uncle Ben, as he noticed the children growing restless.

"Yes, let us go to the house and have some nice cool lemonade and cookies," suggested Mr. Talmage.

Eager looks turned toward Mrs. Talmage, and she laughed.

"We're always ready for something good to eat, father, so you show us the way to the picnic."

It took but a few moments for the children to reach the wide veranda and settle down comfortably until the maids brought out the refreshments.

"A day's work always ought to finish like this," mused Don, munching a delicious piece of cake.

CHAPTER VIII

AUNT SELINA'S CIVIL WAR STORY

The children thoroughly enjoyed their refreshments. Aunt Selina did not care for any, so she sat smiling as she watched them.

"As long as Flutey isn't busy, wouldn't it be nice to have her tell us a teeny-weeny bit of that war story?" ventured Dot Starr.

"Oh, yes! Please do! Flutey, do tell!" came from various directions.

"Why, that would be lovely, Aunt Selina, if you will," added Mrs. Talmage.

Thus besieged, Aunt Selina decided to yield to the children.

"Let me see," she began. "I must have been about eighteen when my dearest friend, Rebecca Crudup, invited me to spend Easter Holidays at her Southern home. We had been chums from the moment we met at Miss Wyland's Seminary for Young Ladies, and the Christmas before the time I just mentioned, Rebecca had visited my home at Happy Hills. Mother liked Rebecca immensely, but she feared the fighting in the South might create trouble for me if I went with Becky. We reassured her, however, and an unwilling consent was written from home.

"A week before the vacation began, Becky received a letter asking her to start home as soon as she received the word, as important matters in the family had to be looked after.

"As this would give us an extra week's holiday we hailed the letter with joy. The girls stood about enviously watching us pack our carpetbags and Rebecca's trunk. I packed many of my things in her trunk to save the trouble of transporting two to Tennessee. We left the next morning 'midst shouts reminding us to be sure to be on hand when school re-opened.

"We enjoyed the journey during the first part of the way, but, as the train sped on, the country showed signs of the desolation wrought by war, and we sobered from our happy laughter to serious contemplation.

"The nearer to Nashville that we came, the deeper the evidence that war was an awful thing. We saw burned homes, devastated land and forlorn-looking families as we passed by.

"Rebecca's father met us at the station in Nashville and welcomed me with a surprised manner. Turning to his daughter, he spoke in a serious tone.

"'We will endeavor to give your friend an enjoyable visit, daughter, but it doesn't seem promisin'. Evidently you did not receive our telegram?'

"'Only this letter, father,' replied Becky, showing him the last letter received by her.

"'Hum! well, we will live up to our reputation, Miss Selina, and be the true Southern hosts.'

"As we came out of the station and walked toward the carriage-posts, Rebecca looked about for the family equipage.

"Mr. Crudup led us toward a great spring wagon which was drawn by two raw-boned farm horses. An old darky sat on the front seat.

"'Why, father! Surely we are not going home in *this*!' cried Rebecca with deep chagrin.

"'Sorry, daughter, but it must be so,' returned her father in a grieved voice. 'You will find many changes here since the fightin' began.'

"'Selina, I'm awful sorry you have to ride this way, and I can't understand why it is. Father seems to know,' said Becky, in an apologetic tone.

"'I don't mind, Becky. Really and truly, I don't. I love the country so, that I would just as soon ride a plow if we had to, to get to your home.'

"'Well, I'm glad your little friend is so sensible, Rebecca,' commended Mr. Crudup.

"We climbed into the back seat after the baggage had been stowed away, and the horses started off.

"'Father, why didn't you drive Jerry and Jim?' asked Rebecca, wonderingly.

"'Becky, your brothers, I trust, are astride them, showin' the Yankees how to fight!'

"'Daddy!' cried Rebecca in dismay.

"Mr. Crudup looked dreadfully sorry, but said nothing.

"'Daddy, have Newell and Ed left home?'

"'Yes, child. And I'm mighty sorry to say that most of your friends and cousins are with them. Some will nevah return—but we are prayin' constant, that our boys will win honahs for the South—and come home to enjoy them.'

"Becky and I sat as stiff as sticks as we realized what this meant.

"'Still, I don't see why *some* of our carriage horses couldn't have come for us!' insisted Rebecca.

"'The horses have been used by some of the boys who had none, and the spring wagon has to come in often with supplies for the troops. This happened to be one of the days. So mothaw thought her girl would not mind, particularly as we believed you received the telegram,' explained Mr. Crudup.

"I was almost sorry I had come, so unexpected did my appearance seem to be, but Becky cheered up when she saw me grow uncomfortable, and tried to amuse me by pointing out neighboring plantations.

"As we drove about a bend in the road, Rebecca's beautiful old home could be seen situated upon a knoll that commanded a view of the surrounding country. We entered the grounds by a road that ran through a dense wood, and then ascended gradually until we reached the porte-cochère. The house itself, large, solid and in perfect condition, was a landmark from every point of view round-about.

"Mrs. Crudup and her two older daughters welcomed me to their home and made me feel more at ease. Rebecca, being the youngest member of the family, was petted and made much of, and I came in for my share of it for being her best friend.

"After our baggage was placed in our rooms, we were escorted upstairs and left to prepare for dinner, which was generally at noon, but had been delayed for Rebecca's arrival.

"My, but that was a delicious dinner! I can almost taste the tender chicken with corn waffles, hot and crisp, this minute!

"Not a word had been said about the reason of calling Rebecca home a week earlier than usual. Toward evening, however, vehicles of all descriptions drove to the side yard and were left to the care of

the negro servants. As the neighbors came to the house they went directly to a large room which had been closed and locked since our arrival, until now. Rebecca and I were invited to join the sewing meeting, but neither of us liked sewing, and we had planned to visit the horses before it grew too dark. However, I saw heaps of flannel garments, half-finished socks on knitting needles, warm caps, and clothes of all kinds being made up for the Confederate soldiers.

"Becky and I strolled down toward the stables, but it was too dark to inspect the thoroughbreds I had heard so much about, so we returned to the house.

"As we passed the great barn we saw men busily engaged in packing all kinds of produce and supplies in long hemp sacks to be carted to Nashville the following day. In the sewing room the ladies were still plying needles that flashed in and out as if speed would save a life.

"At eight o'clock a hot supper was served, and at nine the neighbors left for their homes.

"That night, after we retired to our rooms, Rebecca came into my room for a cozy chat. She looked very pretty as she sat on the corner of the bed hugging her knees up in her arms.

"'Selina, it's a shame you are dragged into such a vacation! I declare, had I known that all of the boys were away, nothing would have tempted me to bring you. Even the girls are too busy sewing for their sweethearts to bother with parties or sociables,' pouted Rebecca.

"'I came to visit you—not to see the boys or go to parties, and I want you to believe that I don't mind a bit having you all to myself,' I said.

"'You're a good little mouse to say that, but, all the same, I will trot you all over the country on our saddle horses. You will have plenty of fresh air, and that is what Miss Wyland said you needed for your paleness,' replied Becky.

"Rebecca kissed me good-night, but I felt ill at ease in that Southern home for being one of the 'detested Yankees.' Never, by word or sign, was such a thought given out, but I felt that everyone would have been more at ease had I never come.

“Every other afternoon Mr. Crudup went to Nashville with a load of bags for the commissary department. One afternoon, about a week after our arrival, he came back from the city earlier than usual and we noticed a troubled look on his face.

“‘How now, father?’ asked sweet Mrs. Crudup.

“‘Reports in Nashville say that the fighting is turned toward this part of the country,’ he said.

“‘Someone has to bear the burden—perhaps the Lord has selected us to carry a share,’ returned Mrs. Crudup, reverently.

“‘The one thing that worries me is that our place is well known in this part of the country, and our fertile acres are known to produce the finest edibles. Then, too, the fact that we raise some of the best-bred horses in Tennessee may cause the Yanks to come down on us at any time and raid the stables. In that case, they will carry off everything—not even a plow-horse will be left.’

“‘Father, our boys have had all they could use for this conflict, and wouldn’t it be bettah to ship our horses to Nashville fo’ the army to use?’ asked Mrs. Crudup.

“‘I would rather see every head of cattle dead than in the hands of a Yankee!’ cried Sally Crudup, bitterly, for her sweetheart had been killed in a battle a few weeks previous.

“‘Sally, Sally! let no bittehness feed your sorrow!’ reproved the gentle mother, patting me upon the back as if in apology for her daughter’s breach of etiquette.

“Mr. and Mrs. Crudup walked away in private converse, and Becky and I started for the paddocks which I had not yet visited.

“‘Selina, I’m plannin’ a desperate deed!’ said Becky, in a whisper, as we passed down the shady lane that led to the stables and pastures.

“I looked at her in surprise, for her tone was shaky.

“‘I have not introduced you to Imp. Imp is the most valuable horse on the place and would bring a high price in Nashville. My only relief is that no one can ride him, manage, or harness him but Tim and me. When Imp was born Tim was there, and when Imp’s mother died soon after his birth, she turned her eyes on Tim and seemed to ask him to look after her baby. I got there just as she turned back her head and saw me. I took her head upon my lap and promised that I

would adopt her boy, and I always felt that she knew what I said and died happier for it. From that minute, I took charge of Imp and fed him on a bottle until he could eat alone. Tim and I have had sole charge of his training, but he is surely an Imp when anyone else tries to come near him.' Becky almost wept as she told me the story of the poor mother-mare.

"'Imp understands everything one says to him, but he can't talk; however, his eyes tell you what he wishes to say! Now, if any stranger should raid the stables and spy Imp, they would certainly try to steal him first, for he is the finest thoroughbred that ever stepped over Tennessee soil! But, he will bite, and kick, and bolt with anyone who dares to trifle with him. Then do you know what will happen? They'll either put a bullet through his heart, or hitch him to an army ambulance, which will break his heart just the same.'

"Rebecca walked along in silence after that, until we reached a stile that divided the house lands from the pastures.

"'Selina, there's only one thing to do—take him away and hide him until this war is over. From what I gather from the servants about the place, this plantation is in a straight line for Nashville, the point the Yankees are making for. So, the sooner Imp is hidden the better!'

"'Becky,' asked I, in alarm, 'will these slaves desert or sell you out to the Yankees?'

"'Mercy, no, Selina! They are like children to us. It may be that one or two would like the novelty of going North, but they would soon be squelched if it was found out. Why, father and mother treat their old slaves like their family—asking advice of Tim, or Martha the housekeeper, as the case might be. As for our old mammy—and the cook—gracious, Selina! I'd die for either one of them, and so would any one of us, and they know it. They'd stick to us even if we lost this war—which we won't!' cried Rebecca.

"I felt somewhat piqued, but said nothing, for I was a guest of Rebecca's. She sensed that she had said something difficult to forget, and hugged me laughingly.

"'You wouldn't give a fig for a friend that could hope anything but success for her country, would you?' she asked.

"I made no reply, and she continued in a low voice.

"'Selina, I'm going to take you into a secret that no one but Tim and father knows about. Father hasn't an idea that I know about it, and Tim won't tell him that I know. I found it myself years ago, and I always go there when I want to be all alone. I have driven Imp right through and he knows the cave and has no fear of the water, now.'

"I listened in surprise to the words but knew nothing of what she meant.

"After we had walked about a mile down the lane, Becky turned off across the field. We came to a lovely little patch of woods where I could hear the roar of a rushing stream. Rebecca led me by crooked paths until we came to the brink of this torrent where it tumbled over a ledge of rock about twenty feet high, and made a most beautiful waterfall. The current was so swift above the falls that the water shot over making an arch as it fell. The steep banks at either side were mossy and tall ferns almost covered them.

"Rebecca led me straight to the falls. I hesitated as I saw her take a step toward the back-rock under the falls and suddenly disappear in the spray, calling upon me to follow.

"I was sure she knew what she was doing, so I too went headlong into the spray to find myself behind the arched falls on a huge flat rock which lay before a deep crevice opening straight into the cliff. Not a drop of water penetrated here, but the spray made a thick curtain between the cave and the outer world.

"Rebecca led me by the hand along a tunnel, and, after we had gone about twenty feet, it opened into a high-vaulted cavern. Soon Rebecca found the lantern and lighted it. I looked about in surprise; the place was quite comfortably furnished with a chair, a rough table and a mattress with bedding upon it.

"'I made Tim carry these things over here from the store-room and made him swear never to tell father. Tim is almost seventy years old and he believes in an oath as firmly as he does in Heaven. As far as I know, Tim and Daddy are the only ones beside myself who know of this cave. The reason I am bringing you here—a Yankee, too—is because I feel in my bones that you will have to help me in some danger or need. Here is where Imp is going to be hidden and I shall have to see if I can get him to make friends with you, for you may have to claim him some day and take him North with you.'

"'Oh, Becky, don't talk like this! You frighten me! I wish you were all at Happy Hills with me where you would be safe.'

"'Do you think that one of us would seek another safer home while we are needed here?' asked Rebecca, sternly.

"I made no reply and Rebecca carried the lantern ahead, bidding me follow her out. We reached the extreme end of the cave, when Rebecca handed me the lantern to hold down close to some lichen. I did so and found that the mass of roots and moss that hung there swayed slowly back and forth in a current of air. This, then, was the cause of the cave being so well ventilated. Becky stooped, pushed aside the mossy curtain and crawled into a small tunnel, taking the lantern from me after she had entered.

"I followed close behind, upon hands and knees, through an opening the size of a bushel basket. Finally, we reached a wider opening where we could stand upon our feet again. We crept through this queer tunnel for a long time and then I felt that we were ascending gradually and that the air was growing purer. In a few moments more, we emerged from another narrow crevice hidden under the gnarled roots of a live-oak. Moss, lichen and fern covered this opening so completely that no one would have dreamed there was an entrance there to a secret cave.

"We were in a grassy dell hemmed in by a thin ribbon of woods which ended in a grove of tall pines upon a knoll.

"Rebecca extinguished the light and led me toward this grove. She selected an old veteran pine and climbed up into its wide branches until a comfortable notch was reached. I did likewise. As we sat there admiring the wonderful view of distant mountains, Rebecca clutched my arm, and pointed with one hand toward the low range of mountains about fifty miles away.

"I looked and saw a heavy cloud of smoke hanging low over the crests. At intervals we heard the echo of a 'boom.'

"'Oh, Selina, there's no time to lose, now! The fighting is so near that we can hear the cannon over the mountain!'

"'What shall we do?' I cried helplessly.

"'Do!' almost screamed Rebecca, as she tore her clothes on the pine boughs in her rapid descent. 'Why, I'll run Imp down to the cave, while you race to the house and tell Timothy the news. Order

him to bring oats, bedding, blankets, and whatever Imp might need for a long siege. Tell him you know the secret and will help me take care of Imp. Then, on to the house, warning the negroes as you go, and tell the folks at the house. If they ask how we know, answer that we were on the ridge and saw it. Don't tell them that we were in the pine tree!'

"Calling these hurried directions as she went, Becky ran back through the glade until we reached the woods near the lane. She pointed toward the house, which could be seen in the distant haze, then ran for the shed where Imp was kept.

"I did as I was ordered, wondering all the way why I was placed in such an undesirable position—a Northerner plotting, as it were, against my own people. I cared little about the war at that time, for I knew nothing of war or its toll.

"However, I reached the outer buildings where the slaves lived and my news acted like an electric current upon the inmates. Immediately they ran in different directions, seemingly bent upon doing a part of a work that had been carefully planned and arranged. I found out later, that such was the case. The older slaves, who were trusted implicitly, set to work burying (as I supposed) whatever fruit, vegetables, smoked meats, and other edibles they could find—in fact, everything stored in cellars or store-rooms.

"I was curious to see how they could prevent the articles from coming in contact with the soil, and found that a chain of bricked cellars had been built a short time before, and the bushes and weeds carefully replaced on the dirt that covered the roofs. A door, opening into the first of the chain of cellars, was made in a steep bank of earth. It was merely a large hole in the ground covered with a flat stone that turned upon a pivot. About this spot the soil and grass had been very cleverly arranged to conceal any sign of what lay beneath.

"By afternoon not a piece of extra linen, bedding, or silver could be found about the house. The jewelry, valuable bits of art and pictures, heirlooms and a valuable library, had disappeared as if by magic. I knew it had all been placed in some safe place and felt relieved at the knowledge.

"I wandered about feeling lonesome for Rebecca and wishing I might assist Tim who seemed busy in some undertaking. I watched

him tie down a canvas covering over a loaded cart and caught his glance, which seemed to beckon me. I walked over to the mule's side and patted its head while Tim spoke.

"'Miss Becky, she say you'se come wif me. I'se got'ter take dis load down to der paddock!' Tim looked about as he spoke and winked at me knowingly.

"I walked beside him as he drove the mule along the lane. The cart seemed laden and the mule walked slowly, but we reached the wall that divided the gardens from the farm, and then Tim made the beast go as fast as possible, all the while looking covertly about for a run-away negro or a Yankee scout.

"I suspected where we were going, and, sure enough! As we reached the woods by the lane, Rebecca called softly, 'No further, Tim!' and came out with several huge market baskets.

"Tim tied the mule to a tree by the roadside and removed the canvas covering. There was everything one would need for light housekeeping for several weeks. Besides the food and clothing, there were bandages, medicine, bedding, lanterns, an oil-stove, dishes, and numerous other necessities. These were piled in the baskets and carried to the cave where they were placed in crannies for some future emergency.

"'Imp, I want you to be introduced to my best friend,' said Rebecca, after we had brought in our first basket.

"I heard a whinny and looked about in the gloom.

"Rebecca went over to a corner near the spot whence fresh air entered the cavern, and held the lantern up for me to see her pet.

"I stood making friendly advances to the beauty and, to Becky's amazement, he never moved an inch, but wrinkled his nose for sugar.

"'Witch! that is what you are!' laughed Becky, as Imp poked his nose under my arm. 'I have never known him to do such a thing.'

"Imp stood listening to his mistress as if he thoroughly understood the situation.

"I turned to tell Rebecca what a beauty he was, and he deliberately poked his nose out against my face.

"After all the supplies were stacked away, Rebecca slipped the halter over Imp's head and led him to a ring cemented in the solid rock.

"'Now, Imp, you will have to be good and not whinny or make a sound. I know what is good for you, and you must do just as I tell you, or a bad Yankee soldier will catch you and then you will see!' warned Rebecca, shaking her finger at him.

"The horse stood looking at her as if striving to understand what that strange word 'Yankee' meant; then he threw up his head and shook it defiantly.

"We said good-by to Imp and returned to the cart where Tim waited. We sent Tim to the barns with the mule and we went back to the house.

"That was such a busy day that everyone felt weary and glad when the sun showed its slanting rays over the trees. It must have been about four o'clock when sounds of approaching cavalry reached the house. It was the company Newell and his brother had formed a few months before. They had been driven over the mountainside and decided to spend the night in hiding at home.

"The sewing room was filled with neighbors whose boys were members of the company, so you can imagine the joy of seeing them again.

"The boys were covered with mire halfway to the waist, and their horses looked as if they must drop where they stood. Many of the soldiers were hatless, powder smirched, and, oh, so tired!

"Rebecca took me to her room and locked the door.

"'Selina, did you see that tall dark officer—the one that kept smiling at us? Well, he is my best friend, and I want you to fall in love with him. He knows all about you and I showed him your picture a long time ago, so he knows you quite well, you see.'

"I laughed merrily at Becky's match-making.

"'Oh,' she sighed, as her thought rushed to something else. 'Wasn't it just like Providence that we got Imp and all of those supplies hidden away in time?'

"'Yes, but it is not necessary with the rebels in command of the place,' I said, using the term 'rebel' quite unconsciously, for the first time.

"Rebecca noticed it, too, but said nothing at the time.

"'Well, I showed you just how to get in and out of that cave in case you are the only one who can take care of Imp. One never knows what may happen, but you, being my guest, are safe with our friends, and, being a Yankee, will be taken care of in case the enemy take the place. But, remember, if Imp is to be taken from me, I would rather you had him than anyone on earth—and you must assert your ownership if necessary to take him home with you.'

"That was a great reunion, that dinner! Besides all of the young soldiers, their families were there, listening to their account of the struggle.

"The happy families had finished dinner and were about to have coffee when a colored boy raced up the steps of the piazza. His face was gray with fear as he gasped, 'De Yanks am comin'—oh, dey am comin' pell mell foh dis house! oh, Lud, Lud!'

"'Tell all the folks, Jeremiah, quick!' shouted Becky, as she sprang forward to warn her friends.

"'The horses—quick, Tim! The horses—rush them to the house!' yelled Newell, as he grabbed his gun and threw on his cap.

"'Mother, good-by,' cried Ed, as he caught a kiss from her lips, and Newell hurriedly did the same.

"The next minute all was confusion as the soldier boys jumped into the saddle, while still buckling on knapsacks and ammunition belts.

"Five minutes after Jeremiah had given the alarm, the boys were lost in a cloud of dust galloping on the way to Nashville. But not soon enough!"

Here, Aunt Selina leaned back in her chair and looked away over the lawns as if she saw again the scurrying horses racing for dear life in one direction, while from the opposite direction she saw another picture she had not yet mentioned.

"If you are wearied, Aunt Selina, we will postpone the story for another day," suggested Mrs. Talmage.

"Oh, no! please don't!" begged the excited children.

"Oh, Flutey, I simply couldn't wait until to-morrow to find out what happened," cried Ruth, beseechingly.

Aunt Selina smiled at the children, and Uncle Ben added: “They are right! I don’t want to wait either!”

“Really! is it as good as that?”

“Good! I should say it is! It’s a big ‘seller’ if it was only in a book!” returned Uncle Ben.

“Well, then, after the magazine is done with it suppose we sell it to a publisher for the benefit of the children,” ventured Aunt Selina, eagerly.

“Fine idea! We will try it!” said Uncle Ben.

Aunt Selina moved her chair to keep the rays of the setting sun from her eyes, and then continued with her story.

CHAPTER IX

HOW THE YANKEES TOOK POSSESSION

"I think the rest of this story is the most interesting of all," murmured Aunt Selina, as she permitted her memory to roam in years long gone.

The children waited patiently for Aunt Selina to begin and, after a short moment, she sat up erect, looking fearfully out over the lawn, and spoke hurriedly.

"Right there before our very eyes we saw the Yankee regiment tear down the lane and swerve toward the road just taken by the Southern boys. They were still to be seen making for the woods just over the slope of the hill toward Nashville.

"We heard the captain shout, 'Halt! Aim! Fire!' and, as a volley rang out, many of the ladies on the piazza screamed or fainted, while Rebecca and I stood petrified at the result of that happy dinner.

"Almost at the same time the Yankees fired there came the rattle of musketry from the woods which the boys had reached.

"From the veranda I saw several of the Yankees' horses leap up and two of them rolled over on the ground. One man threw up his hands, fell over on his horse's neck, and dropped his gun. The horse, frightened, started galloping directly toward the house. Tim, who was coming down the side steps, ran forward and caught hold of the bridle. Mr. Crudup and some of his friends lifted the young soldier from the saddle and carefully carried him up the piazza steps, and placed him on the floor.

"While much of my attention was distracted by this incident, the company of Yankees spurred their horses on toward the patch of woods where the Southerners were hidden.

"The firing continued for half an hour, while everyone at the house waited, fearing the worst and hoping against hope that their boys had gotten away to Nashville.

"Rebecca's two brothers, cousins and old friends were all in that handful of men, and naturally those gathered at the house would wait until the outcome of the skirmish could be known.

"They had not long to wait, for, just as twilight deepened into night, the negroes came in with the report that all of the boys had been captured and were being taken as prisoners to the old school-house. In another half-hour the officers rode up to the door, followed by orderlies and an ambulance corps bringing in the wounded. Slaves were dispatched here and there for hot water, bandages, beds, bedding and medicine. We all hastened to prepare a place for those who needed our care and attention so sorely.

"As the wounded were carried up the steps and past the neighbors, who stood by watching for their own, Rebecca's mother saw her youngest boy lying unconscious with his face white as death and his hair matted with blood that oozed from a wound in his neck. She almost fainted, but Rebecca held her firm, saying, 'Mother, now is the time to brace up and take care of Newell that he may soon recover.'

"Of the Yankees, one was killed outright and five badly wounded, while the Southern boys sustained more serious injuries. Two were killed and nine wounded. The house was immediately turned into a hospital, both sides receiving the same attention.

"The officers were very considerate but insisted upon having their rights observed. When it was found that some foraging parties were in the neighborhood, the captain sent an orderly to say that the Crudup Plantation was well supplied. The Yankees, receiving the message, rode over, took what was needed, food, cattle and horses, and went away.

"Mr. Crudup spared his family the harrowing details of the raid, but looked upon it as the fortune of war and thanked heaven that so much of his property was safely buried.

"When the store-rooms, linen-presses, blanket-trunks, and cellars were found almost empty, the officer in charged looked surprised and wondered aloud.

"'Most unusual to find so large an establishment short of all supplies, and a retinue of servants to feed, to say nothing of the droves of neighbors always coming in for supper.'

"Mr. Crudup overheard the soliloquy and replied courteously.

"'Sir, do not forget that your company is not the first to stop here and demand my hospitality. Naturally, we would lavish our all upon our own men, you know.'

"The officers were very polite and interesting young men, but Rebecca and I had to go about the plantation very warily, for we never knew when we might be spied upon. Imp had to be cared for daily, so we found plenty of amusement in eluding the Yankees.

"The youngest of the officers was a handsome boy and it was not long before we became very friendly. When he learned that I was a Yankee and how I happened to be South, he insisted upon my returning home at once, saying that the neighborhood about Nashville soon would be an impossible place to live.

"When he found that my home was at Happy Hills he was greatly pleased.

"'Why, I have called at your home many times; my sister and yours are school friends.' He described his home and how his sister looked when she came to visit us, and I faintly recalled seeing him with the others who were some years my senior.

"From that day he became the sworn ally of Rebecca and myself. He understood there was a secret between us and often managed to screen us when we left the house to creep to the cavern to look after Imp.

"The wounded were getting along beautifully, and nothing exciting had occurred for a fortnight. Foraging parties that stopped at the house and found Yankees in possession moved on. It seemed more like a house-party.

"But a change soon took place.

"It was afterward learned that Ed Crudup escaped during the transfer of the prisoners from the school-house to the army; he found out from some of the Crudup slaves that the Yankees who shot his brother and imprisoned himself were holding the premises until further orders from Headquarters. So he raised a small company at Nashville and drilled them for a few days, planning to surprise the men at the house and take them prisoners.

"One day, while some of the Yankees were out foraging, Ed and his men came upon them suddenly and a skirmish ensued.

“Ed was shot down and so was our young officer who was in command of the foragers that day. The others fought like madmen, hand to hand, until the men at the house, hearing the shots, ran out to their assistance.

“The Southerners, outnumbered, took flight, but were pursued and captured.

“The two men, Ed and Vernon, lay still as death in the tall grass, and no one missed them at the time of the pursuit.

“Tim, however, on his way to water Imp, found his young master shot through the heart, and the young Yankee unconscious. In his faithful loyalty to the family, he decided to make a prisoner of the Yankee, so he dragged Vernon over to the waterfall, carried him through the spray, and laid him down on the mattress in the cave. The cold water which had fallen upon Vernon’s face had partially revived him, and he moaned as if in pain.

“Tim lighted the lantern and examined him. He found a clean bullet hole in his chest, but very little bleeding. He decided the best thing to do would be to notify the master. So, after attending to Imp, he crept out of the cave and went over to the remains of the young master. He managed to carry him until he met some of the slaves, then had them improvise a stretcher to carry the body to the house.

“There was great sorrow in the household, and his death changed the attitude of the Crudups toward the Yankee officers.

“When it was found that young Vernon was missing, with no trace of him anywhere, it was thought that he had been taken captive by a few of the Confederates who got away. Rebecca and I felt dreadfully lonesome after our friend was missing, and I wished, for the first time since I came South, that I could go home.

“Then one morning, Rebecca and I decided to go through the hole in the live-oak tree and crawl to the cave to see Imp. We had not dared to visit him for some days, as a Yankee sentry was stationed in the woods by the waterfall.

“Rebecca hid a small lantern under her cloak and we strolled unconcernedly down the lane toward the dell. We looked carefully about to make sure no spies were watching, and in another minute both of us disappeared. We groped along until we reached the opening into the cave and as we crawled out near Imp’s bed, he

greeted us with a joyful whinny. Rebecca ran over and placed her hand over his mouth, so she did not see the apparition that stared at me from the mattress. Had I held the lantern I would have dropped it. As it was, I almost dropped myself, so frightened was I.

"I clutched Rebecca's arm and she turned about to see what ailed me. In a second she recognized Vernon and ran over with the lantern. As he could not tell us how he came there, but confided that Tim and Mr. Crudup came daily to attend to him, we learned that they knew of his whereabouts. Rebecca snapped her teeth close and her eyes blazed at the thought of her father keeping this man a prisoner in such a suffocating place.

"While we were there, Tim and Mr. Crudup crept through the tunnel and found us talking to the sick man.

"'Becky, better leave this business to us,' suggested Mr. Crudup.

"'Father, how could you keep this man in such a place?' cried Rebecca, unguardedly.

"'Ssh!' warned Tim, apprehensively.

"Mr. Crudup told Rebecca how Tim had carried Vernon here to square accounts for Ed's death; how he had shown Tim the folly of the deed, and that being done, it had to be made the best of, or disclose the secret of the cave. Tim was so repentant that he agreed to remain in the cave and nurse the prisoner.

"After our discovery, Rebecca spent several hours with Vernon each day reading or talking to him, while Imp began to show his fondness for Vernon in every way a horse can.

"Matters at the house became troublesome, for the larder was empty, and there was no way to get at the great store-rooms dug out of the ground without letting the Yankees into the secret.

"Tim had been very meek since he found the serious blunder he had made with Vernon, and he was eager to make amends in any way.

"From the time that Tim heard of the threatened famine he was seldom seen about the place. Now and then, one of the family would meet him coming from the basement with his face and hands smeared with black, but he never confided in anyone as to his work or whereabouts, and being an aged favored man, Mr. Crudup never questioned him.

“One morning the cook entered the room where the family was gathered and announced: ‘There ain’t no aigs fer brekfus.’

“‘Have plain ham or bacon,’ suggested Mrs. Crudup.

“‘De ham an’ bacon done all et up, too,’ said cook.

“Mrs. Crudup looked deeply concerned, but said: ‘Then we’ll have just coffee and muffins.’

“‘Done used all de flour yistiddy—not a smitch lef’.’

“Here, indeed, was a quandary! Nothing to eat!

“This was Tim’s opportunity.

“He came in, bowed with old hat in his hand, and turned to the cook with the request, ‘You please ’scuse yo-se’f fum de room whiles I conflab wid de missus?’

“Cook tossed her head and went out, followed by everyone except Mr. and Mrs. Crudup.

“Tim turned his hat about in his hands for a time and then looked up smilingly and said: ‘I done squared myself wid you all fer makin’ dat blunner ’bout the Yank. I done gone and dug a tunnel fru fum de coal cellah to the fust storehouse on de fiel’. I fixed a doh to the cellar an’ heah’s de key to de padlock.’

“‘You what!’ exclaimed Mr. Crudup, in amazement.

“‘Yas’m, das whad I did!’ said Tim.

“Mr. Crudup threw back his head and laughed while he slapped Tim on the back and said, ‘Tim, it will take more than a company of Yankees to starve us out while you are about!’

“But Mrs. Crudup took Tim’s hand and thanked him with tears in her eyes.

“The supply question was easily solved after that. No one but Tim knew where the tunnel was, for Mr. Crudup never allowed anyone to be about when the old servant started his daily trip to the underground store-rooms. Oftentimes, the officers expressed their wonder as to how Southern cooks could manage the way they did, with so little on hand to cook with. If they suspected the truth they never hinted at it.

“The secret of Vernon’s prison had been kept, and several weeks after the fight that disabled him, his company was ordered to join the main army. The moment the place was entirely freed from the

Yankees, Mr. Crudup ordered one of the guest-rooms prepared, and, to the surprise of Mrs. Crudup, told her he had a prisoner to bring in. That night Vernon was blindfolded, placed upon a stretcher, and taken to the house.

"As soon as he could sit up and come down upon the veranda, we wondered what to do with him. He was our prisoner but we had no use for him. Everyone liked him and disliked sending him to the dirty barrack-jail in Nashville.

"Suddenly Rebecca was inspired with a brilliant plan.

"When the Yankee officers left the place they took the convalescent prisoners with them. Now Rebecca suggested that negotiations be started to exchange Vernon for Newell.

"Mr. Crudup immediately sent Tim to Nashville to see if this could be done, and friends there promised to attend to it without delay. Consequently, in a few days, a number of soldiers from Nashville rode to the Crudup house and carried away the prisoner, giving Mrs. Crudup the slip of paper that stated that Newell's freedom would be granted upon the return of Vernon.

"We all felt sorry about losing Vernon, but he promised to visit me at Happy Hills when the war was over."

Aunt Selina stopped and the children began plying questions.

"Aunt Selina, what became of Imp?" asked Dot.

"We kept him in the cave for a few days more, and then, one morning, the negroes all turned green with fear when they saw Rebecca riding Imp down the road from the paddock, for they believed Imp to have been taken with the other horses, and were sure that this was a ghost of the real Imp." And Aunt Selina laughed as she recalled Rebecca's mad ride down the lane and the high wall Imp vaulted before he stopped stock still in front of the quaking, superstitious slaves.

"Did Newell come back home?" asked Betty, whose sympathy was all for the mother who lost one boy and then had the other one taken prisoner.

"We received word of his transfer from the Yankee army to his own. He went into active service again and fought all through the rest of the war. He won many honors for bravery before the Confederate Army was disbanded."

"Do you know what became of him afterwards?" asked Don, interested in such a fighter.

"He married and settled out West upon a large ranch. Now and then Rebecca's daughter has a letter from him, giving news of his children or the grandchildren."

"Oh, then, Rebecca married too. Did you know who it was?" asked several curious voices.

"Yes," smiled Aunt Selina. "She married the very beau she had selected for me."

"I am so anxious to know if that fine old house is still there and if we could find the cave and underground store-rooms if we ever went there?" asked Norma.

"No, dear; the beautiful old mansion was entirely destroyed by fire started from a shell during the time the battle line closed about Nashville. I was not there at the time, but Rebecca wrote and told me of the dreadful scenes. Almost every family for miles about was left homeless and destitute. The Pines, Rebecca's home, stood as long as any and sheltered every homeless Southerner round about."

"I guess Rebecca liked to remember that, didn't she?" said Ruth.

"Yes, indeed, Fluff."

"Aunt Selina, you didn't tell us what became of Imp and Rebecca that day she rode up to the house," reminded Ned.

"Rebecca laughed at the servants' fear and rode Imp over to the steps of the piazza. We stood watching her as she jumped off and led Imp right up to the rail. 'Lady,' said she to me, 'this horse just told me that he was going North on a little visit. As there is no one here but you who can take him there, I believe he intends taking you home.' Although Rebecca's eyes filled with tears and her voice trembled, we all laughed and made a great fuss over Imp.

"Later, she confided to me that she had entrusted Vernon with the request to secure a passport for Selina Talmage and her horse, Imp, going home to Happy Hills, Pennsylvania. The passport came that day in a letter for Rebecca explaining how I was to go and to whom I was to entrust myself. A note for me was inclosed in the letter, and I read it with a smile. Vernon said he would demand payment for the favor given me as soon as he reached Happy Hills. Rebecca teased me about that note and said that she knew what the favor would be,

for Vernon was in love with me. I pooh-poohed the suggestion but felt very glad to pack my clothes for home. In a few days word came that I was to ride to a certain town where an escort would meet me and conduct me to the nearest railroad. And so Imp and I went home."

"And now tell us, Aunt Selina, did Vernon come home and ask that favor?" wondered Norma, interested in a love-story.

"Oh, yes! He had leave of absence for several months to fully recover from the wound that had partially punctured a lung. He used to ride over to Happy Hills every day, and I tell you we missed him when he returned to his regiment."

"Where is he now, Aunt Selina?" asked Ruth.

"Gone—his name is carved on the monument at Washington for bravery in the Battle of Bull Run," whispered Aunt Selina.

"Oh, oh, Aunt Selina! Is *he* the same one you told me about last spring?" gasped Ruth.

Aunt Selina dabbed her tear-moistened eyes and tried to smile as she said, "The same, Honey."

"What's that—tell us, Aunt Selina; we never heard about it," cried several children.

"Well, Vernon came back North about a year after his leave of absence expired with important letters for a general in Philadelphia. After delivering the letters he was to have two days' leave in which to go home and see his folks. He rode over to our house one evening and asked my father and mother if he might pay court to me when the war was over. My parents were delighted, for they knew him and liked him. Vernon and I walked out to the very summer house that Ruth was in when she thought of the farm plan, and there he told me what he had said to my parents. He would not bind me, for he said he might never come back. But I said it would make no difference to me—if he never returned I would wait just the same. We exchanged rings—one which had been given me for my birthday and one he had received on his twenty-first birthday. When he left that night mother gave him a paper, but I never knew what was in it until later. When news of his bravery and death came home, the letter contained a ring and a small daguerreotype picture of me. Then mother said he had asked for it the night he went away."

“Oh, Aunt Selina, how lovely of you!” cried several little girls as they crowded about the old lady and hugged her.

“Rebecca did not return to school again, but as soon as the war was over we wrote and invited Mr. and Mrs. Crudup to bring Rebecca North to visit us. The elders were too heart-sore to come to a country they blamed for all their losses, but Rebecca came and stayed a long time.”

CHAPTER X

BEGINNING TO SPELL SUCCESS

Another nest of Blue Birds had been formed under Mrs. Catlin's supervision, and these little girls were chosen to act as agents to secure subscriptions for the forthcoming magazine. They were also permitted to donate short stories or pictures to the magazine and, being so young a branch of the first Nest, felt this was a special privilege.

Aunt Selina had written her interesting Civil War story and had it ready for Uncle Ben, but Mrs. Catlin was still busy trying to arrange her chapters so they would make a good serial.

The Blue Birds had written their pages over and over, and finally Mrs. Talmage said they would lose all sense in the telling if they kept on rewriting. So the pages were taken as they were and corrected by Uncle Ben.

As the various short articles came in to the Publishing House, Mrs. Talmage took charge of them. Many a pleased surprise she had as she read the different articles submitted by the boys, and the suggestions and hints sent in by the girls.

The Bobolinks spent every afternoon at their Publishing House, setting type, trying to run machines, and find out various things about business. The two young men promised by Uncle Ben were not expected until actual work on the magazine began.

So much talk had been heard at various dinner-tables in Oakdale, that fathers manifested enough curiosity in the work to ask for an invitation to the Publishing House. The habit of "dropping in to watch the boys" grew to be regular meetings, and the men enjoyed the social evenings as much as the boys did. Naturally, the work did not lose any of its value by the suggestions and ideas given by the older, experienced business men, but the Blue Birds grew envious over the evident interest shown in the Bobolinks while they were never about.

One afternoon the Blue Birds gathered about Mrs. Talmage with a complaint.

“Mother Wings, those Bobolinks will be ’way ahead of us in this fun, unless you get the mothers to meet once in a while to suggest things for us to do,” said Ruth, dolefully.

“And from something I heard Don tell Mete, those fathers have promised to help the Bobolinks do the *work*, too!” broke in Dot Starr.

“Since Ned has moved his printing stuff to the carriage house his den is vacant—we might use that for our Winter Nest, until we find something better,” suggested Mrs. Starr, after thinking seriously of what had just been said.

“That will be all right, but it won’t boost our work like the boys are being boosted,” fretted Norma.

“I shall have to think of it,” replied Mrs. Talmage, deeply concerned over the discontent of the Blue Birds; but Aunt Selina, who had been a silent listener of the complaint, spoke.

“Are those Bobolinks and the men actually helping the success of the magazine?”

“No, not that we can see; they just use paper and fool away every evening running those machines,” snapped Dot, who generally heard all the doings from her brothers.

“Then they are not getting ahead so fast with success as you seem to think,” replied Aunt Selina, calmly. “The principal things in making a magazine pay are its circulation and the advertising contracts. If these are not being thought of and tried, the Bobolinks are wasting their precious time.”

“But they are so well acquainted with the machines that they say they can print anything!” said Dot.

“All right, suppose we take them at their word and ask them to give us proof of some circulars,” laughed Mrs. Talmage.

“I suppose they would, but where would we use them?” asked Norma.

“This is what I would suggest—we’ll play the game of the ‘Tortoise and the Hare,’ and they’ll be left asleep at their work while we win the race,” declared Aunt Selina.

The Blue Birds gathered closer to Aunt Selina’s chair, and she continued her instruction.

"We'll have Mother Wings write a letter and ask Mr. Wells to bring down that Institution Book he promised us, as we wish to use it at once. Then we'll count up the number of institutions where we could send a magazine and circular. Some of these will subscribe most likely, while the circular letter will reach the hands of some of the wealthy patrons of the Homes. We'll compose a letter and order those Bobolinks to print ten thousand for us. I guess that will keep them busy for a time and at the same time make them wonder what *we* are doing without their knowledge or consent."

"Shall we mail the letters when they are printed?" asked Betty.

"No, I thought we could address large-sized envelopes with the names of the institutions and as soon as the magazines are printed we can place a letter and a magazine in each envelope. Of course, we inclose a subscription blank, too; this work of folding and sealing the letters and magazines is where we will invite the mothers to help. After that we can send out some samples to other folks, but we will make the Bobolinks wonder why the mothers are here so often."

The Blue Birds laughed and thought the plan very good, and Dot Starr added, "We're surely glad you're here, Aunt Selina."

"And we will keep all of our papers and work in the den and no one will see what is being done," added Mrs. Talmage.

"You must keep the key, Mother Wings," advised Ruth.

The letter for Mr. Wells was written without delay, for Norma was to hand it to her father that evening. After this was finished the important work of composing a letter for folks who would receive the magazine was started.

This letter provoked many suggestions and criticisms, but finally was concluded and read aloud to the children, who declared it just right.

"But we haven't a bit of paper for the printing," exclaimed Ruth.

"Maybe Aunt Selina and I can go to the paper mills in the morning and see if they have any small lot that will do," suggested Mrs. Talmage.

This offer cheered the Blue Birds again, as a few hours' delay would not matter very much.

"Now, that's done, what next?" asked Dot.

"Next thing is to say 'good-afternoon' and go home," laughed Mrs. Talmage, looking at her watch.

"Oh, dear, mother, it cannot be dinner-time," said Ruth.

"It is almost six o'clock, and I have some matters to look after, dear," returned her mother.

"Well, we can invite our mothers to join us, anyway, can't we, Mrs. Talmage?" said May.

"Yes, but I wouldn't mention the fact that we feel that we must have them to enable us to get ahead of the Bobolinks, for your fathers will hear of it and plan some way to win out in spite of us," advised the astute Aunt Selina.

"We won't! We'll just say that as long as the boys have their fathers with them, we girls are going to invite our mothers," explained Norma, while the others nodded approval.

"May we come to-night?" asked Betty.

"How about school lessons?" asked Mrs. Talmage.

"And I want to revise several parts of my story to-night, besides the paper mills have not yet been visited, you know," objected Aunt Selina.

"Girls, we'd better wait until to-morrow; that's Friday and we won't have to go to bed so early as other evenings," suggested Ruth.

"All right, we'll meet in the den to-morrow afternoon and report how many mothers will be here," consented Dot.

"And I'll have Mrs. Catlin here in the evening," added Mrs. Talmage.

"Mother Wings, if we use that old room of Ned's, why couldn't we call it our Winter Nest? We can move in our cherry-tree Nest furniture when it grows colder and make the room look real comfy," said Ruth.

The other Blue Birds approved of the suggestion and Mrs. Talmage said she had no objection to having the Winter Nest in the den, so it was decided then and there.

Ruth accompanied her friends to the steps and as they stood vainly wishing there were several extra hours to add to an afternoon, Dot saw Don jump out of the wide-open door of the Publishing House and laugh derisively at someone inside.

"Now I wonder what that boy is up to?" she said.

"Oh, say, wouldn't it be fun to creep in back of the carriage house and peep in at the windows to watch the boys!" suggested Edith.

"I know a better way," answered Ruth. "We will ask Ike to let us go up in the loft from the small room and we can look down through the wide chinks of the floor."

"Oh, do let's!" cried the Blue Birds, as they hurried back of the house to steal noiselessly over to the garage.

Ike understood the rivalry growing between them, and decided to be perfectly impartial, so he unlocked the door of the small room where the stairs led to a loft over the Publishing House.

The Bobolinks were making such a noise that they never heard the creaking of the floor overhead, or the giggles of the girls as they glued their eyes to the crevices between the boards.

"Now it's Tuck's turn to be an advertising solicitor!" called Don, who evidently had been discharged from some make-believe service when he was so unexpectedly put out of the door.

"Ah, I'd never make a solicitor of any kind," grumbled Tuck Stevens.

"But you've got to play the game as we all promised," coaxed some of the boys.

"I'll be the man you want to see," persuaded Jinks.

"Come on, Tuck. We'll have to go home pretty soon, so get busy," commanded Ned.

The girls began to understand that the Bobolinks were not playing, but practicing their duty for the future, so they silently looked at each other and nodded understandingly.

"Here goes, then," ventured Tuck, bravely.

He strutted across the floor toward the office and met one of the boys stationed there.

"Good-morning, sir; do you wish to see anyone?" asked the impromptu clerk.

"I have an appointment with Mr. Slamhim," quivered Tuck, as if the visit was an actual affair.

The boys tittered with glee as Tuck turned red and white.

"Your name, please?" asked the polite clerk.

"Reuben Stevens," replied Tuck, in a whisper.

"Ha! the name'll queer you, Tuck!" laughed Don, behind his chum's back, but the older boys hushed Don.

The clerk rapped upon the office door and a voice said, "Come in."

"Reuben Stevens to see you, sir. He has an appointment."

"Show him in," said the voice which Ruth recognized as a disguised bass of Ned's.

Tuck walked to the office and then turned about and asked the other boys: "Now, what shall I say—I've forgotten."

Immediately there was a loud chorus of laughter, and a scuffle and Tuck was ousted in the same manner that Don had been.

"Didn't I say that name would spoil you?" teased Don.

"Next!" called one of the boys who had a list of names which he marked down "good, indifferent, bad."

The boy whose turn came next carried off the rehearsal as if he had been a solicitor all of his short life. The other boys cheered his efforts and even the Blue Birds were tempted to clap their hands.

"Well, Bobolinks, I think this will do for to-day; we have drilled three of the boys after the manner shown us last night, but Don and Tuck seem to be hopeless cases," said Ned.

"I'll practice it at home on Dot, and show you what I can do to-morrow," eagerly promised Don.

Dot looked up at her friends when she heard this and shook her head energetically.

The Bobolinks carefully covered the machines with the canvas covers and started to go out. At the same time the girls in the loft crept across the floor toward the steps. The boys were not making so much noise as when the Blue Birds went up in the loft, and Meredith stood surprised when he heard something moving over his head.

"Where's Ike?" he whispered to Ned.

"Just outside the door—why?" replied Ned.

"Don't you hear those footsteps?"

"What—where? Yes, of course!" exclaimed Ned.

Simon was seen crossing the lawn and Ike stood outside with the boys, so who could be upstairs?

Meantime, Ruth overheard Meredith's exclamation and hurried the girls down and out, and pushed them inside the garage before any of the boys could persuade Ike that someone was upstairs. Finally he allowed them to drag him to the small carriage room and ascend the steps.

The Blue Birds lay hidden in the bottom of the automobile and almost suffocated trying to keep from laughing outright at the way the Bobolinks were hoodwinked.

Every one of the boys trudged up the steps, but found the loft empty. As soon as they were out of sight in the small room, the girls jumped out of the car and ran madly for the shrubbery which sheltered the kitchen gardens from the lawns. Here, they could creep toward home without being seen from the barns.

Ike looked carefully about the loft but hid a smile when his back was turned.

"There, I told you no one was here!" he said.

"Well, I don't care, I *heard* them!" retorted Ned.

"Maybe it was rats!" ventured Ike.

"No, sir, you said that you were never pestered with rats; besides, this noise was just like walking would sound," insisted Ned.

Ike kept the boys upstairs arguing for a sufficient time to permit the Blue Birds to get out of the way, then he started down.

"Well, I'll keep the door locked and the key in my room," promised Ike, as the boys waited for him to lock up.

"If it was a tramp, Ned, he couldn't move our machinery, so what's the use bothering?" said Don.

"He could steal our type and other things, and sell them," grumbled Ned, still unassured.

Ruth was walking slowly up from the main gates when Ned reached the veranda. She was stooping over a chrysanthemum blossom to note its beautiful coloring when Ned whistled to attract her attention.

"Better hurry in and wash up for dinner—it's almost seven, and mother doesn't like dinner delayed, you know," Ned said, as Ruth skipped up smilingly.

Not a word was said, and the Bobolinks never found out how the Blue Birds watched them practice their future business tactics.

The next morning Mrs. Talmage and Aunt Selina had Ike drive them to the paper mills.

Mrs. Talmage explained her errand and selected some samples of stationery paper. The manager then showed them over the mills and Aunt Selina whispered aside to Mrs. Talmage: "What an interesting article this work would make."

"Indeed, yes!" replied Mrs. Talmage, turning to the manager to tell him of the new venture of the Blue Birds and ask him to write up a story about the manufacture of paper.

"That I will! I like to write, and often, when I'm tired or worried, I sit down to write a funny sketch. I have sold a number of them to Sunday papers," was the surprising reply.

The two ladies were escorted to the manager's office and chairs were placed for them while a price list was prepared for the convenience of the Blue Birds.

This done, the manager sat back in his office chair.

"Have the children planned any campaign for securing circulation?" he asked.

"Why, no, Mr. White, we intended talking that matter over with the mothers to-night. We are all so inexperienced in this undertaking that I suppose a business man would laugh at our way of putting 'the cart before the horse,' as the saying is," laughed Mrs. Talmage.

"The fact is, this whole proposition is so sudden and different from anything the children had dreamed of!" added Aunt Selina, in defence of their mistakes.

"I know! When I heard of the daring of the children I certainly admired their spunk, but I couldn't help shaking my head, too, for it is no joke to start a real business, as they are doing," said Mr. White, seriously.

"Well, we will need the help of all of our friends," smiled Mrs. Talmage.

"You'll have it, too. Why, everybody in Oakdale felt the Blue Birds' work last summer was wonderful; now, this new venture will have the support of all of the townsfolks."

“It is very encouraging to hear you speak so, and if you think of any way to boom our circulation, I wish you would come over some evening and tell us all about it,” replied Mrs. Talmage.

Suddenly the manager sat upright and looked toward the book-shelves, which contained rows of business-like looking reference books.

“I believe we have the idea!” exclaimed he, jumping up and going over to the shelves to take down a heavy volume.

“This book contains all the names and addresses of stationery stores in the United States and Canada. It is only a year old, so most of these addresses will be up-to-date. We use it for mailing samples of our paper, but I have an idea that you would get plenty of subscriptions and make willing agents of these storekeepers. If you send a sample of your magazine and give them a liberal commission there is no reason why these firms would refuse to act as agents. Anyway, it would do no harm to try out the suggestion,” said Mr. White.

“Why, Mr. White, do you know that you are a direct answer to my prayer!” cried Aunt Selina.

“I am grateful to be favored,” laughed Mr. White, “but it must be your faith that brought the answer.”

“Well, to tell the truth,” continued Aunt Selina, “I am so very anxious to have this movement of the children a fine success that I have been praying in season and out for the way to open that we might be blessed in this work. All we needed for the next step was a hint for circulation.”

“And I’ll confide a secret, too,” said Mrs. Talmage, leaning over toward the desk. “The boys have had their fathers meet with them every evening, advising and drilling them in ways and means to succeed, while my girls have had to do the best they can with Aunt Selina and me. This book will boost us far ahead of the Bobolinks and give the men who are advising a fine surprise.”

Mr. White laughed as he understood the rivalry between the two factions, and promised to send his wife to the meetings of the mothers to convey any advice or suggestions he might think of.

“Oh, splendid! We expect to hold our first meeting at our house to-night. Do bring her over!” cried Mrs. Talmage.

As the three were going out to the automobile, Mr. White ventured a remark.

"I have been told that the paper for the sample issue was to be sent over when you wished it. Now, I thought of making an advertising proposition to the corporation at their next meeting. If the magazine would mention that all the paper used by them for letters, circulars and magazines was furnished by the Oakdale Mills, it would be a good exchange if the company donated the paper needed for the first year's work."

The ladies stood amazed at the generous idea.

"Every paper mill in the country will try to place a contract with the children as soon as news of this plan is out. Now, the Oakdale Mills can secure its contract for future years by being wide-awake for the present. It is a strictly business proposition, you see," explained Mr. White.

"It may seem so to you, but I know that it is a proposition that no other firm would offer, and we are deeply grateful for your interest," replied Mrs. Talmage, sagaciously.

"I'll suggest it, and you find out if the magazine is willing to give us the mention I hinted at," said Mr. White.

Handing the huge book of addresses to Ike, Mrs. Talmage shook hands with Mr. White and reminded him to bring his wife to the meeting.

"Well! that was the best hour's business yet!" exclaimed Aunt Selina, as the car sped away.

"Wonderful, isn't it? I hope everything will glide along as nicely as it has up to the present," said Mrs. Talmage.

Being Friday, school closed an hour earlier than usual. The moment the Blue Birds could catch their hats from the pegs in the cloak-rooms, they ran out to join Ruth, who was hopping from one foot to the other in a vain effort to calm her impatience.

"Hurry, girls! Don't you know Mother Wings went to the mills this morning for samples of paper?" called one to the other as they ran up to Ruth.

It was not long thereafter that seven eager little girls crowded about Mrs. Talmage on the veranda to hear the news.

"I'll show you the samples, but we will wait for the mothers' opinion to-night. But this great secret I will give to you now!" and, forthwith, Mrs. Talmage told the Blue Birds all about Mr. White's interest and ideas, and showed them the precious volume loaned them.

CHAPTER XI

THE WINTER NEST COUNCIL

Before eight o'clock that night the Blue Birds and their mothers were assembled in the living-room ready for a council. The children had not seen the den for a few days and stared in delight as they filed into the room. Mrs. Talmage had purposely had all meet together before mentioning that they might as well spend the evening in the Winter Nest.

"Why, Mother Wings, when *did* you fix this up?" asked Ruth, as much surprised as the others.

Mrs. Talmage smiled, but said nothing.

The guests looked about and admired the unique charm of the Blue Bird quarters for the winter, and Betty ventured the question: "What has become of our other chairs?"

The room had all been renovated. The windows were hung with snow-flake madras, and the floor covered with heavy knotted white rag carpet that looked like snow freshly packed. The walls had been repapered with a sparkling white paper which glistened like ice in the electric light. From the wainscoting to the picture rail branches of dark green spruce and pine were fastened and upon these green needles were caught flakes of make-believe snow—made of white cotton-batting with diamond dust powdered on it. The furniture of the summer Nest had been brought in late that afternoon and the slip covers, which had been made for it, were slipped over until the thick white covers hid the familiar chairs under the novelty cloth that looked like snow-drifts. The whole effect was so beautiful that the children danced about with joy.

"Well, we must get at our work," reminded Aunt Selina, after enough chairs had been brought in for all.

"I walked over with Mr. Wells and he was quite surprised to find I was coming to the house," said Mrs. Wells, laughingly.

"I never said a word to Mr. Talmage or his brother," confided Mrs. Talmage, smiling at the secret.

“Mr. Stevens knows I am at this council with Betty, but he hasn’t the faintest idea for what,” admitted Mrs. Stevens.

And so it was that not one of the men who had formed the habit of dropping in to help the Bobolinks could imagine what their wives were doing with the Blue Birds.

If the inmates of the Winter Nest that night could have seen the questioning faces of the boys and men when it was known that a meeting of mothers was being held, they would have felt the balm of satisfaction applied to wounded pride.

Mrs. Talmage showed the sample of paper and, after a discussion of merit and price, a selection was made of an artistic grey paper to be printed in blue—the colors of the Blue Birds.

“We must have envelopes to match, mother,” said Ruth.

“I never thought of that, but it is so!” admitted Mrs. Talmage.

“I know the address of a firm where Mr. Wells has all of his ‘made-to-order’ envelopes made—we will get them to do it,” suggested Mrs. Wells.

“What a relief to hear that offer!” sighed Mrs. Talmage. “I was just wondering where I could find anyone who would make them for us.”

“It also goes to prove that many heads gathered to discuss Blue Bird affairs are better than one, and I suggest that we meet at least once a week,” suggested Aunt Selina.

So it was then and there agreed that the mothers would come regularly to hold a council in the Winter Nest with the Blue Birds.

“Just as soon as the envelopes come back we can begin to address from mother’s big book, can’t we?” asked Norma.

“If there’s only one book, how can all of this crowd read it at the same time and then write down the names?” demanded Dot Starr.

“Why, we won’t have to do that work,” added Mrs. Wells. “There’s a firm in the city that addresses envelopes for a dollar a thousand.”

“Another fine hint! I’m sure I’d rather pay my share than risk Dot’s ruining dozens of envelopes with ink,” laughed Mrs. Starr, patting Dot on the hand.

“We wouldn’t want to write ’em in here, because the snow would freeze our fingers so the ink would spatter all over,” said Dot, ludicrously.

"Yes, I suppose these lovely covers would be speckled black by the time the Blue Birds completed, say, fifty thousand addresses," laughed Aunt Selina.

"I would vote against Edith's writing—I fear the person would never get the letter—it would go straight to the Dead Letter Office," said Mrs. Wilson, pulling Edith's curls.

As everyone knew how Edith hated writing and never could write a legible hand, a laugh went up, in which Edith joined heartily.

So the Blue Birds were spared the arduous task of copying thousands of names.

"I have heard that these large addressing bureaus prefer to employ children—I wonder why?"

"Because children just finishing grammar school are more careful in forming letters and can write much better than adults. Besides, they have to pay children but a third that an adult would demand for his labor," explained Mrs. Wells.

"Why, isn't that just as bad as working children in a factory?" questioned Miss Selina.

"The rooms that I visited are just as bad. The girls are crowded close together in a wretchedly lighted room without ventilation, and they sit writing all day with their poor backs bent double and fingers grown crooked from habit," said Mrs. Wells.

"Goodness! Can't we do something to stop it?" cried Mrs. Starr.

"They have to have the money for home needs, and it isn't quite as bad, you know, as working all day in cold water to your knees, opening oysters at a cent a hundred."

"Oh, dear, dear! don't tell me any more," half wept Aunt Selina. "I feel like a criminal to think I lost all of these years with money piling up in the bank that could have helped hundreds of these little workers. Let's get busy this minute!"

"It would be nice to take all these little workers to the country, wouldn't it?" queried Mrs. Talmage.

"Yes, yes! But, Mary, don't delay me longer in this work—I have so many years to make up, and so little time to do it in," mourned Aunt Selina.

"All right! Now that is settled—we hire a firm to do the addressing, and Mrs. Wells will see to the envelopes. What next?" said Mrs. Talmage.

"Oh, Mother Wings, don't forget about that book—you know?" reminded Ruth.

"Oh, of course! One of our great secrets! Here is a volume loaned us by Mr. White, of the Oakdale Paper Mills, and it has the addresses of all the stationers in the country," explained Mrs. Talmage. "He suggested that we send a sample magazine to each, with a letter stating agents' commissions and price of subscription."

"And that reminds me—the book you wrote for was given me to bring in to-night, and I left it out in the hall," said Mrs. Wells, turning to Frances and asking her to get it.

The institution book was brought in, and its pages eagerly scanned.

"My! what a lot of poor children there are!" said Dot sympathetically.

"It doesn't seem possible, does it?" said Mrs. Starr, turning to the others.

"We never realize what needs there are for help until we face something of this sort," said Mrs. Talmage, turning page after page. Suddenly she stopped.

"Has anyone here an idea of how many dependent little ones there are in the United States alone?"

Heads were silently shaken, and Mrs. Talmage continued:

"There are 87,000 children's institutions—homes, hospitals, asylums, and homes for cripples that are mostly supported by gifts, philanthropy, or legacies. About one-fourth of these are partially controlled by the state. The number of inmates in these institutions amounts to 1,740,520 children. Think of it! Practically a million and three-quarters! How terrible!" And Mrs. Talmage had to find her handkerchief to dry her eyes at the picture of so many, many dear little ones bereft of home and mother-love.

"Mary, Mary, I shall have to run away from here if you keep on!" cried Aunt Selina.

“But, Aunty, it is not your fault, and you must not feel this way, especially as you are doing so much to improve the conditions,” said Mrs. Talmage.

“Well, mother, I should say that if there are 87,000 addresses to send letters to, we’d better begin that letter now, and not spoil Flutey’s pleasure by thinking of all the things she never did,” advised Ruth, very sensibly.

“Yes, that letter is very important—let us compose it,” said Aunt Selina.

After an hour of writing and rewriting, Mrs. Talmage read aloud the result of their labor:

“Dear Friend:

“The Blue Birds of Oakdale have started a philanthropic work which must appeal to everyone who is willing to help our poor children. A magazine is being published, a sample of which is being sent you, that will contain instructive, helpful, interesting articles.

“Perhaps you know that there are 87,000 benevolent institutions in this country filled with over a million and a half poor children, to whom this magazine will prove a welcome visitor. The cost of producing this magazine is partially paid for by donations, and the profit of the work is all devoted to a settlement in the country where the city children can spend the summer.

“Inclosed find a subscription blank. Make all checks payable to ‘Blue Birds of Happy Times Nest.’”

“Wish we had time to run over to the Bobolinks and order fifty thousand of these letters,” suggested Dot.

“Oh, wouldn’t it be fun to see their faces!” laughed Norma.

“Maybe we will have time—it is only five minutes to nine,” announced Mrs. Talmage, looking at her watch.

“We can try it—we will walk down the path, and if we find they are leaving we can keep our own council until another night,” said Mrs. Talmage, as everyone rose hurriedly to go.

The children hurried on before, while the ladies followed more sedately.

The heavy doors were closed, but an opening about a foot wide left space enough for Ruth to squeeze through and pull one of the sliding doors along the groove to admit the other visitors.

The men had been lounging about, talking and watching their sons work, but upon the entrance of the ladies everyone arose in surprise.

"Rather a late hour for a call, dear," ventured Mr. Stevens.

"Oh, not at all. We were attending a business meeting, and found it necessary to leave an order with the Bobolinks."

"An order—what kind of an order?" questioned Ned dubiously.

Mrs. Talmage handed over the copy of the letter she wanted printed, and directed the company to get out a proof as soon as possible, for they would need about fifty thousand.

"Fifty thousand!" gasped the boys, while the men looked incredulous.

The Blue Birds could not restrain a giggle at the utter amazement of the Bobolinks, and the ladies thoroughly enjoyed their husbands' surprise.

"Oh, well, I suppose it will take you a long time to run off so many, so you may do ten thousand at a time," said Mrs. Talmage.

The Bobolinks could find no words with which to reply, and the men seemed to have lost their tongues also. While Mrs. Talmage waited for an answer, Don scowled at his twin sister.

"I am still waiting to hear you accept the order," smiled Mrs. Talmage, feeling that the Blue Birds had scored a point.

"Maybe you are not yet ready to do business," suggested Mrs. Wells, with just a touch of sarcasm.

"Of course we are ready!" exclaimed several boys, faintly echoed by the men.

"Then tell us how long will it be before you can show us a proof?" asked Mrs. Talmage.

"H'm! We will have to consult," replied Ned, as he beckoned some of the Bobolinks to the rear of the room.

The Blue Birds were so delighted at catching the Bobolinks napping that they danced up and down, finding it very difficult to keep their secret.

Don was the first to come over to the ladies.

"Say, what do you want that letter for? Where will you ever get paper enough to print ten thousand—we can't buy it for you," he growled.

"Don, come back here and mind your business!" shouted Meredith.

"When you return to the boys, please ask them to hurry, as we have another letter to ask them about—we may need 100,000 of these," said Mrs. Starr sweetly.

The Blue Birds noticed that their fathers looked sceptical at the last sentence.

"You never made up a list like that!" grunted Don, looking at the Blue Birds with fire shining in his eyes.

"What do you think we were doing while you spent your evenings having a good time?" retorted Dot.

"Humph!" was the only reply Don granted his sister.

"Folks said this summer that we Blue Birds were little hustlers, but I never paid much attention to them then; but *now* I think we are hustlers when I see the way you Bobolinks poke away for two weeks and nothing to show for it," teased May.

Mr. Wells was called over to join the conference of the Bobolinks before an answer was given the Blue Birds.

"We will set this type and run off a proof by to-morrow evening; will that do?" said Ned, coming forward with the letter.

The Blue Birds thought it would take the boys about three days to set type and give a proof, so it was their turn to be surprised. Mrs. Talmage seemed to understand, however, and replied in a very condescending voice:

"Oh, yes, to-morrow will be Saturday, and Uncle Ben will be here at noon. That will be fine, for, of course, he will show you what to do; and I am sure he knows just what he would like for the purpose."

The looks exchanged between the Bobolinks and Mr. Wells were sufficient proof that Mrs. Talmage was right in her surmise, but the Blue Birds were too polite to say anything more.

The men said it was long past closing hours, so the lights were extinguished, and the whole party went out into the cool night air.

Early Saturday morning the Blue Birds met again in their pretty Winter Nest, and Mrs. Talmage told them what she had thought over since the night before.

"Since Uncle Ben will be here all afternoon to supervise the work, I think it would be as well for us to form the letter for the philanthropists, too; then he can help the Bobolinks set the type."

The Blue Birds agreed that this was a wise plan, and so the letter was discussed and composed. This done, they went to the Publishing House with the copy, and told the boys what they wanted. The Bobolinks were hunting for the right style of type and fussing about the machines so as to have them in readiness for the afternoon.

Uncle Ben arrived at noon, and the boys placed their work under his supervision. From the expression on his face when he read the letters, it appeared that he understood the plans the Blue Birds were keeping so quiet.

"What are you smiling at, Uncle Ben?" asked Ned, keen to find out what the Blue Birds were planning.

"At the remarkable progress the Blue Birds have made since I last visited you," returned Uncle Ben.

"Why, they haven't done anything—much," grumbled Don.

"Only fixed up these two letters for us to print," added Meredith.

"They haven't done their usual sewing and playing in the cherry-tree nest, either," said Jinks.

"Is that so? Well, how do you know *what* they have been doing without your knowledge?" asked Uncle Ben laughingly.

The boys looked at him, and their eyes asked the question, "What?"

"As an old magazine man, I can see signs in these two letters that tell me of two tremendous pieces of work being started—and being very nicely handled, too. Why, I would not be surprised to have the Blue Birds fly down upon this Publishing House some day and settle here long enough to say that they had a paid-up subscription list of ten thousand! At any rate, you boys had better prepare to print about fifty thousand sample copies of the first magazine."

The faces of the Bobolinks looked as if their owners must sit down or collapse. Uncle Ben laughed heartily at them.

“Ah, you’re only fooling us, as usual,” ventured Ned.

“No, siree! I am not. Wait and see,” returned Uncle Ben.

Without further discussion, Uncle Ben showed the boys the proper style of type to use for a letter, then helped them run off a proof of both letters.

“This will show the Blue Birds that we are not so slow but that we can turn out samples in up-to-date style,” said Ned, as he admired the printing.

“Now, run off a few letters on this paper,” ordered Uncle Ben, producing some beautiful bond paper.

“My, but it’s pretty! Where’d you get it, Uncle Ben?” asked Ned.

“I brought it out for the Blue Birds’ inspection, but I shouldn’t doubt but that they have already attended to that detail, so we will present our proof all finished on my paper.”

“Now, tell us, Uncle Ben, why you think the Blue Birds have a big plan of their own,” entreated Ned.

Uncle Ben smiled and reminded the boys to keep his words from becoming public property.

“I should say that the fact that the Blue Birds have not been near their old Nest all week, when the weather is so glorious, proves that they have a deeper interest elsewhere. Now, what can that be? Here you have a hint of part of the interest,” and Uncle Ben waved the letters at the boys. “How do I know?

“Take these two letters—either one of them would startle a slow circulation manager in the city if he thought a competitor suddenly produced it! Why, in some way the Blue Birds have found a way to reach book stores, stationers, and similar business places. Then, too, the mention of needing thousands shows me they have found a mine of addresses that is worth a large price to a publisher.”

“Ah, Uncle Ben, you’re wrong there! The Blue Birds haven’t gone anywhere, and no one has been here to tell them how to get such names,” said Ned.

Without replying to Ned’s words, Uncle Ben continued:

“Then, too, they must have the institution work well under consideration or they would not have ordered the form letter—and hinted at the size of the order.”

The boys shook their heads, unwilling to admit that Uncle Ben's surmises sounded practical.

"Lastly, they have their paper selected, because they told you the size this sheet of printing is to be; and therefore they must know how deep a margin they will need. To get the size of their printing correct, they would have to know how many sheets will cut out of a large sheet of paper, and order it cut accordingly."

"If they have done all those things that you say they have, they are 'way ahead of us Bobolinks," grumbled Don.

Uncle Ben laughed and advised:

"Boys, work *with* these Blue Birds, not against them or ahead of them. Do not think that just because they are girls, and you are boys, that they are going to remain in the shade and let you boys come out and shine in the light. If you boys ever do business in the city, you will find that a woman will contest your right at every step, for to-day's women are equal in every way to the men—I rather think a number of them are superior to the men. These Blue Birds are but a proof of what I say. They will not permit the Bobolinks to walk off with the honors that are due them." And Uncle Ben chuckled at the idea.

"Well, Uncle Ben, you'll help us in every way until we are even with the girls, won't you?" asked Ned.

"And you won't help the Blue Birds any more, will you?" asked Don.

"I am absolutely neutral," replied Uncle Ben, holding both hands up over his head. "I won't take sides, but I will help the work along in every way, for I want it to succeed. I'll help you when you need it, and I'll help these little Blue Birds. But do as I said: Work together, not in a spirit of rivalry, for that will only sow seeds of strife and discontent."

"Come on, boys, let's take Uncle Ben to the house and show our letter proofs to the Blue Birds," said Ned.

So the Bobolinks were taught their lesson in trying to win a race by running for a time and then resting.

CHAPTER XII

THE STORY OF AN ALASKAN TRIP

When the Bobolinks reached the house, they found the veranda occupied by the Blue Birds, who sat in a semi-circle about three ladies in rocking chairs—Mrs. Talmage, Aunt Selina, and Mrs. Catlin. The latter had a roll of paper in her lap, and evidently had been explaining something to the audience.

"Oh, boys, you're just in time!" cried Ruth.

"Mrs. Catlin's got her story all written for our magazine, and she was just going to read it," explained Dot.

"May we hear it?" asked Ned, for the Bobolinks.

"Why, certainly. Sit right down on the steps," said Mrs. Catlin.

As soon as the boys were comfortable, she continued:

"I was about seventeen when I read the exciting tales of gold in California and the wealth to be obtained in Seattle—a town that was boomed in a night. I knew my father would never consent to my leaving home, so I said nothing, but pawned my watch and ring, drew my savings from the bank, and raised enough money to pay my way West. I worked part of my way, and stole rides on freight cars part of the way, until I found myself in Seattle. I was not particular where I went as long as it was in the West. Well, in Seattle I found that the fever of gold mining in Alaska was reaching a boiling point, and every steamer bound for Sitka was already overloaded, but I managed in some way to steal aboard and hide until the captain could not turn me off. I had to do some awfully dirty work, however, and had very little to eat.

"We arrived at Sitka, and there I spent some more of my money for a passage to Juneau City. There I landed with forty dollars left in my pockets. Ten of this was paid out for a hard bed and some scanty food, and I soon feared that I would be left without a cent unless I started somewhere for the gold mines. I heard all kinds of stories about the gold found up on the Yukon River, so I found a shed where outfits were sold, and paid twenty dollars for an outfit that was said to be all I would need. I still had a few dollars left when I started on

the road, with my outfit strapped to my back, visions of finding millions of dollars' worth of gold always before my eyes.

"I walked along a trail that seemed to be well traveled, and felt glad to get away from the drink-sodden town. I had tramped for hours, when the outfit began to rub painfully on my back. I was hungry, too, for the food given me at the eating-houses was unfit to eat. In buying my outfit, I added a strip of bacon and a loaf of black bread, so I decided to rest for a bit and have my dinner.

"The country, as far as I could see, was very beautiful, so I sat down beside the trail and dropped my pack. I took out the tiny frying pan and cut some bacon into it. I gathered some sticks, and then tried to light one of the matches that was in the waterproof box, but it merely sputtered and went out. I used so many matches in this way that I became nervous lest the supply give out. Finally I ate my bread and bacon as it was, and was about to strap the outfit together again when I spied a caravan leaving the town several miles beyond the point where I sat. I was so interested in watching the long line, as it lengthened out along the trail, that I forgot how soon night comes down in this country. I had no plans for the night, and expected to go much farther before I struck camp. When the caravan had come halfway the distance from town toward me, I picked up my pack and started on.

"I found the pack dreadfully heavy this time, and had to rest several times. I was thus resting on a large rock when the caravan passed me.

"The sledges were piled high with camp equipment. At the end of the line was a cumbersome-looking affair that was covered with canvas and drawn by four horses. A grizzled man drove these horses, and seemed intent upon his job.

"So interested was I in watching them go by that I was startled when one of the men in the sledge called to me:

"'Hello, Kid! What are you doing—picking flowers?'

"A number of the men laughed, but the younger one who sat with the man in the sledge shouted: 'Want to join us as far as your road lies? This is no place for a boy to travel alone. Beasts on two and four legs are too powerful about here.'

“I felt an irresistible desire to join them, but they never stopped. However, taking it for granted that they wanted me or they wouldn’t have spoken, I ran after the caravan and tried to keep up with them. The pack grew heavier every moment, and at last I decided to give it up. Just then one of the leading horses of the four stumbled down upon his knees.

“This caused a halt while the driver got down and examined the horse. I had the opportunity that I needed, so I took a deep breath and shouted, at the same time running as fast as my weary legs would carry me.

“‘How are you comin’?’ asked the driver.

“‘Coming!’ I cried, so tired I could have wept. ‘Why, I’ve been coming ever since the man asked me.’

“‘Some run, eh?’ asked the old man, smiling.

“‘Didn’t they mean it?’ I asked, in a tremble lest I be left again.

“‘Guess so. Don’t believe they gave you another thought. But, now that you’re here, you kin sit with me,’ said the man gruffly, as I thought, while he rubbed the skinned knee with whale-oil.

“I climbed up and sat in the seat beside the driver. He gathered the reins together and started the horses again before he spoke another word.

“‘Kid, I watched you runnin’ after this crew, and I jus’ said to mysel’, “Old Hal, keep an eye on that kid and see what stuff he’s made of.” I reckon you’ll win out, even if this brazen outfit loses. I’m goin’ to take a likin’ to ye, kid, d’ye hear that!’ grinned the old man, as he chirked to the horses.

“I sat still and pondered what he said.

“‘Thar ain’t many men as kin say that Old Hal the Guide took a likin’ to ’em, kid,’ he continued, watching the trail where his horses stepped.

“I had overheard the men at the town talking about a guide called ‘Old Hal,’ and the conjectures as to how much the swell outfit had to pay him to get him to take charge of their expedition.

“I felt unduly elated at hearing the man address me so comradely, and I decided to be as friendly as I could.

"'What's the great hulk under this canvas?' I asked, nodding my head toward the load back of us.

"'Hulk! You're right, sonny, it is a great big hulk. These men from the East think they know a lot about goin' on a expedition like this—they git their learnin' from the books. But I could have saved 'em heaps of money hed they consulted me fust. Now, this pertickler hulk is dead trash! *They* call 'em canoes, but the fust little jolt one of 'em gits in the end of its nose—down she goes!'

"'Canoes, eh?' I said wonderingly.

"'How many did yeh bring in yer outfit?' asked Hal, nudging me in the ribs.

"'I may have all of those to take care of if you don't watch the horses,' I growled.

"'Right choo are, kid! Did yeh ever hear the verse, "From the mouths of babes, etc."? Guess yeh didn't know I ever read Scripter, did yeh?' laughed the old man.

"'Guess you don't or you wouldn't joke that way about such a good Book,' I replied.

"'Right choo are agin, kid! My, but you are a lucky find fer Hal to have. Jus' fancy all the fun we will have durin' the long winter nights,' said the guide, in a conciliatory tone.

"'Hope so! If I ever get the chance to show you that I am thankful for this help, I surely will,' I said, full of gratitude that I was not dragging my feet along the tiresome trail at that very moment.

"'Now, that's the kind of a heart to have—one that kin thank a feller without feelin' 'shamed to show his colors! I see where you and me are goin' to make a fine team!' said Hal.

"After some silence, the old man asked: 'Where'er yeh bound fer, anyway?'

"'Don't know—just going out to find gold,' I said.

"He turned square around and stared at me for a few moments, then gasped: 'Father an' mother dead?'

"I had to gulp hard before I could answer this question, then I said: 'No. Had my own money in the bank, and so I just came.'

"'How fer?' he asked abruptly.

"'All the way from New York state. I worked my way out and worked part of my way on the Seattle boat,' I said, with great pride in my achievement.

"'Why, yeh little fool!' cried the irate guide.

"'What's the matter?'

"'An' I s'pose yeh hev ben payin' fer full board an' keep to yer mother ever sence yeh wuz borned, eh?' scoffed Hal.

"I was silent. I was looking at the matter from a new point of view.

"'S'pose yer pa an' ma was on'y too glad to git yeh out'en the way, eh?' he continued.

"Again I had to gulp when I thought of my mother.

"'I see the hull fool thing. Yeh jus' went crazy readin' trashy papers, an' yeh run away widdout tellin' a soul, 'cause yeh knew they wouldn't let yeh come otherwise.'

"I marveled at how close he had come to the truth.

"'Well, yer here, kid, an' I s'pose Old Hal's got to see yeh through wit it, so thet worritin' mother of yourn'll see yeh agin, some day.' And he swung the whip over the horses' heads with a crack that saved me from his ire.

"We came to a bad grade then, and Old Hal had to keep a wary eye on the trail, for the horses were not as sure-footed as the dogs and deer.

"It must have been four o'clock before we halted. The air was growing colder as we advanced, and I was glad enough to open my pack for a chunk of bread and a slice of bacon.

"'Hist, kid, stow that away!' whispered Hal, as he began to unhitch the horses for the night.

"In a short time the two men from the sledge came up.

"'Hello, youngster! You did come, after all, didn't you?' said the older man.

"As the supper was being cooked by an Indian guide, I was welcomed in the circle sitting about a blazing fire and asked about myself. To each question I replied truthfully, and wondered at the smiles and surprise shown at my answers.

“One of the two men who owned the expedition turned to the old guide after a time and said: ‘Hal, what shall we do with the kid? Send him back home?’

“‘If ’twere me, I’d give him his fill. He’ll be safe enough wid us, an’ we kin git heaps of work outen him; but he’ll never ‘mount to nothin’ ef yeh send him home, ’cause he’ll allus think of the gold he might have got,’ said Hal astutely.

“‘Guess you’ve hit the nail on the head, Hal,’ laughed the younger man, as he looked at me.

“So I became a member of the Yukon Gold Expedition, under the management of John Herrick and Julius Dwight, engineers.

“We traveled over hundreds of miles of snow, for we were trying to reach a certain trail that Old Hal knew, before the thaw set in.

“We did not quite get there, however, before the general thaw struck us. Then the canoes were needed. I had wondered why we delayed our traveling to cart those canoes with us, for there were no streams or lakes to cross, but the moment the thaw set in it seemed that every piece of ice and snow in the North was turning to water. Instead of trails, we had to travel by green-blue rivers, or over deep, dark seas.

“Well, after losing one canoe and two of the Indians, Old Hal hit his trail and led us up toward the mountains.

“All of that short summer was passed in the usual work of prospecting: digging, panning, washing, or testing for gold. Permanent camp had been built by the men, and a number of Indian servants took precaution that every emergency should be provided for in case of a hard, long winter. Every kind of edible bird or beast was trapped and prepared for food, while the skins and pelts of animals were cured and made into garments and covers.

“I was the youngest in camp, so I was known as the ‘Kid,’ and Old Hal took the office of guardian toward me from the first and ordered me about—always for my good, be it known—and kept a watchful eye over my doings and the men I happened to work with.

“Toward the end of the short summer we struck a rich vein of gold!

“I shall never forget the change in everyone’s character the moment the gold was discovered in the shining sand. Some became

savages, others grew crafty and cunning, and Old Hal had his hands full to keep discipline in the camp. Dwight and Herrick saw the tendency of their hired men to mutiny against Hal and themselves, and perhaps jump the claim when the owners were out of the way, but they were farsighted men, and Hal was no greenhorn in handling Esquimo and half-breed Indians.

"A large tract of land on both sides of the creek was staked off and a diagram of the area carefully drawn by Herrick, to be filed in the office at Forty-Mile Station, where a legal land-office was maintained by the government.

"As it was most necessary to file this claim before winter came on, a conference was held between Hal and the two engineers. Hal said he could easily make the trip to Forty-Mile and back again before winter froze everything solid, so he was ordered to take a canoe, with two of the mutinous men, and start immediately. Two dogs were placed in the canoe, in case they would be needed for sledging, and a store of food and pelts were packed under the seats. At the last moment, Hal was led to take his own canoe, which he had made that summer, and ask for my company. I was delighted to know I could accompany my old friend, so one of the dogs and a sledge were placed in Hal's canoe, and but one of the men got in, while I was placed in the other canoe, with the other man.

"We started in good order and made quick time. We had no route, map, or survey, for there were none in those days, but Hal knew every foot of the way, unless unusual conditions prevailed. We made camp that night, and rested, all unmindful of the plot the two mutinous men were hatching against us to get possession of the claim papers.

"In the morning, after an early breakfast, we started, and had gone but a short distance before our canoes ran out of the stream into a broad expanse of water that was unfamiliar to Hal.

"He looked carefully around for some landmark to guide him, and saw, some miles further on, what he believed to be a blazed spot. So he directed his man to paddle for that place.

"When Hal was about ten feet in advance of us, and as I sat in the stern of our canoe, I saw the man paddling our canoe suddenly raise a rifle—where he got it no one knows—take aim, and shoot. It was all

done so quickly that I could scarcely move. Hal always held his revolver ready to enforce obedience from his men, and the moment I heard the shot I saw his arm jerk spasmodically and his revolver fly out and fall in the bottom of the canoe. At the same time I tore my revolver out of my belt and covered the man who had shot.

"I was so occupied in this that I had no time to see what Hal was doing, but I heard him yell: 'Go overboard this second or I'll shoot you dead!'

"I immediately followed suit, and cried: 'Go overboard, and swim ashore, or I'll shoot you!'

"The man sat and stared at me for a moment, as he never dreamed I had the spirit to do what I had. I was so nervous, and my heart seemed to bulge out in my throat so that I could hardly swallow. The man still sat and looked at his pal, who had jumped overboard and was swimming for shore. I never knew how it happened, for I had no idea of shooting him, but in that moment that he turned his look from me to his pal my fingers twitched with dread, and the revolver rang forth its shot, and the fellow fell into the water. I was so frightened that I clung to the neck of the dog and hid my eyes. Meantime, the fellow who was swimming saw what had occurred, and went under water to escape being shot.

"Soon Hal had his canoe alongside, and said: 'Step in here, Kid.'

"My canoe was fastened to the other one, and the transfer made without further mishap. I looked about for the swimmer, but could see nothing of him. He might have drowned or gone ashore.

"We managed to travel pretty well until night, when we again camped on shore, but Hal seemed worried at the strangeness of the land.

"After a few days' futile seeking for the trail, we felt a sudden chill in the air. Hal was concerned, and sought in every direction for some familiar object.

"We made camp one night while the dogs sniffed ravenously about for food, for our stock had run so low that Hal had to economize to make it last another day. The next morning I awoke to find snow blowing in every direction. The change was so unlooked for that I rubbed my eyes to make sure I was awake.

"'Well, Kid, this settles our trip to Forty-Mile for some time,' admitted Hal forlornly.

"'What do you mean, Hal?' I asked.

"'If we don't make camp quick, we'll be caught in the cold and frozen. If I was alone, I'd try to make some Esquimo hut or die, but havin' you I can't take a chance.' Hal's manner of speech had improved a great deal during his intercourse with cultured men, and I took note of it as he spoke—such queer things will impress one when a sudden calamity presents itself.

"That morning Hal set me to cutting down some small trees. He said he would take the sledge and the dogs and try to find the trail. I begged him not to leave me alone, and he promised that this would be the last effort if he was unsuccessful.

"I felt the terrible fear of being alone in this wilderness all winter, but I kept busy chopping down trees. All day long I worked and prayed, and before dark settled down I rejoiced to see Hal coming back. I could tell in a moment that he had not found any trail, so I said nothing.

"That night Hal saw all the signs of winter breaking upon us, and he worked fast and furious to make camp so that we might survive the cold months.

"In his search the day before, he had found a stream whose banks were well covered with sheltering pines. Here he proposed to build a hut. While, with the help of the dogs, he hauled the small logs I had cut to the stream, I was ordered to fish and hunt for all the supplies I could gather before the waters froze solid.

"I went to work with a forlorn hope of ever living to see another year, but the fish were plentiful, and the task of preparing them for winter use kept me from thinking too much.

"Hal set traps for animals, and this game we skinned; the meat we dried and the pelts we hoped to use in the winter. The fats I dried out and kept in a skin pouch Hal made. Some of the game could not be eaten, so we used that for bait.

"Hal built a rude log hut about eight feet wide, with a smoke hole at the top. The wide chinks were plastered full of clay from the river-bank. A door was made of split logs and fastened together with rope and strips of skin. We had brought no nails or screws, and had

to use whatever came to hand. The hinges of the door were made of tough strips of hide and fastened to the logs with some nails Hal took out of the sledge.

"A rude fire-bowl was made in the center of the hut and some flint-rock carefully placed in a chink in the wall. The hut completed, Hal felt relieved, for the winter seemed to hold off for our benefit.

"We chopped wood, and stacked it on one side of the wall, inside, and then started to pile up more on the outside near the door. Some of our food was buried in a pit just outside the hut, but Hal hung all there was room for to the logs of the roof.

"We were feeling quite contented one night, when Hal remarked: 'Kid, she's comin' down on us. I kin tell by the queer sounds through those pines.'

"'Let her come. We are ready,' I laughed.

"'All but the beds. I'll have to go out now and bring in those balsam branches I have been savin' all these days.'

"That night we slept upon our fresh balsam beds. When I rose I could not have told whether it was twilight or dawn. The blizzard howled outside, but Hal had a cheerful fire cracking inside."

CHAPTER XIII

A WINTER IN THE FROZEN NORTH

"For ten days that blizzard raged, and I began to think we never would get out again. Then one morning Hal called me to see the beautiful snow. I stretched and got up. Hal had managed to chop away some of the drift that had piled against the door, and after some digging we squeezed through an aperture and stood without.

"My, but it was grand! One great world of sparkling white, with drifted mountains of snow all over. Even our hut was but a smaller drift in the general picture. While I stood and admired, Hal brought out two pails which we had had in the canoes, and told me how important it was to get some water from the stream. We carried the water carefully to the hut, and then I watched Hal set a bear trap, as well as a trap for small game.

"The dogs enjoyed being out once more and lapped the water greedily while we filled the buckets. We worked several hours taking wood from outside the hut and piling it up on our depleted stack inside. Long before we were done, I heard a distant howling, and looked toward Hal for its meaning.

"'Wolves! They scent our meat,' he said laconically.

"We managed to fasten our door again, and sat down by the fire while the dogs went over to their corner to sleep.

"That night the thermometer dropped to thirty degrees below zero and stayed there for a week. Everything that could froze up solid, and the wild beasts could catch no more fish or small game, so took long jaunts away from their lairs to find food.

"Inside of forty-eight hours I heard every kind of a growl and howl imaginable, as bears prowled about the hut sniffing at the buried food, or scratching at our hut to get in.

"'Wish we could get some of 'em in the traps,' I said.

"'They'd be torn to pieces and soon et up by the other wild beasts,' replied Hal, as he made another notch in a log where he was keeping record of the days.

“It wasn’t very pleasant that week, for the room was small, and the dogs and meat began to make the air reek, so we were mighty glad, one morning, to wake and find it warmer. Without delay, Hal and I chopped the door out of the ice and snow and got out, followed by the dogs. The air was still so cold that it felt like a knife going through my lungs, but it was sweet and fresh. The dogs, too, were glad to have a run.

“The only thing to mark the hut from the other humps of snow round about was the dirty spot where the smoke came out. While we aired the room we cleaned up whatever débris lay about and filled the pails with some ice that Hal chopped out of the frozen stream.

“Meantime, the dogs were scenting about in the drifts and growling and yelping. Hal looked up and saw that they were off following some tracks. He ran after them for a few rods and then came back, calling them to come in.

“‘Those were bear tracks,’ he explained, as the dogs obeyed most unwillingly. ‘I wish I had some way to trap them without having the fur ruined by other animals.’

“‘Couldn’t you set a trap right in range with the chink of the door, and if you hear other animals about you can shoot them,’ I said.

“‘But it would waste a lot of valuable ammunition,’ he replied.

“He set the trap where I had suggested, however, and said he would wait and see what happened.

“We felt better for that day’s fresh air, but the storm settled down again during the night, and it was several days before it stopped snowing. The cold held on longer, but we knew it was clear by the bright gleam of light that filtered through our smoke-hole.

“‘I wonder if we can get out to-day?’ I asked, but at the same time howls were heard coming from the pines.

“‘Guess you will do better to stay in to-day,’ smiled Hal.

“That night we found it impossible to sleep, for the wolves howled madly just outside the hut, and some of them pawed at the smoke-hole so that Hal finally picked up a red-hot firebrand and poked it up through the opening just as one of the beasts tried to nose down into the hut. It must have caught him well, for he set up a terrific howling.

“The next night, as the wolves came back again to pay their nightly visit, we heard a new growl coming from a distance. I looked at Hal for information, and he chuckled with satisfaction.

“‘Ha! I thought so! I was sure a bear would come along before long.’

“‘A bear! Oh, I wish we could get him in that trap!’

“‘Will he attack the wolves?’ I asked.

“‘He will come sniffing about that pit for meat, and if the wolves bother him they will most likely get into trouble,’ said Hal, laughing.

“‘Gracious, Hal! S’pose he gets our meat—what will we do?’

“‘We’ll have to prevent him from gettin’ it, that’s all,’ said Hal, looking at his rifle to see that it was in good order.

“‘How are you going to do it?’

“‘Shoot him while he’s busy with the wolves, or try and get him while he is digging at the pit.’

“‘Wait and try the last plan. Let him kill off a pack of hungry wolves, and when he has driven them away he will come to the pit. Then is your time,’ I said.

“‘Kid, you’re comin’ on fine! Another season in the north and you will be a regular hunter,’ laughed Hal.

“I saw that I pleased the old man, and felt happy that I could do it so easily. But my attention was attracted by the din of battle outside, as howls and snarls mixed together so furiously that the dogs huddled down in a corner of the hut and showed their teeth at the doorway.

“We couldn’t tell from the sounds which was being worsted, but the fact that the wolves were so numerous led us to believe that they could finally tear to pieces any bear. Then, while we were checking off the howls, quite a singular snarl came from the opposite direction.

“We could tell from the noises that another bear had taken a hand in the fight, which continued for a long time. Then all was quiet.

“All that night we heard something scratching at the door and climbing up to the smoke-hole, but a firebrand always met the inquisitive nose, for we could hear the snarl of rage as a hasty retreat

was made. One queer thing, though, was the fact that we only heard one beast clawing about.

"When light came again, Hal placed his ear to a chink in the door and listened. He seemed satisfied that the coast was clear, so we started to chop out the snow that bound the door on the outside.

"We got the door open about an inch, and Hal peeped out, but could see nothing. Then we managed to push it open a little further, and still nothing but snow was visible.

"Then suddenly a dark shadow fell across the light from outside. I stood rigid while Hal took a good aim.

"'Why don't you shoot?' I cried, as I saw the largest bear I had ever seen standing there scenting the air.

"'He isn't in perfect range yet. I'd only ping him and make him run, if I shoot now,' whispered Hal, still holding his finger on the trigger.

"'If he'd only move a foot this way!' I sighed.

"As if the brute felt my wish, he turned his head in our direction. Instantly a deafening report seemed to blow up the cabin, and powder smoke hung thick over our heads. The dogs were so startled that they yelped and rolled over on the floor.

"There was not a sound from outside, and Hal smiled to himself.

"'Bet I got him first try. Didn't hear any objections from him, did you?'

"'Gee! I wish we could open this door and drag him in before those wolves come back,' I said, digging frantically.

"'They won't get back straight off. They have been whipped for the time and will be feared to try it again unless they get the scent of the dead bears,' said Hal, digging away at the top of the drift while I scooped at the bottom.

"We finally managed to open the door enough to get out.

"The bear had dropped dead in his tracks. At his feet—but out of range of the chink of our door—lay the other, literally ripped to pieces by the wolves during the night's battle. She had put up a fine fight, though, for the area all about her was covered with the bodies of the wolves she had slaughtered, and the snow was all trampled and red.

“The dogs ran out, their hair bristling along their spines as they sniffed at the carcasses.

“We heard the wolves’ howls from the pine woods, so we hurriedly dragged the bear Hal had shot inside the hut. We put the carcass in one corner of the room, which left us scarcely enough space to move around in.

“Hardly had the door been closed before the pack of wolves were upon it, scratching and tearing at the logs.

“We had a difficult time skinning the bears and trying to cut the steaks properly; the grease we kept for oil after it had been melted down. I used to implore Hal to throw out the whole dreadful mess, but he knew the value of bear-grease and steaks, so kept his own counsel and minded me not at all.

“Parts that could not be used, however, and refuse were thrown to the wolves, thus keeping a howling horde of them in our vicinity constantly. This, as it happened, proved our salvation.

“We sat cross-legged one morning, figuring out by the notch calendar how many weeks of winter remained. Suddenly a most startling sound rose above the din of the snarling, fighting beasts outside.

“A shot rang out, followed by a shrill yelp of pain from one of the beasts; again a rifle cracked, and one more wolf was struck, judging from the noise and confusion that ensued.

“Hal and I looked at each other as if in a dream; then we comprehended, and almost choked with joy. The beasts outside slunk away as the strangers who had dealt death so swiftly among them approached. Hal and I both raised our voices and shouted and called as loudly as we could. I thought of his rifle, and brought it to him.

“‘Shoot through the rifle-hole in the door,’ I said, excitedly.

“‘Sure thing!’ he cried, raising his gun to his shoulder and shooting toward the sky.

“We heard an answering shot, and then voices approaching to within a few yards of the hut. We pried the door open far enough to hand out the spade. The unknown visitors already had one spade, and between the two we were soon excavated, the door was opened,

and we leaped forth! There stood an Indian squaw with a boy of about twelve.

"Fancy our chagrin and sinking hearts! Hal said afterward that he thought a rescue party had started out to find us, although he knew this was practically impossible.

"The squaw and Hal could speak, after a fashion, and he explained to me that she and her son were hunting the day before, and had been caught by night's swift approach. They were forced to rest in a cave until morning. Here they had to keep the wild animals at bay, although they could see them moving around in the shadows just outside the circle of their campfire, and heard them howling all through the night. When light came again, they started to find their way home, and had seen the beasts prowling around a hump in the snow from whence issued a thin stream of smoke. They knew immediately that some human being was there, and tried to drive away the animals long enough to investigate.

"Hal explained how we had come to be there—and how grateful we would be to get away. The squaw managed to tell us that she would return to her tribe at once and find out whether or not we would be welcomed among them.

"Hal made her understand how much money she would have if she would help us reach Forty-Mile, where he had 'much money' waiting for him in the bank.

"The squaw had heard of 'Old Hal,' the guide, and was evidently surprised to find him lost while so near the trail.

"'With this kid, I couldn't take any chance at hunting for the trail any longer,' he explained, 'but decided to follow the most sensible course, and wait until Spring!'

"We offered the squaw the bear-pelts if she would return with help and rescue us. In the native manner of 'hearing without speaking' she stalked away, and we were not sure as to whether she would return or not.

"In a few days, however, we again heard the sound of a shot which came from the direction of the woods, and after forcing the door open we found the squaw with two young men from her tribe.

"'Trail—him all right,' mumbled the squaw.

"We found the weather clear enough to enable us to travel, so we packed all of our belongings upon the sledge, leaving the canoe in the snowbank, where it lay hidden against the house. The bear-steaks were almost gone, but Hal showed the squaw where the other food was buried, and told her she could use the hut any time she liked. She nodded, and as soon as the dogs were hitched to the sledge, we proceeded on our journey, guided by the squaw and the two boys.

"We had only a few hours in which to travel, but in that time we reached the cave the squaw had told us of, and there spent the night. The following morning, we continued the journey, reaching the village before dark.

"The settlement was small, comprising but a dozen families and about six huts, but it seemed like a town to us, who had been lost all Winter with nothing but wild animals and snow around us.

"Our dogs were delighted at being able to join some of their breed again, and, upon the whole, we were all treated as well as could be expected.

"We stayed there for two nights, then made an early start on the third morning for Forty-Mile.

"The faithful squaw and her two boys accompanied us a short distance, until Hal had gotten his bearings and said he would be all right.

"We started on the trail at a goodly speed, and reached a small settlement by night-fall. The next day we arrived at the first real colony of white people we had encountered since we left the camp, and a week after we had left the squaw we came to the town of Forty-Mile, where we filed the papers for the claim Herrick and Dwight had staked out.

"Hal knew this was an important matter, and wondered if the rascal who stranded us had found his way to the land-office first.

"I was sitting in the little smoking-room in the place they called 'Hotel' one morning, while Hal was in our room sewing his gold-dust belt a bit safer inside of his shirt.

"I had changed so much in appearance—with a boyish growth of beard over my chin, and my hair as long as a poet's—that a villainous-looking man who came in and asked for whiskey failed to

recognize me; but I knew him at once as being the man who had escaped from our canoe.

"I managed to get out of the room without being seen, and ran to Hal.

"'What do you think! The murderer is downstairs!'

"'Who?—Sit down and talk sensible,' said Hal.

"'One of the Indians who got away from the canoe,' I cried in a hoarse whisper.

"Old Hal leaped to his feet. He strapped on his belt and swung his gun over his arm. After making sure his revolver was all right, he crept downstairs. I was not going to be cheated out of anything as exciting as this promised to be, so I cautiously followed him.

"The tavern-keeper and by-standers knew Hal well, and, of course, would stake their all on his word; so when he entered the bar-room and cried: 'Hands up!' to the Indian, everyone took sides with him, and we soon had the fellow safely bound.

"'Now, let me see those papers you forged for our claims,' snarled Hal, fishing through the man's dirty pockets, but finding nothing.

"The man's face showed too much elation for an old guide like Hal to be fooled, and he ordered the boys standing about to help him strip the Indian, and there—fastened to his back with strips of plaster—were found the drawings rudely sketched, somewhat like the set of surveys Hal had already filed.

"They were ripped off and thrown into the fire and the villain was chained to a post out in the shed with the dogs, with his arms tied behind him to prevent his escape, until the Sheriff should come in the morning.

"Hal told the crowd all about the treachery of the Indians, and they promised to attend to this man after we were gone.

"A public sledge was about to leave for Dyea in a few days, and Hal engaged seats for himself and me. He paid the tavern-keeper to keep the dogs until he returned.

"I had refrained from asking Hal about my future while there was any doubt of our getting to the Coast, but this seemed to be the best time to speak of it.

"'What you going to do with me?' I asked.

"'We'll skip right down to Juneau, and see if there are any letters there. It all depends,' he replied.

"In a few days more we reached Dyea, where Hal secured some trustworthy men into whose charge he could commit the mining work. Then we took the boat and started for Juneau.

"After a rough voyage of more than ten days, we docked at the wretched little city, and went to the post-office for our mail.

"Three letters awaited me—but every one of them were from chums to whom I had sent cards from Seattle. My mail had been forwarded to me from Seattle to Juneau, but there was no word from my parents.

"As Hal and I stood reading our letters, the postmaster—a shrivelled-up, little old man, peered at me over the rim of his spectacles, and called out:

"'Be you the one thet jist got some old letters from the East?'

"'Yes, sir,' I returned, going over to the counter.

"'Waal, heah's one thet cum a long time ago, an' I meant to send it back, but somehow fergot it. I cum across it yistiddy, and made up my mind to do somethin' with it sure, so heah ye aire.'

"With relief I recognized my father's writing, but the letter was dated two months previous.

"I opened the letter and read it through with intense emotion. First, I learned that my Mother had died after a brief illness. Next, my Father had lost his fine saw-mill by fire. Third, my oldest sister had married, and the home was broken up, Father having gone to live with her in New York.

"I wondered where I would go if I went home. There was no Mother waiting, no home, and my Father was in a strange city with his son-in-law.

"I turned and handed the letter to Hal. He read and comprehended.

"'Guess it's Alaska for ye, Kid. Want to go back with me?'

"Did I?—well, I just guess I did, and I fairly jumped at the hand that was held out to me.

"'Glad myself, Kid, to have you. I sure would have missed you tol'able ef I saw you sailin' away from me, headed for Seattle.'

"'Hal, will the bosses think it is all right now?' I asked.

"'Sure thing, when they read this letter, Kid. And, say, I never told anyone this, but seein' thet I am to be your 'dopted father, now, I may as well tell yeh—I am to have a tenth-share in the claim up there, and, as my 'dopted son, you come in fer a part of mine—see?'

"'Hal, do you mean you will take me under your wing?' I cried, all forgetful of the goldmine.

"This pleased the old guide so much that he laughed as he retorted, 'I knew I wasn't wrong on the stuff you're made of. That was a lucky day when my horse stumbled, eh?' and he slapped me kindly on the back.

"Well, we went back to Dyea, and waited for a caravan to start on the trail. We joined the very first one out, and Hal earned our passage and keep all the way, as guide.

"We found the camp in excellent condition, and the new miners we had chosen in place of the villainous Indians proved to be all that could be desired.

"Some machinery was purchased by Hal at Dyea, and as soon as it was delivered at our camp, all hands set to work.

"I stayed at that camp with Hal for three years before we sold out our interests and took a vacation. The bosses had only remained until the gold was panning out well, then they sent for experts to come and value the entire mine.

"Hal had filed some property claims for himself and me adjoining the Dwight mine, and after the experts had rendered their verdict on the property we were able to sell them at a big price.

"Hal and I decided to go to Seattle for a while, and then travel a bit; if we found the life too lazy we could easily get back to Alaska.

"We put in a year of pleasure-seeking together, but the life and climate was too mild for the old guide who had always been accustomed to work and cold, and one night I found him breathing hard, and he complained of pains in his chest. In a week he had passed away, leaving me with all of his wealth to add to my own.

"I had written father, and sent him some money several times during the year, and now I wrote to tell him I was coming home.

"Needless to say, we were overjoyed to see each other again, and then I told him I was going to take him on a little trip.

“We went straight to our old home town, and to his surprise I took him to the old homestead where I was born, telling him that I had repurchased it from the folks who had bought it from him. He trembled with happiness as we entered the door and found all of the familiar old furniture there, too. Above all, there stood his maiden-sister, in the dining-room door, smiling a welcome!

“I explained how I had found Aunt Delia, and made her promise to keep house for him, and how we had collected the old furniture that the village-folks bought when mother died. I was always thankful that my money enabled me to make his last days happy.”

CHAPTER XIV

THE B. B. & B. B. MAGAZINE

By the fifteenth of October the Blue Birds and Bobolinks were deep in the work of constructing a magazine. Uncle Ben sent out the two young men he had spoken of, and they showed the children what to do and how to do it.

The Oakdale Paper Mills passed a vote to supply the paper for one year, and the B. B. & B. B. Company had agreed to give the mills advertising credit for the donation.

The two important letters which had caused such consternation in the Bobolink nest were all printed on beautiful grey paper in blue ink, and the envelopes all addressed and packed in boxes ready to be used.

All the stories, articles and lessons had been given to Uncle Ben before the tenth of the month and he had sent back the linotype by the thirteenth as he promised he would. Then work began in real earnest.

The Bobolink Boys had to make a galley proof of the printing, and the Blue Birds had to read it (or at least their mothers did) and construct the dummy. This last work was great fun.

Every evening fathers and mothers visited the Publishing House and the Winter Nest and assisted where they could, or watched progress when they were not needed; after every meeting it became the custom for one or the other of the fathers to treat the publishing company and guests to refreshments. This, Don thought, was reward enough for every aching back or arm. To keep the children from tiring of the treats, the fathers planned each morning, while going into the city, just what new kind of a surprise to furnish that night.

The interest shown at first had not abated—possibly due to the fact that so much fun was always to be had from unexpected sources—and the two men from the city said it was a marvel that children could produce such splendid work.

"Goodness! those Bobolinks ought to! they spent heaps and heaps of time fooling with those machines to learn how to work 'em!" said Dot Starr, overhearing what the men said.

"And just see how the fathers help!" added Norma.

"I guess the magazine wouldn't be much of a paper if the Blue Birds hadn't done their part so well," said May.

"And the Blue Birds' mothers!" reminded Ruth.

The Blue Birds were sitting on the steps of the piazza waiting for Mrs. Talmage and Aunt Selina to join them, when Dot told them of the "city-man's" commendation of the work.

"Here comes Flutey, now," said Ruth, hearing the slow steps of her aunt.

"Well, Blue Birds, how's the song this morning?" cried Aunt Selina, happily.

The children all turned with one accord and looked at her. Some great happiness must have been sent her, for she was bubbling over with secret joy and her face looked as young as one of the Blue Bird's. She took a chair near the children.

"Say, Flutey, you won't be offended if I ask you a very happy question, will you?" asked Dot, in a half-whisper.

"Why, of course not! Ask it, child," smiled Aunt Selina.

"Well, you look so happy, you know, I thought maybe *that* soldier-man came back to marry you—maybe his being shot was all a mistake and he has been a prisoner all this time and just got away," said Dot with horror and awe in her tones.

Mrs. Talmage had stepped out just in time to overhear the funny little girl's remark and she had to run inside and smother her laughter in a handkerchief, for Dot was most serious in her statement, and it would never do to make her feel badly by laughing at her sympathy.

"Oh, no, dearie, those prisons were abandoned soon after the war. But this surprise I have for the Blue Birds is entirely different from anything personal," replied Aunt Selina.

"Oh, what is it?" asked several voices.

"I have a letter here," said Aunt Selina, taking it from her reticule, "in reply to one I wrote an old-time friend a short time ago. This

friend started an advertising business in Philadelphia many years ago and has been very successful. Let us see what advice this friend gives about securing contracts for advertising."

The Blue Birds hovered about Aunt Selina's chair eager to hear the letter read.

The letter was short, but to the point. Mr. Sphere said he was delighted to hear from his old friend and hoped his information would give her little friends the satisfaction they deserved for their undertaking. He said that one of his best representatives had been told to call at Mossy Glen to interview the Blue Birds and to do just as the ladies directed. This man would tell them how to get advertising.

"Oh, Flutey! is that all he said?" murmured Ruth.

"Why, I don't call that such a piece of 'happy' news to smile over as you did!" pouted Dot.

"He didn't ask you how you had been all the time since you two knew each other, and he never said a word about our magazine," grumbled Norma, feeling a personal offence in the letter.

"Why, children! *I* think it is a wonderful piece of good news to hear that he takes enough interest in the work to send one of his best men down here to talk matters over," said Mrs. Talmage.

"If you knew my friend you would understand this letter better, for he always was a quiet chap who listened to others, but said little himself," explained Aunt Selina.

The following day while the Blue Birds were at the Publishing House watching the wonderful process of stitching and trimming completed magazines, a very alert young man rang the bell at the Talmage house.

Mrs. Talmage and Aunt Selina welcomed the visitor.

Shouts of excitement reached the house where the ladies were talking with Mr. Sphere's representative, and soon a crowd of boys and girls swarmed up the steps and ran pell-mell for Mrs. Talmage, nothing daunted by seeing the stranger.

"Mother, mother, see, see!" cried Ruth, dragging Jinks by the sleeve.

"Oh," gasped little Betty, "see our magazine!"

“It’s perfectly lovely, Mrs. Talmage!” cried Dot.

The older boys were more subdued when they saw the stranger.

Mrs. Talmage introduced the gentleman, Mr. Richards, one of the New York advertising solicitors for the Philadelphia agency. He smiled in a condescending way when Don asked, “Want to see our magazine?”

“Yes, indeed! It is such an unusual thing to find such dear little children interested in such a way,” replied Mr. Richards, looking about at the boys and girls.

Don looked at Dot with a glance that said as plain as day, “Pooh! he’s trying to pat us on the back!”

And Dot said to the visitor: “Don’t think that we like to be fussed over just because we are working!”

The rest of the publishing company looked uncomfortable at the very evident tendency to humor them on account of their work.

The fact was, that the man couldn’t understand why his firm (such a sensible lot of business men) should send him away from his important work in New York to call upon some wealthy ladies and a number of children, to talk about advertising pages in a toy magazine.

The two copies of the completed magazine had been given to Aunt Selina and Mrs. Talmage and they expressed such satisfaction at the appearance of the work that the man turned his attention to Mrs. Talmage. She handed him her copy.

When Mr. Richards saw the magazine, he was surprised out of his usual self-possession and exclaimed,

“Why, who did this?”

“Blue Birds and Bobolinks,” replied Ned, with head tilted on one side the better to see the precious book the man held.

“But this is first-class work!” exclaimed the visitor.

“Sure! did you think we were going to turn out anything else?” asked Jinks, insulted.

“Oh, of course not, but it takes experienced hands to do anything as good as this,” continued Mr. Richards, turning the pages slowly and examining each one carefully.

"Well, Uncle Ben knew the kind of workers we were when he trusted us with his pet hobby!" declared Ned, proudly.

Mr. Richards looked rather helpless, so Mrs. Talmage explained who "Uncle Ben" was and what part he had taken in the enterprise.

Light gradually began to break in upon the young man's brain as he heard the story of the magazine. Suddenly he sat up as if electrified with a new idea. He looked about at the children, the house, lawns, and ladies; finally he took his return railroad ticket from his pocket and noted the name printed on the card—Oakdale.

"Well, well, well! is this place called 'Mossy Glen'?" he asked.

"It is," replied Mrs. Talmage, wonderingly.

"And these youngsters, the same that set folks agog last summer with their 'Fresh Airs'?"

Mother Wings bowed affirmatively, but the Blue Birds, who had never dreamed that their doings had ever been heard of outside of their own little community, were as surprised as their visitor.

The solicitor looked everyone over with a new interest after that, and breathed softly to himself, "Great Scott! What a piece of luck to get the lead in this idea!"

"We do not understand exactly what you mean," said Mrs. Talmage, with dignity.

"Well, I was present at a meeting a short time ago when the talk veered to a project evolved by some children. It was creating quite a little interest among the older men, but I paid little attention to it at the time, for I had my mind full of other matters. But I remember hearing one of the leading publishers state that he believed we would hear of this undertaking in the future, for he knew some of the children who were in it. Now, here I am, unconsciously dropped into the heart of it."

From that moment Mr. Richards was the enthusiastic collaborator of the company. He went over the pages of the magazine again and made some valuable suggestions for the future. When he expressed a desire to visit their plant, everyone jumped up ready to show him the B. B. & B. B. Publishing House.

Another great surprise awaited Mr. Richards. He had an idea that the work was done upon toy machinery, or hand presses; but, to find a shop equipped with electric motors and up-to-date machines, to

say nothing of type-stands and a real office, was more than he could comprehend.

"I'm not surprised at the statement that man made at the meeting—he must have known you children, indeed!"

"Seems to me that we are getting this young man 'rooted' in this work," laughed Aunt Selina, who liked the expression ever since Mrs. Talmage told her how to interest friends in the work.

"Well, I'm 'grafted' upon this idea even if I'm not 'rooted,'" returned Mr. Richards, laughingly. "So much so, in fact, that I am going to make a suggestion that I think will meet with the approval of all of you."

The children came closer to await his proposition.

"At present I am an advertising man, but I used to be on one of the large newspapers in the city, and whenever any unusual story came in I was supposed to 'dress it' for publication. Now, in my opinion, this whole affair will make a fine story for the press and at the same time give this magazine the publicity it needs." Mr. Richards looked at the ladies for approval.

"It doesn't seem valuable enough for a paper to print," ventured Mrs. Talmage.

"It is the *unusual* that papers are always after," replied Mr. Richards. "Show me anything more unusual than this (waving his arm about to embrace the children, the plant and the work) and I will run after it!"

"What would you say in the story?" asked Aunt Selina.

"Well, I'd take kodak pictures of this office, of the plant, and of the Winter Nest you have been telling me about. Then we would group the children on the lawn in front of the house and have a picture of the Blue Birds and Bobolinks who own and publish this magazine."

"What would Mr. Sphere say if he saw the story in the papers?" asked Aunt Selina.

"He'd say, 'Richie, old boy, I always knew you had a grain of sense in your head!'" laughed Mr. Richards.

"I have a fine camera in case you want to use it," said Ned, eagerly.

"And we have everything in good shape to have a picture taken," added Meredith.

“If the ladies consent we will lose no more time, but get the pictures while the sun is right,” Mr. Richards said, as he turned toward the ladies and Blue Birds.

“Yes, yes, Mother Wings, let’s do it!” cried several Blue Birds. So Aunt Selina and Mrs. Talmage smiled a consent.

Ned brought his camera and Mr. Richards grouped the Bobolinks about the machines in as workman-like poses as possible, and managed to get a good picture of them. Next, the office, with Jinks at the typewriter and Ned at the desk, was photographed. Outside, the Blue Birds and Bobolinks grouped themselves in front of the door and another picture was taken. The Blue Birds were given their pose as editors in the large library of the house, where books and writing material could be utilized in the picture. The Winter Nest was the last picture to be taken.

“Now, watch the papers for a story of your entire plan and achievement, with illustrations, and if you don’t tell me the next time I come out that my idea was the best publicity plan imaginable, then you’ll be ungrateful, indeed!” said Mr. Richards, pleased as he could be with the success of his visit.

“When will the papers come out?” asked Ned.

“I’ll keep you posted day by day. I’m not going to lose sight of such a promising crowd of young folks, *I tell you!*” laughed the young man as he placed the film in his pocket and started to say good-by.

“Say, here, are you going to take that magazine with you?” cried Don, seeing the magazine rolled up in the visitor’s hand.

“Well, I guess! I’m going to exploit this everywhere I go,” said Mr. Richards, tapping the paper with his hand.

“And tell the newspaper man that lots of famous folks have promised to write for us,” said Ruth, who desired the magazine to have all the glory possible.

“And tell him to be sure and say that Aunt Selina will be glad to have grown-ups write to ask her about Happy Hills,” added Aunt Selina, anxious to have the children’s farm advertised.

“I’ll make them write everything I can think of, and more too, if possible,” laughed the young man as he started down the steps.

"Oh, Mr. Richards, I forgot to tell——" Don started to say something, but Ike interrupted from the automobile which had been waiting for some time in front of the house.

"There'll just be time to jump aboard that train if we get off at once!"

Mr. Richards jumped in and raised his hat to the ladies, while Ike started the car at full speed, the children meantime waving their hands and shouting reminders after the visitor.

Back to the Publishing House trooped the bevy of workers, more eager than ever to continue their work.

"Now, he's what I call an 'all right' man!" declared Don Starr, emphatically, as he accented his words with punches at the stitcher.

"What a piece of luck for us," exclaimed Ned, overjoyed at the promised newspaper story.

"I always said I wanted to go through college," said Tuck Stevens, thoughtfully; "but what's the use? When I have such a good business to work in and will be all ready to live on my money by the time I'm a man, why should I bother?"

"That's so, Tuck; better have a good time on that money," laughed Jinks.

"Better 'not count your chickens before they're hatched' or they may never come out of the shell," teased Ned.

The Blue Birds had been equally busy talking, while folding pages, but the work soon engrossed too much of their attention to keep up any conversation.

After several hours' work the Blue Birds began to feel tired and decided to carry the finished magazines to the house.

As each little girl came up the steps carrying a heap of neatly finished magazines, the two ladies stopped talking and turned to watch the girls deposit the magazines on the table in the hallway.

"What were you saying about Happy Hills, mother?" asked Ruth.

"Aunt Selina was telling me all about the three beautiful hills at the back of the estate. She said what pretty kodak pictures they would make if we wanted to use them for the magazine, and I said it might be a good plan to write up a short story about our plan for next month's issue."

"Oh, yes, that would be a fine start for the farm," cried Ruth.

"And we think that we would need all of the time we can get to make sure of next summer's success," added Aunt Selina.

"Aunt Selina, how many poor children do you think we can keep at Happy Hills?" asked Ruth.

"We could not tell without having expert help to show how many camps can be built there," said Aunt Selina.

"Oh, are you going to build camps, Aunt Selina?" asked Norma.

"I thought the children were going to live in the woods," said Dot.

"But you didn't expect them to sleep on the ground and dress behind the bushes, did you?" said May.

"I never thought what they would do," returned Dot.

"Will you have nests to live in like ours in the cherry-tree?" asked Betty.

"No, dearie, I am planning to build little houses that will hold about six or eight bunks, and a locker for each child. These houses will have a floor and a roof with posts to hold it up, but the walls will be made of canvas curtains that we can roll up when we want the house wide open. The long building where the children will gather to eat or have games, will be centrally located if we build it in the valley between the three hills," explained Aunt Selina.

"Are we going to give the camp a name?" asked Edith.

"Why, we hadn't thought of that—we can use the name 'Happy Hills,' couldn't we?" said Mrs. Talmage.

"Nobody will know the camp is any different then. The place has always been called Happy Hills, so how is a stranger going to know that it is the same where the children are living?" said Dot.

"The name 'Hills' sounds all right, but you can't call the big house in the valley by the name of 'Hills'; we ought to have a new name for *that* so the children will know what place we mean when we talk about the dining-room," suggested Norma.

"Just say 'Valley where the long house is,'" said Edith.

"That doesn't sound nice, a bit! Everything else we have have such nice names," complained Ruth.

"But, why do you children want a name for the valley and one for the children's camps?" asked Aunt Selina.

"Doesn't everything in the world have a name?" asked Dot.

The others laughed, but Ruth added, "Dot's right; we have a name for our cherry-tree nest, and one for the new nest; and Mrs. Catlin is going to call her Blue Birds' nest 'Hill Top Nest'—'Blue Birds of Hill Top Nest.'"

"But this is different," argued Mrs. Talmage.

"No, it isn't, Mrs. Talmage," insisted Dot. "We call our house 'Oakwood' and you call this place 'Mossy Glen'—and our town we call Oakdale. Why, what for? Everyone knows where the Starrs live, and where the Talmages live, and we all know where the town lives, so what's the use of having names?"

"Dot, you hit the nail on the head every time," said Aunt Selina, as all of the others laughed at Dot's explanation.

"Yes, but that's why we want a name for our children's camp and the valley," said Ruth.

"Really, it doesn't matter to us how many names you choose to give it—just please yourselves about it," said Aunt Selina.

"All right, then, if you don't mind, we'll try to get a real lovely name for it," said Betty, smiling at Aunt Selina.

For quite a time, silence reigned, for the Blue Birds were trying to think of a pretty name for the farm.

"In 'Pilgrim's Progress' there is a 'Valley of Humility,'" suggested May.

"I'll run and get the Bible Concordance—that will have some valley names in it," said Ruth, running indoors to get the book.

"Now, listen while I read some for you," continued Ruth, bringing the book over to the wicker table.

"Here's one—'Inhabitants of the Valley'—turn that about and call it 'Valley of Inhabitants.'"

"No, that isn't nice!" objected several voices.

"Then comes a lot of hard-spelled names of valleys that won't do, either. Next comes: 'valley of passengers' and 'valley of vision.'"

"We don't want either one," grumbled Dot.

"Would you like the name 'Valley of Joy'?" asked Aunt Selina.

After a few moments' thought the children replied, "Better, but not right yet."

Aunt Selina smiled and thought how difficult to please were these Blue Birds; but Mrs. Talmage smiled, knowing that the children knew just what they wanted.

After much thinking and suggesting, Ruth said, "We ought to have a name that will fit with Happy Hills, you know."

After "pleasure," "fun," "contentment" and other names had been suggested, Aunt Selina suddenly mentioned "delight."

"Valley of Delight," repeated Mrs. Talmage to hear the sound of it, while the Blue Birds hailed the name as just right.

"Happy Hills in the Valley of Delight!" said Aunt Selina, as pleased as the children were.

"Write it down—that's its name from now on," cried Dot.

"We want it printed on all of our letter paper that will be used for farm purposes," said Mrs. Talmage.

"Oh, yes; won't it look fine to send out letters asking folks to send donations for the poor children of 'Happy Hills in the Valley of Delight!' and let them see the name on top of some nice grey paper," cried Edith.

"Wish we could find a name for those poor children. I never like to say that word—'poor,'" complained Ruth.

"Neither do I," added Norma.

"I know I wouldn't like a country child to be always calling me 'poor city child,'" declared Betty.

"Then you ought to find a nice name for all of them, too, so we won't have to say 'poor' any more," said Mrs. Talmage.

All heads were bent down again while busy brains tried to find a suitable name for the protégés coming from the city.

"Could they be called 'birds' like us?" asked Dot.

"I do not think city children would care for such a name. You see, dear, they are so precocious from their daily experiences that they might think a bird-name silly," said Mrs. Talmage.

"Maybe they would like the name 'Little Soldiers,'" ventured Norma.

"Oh, that makes you think of 'Onward Christian Soldiers' and they would guess we were goin' to make them join a Sunday School class right off!" objected Dot.

Everyone laughed at Dot's viewpoint, but Aunt Selina was given an idea by Norma's suggestion.

"How would 'Little Workers' sound?" she asked.

"Then they will all fear you are going to make them work," laughed Mrs. Talmage.

"'Little Lambs'—'Little Folks'—'Little Friends,'" recited Dot, zealously, then waited for a verdict.

Heads were shaken in negation of the names, and Ruth started a list of names.

"'Little Americans'—how's that?"

"Better, but not good enough," replied her mother.

"Oh, here's one—everything that lives in a forest is called a 'denizen' of the forest—let's call our children 'Little Denizens,'" cried Norma.

"Wish someone could find a name that would mean the same as Americans and woods folks," came from Betty wistfully.

"How does 'Little Citizens' sound?" asked Ruth.

"Wait! say it again!" exclaimed Mrs. Talmage, while the children and Aunt Selina seemed to like the name.

"Little Citizens—of Happy Hills in the Valley of Delight," rehearsed Ruth.

"Why, just the thing—it's lovely!" cried Aunt Selina.

"Yes, Fluff, couldn't be better," said several of the Blue Birds.

"Sounds almost like a book story-name, it's so pretty," commended Mrs. Talmage.

There was no more leisure to admire their new names, because shouts were heard in the direction of the Publishing House, and the boys came out, each carrying a stack of magazines piled up in their arms. They reached the steps and Mrs. Talmage hurried to the hallway to show them in which closet to place them.

"My, but that was a big load!" exclaimed Don.

"Big piece of work, that!" said Jinks.

"More fun than I've ever had," commented Meredith.

"But it makes a fellow awful hungry to work so hard. I wish it was night so the men could treat," hinted Don.

The last remark from Don made the children laugh at him, but Mrs. Talmage said, “Don, if you will take Ned into the dining-room you will find something there which you can carry out here.”

Don looked surprised, but Ned led him indoors to find what the surprise could be.

Soon both boys appeared again carrying a tray of cakes and dishes, while the maid followed with a huge platter upon which stood a high brick of ice-cream.

The refreshments were so delicious that the boys said they could start another day’s work if they were sure of being treated with more ice-cream afterward.

“How many magazines do you suppose you finished to-day?” asked Ruth, of her brother.

“Guess.”

“I don’t know; we girls carried in ’most a hundred, but our piles were not so high as the ones you boys brought in.”

“Well, we counted before we left the office; there were thirty in a pile, and we brought over thirty piles—that made nine hundred all told, but the hundred you girls carried in makes just one thousand copies. Isn’t that great?” cried Ned.

“Then we can begin mailing copies to our philanthropists to-night, can’t we?” asked Norma.

“Yes, and bring your mothers with you, to help,” said Mrs. Talmage.

As everyone felt eager to get the thousand copies wrapped and mailed, the children soon said good-by and went home to tell the great news of the day’s work.

CHAPTER XV

HOW THE MAGAZINE WENT OUT

Before nine o'clock that night the magazines had all been wrapped, ready for Ike to take to the post-office. The children were just as eager to continue the work, but Mrs. Talmage said that nine o'clock was time to go home.

"We'll all be here Monday afternoon to help some more, Mrs. Talmage," promised the Blue Birds as they skipped away beside their mothers.

It took the Bobolinks all of that week, working every moment after school, and many of the evening hours, to finish the rest of the magazines. Everyone had decided that ten thousand would be enough for the first issue, for it took so long to wrap each copy that no extra time could be given to printing.

The first week of November results began to appear. One day the Blue Birds came to the Winter Nest and found several letters lying on the table, addressed to the "Blue Birds of Oakdale."

"Oh, oh! who do you s'pose they are from?" eagerly asked Norma.

Dot was trying to look right through the envelope and the others laughed at her expression.

"Let's open them and see!" said sensible Ruth.

Mrs. Talmage entered the room just then and the letters were given her to open and read aloud.

"Maybe they are subscriptions," suggested Mrs. Talmage, as she slipped a paper-knife under the flap of an envelope.

"Goodness! suppose they are?" whispered Betty.

"What would we do with them?" said Dot.

As this was an entirely new and unexpected problem, the Blue Birds looked at each other and then at Mrs. Talmage.

"I think we will have to invite the Bobolinks to a conference to-day and talk this matter over," said Mother Wings.

Norma was sent to the Publishing House to invite the boys to be present at the meeting that afternoon at five. As it was four-thirty, the boys hurried to wash their hands and pull down their shirt

sleeves, for almost all of them had taken off their coats and rolled up their sleeves.

The meeting proved to be very important in the judgment of the children, for the letters were found to contain money orders and checks which had to be deposited in some bank.

After looking over the papers, Ned said, "We must sign these and send back a receipt, eh, mother?"

"Yes, and we must select some bank in which to place our account; shall we say the Oakdale Trust Company?" said Mrs. Talmage.

So that was agreed upon and the secretary told to stop at the bank in the morning and get the necessary blanks for the company to fill in.

"What a heap of money the magazines must make," said Dot. "Just look at all the money we have already with no list."

"But you forget we have really no costs to pay at present so all that is paid in is profit. But the city publishers have heavy expenses to pay out of all their income," explained Mrs. Talmage.

"Uncle Ben says that hardly any magazine published could pay its expenses on the subscriptions only; it is the advertising that pays for the work," said Ned.

"We ought to get busy on our advertising, then," urged Jinks.

"If we don't we won't pay costs after all of these free donations of paper and postage are over," added Meredith.

"You boys practised that part of the work, so why don't you try and call upon some big firms and ask for contracts?" asked Dot.

"How do you know we practised?" questioned Ned, looking at the Blue Birds, who started giggling as they recalled the visit to the loft over the carriage house.

"Ho, didn't you?" insisted Dot.

"No one but we boys knew it—we kept the doors closed while we tried to see which one could do it best," replied Don.

"A little bird whispered it in our ears," teased Ruth.

"Say, Jinks! do you remember the time I heard those noises in the loft?" asked Ned.

The Bobolinks saw that the girls were laughing at them.

"I wonder when Mr. Richards will get that story printed in the papers—that will help so much!" sighed Betty.

"Don't be impatient, little girl," said Mrs. Talmage. "Remember, we have only just begun, and I think there have been marvelous steps taken."

"And when it once gets started, the subscription list will grow very rapidly," added Aunt Selina.

And so it proved. In a few weeks' time the letters containing checks and money orders for subscriptions reached such proportions that Mrs. Talmage was distracted trying to attend properly to the clerical work. Mr. Talmage saw that it was such tiresome application to detail that he telephoned Uncle Ben to send out a competent filing clerk; in a few days a nice young girl of about eighteen arrived and took charge of all the mail, and Mrs. Talmage heaved a deep sigh of relief.

Uncle Ben had made it a custom to visit his brother's family every week-end since the inception of the magazine, and one Saturday he arrived unusually early—in time for lunch.

"Ned, can you call a meeting of the B. B. & B. B.'s at the Publishing House for two o'clock?" asked Uncle Ben.

"The Bobolinks will be there anyway, but I am not so sure about the Blue Birds," said Ned, looking at Ruth.

"We had something to talk over in the Winter Nest, but we can postpone it until afterward," said Ruth.

So at two o'clock all of the children were gathered about Uncle Ben to hear the news he had to tell them.

Uncle Ben made a great fuss clearing his throat as if in preparation for an oration, then took a packet of letters from his pocket.

"The sample issue of your magazine made such a stir in various publishing circles, that one of the officers of the Publishers' Association asked me Thursday night who was back of all this business that a lot of youngsters had started down at Oakdale.

"I didn't reply right away, and a man sitting near me said, 'Oh, some folks, probably, who have a smattering of how to do printing!'

"Some of my friends laughed hilariously, for they thought it a good joke on me, but the President of the association was not satisfied.

"'This is no amateurish work, Mackensie,' he said; 'here is a copy of the magazine and I tell you it can compete with any juvenile publication in the country. Why, man, the names of some of the contributors are familiar to me, for I know of offers made to induce these same writers to throw us morsels of their wisdom.'

"Then a friend of mine spoke.

"'This whole affair sounds very much like the pet hobby of a friend—he told me about it years ago.'

"The other men laughed at the explanation, but my friend looked at me and said, 'Talmage, what do *you* know about it?'

"Then I said, 'My niece and nephew belong to the Blue Birds and Bobolinks that started the poor children's outing at Oakdale, last summer. They have become so interested in the work that they propose raising enough money this winter to take over a farm of a few thousand acres and send out hundreds of children for all of next summer.'

"'They what?' exclaimed every man present.

"'Say that again!' commanded the President, so I gladly told them the story in detail.

"Well, B. B. & B. B.'s—do you want to know the result of that meeting?"

The children shouted and begged to be told at once, so Uncle Ben continued with evident pleasure in the telling.

"Those great publishers talked for hours of ways and means in which to help along your good work. Some promised to interest prominent people they knew, and others offered to insert advertising cards in their own publications to tell about the magazine and its purpose. Almost every one of them offered to make special clubbing offers with their own magazines to induce readers to subscribe for yours.

"Now, these letters are the results of some of the promises already kept by these men. I will read them to you."

Uncle Ben then proceeded to read aloud the letters from prominent people and philanthropists who had responded to the call made by friends. They commended the interest shown by the younger generation and hoped the sympathetic work done for the

sick and poverty-stricken little ones of the cities would win success. To this end a donation was inclosed.

As Uncle Ben read the last letter, he took from his wallet a package of checks and handed them over to Ned.

Ned saw the figure written on the face of the first check on top and held the package as if it were dangerous.

"Heigh, there, Ned, they aren't loaded, are they?" laughed Jinks.

"Read it off, Ned," urged the boys and girls.

"This top one is from the Cage Foundation and is for five hundred dollars—subscriptions to be sent to hospitals. The next one——" and Ned gasped again as he took up the second paper.

Uncle Ben laughed at his evident amazement.

"The second is from the Sarnegie Fund and is made out for a thousand dollars, subscriptions to be sent to homes and orphanages.

"And here's another for five hundred dollars from Harriet Rowld. Then there's—let me see! One—two—three—four—for a hundred dollars each for cripples' homes."

When Ned finished the children were too surprised to say a word, but Uncle Ben spoke for them.

"Well, Chicks—I mean Birds—you see that any time you grow weary of working out this scheme there will be no difficulty in selling the business for cash. Any wide-awake publisher will jump over the moon to get this magazine from you."

"Oh, Uncle Ben! what a dreadful thing to say!" cried Ruth.

"As if we ever would sell out such a wonderful plan," murmured several of the children.

"If every one of you feel the same about this matter, why not pass a resolution that we will never sell out this business for mere commercial reasons?" suggested Uncle Ben.

It was instantly agreed upon and the resolution made a part of the by-laws of the company.

"Now, for a social proposition," said Uncle Ben, smiling in his possession of a pleasant secret.

"I was thinking that we ought to get out an extra fine Christmas number, and send out as many samples as could be turned off the press. To do this you would have to have several men working during

your school hours, so I thought it best to ask the men already here to wait for further orders. With all of this money on hand you can easily pay their salary and that of another good man that I should like to send out here to boss the work. Ike says he can fix up some rooms in the loft overhead and the men can take their meals with him. The two men who are working here like it very much and will remain if you want them to."

"But we would be crowded out of our work if the men did all of it," complained Don.

"Not a bit of it! I said: 'During school hours,' so an extra large number of magazines can be printed for Christmas. You boys worked every moment of your time but could only finish ten thousand this month," explained Uncle Ben.

So it was cheerfully agreed to have the men help them with the next month's magazine.

"You said 'social,' but I don't see anything social in having the men help with the work," grumbled Don.

"Now that you will have the men to help with the work you will have time to think of the social side of the plan I am going to suggest," replied Uncle Ben, winking at Don to cheer him up. "So many of my friends in New York have heard of this B. B. & B. B. Company that I am constantly answering questions as to your ages, looks, and other personal matters. I think it will be a splendid plan to have all of you meet them soon and spare me so many extra words and time, to say nothing of wear and tear on my vocal cords."

"I know you've got a lovely surprise to tell us—I can tell it in your voice!" cried Ruth, jumping up and hugging her uncle about the neck.

"I don't know whether it is or not—how can I say until the others tell me whether it is," said Uncle Ben, trying to look troubled over the doubt.

"Out with it, Uncle Ben!" laughed Ned.

"Well, if I must, I must!" groaned Uncle Ben. "I have discovered a very amusing play that has Saturday matinées. Of course, I suppose Birds could get into a theatre, couldn't they? Well, if we went to see the show in the afternoon and then went to a hotel where we could

have a dining-room all to ourselves and give a little party to all of my friends, it would save me so much trouble for the future."

Mere words failed to express the excitement and delight of the children as they fully realized what Uncle Ben meant.

"Oh," said Betty, "I've never been to a theatre in my life—and to think of going to one in New York, oh!"

"Neither have I, Betty," replied May. "Can you go?"

"Will mother go with us, Uncle Ben?" asked Ruth.

"Most assuredly, for you Blue Birds will have to have a Mother Wing to cover you—and Aunt Selina, too, if she will come," said Uncle Ben.

"When can we go?" asked Don, eagerly.

"Have you decided to come?" teased Uncle Ben.

The storm of acceptance made him laugh.

"Well, then, let's say a week from next Saturday, if everyone can arrange it for that time. I will invite my friends to be at our party at six o'clock sharp, for afterward we will have to come home on the nine o'clock train."

"And will some of those real publishers be there, Uncle Ben?" asked Ned, sceptically.

"Some of the greatest in America, my boy," said Uncle Ben, seriously, as he understood Ned's ambition to meet them and his doubt of having the desire fulfilled.

"What must we wear?" asked Norma.

"The prettiest that you have, for I want to show off my publishing company to the very best advantage," replied Uncle Ben.

Just then Mr. Talmage appeared at the doorway and said,

"Do you know that dinner is almost ready and no one there to sit down to table?"

Then everyone began to tell of the party to be given in New York, and Mr. Talmage seemed very much surprised.

"If that is the case, you will all have to do your very best to have a fine Christmas magazine so that the friends you meet in New York will want to come to another party at some other time. Perhaps if the magazine was very, very attractive they would feel so proud of being acquainted with you that they would take the trouble to come all the

way out to Oakdale to have a party this winter," ventured Mr. Talmage.

"Wouldn't it be fun to invite them all here at the Christmas Holidays and give them a real country Christmas tree with Uncle Ben for Santa Claus!" cried Betty, expectantly.

"And sleigh-rides from the train, and bob-sledding down Oakdale Hill, then over to our Publishing House for the Tree," added Dot.

"And have a present for everyone like we had on our Fourth-of-July tree," cried Ruth.

"And after all the fun is over, a great big feast with plum-pudding," sighed Don, making them all laugh.

"Yes, I think that will be fine, and I don't believe one of those New Yorkers will stay away if you tell them all the fun you propose giving them," laughed Uncle Ben.

"But, first, let us have our party with you, Uncle Ben, then we can talk about the Christmas one," advised Ned.

Families in Oakdale were entertained that Saturday night by hearing the children tell of the plans made by Uncle Ben for the social side of the B. B. & B. B.'s life. Many were the dreams of all the fun to be had when that New York party came off.

While the children were home talking over the anticipated dinner-party, the grown-ups at Mossy Glen were engaged in perfecting plans for the party. Invitations on grey paper, printed in blue ink, with a flight of birds shadowed across the sheet was the suggestion of Aunt Selina. The favors for the table and the tokens presented for speech-making were suggested by Mrs. Talmage, while the dinner and decorations were planned by Mr. Talmage and Uncle Ben.

Much fun was the result of the party in New York. The guests accepted the B. B. & B. B.'s invitation to have a Christmas Tree at the Publishing House with great eagerness. But it will take another book to tell about everything that happened.

This book, called "THE BLUE BIRDS' UNCLE BEN," is the third of the series.

THE END

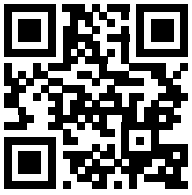
The Blue Birds' Winter Nest

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