

Little Downy;
OR,
THE HISTORY
OF
A FIELD MOUSE.

—
ILLUSTRATED WITH
TWELVE COLORED ENGRAVINGS.

—
LONDON:
Printed for
A. K. NEWMAN and Co. Leadenhall-Street.

—
Price 1s. 6d.

*** A Distributed Proofreaders Canada Ebook ***

This ebook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the ebook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the ebook. If either of these conditions applies, please check with an FP administrator before proceeding.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. **If the book is under copyright in your country, do not download or redistribute this file.**

Title: Little Downy; or, The History of a Field-Mouse.

Author: Traill, Catharine Parr (1802-1899)

Illustrator: Anonymous

Date of first publication: ca. 1822

Place and date of edition used as base for this ebook: London: A. K. Newman, no later than 1822 (possibly but not certainly the first edition)

Date first posted: 20 October 2008

Date last updated: 17 June 2014

Faded Page ebook#20081014

This ebook was produced by: Marcia Brooks, Louise Hope & the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

This file was produced from images generously made available by The Internet Archive/American Libraries

Missing quotation marks have been left unchanged for flavor. Obvious typographical errors have been corrected. They are marked in the text with mouse-hover popups, along with some possible errors that were not corrected.

Spellings such as **recal** and **befel**, and **eat** as a past-tense form, are unchanged. The author almost always uses **lay** (present) for **lie**, and **laid** for **lay** (past); no attempt was made to correct these forms.

Front Cover Text



*Mrs. Clifford relating to her son Alfred,
the history of the Field-Mouse.*

LITTLE DOWNY;

OR,

THE HISTORY

OF

A FIELD-MOUSE.

A MORAL TALE.

EMBELLISHED

WITH TWELVE COLORED ENGRAVINGS.



LONDON:

Printed for

A. K. NEWMAN AND CO. LEADENHALL-STREET.

1822.

THE LIFE AND INTERESTING ADVENTURES

OF A

FIELD MOUSE.



“**WHAT** is my little Alfred crying for?” asked his mother, Mrs. Clifford, as she entered the room where Alfred stood weeping by the table. Come here, and tell me what is the matter with you.”

Alfred slowly advanced towards his mother, and wiped away his tears with her apron. Alfred was but a little boy, or he would not have cried for such a simple thing as he did.

“Well, Alfred, and what is it?” asked his kind mamma.

“Why, mamma, you know that nice plum cake you gave me for saying my lesson well; I had put it in the cupboard, as I did not want to eat it then, and I came just now to take a little nibble at it; and when I opened the closet-door to look for it, there was an ugly brown mouse in the closet, and hardly a scrap of my cake left; that greedy thing had eaten it all but a few crumbs.” And here Alfred’s tears flowed afresh.

“I am very sorry, my dear child, that the mouse has eaten your cake; but still, I do not think it was worth shedding so many tears about: you must learn to bear such trifling disappointments with more patience. I dare say, the mouse has eaten my sugar and cake, but I shall not cry if it has.”

“I am sure it is enough to make any one cry, (said Alfred). I only wish, (added he, his eyes sparkling with anger), that I could have killed the little beast for stealing my cake.”

“Now, Alfred, I am ashamed of you,” said his mother gravely.

Alfred could, however, think of nothing but the loss of his cake, and begged his mother to let the mouse-trap be set to catch the mischievous intruder.

Mrs. Clifford was very sorry to hear her little son talk so, and she represented to him his cruelty in wanting to take away

the life of a poor mouse only for having satisfied its hunger.

“But, mamma, mice do a deal of mischief, (said Alfred), and ought to be killed; for that mouse will soon eat up all your sugar.”

“But, Alfred; I know a certain two-legged mouse, who, if I left the key in my store-closet, would eat more sugar in one minute than this poor little animal could in an hour.”

Alfred hung his head at this reproof, for it was but a day or two since he was detected at the sugar dish; and he soon after left the room.

Mrs. Clifford was much grieved that her little Alfred shewed so much inclination to be cruel and revengeful, two qualities so dangerous in a child, or in any one; and she knew that, unless it was timely checked, it would grow into a habit. Harsh means, she did not like to adopt; and so she at last thought of a method which seemed likely to succeed. She was well aware of the inconvenience of having mice in her cupboard, as they not only commit great depredations, but soil every thing they touch; so, as she was forced to kill the mouse, she hoped to turn its death to a good use. Therefore, the next time Alfred entered the room, she asked him if he was still resolved to have the mouse killed. “Yes, mamma, (replied Alfred), it had no right to eat my cake.”

“Very well; I will have the mouse-trap set; but observe, Alfred, whether before the day is past, you do not tell me you are sorry for its death.”

“Oh! no; that I am sure I sha’n’t,” replied Alfred, and Mrs. Clifford ordered the trap to be set.

Early the next morning, when Mrs. Clifford came down stairs and went to the closet, she beheld her poor little prisoner dead in his wire cage. “See, Alfred, (said she), here is the poor mouse dead!”

Alfred at first was glad; but when he saw what a pretty one it was, he was sorry, but contented himself by saying to the dead mouse, “If you had not been in the cupboard doing so much mischief, you would not have been killed!”

When he had said his lesson, his mother said to him, “Now, Alfred, shall I tell you a story?” Alfred was very fond of hearing a story, if it was not too long, and he asked his mother, if this would be a long one.

“I don’t wish to tire you, (said his mother), so I will only tell you part of it this morning. Alfred fetched his little stool, and having placed it at her side, fixed his eyes on her face while she related

THE HISTORY OF A FIELD MOUSE.

“IN a wheat-stack, in Farmer Ball’s yard, lived an old mouse with her family, consisting of five little ones, the most worthy of which was a pretty brown mouse, called Downy, because her fur was longer and softer than either of her brothers and sisters, and besides being the prettiest, she was likewise the wisest and best among them.

“Her mother was by birth a field-mouse; she had been carried among the sheaves of wheat into the stack, with a great many more field-mice; and had lived there, at the expence of farmer Ball, ever since.

“It was one fine clear morning, in the middle of March, that, as Downy was peeping her little nose out of the straw at the edge of the stack, to breathe a little fresh air, she saw the farmer with his men enter the yard, and heard him tell the people that he would have the stack taken into the barn and thrashed, and desired them to bid Fen, the ratcatcher, come, and bring all his dogs with him.



“Poor Downy was in a terrible fright at hearing this; she ran to acquaint her mother with it; and asked her what they had best do; but her mother, who was but a foolish mouse, bade her not be under the least alarm, for she was persuaded the farmer did not mean to take it in just then; and added, it was time enough to think of it when the men began; she told Downy to go to bed with the rest of her brothers and sisters, and not to be afraid.

“But poor Downy was in great trouble about what she should do, and could not sleep for thinking of the sad fate which threatened them; she awakened her companions to consult with them; but her sisters only laughed at her fear, and said, they would never leave a place where they were so well off; and where they could get plenty of good corn, only for the trouble of eating it. Her brothers were of the same opinion, and added, they could run so swiftly, they were sure they could soon get away into the field; but they expected they should live very quietly yet for some time.

“Poor foolish little things! they did not think the danger was so near; but they were awakened the next morning by the farmer’s men unroofing the stack, and they now wished they had hearkened to the prudent advice of their sister Downy.

“Poor little Downy’s heart almost died within her, when she heard the barking of the dogs, and the hallooing of the men; how much rather would she have been in the field, than in the warm stack! for she heard the men drawing near to the place where they lay; and they were all terribly afraid; and their mother, the old mouse, would go to see how far the danger was from them. Imprudent creature! she ventured too near; for a great black dog on the top of the stack, the moment the men raised the sheaf where she was, snapped her up in an instant.

“Nothing was now to be heard but shrieks and cries from every side of the stack; and the men drew nearer and nearer: Downy heard the last cries of her brethren; the sheaf where she had taken refuge, was already on the point of being raised, when she sprang through an opening in the side, and was just going to run down, when she beheld a great dog directly under her!

“Poor Downy gave herself up as lost, and awaited in trembling anxiety her fate: for some moments she clung to the outside of the stack, not daring to descend, yet fearing still more to stay; when, luckily for our poor little mouse, some one called the dog, who instantly ran off; and Downy, darting from the stack, had just time to gain a place of security beneath a clod of earth, where she lay shaking with fear, not daring to look up for some minutes.

“She shuddered with horror when she heard the dying groans of her friends in the stack, and the shouts of the men encouraging the dogs; many a poor mouse did she see running away in hopes of making its escape, but pursued and devoured by the dogs.

“Several times poor Downy had like to have been discovered by the dogs, or crushed beneath the horses’ feet, but she crouched very close to the ground, and lay so still, she hardly breathed, so great was her fear; at length she watched an opportunity, when no one was near, to quit her retreat, and ran with all the speed she could, not once daring to pause or look behind, till she gained the farmer’s orchard; where she laid among the long grass, panting, and half dead with terror and fatigue; she hid herself toward night under the roots of an old apple-tree; for she was very much afraid of a great white owl which she had seen flying near.



“It was in vain for her to lament the sad fate of her mother and brethren; she could not recal them to life; and Downy was thankful that she had escaped so well; but the cold weather was not gone yet, and poor little Downy knew she had nothing to eat and no warm house to live in; but must make herself one; and she was afraid she should be starved to death with hunger, or die with cold. These thoughts occupied her mind, till she fell asleep, nor did she awake next morning till quite late, and found herself very hungry. She first peeped out of her hole, and seeing nothing near to hurt her, she ventured forth in search of some food; she rummaged among the dead leaves for some time, without success, till chance led her to a row of nut-trees; here, after a diligent search, she had the good fortune to discover three nuts, one of which she eat, being very hungry, and the rest she carried home to her tree; but Downy knew they would not last long, and so thought it best to try and get more, she therefore deposited them safely away, and sat off to look for more provisions; she spent nearly the whole day among the nut-trees, but returned home only with one nut; and a shower of snow falling, she was forced to return to her dwelling, and did not go out any more that day, but laid still, and thought how she should make herself a warm nest; for she was very cold here, having been used to the close warm stack, where scarce any air entered. She eat very sparingly of her nuts, saving as much as possible for the morrow, fearing lest the snow should hinder her looking for more; but there had not fallen much, and in the morning, the sun coming out quite bright, melted it all; and Downy left her tree to look for something to line her nest with, and for more food. That being the first object, she began to search for some first, and was more fortunate than before, as she discovered several ears of corn, which had been blown by the wind off the stack; she could hardly credit her good fortune, when she beheld her store and saw it all safely lodged in her granary. Her next care was to line her nest; for this purpose, (though it was very cold and frosty) she collected all the bits of dried moss and grass she could find, and carried them in her mouth to her new habitation; she nibbled off the fibres which hung to the roots of the tree, and dried weeds, and soon made her house quite warm and comfortable.

“She spent the remainder of the month of March, and the beginning of April, in laying up stores of provision, and in enlarging the inside of her house.

“The Spring began with some beautiful warm days, and everything looked cheerful and gay; the crocusses were all in flower, and the primroses, and snow-drops, with some early violets. Downy was rejoiced when she saw the daisies in the orchard begin to shew their white heads above the grass, and she took many a frisk out to enjoy the sunshine, and was quite happy and content.

“One fine evening as she was returning to her house, she saw a creature much like a weasel, only somewhat smaller, which she knew to be a mousehunt, by what she had heard of them: he was prowling along close by her tree, in hopes of catching her; he smelt about some time, and at last went in. Poor little Downy was in a sad fright; she knew not what to do, for she saw his head peeping out of her hole, and his cunning black eye looking round in every direction.



“When little Downy saw the mousehunt take possession of her house, she knew she must not venture there again, and was in great distress, as to where she should pass the night securely; at last she found a hole in the bank, and into this she crept, though very much alarmed for fear of her enemy’s discovering her; she dared not go to sleep at all that night; nor did she stir out next day, till forced by hunger to seek for food; she did not see any thing of the mousehunt, but she resolved to leave the orchard and seek a safer spot for her new habitation.

“Accordingly, next day, she sat off to look for a proper situation; she passed through the orchard hedge into a beautiful green meadow, all covered with daisies, red clover, cowslips, and golden buttercups. Here Downy resolved to find a place to live in: and she whisked about under the tall heads of the cowslips and buttercups; at last she fixed on a little green mound, such an one as you, Alfred, call a fairy’s throne, and here she began to scratch with her fore feet, till she had made a little opening in the turf, and she used such diligence, that before night she had made a hole large enough to sleep in, and though it was not lined or so warm as her house under the old apple-tree, yet she slept so sound that she never awoke till the sun had risen quite high in the heavens.

“Downy jumped up in a hurry when she saw how late it was: the birds had been up hours before her, and were all busily employed building their nests; every bush resounded with the songs of these little creatures while at work, and Downy knew she must not be idle, for she had much to do; being very hungry she first went to an oak which grew at some little distance, and here she found plenty of acorns among the leaves—of these she made a hearty meal, and carried some to where she was at work. With a great deal of care and labour she dug her house and made it quite round and smooth, as she went on, carrying it in a slanting direction along the hollow side of the hill. It cost poor Downy many a long day’s hard work before her house was completed, and many a weary nibble before she had finished lining the inside of it. Her next care was to make a secure room for stowing away her winter stores; for this purpose, she made an opening on one side of her first room, and carried a passage along some little distance, and then formed her store chamber, which she was a long time making, but it was at length completed perfectly to her own satisfaction, having rendered it a most convenient granery. She had now nothing to do but find feed for herself, and play, but Downy never came home without bringing something useful for her house, either a bit of straw or hay, a little tuft of moss, or the dried stalk of a flower; these she cut with her teeth into little bits, and laid in her nest to make it soft and warm.

“Downy was now quite happy, her mound was all covered with flowers, fine cowslips, and butter-cups, and tuft of daisies grew close to the entrance of her house, and served to hide it from the eyes of owls, mousehunts, or any of the enemies to poor mice; and Downy thought herself quite secure from all dangers: of a beautiful moonlight night she used just to peep out from under the daisies, and look at the dew drops all shining like diamonds in the moon-beams, and once she whisked on to the top of her green mount, and began to play among the flowers, but she was alarmed by the sight of a small dog running through the high grass, and she quickly retreated into her house; nor was she so imprudent again as venture out after it grew dusk. And now the grass grew long and high, the flowers began to lose their beauty, and turn brown; every thing proclaimed the approach of summer.

“The month of June began, and the mowers came to cut down the grass; Downy was fearful that they would molest her, and spoil her house, when they came near the little mount; but she trusted to the chance that they might not discover it, and she laid quite close all day.

“But poor little Downy was very sorry to see all the nice high grass and pretty flowers cut down to the ground, those flowers which had sheltered her from the sun and rain for so long.



““And now, (thought she), I shall certainly be caught by the great white owl; for he will be able to see me now; and I can’t hide myself under the long grass and dandelions, as I used to do, for they are all cut down and spoiled.’—Poor little Downy was in a great fright all the time that the hay-makers were at work, and when she found them coming near her house, with their great pitchforks in their hands, she remembered the fate of her mother, and all her brothers and sisters in the stack, and she thought that she should be safer in the bank of the garden hedge; which was not far off. She watched an opportunity when no one was looking, and hastened away to the hedge as fast as she could, and creeping in laid quite snug; she remained in the bank the whole day, and enjoyed herself more than could be expected, for the weather was extremely pleasant, and there was a fine bed of ripe wild strawberries close by, which smelt quite refreshing. Though Downy dared not venture back into the field for fear of being killed (for mice are but timid little things) yet she was very happy all that day; and when she saw the men leave the field with the pitchforks which had caused her so much terror, she returned to her nest, and slept that night on some new hay which she had nibbled, and brought into her house to lay on. As soon as it was day, away ran careful Downy to the bank; she peeped through the hedge, and saw every thing in the garden looking very pleasant. So Miss Downy thought she should like to spend this day in the beautiful shady garden; in she went, and soon found it as charming as it looked; for the garden abounded in plenty of good things; there were peas, and beans, and potatoes, and young carrots, and beds of ripe red strawberries. Downy did nothing but eat and enjoy herself the whole day, and did not think of returning home that day, nor for many days afterwards, for she said to herself—‘What occasion is there for me to go back to the meadow, where I have so much trouble to get food, for here is more than I could ever eat, and I have no trouble in getting it at all—and I am sure no mischief will happen to me here!’ So she gave no thought of her nice house in the field, but amused herself by eating all the day long; till she grew quite fat, and Downy thought she was happier than ever she had been in the field, and she grew very indolent, for she now began to think that there was no occasion for her to work, but she said to herself, she would play all day; and here she shewed herself to be a very simple little mouse, (as it proved in what befel her). She had been living in the garden for nearly a month, when one fine sunshiny day, she had ventured nearer to the house than usual, and was lying reposing herself in the sun by a clod of dirt, near a rain-water butt, when she was disturbed by a noise near her, and to her horror she beheld the black cat with a fine kitten by her side, proceeding down the walk where she lay; to escape was almost impossible, even the attempt was vain, and hapless Downy gave herself up for lost. A month back, and she might have trusted to her own speed for escaping—but, alas! Downy had so long been used to do nothing but eat and enjoy herself, that she was no longer able to run as swiftly as she used to do; she dared not even move a step, and sat in an agony of hopeless despair.

“Downy now lamented her folly in having left her safe retreat in the meadow: what would she now have given to have been in her own little house under the mole hill? and she bitterly regretted ever having been tempted to quit it, for there no cats ever came, and there she had lived in innocence and happiness, whilst now she was doomed to fall a victim to the merciless claws of a hungry cat, who would devour her alive: she lay breathless! not a limb did she move, scarce did

she even draw her breath, for the cat approached within a yard of the spot where she laid, and——” “Oh! poor Downy! (cried Alfred,) how sorry I am!—but, mamma, did that wicked cat kill her? do, dear mamma, make haste and tell me.”—“Why, Alfred,” said his mother, “you would not wait for me to tell you whether she was killed or not: I am sure you could not feel sorry for the death of a *nasty brown mouse*; you hate mice, they are such little thieves.”—Little Alfred blushed at what his mother said, for he remembered they were his own words, and said to his mother, “Dear mamma, I think I will never wish for the death of any thing again, and I am very sorry I had that mouse killed; I will never kill another mouse, if it was to eat all the cakes you mean to give me when I am a good boy.” Mrs. Clifford not help smiling at her little boy, but went on.—



“The cat, as I said before, was close to the clod of earth on which luckless Downy stood, and when she believed her death certain, she had the inexpressible joy of finding that her motionless posture had been the means of saving her from the vigilant eyes of the cat, who passed on quite unconcerned without taking any notice of her prey. For an instant Downy could scarce credit her own eyes when she saw her enemy pass on; but fearing that if puss should return, she should not again escape so miraculously, she darted away as she hoped unseen, but, silly little thing! she had better have laid where she was, for the kitten beheld her as she ran, and sprung upon her. Poor Downy felt her claws, but exerting all her speed, she flew to the hedge—this friendly hedge which had so often been her refuge, and darting among the tangled roots of the hawthorn and ivy, left her pursuers far behind, and, exhausted with terror and fatigue, remained trembling and panting till she was half dead. Still she heard the mews of the disappointed kitten, and the angry purrs of the old cat—who sat watching about the bank for more than an hour, waiting to seize her if she ventured forth, * but that poor Downy was not in a condition to do, for her poor back still ached with the bruise the kitten had given her, and she felt in such a panic, she could not have stirred a step if she had seen a dozen cats. For two whole days poor little Downy thought she should have died, and when she was a little better and began to feel hungry, there was nothing for her to eat but hay seeds and ivy leaves, or the roots of the trees, and Downy, who had of late been used to such good fare, could not bear to eat such dry unpalatable food as this was.

“When she used to spend her time in labour and industry, she eat the hardest fare with an excellent appetite, and was thankful and contented with the least bit of any thing she got, but now she turned away disgusted at the coarse food, and it was not until pinched by hunger, that she would eat any of it. And now Downy began to consider within herself, whether it would not have been much better and wiser for her to have returned back to her own house in the meadow, instead of living so long in idleness and luxury; and Downy found that idleness brings its own punishment sooner or later, for had she been at home she would not have been so frightened by the cat, or nearly killed by the kitten; or even if a cat had come near her nice nest, she would have run away much faster than she did now, for being then smaller and thinner, she was much nimbler; nor was her daintiness the least evil that attended her long indulgence, and this she felt more severely now she was ill and could not go out to find good food; she had suffered so much with pain and terror, that she resolved never to go into the garden again, excepting to get provisions when in want. With a sad and penitent heart Downy once more returned to her old habitation, but, alas! what was her grief on beholding it a complete ruin; her nice warm nest all destroyed, and the pretty green mound quite spoiled! Downy was sadly vexed, for the cruel hay-makers had with their pitchforks torn open the turf and scattered her soft bed all round on the grass. She stood gazing with anguish on the

desolate scene before her; here was all her spring work entirely ruined, and now she was ill and had no where to lay her head. ‘Ah!’ thought she, ‘if I had not spent so much time in doing nothing but eating and playing, I should have escaped the danger of being caught by the cat, and should not have been hurt by the kitten, besides which I think by this time I might have made up my nest, and have been quite comfortable again. She was hardly able to work, and what was far worse, she felt very great reluctance to begin her laborious task, so much harm had her living so long in indolence done her, as it does to every one who indulges in it. Remember, my little Alfred, that idleness is the root of all evil, as you may see in the case of Downy:—now which do you think was the happiest and best,—careful and industrious Downy making her house, and busily procuring food for herself against the winter,—or careless idle Downy doing nothing but playing and enjoying herself in the garden, eating the fruit, and sleeping among the flowers? now tell me, which do you like best of the two?’ Alfred considered for a minute or two, and then said, “Why, dear mamma, though I should have liked to have eaten the nice things in the garden, and lived among the flowers, yet I see that it would have been better for Downy if she had always remained in the field and worked hard; but I am afraid I should have been as silly as Downy, and not liked work.”

“That is what I was afraid of, therefore, my dear child, I thought it best to shew you how wrong she was in indulging herself in that manner; and be assured that, whoever does so, will fall into misfortune.

“Necessity obliged Downy at last to overcome her extreme reluctance to work, and she once more began to look out for a proper place for her new habitation; she visited all the green mounds in the meadow, but alas! they were occupied by the ant, and poor Downy was quite out of patience—and at last she was, though with reluctance, forced to take up her lodgings in the side of the garden bank, quite at the farther end, where no cats ever came, and at last, finding it was to her own interest to work, she resolved not to be idle any more, and laboured as hard as ever she had done, and soon completed her new dwelling, having made it a most commodious habitation, in which she lived very happily all the summer. When the harvest time arrived, then was Downy very busy; she went into a neighbouring wheat field, and there she made a good harvest for herself, and laid in a handsome store of grain for her winter supply. In her journeys to the corn-fields she met many mice, who, like her, were gathering in their winter stock of provisions; but Downy would not stay in the corn-fields, because she remembered the fate of her nest while she was gone in the garden, so she came home very regularly every night.



“Nothing of any consequence happened to Miss Downy till the latter end of the Autumn; for some days she had missed her provisions, but could not account for it in any way, and was at a loss to know who it could be that devoured the fruits of her daily labour, but one morning when she returned from gleaning in the stubble-fields, she was greatly surprised, on entering her house, to behold a young stranger busily employed in breakfasting in her granery; she stopped at the entrance of her house to examine her visitor, and was struck by the beauty of his form; he was of a reddish colour, his hair very long and thick, his breast and fore-feet of a pale buff, and his belly white; he had a nice round face, and small oval ears, with quick lively brown eyes and long handsome black whiskers; in short, he was the prettiest mouse Downy had ever seen, though he was a sad little thief, and had eaten a great deal of her store. He appeared at first much disconcerted at being disturbed and discovered in his depredation, and looked round on every side for an opening to escape at, but none

appearing, he stood still, and scratched his ear with one of his hind feet, assuming as unconcerned an air as he could possibly put on; Downy was not sorry she had discovered who was the thief, but she soon forgave him, though she could not help thinking he was a very dishonest mouse to come every day and rob her as he had done, but he was so pretty, and made so humble an apology for his intruding into her house, that she could not find it in her heart to be angry with him long, and they soon became very good friends, and at last he proposed her taking him as a partner, which the simple Downy agreed to without hesitation, and shared her house and provisions with the handsome young stranger, who behaved with great decorum for some time, and was very careful to mind what Downy said to him, but at last he began to throw off his restraint, and was often getting into mischief in spite of the sage advice of Downy, who took great pains to warn him from such evil practices; but Silket would frisk in the garden, robbing the newly-planted bean and pea crops with the greatest audacity, not minding what careful Downy said, who represented to him the danger he run of being killed by cats, or mousehunts, or caught in traps; but Silket, like a naughty mouse as he was, only laughed and made light of her fears; and when at last she appeared vexed at his disobedience, he promised never to go into the garden again; but, like many more, he broke his promise directly he was out of her sight; and beside this, he was sadly idle, and was I am sorry to say, much fonder of play than work, and Downy was obliged to remonstrate with him on such bad behaviour, and said, ‘Silket, how can you expect me to work for both you and myself? you are a sad partner. Silket was very humble, and promised to be more industrious for the future, and that very afternoon he ransacked a new crop of peas, which the gardener had sown that day, and came home laden with the spoils; next day he brought home hoard of nuts from the garden, and Downy thought if he would but continue so good, she should be very happy, for her Silket was a very pretty creature, and she was very fond of him. But pretty creatures are not always the best, as she soon found to her cost, for when the weather set in cold, then Mr. Silket refused to work, or even to stir out of the house, but lay rolled round like a ball in the soft hay, and slept, only just getting up to eat; and Downy was much grieved, for she feared their stock of food would never last out the winter, if he did not help her make some addition to it, but Silket begged her not to be under any concern, for there was plenty for them both; and on her again expressing her fears on the subject, he gave her two or three severe bites on her ear, and squeaked most vehemently, shewing his anger at being found fault with, and then laid down again with a sulky air of displeasure; while poor Downy almost broken-hearted, slowly and full of sorrow, left her house, and strolled along the side of the bank quite disconsolate, and she resolved never to go back again to her ungrateful husband, who had treated her so unkindly, but leave him in quiet possession of her dwelling.

“Simple little Downy! she might have known beforehand how he would have treated her, as she was so well acquainted with his propensity to stealing, and she was a very foolish mouse to take for a partner one who shewed, from the first, that he liked better to play about and steal, than to labour and get an honest living. Downy ought to have considered all this, but she thought him so pretty, that she forgot all his misdeeds, and very imprudently shared her food and house with him. It is true, that he promised very fair, and said he would work for her, and that she should have nothing to do but just to eat, and sleep, and play; and Downy (who did not think that such a pretty soft creature could tell so many stories) believed all he said, and this was the consequence of her imprudence.

“So you see, Alfred, that we must not always judge by appearances, because I know rather a pretty creature, with bright blue eyes, who, like Silket, can steal, and tell fibs, and who likes to play better than learn a lesson and read.” Alfred coloured up, for he knew all along that his mother meant he was like Silket; so he felt a little ashamed, and did not make any answer; and his mother continued her story.

“Poor little Downy laid bewailing her sad misfortune in the cold damp grass, determining never to go home to her little tyrant again, so angry was she at his cruel conduct.—‘Ah! foolish mouse that I was, (said she), why did not I continue to live by myself when I was so happy! I might have known how he would have behaved to me, but I will never return to him, he may enjoy by himself that food which he loves so much more than he does me, ungrateful that he is!’ In this manner she was uttering her complaints, when she heard a soft padding step behind her, and a mournful noise made her turn round, and she beheld her penitent Silket, (for it was him) who advancing with a sorrowful air, humbly besought her forgiveness, and rubbed his velvet cheek in an imploring manner against her’s; his lively brown eyes were now troubled, and very sorrowful. Downy could not resist his beseeching looks, but forgave him for all his past offences, and took him once more into favour, on his promising to be good in future and never to bite her ears or tail again. Silket was very sorry for his late bad behaviour, and he resolved to be very good and do so no more, for he did love Downy very much, though he loved himself better. He accompanied her home with great affection, and they were happier for some weeks than they had ever been before; he was so attentive and kind, and seemed to study only to please her; he spent day after day in searching among the dry leaves in the garden for filberts; and when he could not procure any thing else, he brought

her crocus roots, and carrots out of the garden.

One evening he had been out later than usual, he did not see Downy's bright eyes looking out from among the dry leaves and moss for his return, and he was fearful some ill had befallen her. As he approached the house, he thought he heard several little squeaking sounds, and on entering his nest, found that Downy in his absence had become the mother of four little helpless blind mice, which she was suckling. Silket was overjoyed, he licked the little ones with much affection, and behaved with the greatest tenderness to Downy; he presented her the filbert he had brought home, and praised the beauty of his little family, though none but himself could see that they possessed any, for little mice are very ugly till they can open their eyes, and have got fur on them; for like puppies, and kittens, and rabbits, they are all born blind, and do not open their eyes for many days after.

No mouse could behave better than Silket now did; he would not suffer Downy to stir out in the cold, on any account, for, though it was the latter end of March, the weather was unusually severe, and the frost very hard; Silket was out almost the whole day searching for nice food for Downy, and getting soft moss to keep his young ones warm,—but one day he grieved Downy much and did a deal of mischief,—he wanted something to cover his little ones with, and what did he do, but went into the garden to the hedge where Mrs. Ball had hung out her linen to dry, and the wicked Silket gnawed and bit one of the old lady's white aprons almost to pieces, carrying home as many of the rags as his mouth would hold, to his house. Downy was sadly vexed when she heard what he had been doing, and she was forced to read him a very long lecture on being so mischievous, while Mr. Mischief amused himself by laying the rags out to the greatest advantage, admiring the white quilt he had brought home for his little ones' bed, and secretly resolving to go and fetch the remaining fragments, and though he saw how grave Downy looked, he did not think he had done so much harm in biting the old lady's apron; so he cast a cunning eye at Downy, to see if she was observing him, for he wanted sadly to get the rest of the apron, only he did not like to disoblige her commands, and get another scolding; but she saw what he was after, and she begged him not to go, for she said, she knew that such mischievous ways would come to no good end, and that he would get caught in a trap, or killed by some cat, or fall into some great danger, 'And, (added she,) what should I do, Silket, left with these four helpless little mice to provide for?' Silket immediately saw the impropriety of his conduct, and he never spoiled any more of good Mrs. Ball's linen, though he often came in the way of it. The poor old lady was greatly disturbed at the misfortune which had befallen her best muslin apron, and threatened to have the ratcatcher's dogs and ferrets to hunt the garden and the hedge, if any thing more was destroyed; so that it was a good thing that Silket took Downy's advice in that respect, or he would certainly have been killed for his pains.

"At the end of three weeks the little mice began to be quite lively, and to grow very pretty little creatures; they much resembled their father in his mischievous inclinations, and it needed all Downy's prudent management to keep them in order, for they would frisk out of their nest, and scud about in the meadow, going so far out of sight, and staying so late, that Downy was in a great fright lest any mishap should befall them, as to Silket, he seemed to take great delight in their pranks.

They would lay on the bank, enjoying themselves and basking in the sun, almost all day long. When it was fine weather, sometimes, one bolder than the rest would run up a little tree not more than a yard high, and clinging to the top, look down with triumph on his companions; then, if he heard the dead leaves shake, the timid little thing whisked down, and away they all four scudded, hiding themselves in the holes of the hedge, till they thought the danger past.

Downy now began to feel the cares of a family, and she was often much grieved at the disobedient behaviour of the little mice. Velvet was the only good-behaved one, and she was bad enough in all reason. They were incorrigible little thieves, which quality they inherited from their father, for no sooner were their parents out of the way, than they found their way to the granary, and though Downy and Silket were all day busied in getting food for them, and fed them with the best of every thing, the wicked little things stole the corn, and eat even more than they wanted; they grew so fat and sleek and wanton, that all the field-mice in the meadow declared they were quite spoiled, and Downy ought to keep them under more restraint, and punish them when they behaved ill. As they grew older they grew worse and worse; Downy had warned them of all the dangers which they ran in roaming so far from home, and told them of the cat that haunted the garden, and of the mousehunt, and the great white owl, but these bad mice paid no attention to what their kind good mother said to them.

"Among other things, she begged them not to go near the brick traps which the gardener had set among the beans and peas, to entice simple mice to eat the bait, and then they were sure to be killed, by the trap falling on them; but they did

not regard those prudent counsels in the least, and a day or two after, they all sallied out into the garden, (with Whitefoot, their leader) in search of something nice. After they had rummaged the ground under the nut-tree for some time without finding a single nut, they came to a row of late-sown peas; these they made a terrible havoc amongst, regardless of their mother's advice. They were going home, well pleased with their regale, when, unluckily, Whitefoot espied a parcel of nice wheat, laid out very carefully under a sort of brick house; now Whitefoot run all round it and thought it stood too firm to be knocked down, and as he was rather greedy, he determined to venture under, and eat up the wheat; he was in such a hurry, for fear that either of his companions should come and want to share his prize, that, in his haste, he pushed down a bit of a stick which held the brick up—down it fell, and hapless Whitefoot was crushed to death in an instant.



“This was the effects of his disobedience to his mother.

“The noise of the fallen brick alarmed the timid little mice; away they ran as fast as they could, nor did they once stop to look behind to see what had become of their brother Whitefoot, who was found next morning by the gardener, under the brick, and was given to the black cat to eat. Now had he minded what his mother had told him the day before, he would have been alive and frisking about with the rest. See, Alfred, what comes of disobedience and greediness.” said his mother. “Yes, mamma, (said Alfred) I will remember how poor Whitefoot was served, and not disobey you, though you know, I could not be killed by a brick trap as he was.” “No, Alfred, but you might get hurt in a hundred different ways by going where I bid you not—recollect when I had so often told you not to play with the fire, how you burnt your hand, by lighting bits of paper; and if I had not come in, you would have been burnt to death.” “Yes, mamma, and it hurt me so much, I have never done it since.” “No more would Whitefoot have gone near a trap again, if he had only broken one of his limbs, instead of being killed, but he should have minded what was said at first. But you shall hear how the others behaved after his death.

“Downy was much shocked at the death of her poor Whitefoot, and she told the other little mice to take warning by their brother's sad fate, and not go near any more brick traps, but be contented with the food which she and their father provided for them. This they promised to do, and they were very sorry for the loss of Whitefoot, who was the most nimble of them all, and at the head of all their pranks, for he was usually the ring-leader and the most daring of the party.

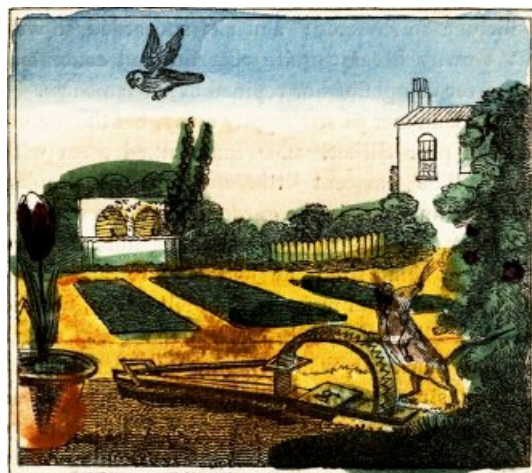
“For a few days they were more orderly, but their bad habits returned again, and they forgot all their promises, and were as naughty as ever they had been—even Silket was shocked at them, and was forced to chastise the two most unruly, by biting their ears. Wilful run away, and came to a most untimely death.—He invaded, one night, a bee-hive, and made great havoc in the stores of honey, eating the honey-combs, and destroying the work of the poor bees—but at last he was punished severely, for the bees, enraged at his lawless conduct, came in a body, and stung their enemy in a thousand different places, so that, unable to escape, he died in great agony.”

“And did bees ever sting a mouse to death in that manner, mamma?” asked Alfred. “Yes, Alfred, and if you are a good boy, I will read you a long account of bees, and how they build their cells, and make their wax and honey.” “But, mamma, there is nothing about their killing a mouse in it, is there?” “Yes, my dear child, I will tell you all about it one day, but let me finish my story first.”



“There were now only two young mice left, Velvet and Sprightly. Velvet was so shocked at the bad end which her two brothers had come to, that she resolved not to be naughty again, but try by her good conduct, to make amends for her thoughtless behaviour—but when she told Sprightly of her intentions, the wicked Sprightly ridiculed her, and said she should go and seek her fortune in the meadow and garden, where no one could scold her, and where she might do as she pleased; and with this resolution she set off, and they never saw her again; for having no house to go to, the white owl saw her as he was flying out one evening, and soon made an end of Miss Sprightly, who had better have staid at home with Velvet, and her father and mother. Velvet was the comfort and pride of her parents; she helped them in all their labours, and assisted them in enlarging their house, and providing food against the winter. As she encreased in goodness, she grew prettier, and every one admired her, she was so clean, and her skin was as soft as satin, and looked quite bright and glossy. Velvet was generally up and abroad before sunrise, and enjoyed being out in the dew; she always returned home loaded with grain; and they were all quite happy and comfortable; for Silket was very good, and Downy had nothing to make her uncomfortable, being blessed with a good husband and a good daughter.

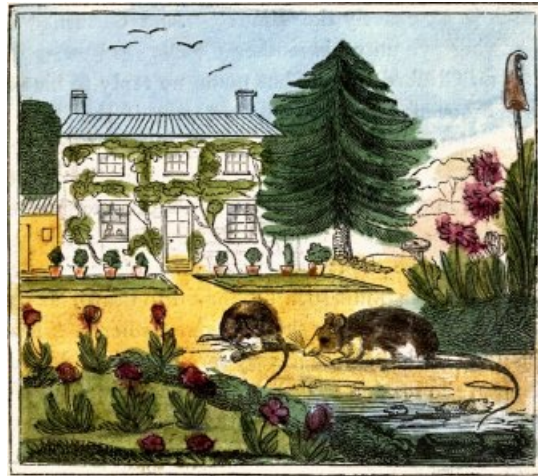
“But a sad accident happened which deprived poor Downy of all means of providing for her wants, and gave Silket and Velvet the greatest pain and uneasiness on her account. One day, Downy had been by herself in the garden, and in passing under a gooseberry bush, she did not see a trap which had been set to catch little birds, and it caught one of her poor little feet, and she lay struggling in the greatest pain, and shrieking lamentably—at last by a violent effort, she got loose, but with the loss of one of her fore-feet. Sadly wounded, and crying piteously, she at last gained her home, and Silket and Velvet found her exhausted with pain, and almost dying; they were greatly grieved at the misfortune, and lamented bitterly the sad fate of poor Downy, and they feared greatly lest they should lose her, but good nursing and great care at last restored her, in some measure, after which Velvet and Silket would never permit her to go out to get food, but always brought the best for her, and she lived quite at her ease, only she never was so strong as before.



“Velvet strove by all the means in her power, to make her mother happy; that she might not feel her misfortune so

severely; and she succeeded so well that Downy became quite cheerful and contented, and never complained or repined at her lameness.

“The Summer passed happily away, but the sudden death of poor Silket, once more filled them with grief. The innocent little creature was sleeping under the nut-trees in the garden, one warm morning in September; he had been collecting nuts to carry home, but being tired, he laid down to repose himself in the sun, and unfortunately fell asleep, nor did he wake till he found himself in the grasp of the merciless black cat, who springing upon her defenceless prey, strangled him in an instant. There was no fond Downy near, nor affectionate Velvet, to receive his last sighs, nor give him aid. The evening came, but no Silket returned to the disconsolate Downy; another day passed, but they saw nothing of Silket, and they were at last certain that he must have been killed. This heavy blow almost overcame Downy, and it was with the greatest difficulty, Velvet could persuade her to eat and be comforted; but every thing around them served to recall the image, and remind them of the loss, of their beloved Silket, and this gave them both great pain. At last, Velvet, without saying any thing to her mother, stole away while she was asleep, and having found a pretty spot, some way from farmer Ball’s land, she made a new house, much more convenient than the one they then lived in; it was a long time before it was completed, but when it was quite finished, and well stocked with grain, she brought Downy to see it: it was situated in a pretty garden, on a beautiful sloping green bank, under the shade of a fir tree, not many yards from a nice white brick house, the front of which was covered with vines and wall-fruit; there were pots of balsams and geraniums, placed on the beds opposite the windows and glass door.”



“Why, mamma, (exclaimed Alfred, suddenly looking up in his mother’s face,) that was just like our garden, and our house.” and he ran to the window, and looked out into the garden, saying with great vivacity, “Yes, mamma, it is the same; it is our garden with the fir-tree and the bank, and all the flowers, exactly the same!” And he turned an inquiring eye unto his mother.

Mrs. Clifford smiled, but made no reply to his exclamations of surprise, and went on as if she had not heard him. “In this quiet pretty spot they settled themselves, and Downy hoped to spend the rest of her days in quiet; she wanted for nothing, for Velvet provided for all her wants. Downy thought, if she should ever be deprived of her, it would break her heart, and she must soon be starved to death, as she could not work now, as she had done formerly. These thoughts made her often very sorrowful, and Velvet thought she seemed to droop, and lose her spirits and appetite, so Velvet thought to get something nice to please her; she stole into the house one day, when nobody saw her, and after some little time, she found her way into the cupboard, where she smelt something very nice, and beheld a new plum-cake. ‘Ah!’ said she, ‘how my sick mother will like a bit of this cake!’ so having made a hearty meal herself off it, she carried away the rest for her mother, not thinking she had done any harm.”

“Ah, mamma, (cried Alfred with tears in his eyes,) how I wish I had not set the trap to catch that good Velvet; she might have had my cake, and welcome, if I had but known what she took it for, how sorry I am! I wish Velvet was alive again, with all my heart.”

“Did not I tell you, Alfred, you would be sorry for killing the *nasty brown mouse*, before the day was over.”

“Oh! yes, dear mamma, and so I am indeed; I wish you had told me the story before, and then I should not have set the trap.—And so I suppose poor Downy will die, because she has no one to feed her.”

“Well, Alfred, shall I finish my story?

“Yes, if you please, mamma, but you don’t know any more of it, do you?” “Only this, when Downy found Velvet did not return, she died of grief. Thus ended the *LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF THE FIELD-MOUSE.*”

“Ah, mamma,” cried Alfred, bursting into tears, “what a cruel boy I have been! I have killed both Downy and Velvet—I will never be so cruel again.”

Mrs. Clifford, charmed with the sensibility of her little boy, kissed him most tenderly, saying, “Dry your tears, my sweet Alfred, and resolve not to be so desirous of the death of a little animal again. Though it is very necessary to kill them sometimes, or they would soon destroy all our food and clothes; still when we are forced from necessity to kill any thing, we should do it with as much humanity as we can, and never inflict on them unnecessary pain. I should myself have been forced to set the trap for Velvet, only I did not like to see my little Alfred, merely from revenge, wishing so eagerly for the death of a poor mouse, who did not know it was doing any harm in eating the cake.”

Alfred kissed his mother, and thanked her for her kindness in telling him the story; and wiping his tears away, went into the garden to play till tea was ready.

THE END.

* The above-mentioned circumstance, improbable as it may appear, I myself was witness to in the garden not many paces from the door of the house; when the poor little mouse actually escaped the eyes of a cat and her kitten, who passed within a yard of the spot where it stood, by standing in that motionless manner on the top of a clod of earth, nor was it discovered till it left its station, and though caught by the kitten, yet it finally escaped unhurt to the garden hedge.

Dean and Munday, Printers, Threadneedle-street.

Front Cover

Little Downy;
OR,
THE HISTORY
OF
A FIELD MOUSE.
EMBELLISHED WITH
TWELVE COLORED ENGRAVINGS.

LONDON:
Printed For
A. K. NEWMAN and Co. Leadenhall-Street.
Price 1s. 6d.

At the beginning of the book, two blank pages have handwritten notes. Although they have no connection with the content of the book, they are included here for historical interest. Note the date and wording of the first.

John Brown Greeley
The present of his kind
Mamma
Oct 24 1822 —

L. S. Greeley
over Seal
1866.

[End of *Little Downy, or The History of a Field-Mouse.* by Catharine Parr Traill]