We have just built our house in rather an out-of-the-way place--on the bank of a river, and under the shade of a patch of woods which is a veritable remain of quite an ancient forest. The checkerberry and partridge-plum, with their glossy green leaves and scarlet berries, still carpet the ground under its deep shadows; and prince's-pine and other kindred evergreens declare its native wildness,--for these are children of the wild woods, that never come after plough and harrow have once broken a soil.

When we tried to look out the spot for our house, we had to get a surveyor to go before us and cut a path through the dense underbrush that was laced together in a general network of boughs and leaves, and grew so high as to overtop our heads. Where the house stands, four or five great old oaks and chestnuts had to be cut away to let it in; and now it stands on the bank of the river, the edges of which are still overhung with old forest-trees, chestnuts and oaks, which look at themselves in the glassy stream.

A little knoll near the house was chosen for a garden-spot; a dense, dark mass of trees above, of bushes in mid-air, and of all sorts of ferns and wild-flowers and creeping vines on the ground. All these had to be cleared out, and a dozen great trees cut down and dragged

off to a neighbouring saw-mill, there to be transformed into boards to finish off our house. Then, fetching a great machine, such as might be used to pull a giant's teeth, with ropes, pulleys, oxen, and men, and might and main, we pulled out the stumps, with their great prongs and their network of roots and fibres; and then, alas! we had to begin with all the pretty wild, lovely bushes, and the checkerberries and ferns and wild blackberries and huckleberry-bushes, and dig them up remorselessly, that we might plant our corn and squashes. And so we got a house and a garden right out of the heart of our piece of wild wood, about a mile from the city of H-.

Well, then, people said it was a lonely place, and far from neighbours,--by which they meant that it was a good way for them to come to see us. But we soon found that whoever goes into the woods to live finds neighbours of a new kind, and some to whom it is rather hard to become accustomed.

For instance, on a fine day early in April, as we were crossing over to superintend the building of our house, we were startled by a striped snake, with his little bright eyes, raising himself to look at us, and putting out his red, forked tongue. Now there is no more harm in these little garden-snakes than there is in a robin or a squirrel--they are poor little, peaceable, timid creatures, which could not do any harm if they would; but the prejudices of society are so strong against them that one does not like to cultivate too much intimacy with them. So we tried to turn out of our path into a

tangle of bushes; and there, instead of one, we found four snakes. We turned on the other side, and there were two more. In short, everywhere we looked, the dry leaves were rustling and coiling with them; and we were in despair. In vain we said that they were harmless as kittens, and tried to persuade ourselves that their little bright eyes were pretty, and that their serpentine movements were in the exact line of beauty: for the life of us, we could not help remembering their family name and connections; we thought of those disagreeable gentlemen the anacondas, the rattlesnakes, and the copper-heads, and all of that bad line, immediate family friends of the old serpent to whom we are indebted for all the mischief that is done in this world. So we were quite apprehensive when we saw how our new neighbourhood was infested by them, until a neighbour calmed our fears by telling us that snakes always crawled out of their holes to sun themselves in the spring, and that in a day or two they would all be gone.

So it proved. It was evident they were all out merely to do their spring shopping, or something that serves with them the same purpose that spring shopping does with us; and where they went afterwards we do not know. People speak of snakes' holes, and we have seen them disappearing into such subterranean chambers; but we never opened one to see what sort of underground housekeeping went on there. After the first few days of spring, a snake was a rare visitor, though now and then one appeared.

One was discovered taking his noontide repast one day in a manner which excited much prejudice. He was, in fact, regaling himself by sucking down into his maw a small frog, which he had begun to swallow at the toes, and had drawn about half down. The frog, it must be confessed, seemed to view this arrangement with great indifference, making no struggle, and sitting solemnly, with his great unwinking eyes, to be sucked in at the leisure of his captor. There was immense sympathy, however, excited for him in the family circle; and it was voted that a snake which indulged in such very disagreeable modes of eating his dinner was not to be tolerated in our vicinity. So I have reason to believe that that was his last meal.

Another of our wild woodland neighbours made us some trouble. It was no other than a veritable woodchuck, whose hole we had often wondered at when we were scrambling through the underbrush after spring flowers. The hole was about the size of a peck-measure, and had two openings about six feet apart. The occupant was a gentleman we never had had the pleasure of seeing, but we soon learned his existence from his ravages in our garden. He had a taste, it appears, for the very kind of things we wanted to eat ourselves, and helped himself without asking. We had a row of fine, crisp heads of lettuce, which were the pride of our gardening, and out of which he would from day to day select for his table just the plants we had marked for ours. He also nibbled our young beans; and so at last we were reluctantly obliged to let John Gardiner set a trap for him. Poor old simple-minded hermit, he was too artless for this world! He was caught at

the very first snap, and found dead in the trap,--the agitation and distress having broken his poor woodland heart, and killed him. We were grieved to the very soul when the poor fat old fellow was dragged out, with his useless paws standing up stiff and imploring. As it was, he was given to Denis, our pig, which, without a single scruple of delicacy, ate him up as thoroughly as he ate up the lettuce.

This business of eating, it appears, must go on all through creation. We eat ducks, turkeys, and chickens, though we don't swallow them whole, feathers and all. Our four-footed friends, less civilized, take things with more directness and simplicity, and chew each other up without ceremony, or swallow each other alive. Of these unceremonious habits we had other instances.

Our house had a central court on the southern side, into which looked the library, dining-room, and front hall, as well as several of the upper chambers. It was designed to be closed in with glass, to serve as a conservatory in winter; and meanwhile we had filled it with splendid plumy ferns, taken up out of the neighbouring wood. In the centre was a fountain surrounded by stones, shells, mosses, and various water-plants. We had bought three little goldfish to swim in our basin; and the spray of it, as it rose in the air and rippled back into the water, was the pleasantest possible sound of a hot day. We used to lie on the sofa in the hall, and look into the court, and fancy we saw some scene of fairy-land, and water-sprites coming up

from the fountain. Suddenly a new-comer presented himself,--no other than an immense bull-frog, that had hopped up from the neighbouring river, apparently with a view to making a permanent settlement in and about our fountain. He was to be seen, often for hours, sitting reflectively on the edge of it, beneath the broad shadow of the calla-leaves. When sometimes missed thence, he would be found under the ample shield of a great bignonia, whose striped leaves grew hard by.

The family were prejudiced against him. What did he want there? It was surely some sinister motive impelled him. He was probably watching for an opportunity to gobble up the goldfish. We took his part, however, and strenuously defended his moral character, and patronized him in all ways. We gave him the name of Unke, and maintained that he was a well-conducted, philosophical old water-sprite, who showed his good taste in wanting to take up his abode in our conservatory. We even defended his personal appearance, praised the invisible-green coat which he wore on his back, and his gray vest, and solemn gold spectacles; and though he always felt remarkably slimy when we touched him, yet, as he would sit still and allow us to stroke his head and pat his back, we concluded his social feelings might be warm, notwithstanding a cold exterior. Who knew, after all, but he might be a beautiful young prince, enchanted there till the princess should come to drop the golden ball into the fountain, and so give him a chance to marry her and turn into a man again? Such things, we are credibly informed, are matters of

frequent occurrence in Germany. Why not here?

By-and-by there came to our fountain another visitor,--a frisky, green young frog of the identical kind spoken of by the poet

"There was a frog lived in a well,
Rig dum pully metakimo."

This thoughtless, dapper individual, with his bright green coat, his faultless white vest, and sea-green tights, became rather the popular favourite. He seemed just rakish and gallant enough to fulfil the conditions of the song

"The frog he would a-courting ride,
With sword and pistol by his side."

This lively young fellow, whom we shall call Cri-Cri, like other frisky and gay young people, carried the day quite over the head of the solemn old philosopher under the calla-leaves. At night, when all was still, he would trill a joyous little note in his throat, while old Unke would answer only with a cracked guttural more singular than agreeable; and to all outward appearance the two were

as good friends as their different natures would allow.

One day, however, the conservatory became the scene of a tragedy of the deepest dye. We were summoned below by shrieks and howls of horror. "Do pray come down and see what this vile, nasty, horrid old frog has been doing!" Down we came; and there sat our virtuous old philosopher, with his poor little brother's hind legs still sticking out of the corner of his mouth, as if he were smoking them for a cigar, all helplessly palpitating as they were. In fact, our solemn old friend had done what many a solemn hypocrite before has done,--swallowed his poor brother, neck and crop,--and sat there with the most brazen indifference, looking as if he had done the most proper and virtuous thing in the world.

Immediately he was marched out of the conservatory at the point of a walking-stick, and made to hop down to the river, into whose waters he splashed, and we saw him no more. We regret to say that the popular indignation was so precipitate in its results; otherwise the special artist who sketched Hum, the son of Buz, intended to have made a sketch of the old villain, as he sat with his luckless victim's hind legs projecting from his solemn mouth. With all his moral faults, he was a good sitter, and would probably have sat immovable any length of time that could be desired.

Of other woodland neighbours there were some which we saw occasionally. The shores of the river were lined here and there with

the holes of the muskrats; and in rowing by their settlements, we were sometimes strongly reminded of them by the overpowering odour of the perfume from which they get their name. There were also owls, whose nests were high up in some of the old chestnut-trees. Often in the lonely hours of the night we could hear them gibbering with a sort of wild, hollow laugh among the distant trees. But one tenant of the woods made us some trouble in the autumn. It was a little flying-squirrel, who took to making excursions into our house in the night season, coming down the chimney into the chambers, rustling about among the clothes, cracking nuts or nibbling at any morsels of anything that suited his fancy. For a long time the inmates of the rooms were awakened in the night by mysterious noises, thumps, and rappings, and so lighted candles, and searched in vain to find whence they came; for the moment any movement was made, the rogue whipped up the chimney, and left us a prey to the most mysterious alarms. What could it be?

But one night our fine gentleman bounced in at the window of another room, which had no fireplace; and the fair occupant, rising in the night, shut the window, without suspecting that she had cut off the retreat of any of her woodland neighbours. The next morning she was startled by what she thought a gray rat running past her bed. She rose to pursue him, when he ran up the wall, and clung against the plastering, showing himself very plainly a gray flying-squirrel, with large, soft eyes, and wings which consisted of a membrane uniting the fore paws to the hind ones, like those of a bat. He was chased into

the conservatory, and a window being opened, out he flew upon the ground, and made away for his native woods, and thus put an end to many fears as to the nature of our nocturnal rappings.

So you see how many neighbours we found by living in the woods, and, after all, no worse ones than are found in the great world.