

EYES AND NO EYES BOOK 9.

# RIVERSIDE RAMBLES



R. CADWALLADER SMITH

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EYES AND NO EYES  
Book. 9

RIVERSIDE RAMBLES

BY

R. CADWALLADER SMITH



## PUBLISHER'S NOTE

**W**E at Living Book Press are extremely proud to bring you this release of *Eyes and No Eyes*, originally published by Cassell.

Some of the old images were not of a high enough quality to reprint so we have included many high quality photographs to accompany the text throughout.

Because this book represents a broad overview of the nature we will find around us the images may sometimes be of similar creatures and plants that are native to other regions than the United Kingdom where the story was first set. This is to help children appreciate that many animal families share similar traits and can be found in many parts of the world, some may even be in their own backyard, as well as provide an opportunity for those who can't access the great outdoors to see nature up close.

We hope these new editions bring a lot of joy to your homes, and that they will help children everywhere take a deeper look at the natural world surrounding them.



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REED WARBLER (LEFT)

A RIVER

## LESSON 1 IN RUSHES AND REEDS

**W**HAT a thick tangle lines the margin of the river! Tall grass-stems, with their silky plumes of flowers, nod and wave in the sunshine. Where the ground is soft and marshy, clumps of stiff round Rushes are dotted here and there. And in full summer, when the riverside is brightest, there is a vivid riband of gay flowers threaded through the greenery. The river-plants flourish in their boggy, wet home, and would soon die if planted in dry soil.

One of the commonest of them is the Reed. It raises its graceful purple head six feet or more above the water. It is really a monster grass, growing, like other grasses, in



#### REEDS IN WINTER

a dense jungle. Beneath the water its roots and hidden stems make a matted tangle; and in the muddy home it loves best it spreads until there is a wide forest of tall stems and waving green leaves. Many timid birds and beasts hide in this welcome shelter.

Though the Rush is less graceful, in olden days it was valued more, and harvested carefully every year; for Rushes were spread over floors. Houses were not then full of comfortable carpets, chairs or couches, as you will see from the following words, written in the year 1528:—"The hall was every day in summer season strewed with green Rushes, and in winter with clean hay, to save Knights' clothes, that sat on the floor, in default of a place to sit on." Rushes were also used as candle, before the "tallow dip," as it was called, became common. There were no paraffin lamps in those days, and such luxuries as coal-

gas or electric light were unheard of. So the Rushes were carefully gathered and prepared. They were peeled, leaving one narrow strip of “rind” to support the white pith. They were then laid in the dewy grass, and afterwards dried in the sun. These dried Rushes, being dipped in grease, were then ready for use. They gave a fairly steady light, though we should think little of it nowadays. A good long Rush would last for more than one hour; and as they were so cheap, the pool man continued to gather Rushes even after candles could be obtained.

Let us return to the reed-bed, for it contains a little brown fairy well worth knowing, whose voice is as familiar as the soft rustle of the Reeds in the summer wind. You can seldom find the owner of the voice, even if you risk getting wet feet. The more you try, the farther the voice will sound from the depths of the reedy jungle. We can hardly call it a musical voice. Some of the notes are sweet others sound as though cracked from too much use! The song is a jangle of such notes, as if to scold you for daring to part the curtain of the fairy’s home. If you stand still, a little brown bird may come to see if you have gone. This is the fairy of the Reeds—the Reed Warbler, dancing up and down the stems, chattering and scolding, with a flicker of quick little wings.

No wonder the Reed Warbler is upset when you trespass near his reed-bed, for it is his own home. It provides him with food and shelter. He is a stay-at-home, and seldom goes much farther than the next reed-bed. But in winter, when the dead grey reed-stems shake their dry leaves in

the icy wind, the little Warbler is not there. He is far away in the sunshine of Africa. But he will return when the warmth of Spring has called up a fresh green bed of growing Reeds, to cover him, his wife, and their nest. The cup of the nest is woven with blades of grass, dry water-weed, and reed-tops, with longer pieces of Reed to bind it together. There is a soft lining of grass and horse-hair for the speckled eggs. This pretty, woven nursery, as you see in the picture, is hung up in the reed-stems. Three or four of the stems act as scaffold-poles, and the nest is bound safely to them, a few feet above the water. The cradle rocks and sways as the wind bends the Reeds this way or that. It is well that the little birds make so deep a nest, or the eggs would surely spill out. A high wind catches the reed-bed, and down go the long stems, carrying the precious cradle nearly to the water. But the stems, though thin, are hollow and elastic, and they spring upright again. The little Warbler must be used to this rough treatment, for she remains clinging to her nest.

Sometimes the swinging cradle is filled with a great, gaping Cuckoo. It has pushed the eggs or young over the side of the nest and the Reed Warblers are busy feeding the stranger. He is so large that he looks as if he could swallow them, and the poor little birds are kept hard at work. Their own family would have been easier to satisfy than this greedy changeling, who is no sooner fed than his bill is wide open for more.

As you walk by the reed-bed, you will probably hear a loud cry sounding like "*Wirruk! Wirruk!*" This comes

from the Moorhen, whose big rough nest is in a clump of sedges near the Reeds. But the Moorhen is not only a Reed-haunter. It seems at home everywhere, even when stealing a meal in your vegetable garden. It can run, fly, walk on water-weeds or on ice, perch in the trees, swim and dive! A Jack-of-all-trades!

It swims in a jerky way, flirting its tail-feathers at each stroke. And on land it is not graceful, its feet seeming to be much too large. Look at the track it leaves in mud or snow. Each big foot-print is in a line with the next, as if a one-legged Moorhen had passed that way. Now why does it place its feet like that? It swims through thick beds of water-weeds; if its legs were widely spread they would soon be tangled in weed. So it wisely uses its legs in one line, and that may account for its peculiar movement.

In late Spring there are seven or eight black fluffy babies with the mother Moorhen. They have a very short nursery-life. Looking into a nest where the young were just beginning life, to my surprise three of them climbed over the edge and into the water. They were scarcely dry out of the egg-shell! In climbing they used the "elbows" of their tiny wings as claws to support their little bodies.

MOORHEN WITH CHICK



Mrs. Moorhen soon has a second lot of eggs. It is as well that the first babies are so active, for she says in her own way “Be off! I have other business now, and you must look after yourselves!” Rats and herons eat the poor little mites, and the big hungry pike swims near the Reeds when baby Moorhen are about!

The Moorhen’s toes are not joined by a web, like those of many water-birds. Those of the Coot are each flattened into paddles. The Coot has a white patch over the beak—bald-headed Coot he is sometimes called; the Moorhen has a red patch. Otherwise the two birds look much alike as they dodge in and out of the Reeds.

### EXERCISES

1. Describe the nest of the Reed Warbler.
2. Why is the clip of the nest so deep?
3. How does the Moorhen use its legs in swimming and running?
4. Name two ways by which you could tell the Coot from the Moorhen.

### COOT WITH CHICKS





SALMON JUMPING UP A RIVER

LESSON II

THE MONARCH OF THE RIVER

OF all our river-fish, no two are more opposite in looks than the lordly Salmon and the humble, squirming Eel. They also differ very greatly in their egg-laying habits. The Eel leaves the river and spawns—that is, lays eggs—far out at sea, and never in the river. The Salmon leaves the sea, and spawns far up the river, and never in the sea. Even at the cost of its own life the Eel *must* go out to sea, and the Salmon *must* come up-river, for the duties of egg-laying.

The sea is a rich dining-room, full of all kinds of good food. And it is there that those splendid Salmon you see in the fishmonger's shop became so plump. We do not know where the Salmon wanders in the wide sea. He may go far away, he may stop near our shores. But we do know that the young herrings, the juicy shrimps, and all



#### EEL

the other titbits he eats make him grow like magic. Yet, when Nature calls him, he leaves it all behind, forgets to eat, and turns his head up the river-mouth. Let us share his journey, and see what happens.

It is early autumn when our Salmon shoots with great speed up the river. This is his first journey up there, but he will not be content until he reaches the shallows, perhaps one hundred miles or more up-stream. How does he find his way? What guides him, and why does he go? The only answer is that he *feels* he must go; that he obeys that wonderful, strange guide we call Instinct.

The perils of the journey are great. Miles and miles of nets are spread to catch the Salmon, and thousands are caught in that way. There are many other dangers, including the anglers with their glittering “flies.” Our Salmon does not care to eat on his travels. But he may snatch at the “fly” or prawn which is drawn in front of his nose. If he escapes the fishermen, he comes to other dangers. Weirs and rapids and waterfalls bar his path. But something tells him to go up-stream, so he tries with all his might to jump over the obstacles. He darts through the

rushing water, and high in the air, with all the strength of his powerful body. If he is beaten back he tries again and again, until at last, with a splendid leap, he gains the top, and rushes on in safety.

After resting here and there, our Salmon journeys on, and in time he finds himself near the right spot. The river is here about two feet deep; and the clear, sparkling water glides swiftly over a bed of stones. These are the "spawning beds," and our Salmon goes no farther.

But, though his dangerous travels are over for the time, his hardships are before him. Many other Salmon have run up to the spawning beds from the sea; some are hen-fish, some cock-fish, as the female and male Salmon are called. The hen-salmon, with a swirl of body and tail, makes a place for her eggs in the gravel. Then, having laid some, she goes a little way up-stream, and lays more. The eggs are heavier than water, and so they sink and are soon covered over.

While this is going on the cock-salmon are fighting and driving one another about. They are rivals, and they fight fiercely, sometimes wounding one another. They have terrible teeth, and the lower jaw at this time is curved into an ugly hook. At last the busy scene of fighting and splashing and egg-laying is over. Then the hen-salmon rest in the deep pools before going back to the sea to feed ravenously and regain strength. But the cock-salmon remain to guard the spawning bed for a week or more, and most of them die soon after.

Now we will follow the fortunes of the precious eggs.

Each hen-fish has laid from 8,000 to 20,000, according to her size. What a vast army of them lie under the gravel! But Salmon eggs are a dainty dish, and every water-bird, many insects, fish and other creatures hasten to have eggs for dinner. Also, as it is now winter-time, there are floods which sweep the eggs away. The lucky ones remain for three months. Then from each one a little creature emerges, wriggles up through the gravel, and rests for six weeks or so. It is quite helpless, with no nest or parent to guard it, and it cannot eat. But it does not starve, for Nature has provided it with a queer kind of "feeding-bottle." The yolk of the egg still holds to its little body, and from this it obtains all the food it needs.

Well, the "feeding-bottle" is empty and gone, so the baby Salmon eats tiny insects. Spring has come, and the river begins to "wake up," and you might see the little Salmon ever so busy darting after flies or grubs of any sort. It is a beautiful baby, olive-brown above, pure white below, with spots and upright stripes along its sides. For many years nobody knew whose baby it was! It has a name of its own—*Parr*. The Salmon's life is like a book with many chapters, and in each chapter the Salmon has a different name, as you will see.

By the next Spring our little Parr is four inches long. He is now over a year old, and stays where he is for still another year. Then he feels the call of the sea. He becomes silvery in colour, and in this lovely "sea-jacket" off he goes to the ocean. With his new coat the baby Salmon takes a new name—he is no longer a Parr, but a *Smolt*, six inches

long and a few ounces in weight.

We lose him as soon as he leaves the river, and find him again when he returns to the river to spawn. But no longer is he the little silvery Smolt! Some young Salmon spend one year in the sea, and some two, three, or four years. And in that time they grow enormously.

We will suppose that our Smolt spends one-and-a-half years under the ocean wave. He has escaped seals and otters and nets, and has fed so well that he now weighs nearly eight pounds! He is a lovely shining fish, strong and plump, yet as swift as an arrow. In this chapter of his life we must call him a *Grilse*. As we have seen, he has a long journey, a long fast, and a hard time when he reaches the spawning beds. So the Grilse will need every ounce of his strength and fat to face the ordeal! He leaves the sea, and, strange to say, runs up the very same river in which he was born!

If you ask how the Grilse finds this particular river, no one can tell you. You may also wonder how we know

#### SALMON EGGS



so much about him. Well, for many years Salmon have been watched very closely. For instance, in one river of Scotland over 5,000 little Smolts were caught and marked in a certain way. They were then put back to continue their journey to the sea. Numbers of these fish were caught again *in the same river*, some after one year, others after two or three years, had passed. Some of these little Smolts had grown into great Salmon of from thirty to forty pounds' weight! But they had returned to their own river to spawn.

Another very strange thing was discovered! As you know, the Salmon's silvery scales are arranged like the tiles on a roof. As the fish grows, of course its coat of scales must grow too. If you make a roof larger, you add more tiles. But the growing Salmon does not add more scales, so the old scales must grow as the fish grows. Perhaps you know how a tree increases, ring by ring each year. Well, the fish-scale also increases like that, by adding tiny rings of growth.

#### SALMON SCALES





#### A SALMON LAYING HER EGGS IN THE ROCKS

By counting these rings it is possible to say how many years the fish has lived. But it was also found, after many thousands of scales had been examined, that the rings told the whole story of the Salmon's life. Thus from one scale we know how long the fish stayed in the river before it went to sea, and how long it spent in the sea before it came back to the river. Those who have studied the scales can read on them every chapter in the story of the Monarch of the River!

#### EXERCISES

1. Where do Salmon lay their eggs?
2. What is a Smolt? What is a Salmon called on its first return from the sea?
3. What can be told from the rings on the scales of a Salmon?



AN OTTER EATING A FISH

### LESSON III

## THE FISH-HUNTER AND HIS FAMILY

**B**Y many a quiet stream you may read the signs of the Otter's presence, but seldom, if ever, will you see this artful fish-hunter. What signs does he leave? A few splashes of blood, and scattered fish-scales, on a stone by the bank. These are the crumbs of his last night's supper. Or you may find a trout with a piece of its head bitten off, to tell you that the Otter will kill just for the sake of feeling his own skill and strength.

And then you may see another sign, in a shady spot where the clay bank goes steep and clear to the water's edge. The clay is scored and scraped as if someone had played at sliding down into the stream. That "someone" was Mrs. Otter and family. Having had enough fish to

satisfy them, they had played games. The game was "follow my leader."

First one and then another slips down the clay bank on its stomach, legs stretched out behind; they slide into the water, and are soon up the bank again, with many a whine and whistle and snap of playful jaws. The mother Otter entered into the fun, for these animals never grow out of their love of play. At dawn, however, she wisely left the playground, and led the way to a snug "hover" under a thick tangle of willow roots, to sleep until the sun had sunk again.

Few animals can dive and swim more cleverly than the Otter. He can double and twist under water as if he had fins, so that even the powerful sea-trout are hunted down and captured in their own homes. The "fins" of the Otter are his webbed feet. Under water he keeps the front paws folded along his body, and strikes out rapidly with the hind ones. A swish of his strong tail guides him as he twists here and there after the flashing fish. He uses his keen eyes under water, small black shining eyes which may remind you of boot-buttons. They are kept wide open. He seems to use them much more than he does nose or ears, when chasing his prey. His ears are small; large ears would be in the way under water, would they not? We find that the perfect swimming and diving animals, such as fish and seals do without such luxuries as ear-flaps.

A very large Otter may measure four feet from tip of nose to end of tail, and weigh as much as thirty-two pounds. Yet he will enter the water with scarce a sound

or ripple. How does he do it? A dog takes the water with a splash. But the Otter, a skilled hunter, parts the water gently with his wedge-shaped head, and glides in. His tail is all muscle, and it clings to the rock or bank like an anchor, so that the artful animal can launch himself without a sound.

Once under water, as we have already said, he is perfectly at home. Even if the fish dart away and hide, he is on their track in a flash. There is little doubt that his whiskers are of great help to him here. You notice in our picture how they bunch out from near the nose. Now each whisker has a root, each root has a nerve, each nerve can send a message to the brain, So these wide-spread “feelers” act as guides to help the Otter find his way safely under water. The rat and cat, both hunters in the dark, also have very sensitive whiskers, and so has that fish-hunter, the seal.

The seal, as you may have seen for yourself, “bolts” its dinner. The fish is no sooner caught than it slips down the seal’s throat and is gone. Our friend the Otter would choke if he tried to copy that quick method. He must cut up his food into small pieces with the knives that Nature gives him.

To do this, he brings his fish ashore, and plants his forepaws on it. Beginning at the head, he munches steadily down to the tail, using the *molar* teeth, the “grinders,” at the side of the mouth. He has, of course, those long sharp teeth we call *canines*; the dog and cat, as you can see any day, also have sharp canines. But the Otter’s are sharper still; when he snaps them through a fish’s head, as he

generally does, there is no escape from such a deadly trap.

Otters are hunted and killed in this country. But a better use for them is found in some parts of the world, where they are trained to catch fish for the table. A traveller in India relates how he saw “a row of no less than nine beautiful otters, tethered with straw collars and long strings to bamboo stakes. Some were swimming about at the full extent of their strings, or lying half in the water, others were sunning themselves and uttering a shrill whistle as if in play.

“I was told that the fishermen in this district all kept these intelligent animals, who were almost as tame as dogs, and of great use in fishing. Sometimes they drove the shoals into the nets, sometimes they brought out the larger fish with their teeth.”

The whistling call of the Otter is rather like the note of a bird. If you twist the glass stopper in the neck of a

A FAMILY OF OTTERS



bottle you will hear a good imitation of it. In Otter language it is often meant for a signal, to say—“Here I am; where are you?”

Baby Otters have many a lesson to learn from their mother before they can face the dangers of the outside world. The family of three or four cubs must learn all the sounds, from A to Z, and what they mean, also how to hide and keep still. Then there are swimming and diving lessons to be mastered, and the proper way to catch and eat a fish. They must know what to do with baby rabbits, and moorhens and ducklings, and how to catch and skin and eat a frog.

Of course, it is all play to them, but the mother sees that they do it well, and punishes the naughty ones with a sharp nip or two. She plays at “slides” with them, as we have already noticed. Her love for them is so great that she will die in their defence. The grown-up Otter, hunted on all sides, often owes his life to the tricks and dodges learnt in these early lessons.

A BABY OTTER RESTING ON ITS MOTHER





#### A OTTER UNDERWATER

The father, or “dog”-otter, leaves his family when they are a few months old. Otters are gipsies in their love of wandering, and he travels mile after mile, hunting at night, hiding all day. He follows the rivers and streams, and sometimes visits ponds and farmyards. If he comes to the sea-side he is quite at home. He knows how to crack and eat shell-fish, and dig out the artful flat-fish from their sandy homes.

He swims out to sea, or hunts in the pools, hiding in caves or under rocks all day. Although he is never safe from man, and dog, and trap, this shy, clever, alert, and graceful fish-hunter leads a happy life.

#### EXERCISES

1. How does the Otter enter the water?
2. Describe how the Otter swims under water.
3. How does the Otter catch and eat its prey?