

Children's Page . . .

BELLBIRD HOLLOW

By Flora Patie

ELSA and Don Grey loved their new home near the hills, where they had lived now for six months. It was one of the finest sheep stations in Hawke's Bay, but the children's chief interest was in the forest beyond the homestead. They had explored part of a bush-clad gorge, where a little creek ran over its stony bed. Near the entrance to the gorge there was a hollow where the creek widened into a pool of clearest water, shaded by the trees which met overhead.

"It was the very place for fairies," so Elsa said. It was there that Elsa and Don first heard the chime of the bellbird, and they named it "Bellbird Hollow."

One afternoon, as they passed by the sheepyards on their way in from school, the children heard their father talking to the shepherd about burning off the bush on the lower hills.

"Oh, Daddy!" cried Elsa, "not our Bellbird Hollow! Oh, please don't burn the bush there."

The children slid off their ponies and ran over to their father. "Daddy," said Don, "we have such fun up in the forest. Couldn't you come with us to-night to hear the birds' good-night song? Mother has promised to take us after tea."

His father laughed. "I'm too busy to think about birds. Off you go to your mother."

A few minutes later, Elsa and Don dashed into the house calling: "Mother Mother! Where are you?"

When the children told her their trouble, Mrs. Grey said: "Daddy doesn't understand what Bellbird Hollow means to us. Let us hope he will change his mind. Don't worry any more about it, darlings. Look what has come in to-day's mail." She held up a large envelope.

"Oh! Oh!" they both cried, "our 'Forest and Bird' journal! Could we have just one peep before tea?"

"Yes," replied their mother, "if you get your work done quickly."

When they sat together on the window-seat, looking at the bird pictures, Don said: "Let us show this to Daddy when he comes in."

"What are you going to show me?" called a merry voice, and Mr. Grey came striding into

the room. He caught up Don and sank into an easy chair with the little boy on his knee. Elsa ran to him with the journal, saying: "Look at the lovely birds, Daddy."

Mr. Grey frowned. "Birds again! Bother—some little things, that's what they are; they're eating the fruit wholesale."

"But we can easily spare them some," said Elsa, "after all the work they have done for us in the garden."

Just then Mrs. Grey called them to tea.

As the sun was setting, the children and their mother wandered into the leafy shade of Bellbird Hollow. They found a comfortable seat on the rocky edge of the fairy pool and waited quietly for the song of the birds. At first there was a solemn stillness, broken only by the tinkling of the creek and the faint stirring sound of insects in the forest, "like the fairies whispering," said Elsa.

As the shadows deepened they heard a great twittering in the trees. "The birds are coming home for the night," said Mrs. Grey. "See them

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from the Lions, or that the Lions, also left entirely to themselves, have ever succeeded in reducing drastically the numbers of the Wildebeest or exterminating the Antelopes of rarer species also found there.

On the other hand, no doubt, had no Lions been present, the game would have increased to such an extent that it would at last have finished even that fine food supply, and would either have perished miserably of starvation long ago or have abandoned the area.

If we desire to have a picture of things as they were designed to be and as, in fact, they continued through many thousands of years before Man counted as a force on Earth, if we desire to find the key to many biological problems, and if we wish to preserve intact the few relics of wild Nature which we have allowed with difficulty to survive, it behoves us to tread warily and to interfere as little as possible in matters concerning the interrelation of species of which at present we know very little.