

## SQUIRREL ISLAND.

By A. FREELAND.

One hundred squirrels lived on a certain island which contained a thousand nut trees. Each tree yielded sufficient nuts to support one hundred squirrels. But all of the trees were owned by ten of the squirrels. The ninety treeless squirrels rented portions of trees from the ten tree-lords, paying part of the nuts they gathered. The tree-lords did no work, but kept fat and sleek, while the treeless squirrels were very poor, both physically and financially.

One of the working squirrels invented a machine for gathering nuts. The ten tree-lords formed a company and paid the inventor a peck of nuts for his patent, and promised him steady employment at higher wages.

Thirty squirrels, aided by the machines, could gather as many nuts as were formerly gathered by all the working squirrels. Sixty squirrels were thus thrown out of employment. Thirty of these eventually secured employment as menials in the households of the tree-lords. They became cooks, flunkys, coachmen, footmen, etc., at a very low wage. The remaining thirty unemployed squirrels subsisted on charity or by theft, some actually dying of starvation.

Owing to the diminished demand for nuts, because so many were unable to buy what they needed, there was soon an "overproduction" of nuts, and the tree-lords were obliged to "shut down" a part of the lime, thus throwing many more of the treeless squirrels out of work.

Competition among treeless squirrels for employment became exceedingly fierce and wages steadily fell. Some of the squirrels organized a union and struck for higher wages, but there were plenty of unemployed squirrels who were willing to work for the low rate. These "scab" workers were hired in place of the strikers. The latter did not relinquish their jobs without a struggle. Riots ensued, in which several of the "scabs" and strikers were killed.

A charitable society was organized which doled out every day a nutshell full of nut-soup to the unfortunates. The government also established a rock-pile and a public wood-yard, where unemployed squirrels could secure half of an inferior nut in return for breaking a basketful of rocks or gnawing off six double-armfuls of wood. In this way, although the majority of the squirrels were always on the verge of starvation, very few getting enough to eat, it was seldom that one actually starved. Of course their lives were shortened, but that was due, it was said, to inexorable and unavoidable conditions over which squirrels had no control.

The unemployed squirrels and those receiving meager pay began to murmur. Even some of those who operated machines were touched by the sufferings of their fellows and suggested that something must be wrong on an island which yielded sufficient nuts to feed 100,000 squirrels and yet did not support 100.

Some attributed their woes to the single nut standard; others asserted that their condition was due to the importation of pauper cracked nuts from foreign islands; still others that it was because some of the squirrels drank rain-water. Some suggested that the hours of labor of working squirrels should be shortened, thus making work for more squirrels; others that pauper squirrel immigration should be prohibited, while a pious squirrel declared that times always would be hard so long as some of the wicked squirrels persisted in working on the Sabbath. Many demanded an income tax of two nuts annually from each of the tree-lords, the revenue from such source to be given in bounties to nut-tree owners to encourage the production of nuts. Some contended for the free and unlimited coinage of nut-shells at the ratio of sixteen nut-shells to one nut, while others asserted with considerable unction that green nut-tree leaves were the only safe, sound and flexible currency. They demanded national greenleaf money sufficient in volume to transact the business of the island on a cash basis—not less than fifty greenleaves per capita—declaring that to be the only means of restoring prosperity to the island. To elevate the standard of citizenship, as a prerequisite to the right of franchise, a poll tax was proposed, the argument being adduced that any squirrel who would not pay for the privilege of wearing a head on his shoulders could not possibly be a good citizen. There was a

popular demand for legislation against the basket and wood trusts, which, it was claimed, were ruining the island by lowering wages and raising prices. The tree-lords and the pious squirrels declared that there always were poor squirrels and always would be; that it was an inscrutable decree of Providence that some (the idlers) should be rich and the others (the workers) poor, some masters and others servants. Many clamored for common ownership of the machines, maintaining that all the ills that were befalling treeless squirrels were the result of machinery displacing labor. A single-tax squirrel mildly suggested that there were sufficient nut trees on the island to support in comfort 100,000 squirrels; that the tree-lords did not create the nut trees; that if nut-tree monopoly were

abolished there would be plenty of nuts, not only for the squirrels then on the island, but for all the other squirrels on all the other islands; that then any thrifty squirrel or association of squirrels could make machines or hire them made, and the hours of labor would be reduced without legislative enactment. Immediately there were cries from all quarters: "Anarchist! Socialist! Communist! Thief! Robber! Traitor! Revolutionist! Confiscator! Agitator! Hang him! Throw him to the sharks!" etc. So he wrote this letter.

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Cincinnati, Ohio.

Price 10 Cents Per Hundred.

NEW YORK