

VARIOUS

BIRDS AND ALL NATURE
VOL VII, NO. 1, JANUARY
1900

Various

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JANUARY

Then came old January, wrapped well
In many weeds to keep the cold away;
Yet did he quake and quiver like to quell,
And blow his nayles to warm them if he may;
For they were numb'd with holding all the day
An hatchet keene, with which he felled wood,
And from the trees did lop the needlesse spray;
Upon a huge great earth-pot steane he stood,
From whose wide mouth there flowed forth the Romane flood.

– *Spenser*.

Announced by all the trumpets of the sky,
Arrives the snow; and, driving o'er the fields,
Seems nowhere to alight; the whited air
Hides hills and woods, the river, and the heaven,
And veils the farm-house at the garden's end.
The sled and traveler stopp'd, the courier's feet
Delay'd, all friends shut out, the house-mates sit
Around the radiant fire-place, inclosed
In a tumultuous privacy of storm.

– *Emerson*.

OLD YEAR AND YOUNG YEAR

I

Said the year that was old:
"I am cold, I am cold,
And my breath hurries fast
On the wild winter blast
Of this thankless December;
Ah, who will remember
As I, shivering, go,
The warmth and the glow
That arose like a flame
When I came, when I came?
For I brought in my hands,
From Utopian lands,
Golden gifts, and the schemes
That were fairer than dreams.
Ah, never a king
Of a twelvemonth, will bring
Such a splendor of treasure
Without stint or measure,
As I brought on that day,
Triumphant and gay.
But, alas, and alas,
Who will think as I pass,
I was once gay and bold?"
Said the year that was old.

II

Said the year that was young —
And his light laughter rung —
"Come, bid me good cheer,
For I bring with me here
Such gifts as the earth
Never saw till my birth;
All the largess of life,
Right royally rife
With the plans and the schemes
Of the world's highest dreams.
Then – hope's chalice filled up
To the brim of the cup,

Let us drink to the past,
The poor pitiful past,"
Sang the year that was young,
While his light laughter rung.

— *Nora Perry*.

THE VIRGINIA RAIL

(*Rallus virginianus*.)

THIS miniature of *Rallus elegans* or king rail, is found throughout the whole of temperate North America as far as the British Provinces, south to Guatemala and Cuba, and winters almost to the northern limit of its range. A specimen was sent by Major Bendire to the National Museum from Walla Walla, Wash., which was taken Jan. 16, 1879, when the snow was more than a foot deep. Other names of the species are: Lesser clapper rail, little red rail, and fresh-water mud hen. The male and female are like small king rails, are streaked with dark-brown and yellowish olive above, have reddish chestnut wing coverts, are plain brown on top of head and back of neck, have a white eyebrow, white throat, breast and sides bright rufous; the flanks, wing linings and under tail coverts are broadly barred with dark brown and white; eyes red.

The name of this rail is not as appropriate to-day as it was when Virginia included nearly all of the territory east of the Mississippi. It is not a local bird, but nests from New York, Ohio, and Illinois northward. Short of wing, with a feeble, fluttering flight when flushed from the marsh, into which it quickly drops again, as if incapable of going farther, it is said this small bird can nevertheless migrate immense distances. One small straggler from a flock going southward, according to Neltje Blanchan, fell exhausted on the deck of a vessel off the Long Island coast nearly a hundred miles at sea.

The rail frequents marshes and boggy swamps. The nest is built in a tuft of weeds or grasses close to the water, is compact and slightly hollowed. The eggs are cream or buff, sparsely spotted with reddish-brown and obscure lilac, from 1.20 to 1.28 inches long to .90 to .93 broad. The number in a set varies from six to twelve. The eggs are hatched in June.

The Virginia rail is almost exclusively a fresh-water bird. It is not averse to salt water, but even near the sea it is likely to find out those spots in the bay where fresh-water springs bubble up rather than the brackish. These springs particularly abound in Hempstead and Great South Bay on the south coast of Long Island. Brewster says the voice of the Virginia rail, when heard at a distance of only a few yards, has a vibrating, almost unearthly quality, and seems to issue from the ground directly beneath the feet. The female, when anxious about her eggs or young, calls *ki ki-ki* in low tones and *kiu*, much like a flicker. The young of both sexes in autumn give, when startled, a short, explosive *kep* or *kik*, closely similar to that of the Carolina rail.

There is said to be more of individual variation in this species than in any of the larger, scarcely two examples being closely alike. The chin and throat may be distinctly white, or the cinnamon may extend forward entirely to the bill. This species is found in almost any place where it can find suitable food. Nelson says: "I have often flushed it in thickets when looking for woodcock, as well as from the midst of large marshes. It arrives the first of May and departs in October; nests along the borders of prairie sloughs and marshes, depositing from eight to fourteen eggs. The nest may often be discovered at a distance by the appearance of the surrounding grass, the blades of which are in many cases interwoven over the nest, apparently to shield the bird from the fierce rays of the sun, which are felt with redoubled force on the marshes. The nests are sometimes built on a solitary tussock of grass, growing in the water, but not often. The usual position is in the soft, dense grass growing close to the edge of the slough, and rarely in grass over eight inches high. The nest is a thick, matted platform of marsh grasses, with a medium-sized depression for the eggs."

Some of the rails have such poor wings that it has been believed by some unthinking people that they turn to frogs in the fall instead of migrating – a theory parallel with that which formerly held that swallows hibernate in the mud of shallow ponds.

COTTON FABRICS

W. E. WATT, A.M

IT is a remarkable thing in the history of the United States that, when the iron shackles were about to fall from the bondman, he was caught by a cotton fiber and held for nearly a century longer. We were about to emancipate the slaves a century ago when Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin, multiplied cotton production by two hundred, and made slavery profitable throughout the South. The South Carolina legislature gave Whitney \$50,000 and cotton became king and controlled our commerce and politics.

Eight bags of cotton went out of Charleston for Liverpool in 1784. Now about six million bales go annually, and we keep three million bales for our own use. So two-thirds of our cotton goes to England. The cotton we ship sells for more than all our flour. Cotton is still king.

In our civil war we came very near being thrown into conflict with England by an entanglement of the same fiber which caught the black man. One of the greatest industries of England in 1861-5 was cotton manufacture, and when we, by our blockade system, closed the southern ports so cotton could not be carried out, we nearly shut down all the works in that country where cotton was made up. That meant hard times to many towns and suffering to many families. That is why so many Englishmen said we ought to be satisfied to cut our country in two and let the people of the Confederacy have their way.

Cotton is a world-wide product. It grows in all warm countries everywhere, sometimes as a tree and sometimes as a shrub. It is usually spoken of as a plant. There was cotton grown in Chicago last year. Not in a hot house, but in a back yard with very little attention. A little girl got some seed, planted it, and had some fine bolls in the fall. It is a pretty plant, and was cultivated in China nearly a thousand years ago as a garden plant.

Herodotus tells us that the clothing worn by the men in Xerxes' army was made of cotton. Their cotton goods attracted wide attention wherever they marched. Columbus found the natives of the West Indies clothed in cotton. Cotton goods is not only wide spread, but very ancient. Cloth was made from this plant in China twenty-one hundred years ago. At the coronation of the emperor, 502 A.D., the robe of state which he wore was made of cotton, and all China wondered at the glory of his apparel.

More capital is used and more labor employed in the manufacture and distribution of cotton than of any other manufactured product. There is one industry in Chicago which out-ranks cotton. It is the live-stock business. More money is spent for meat and live-stock products than for cotton, taking the whole country together. But cotton ranks first as a manufacture.

We spend more for meat than for cotton goods, and more for cotton goods than for wheat and flour. The hog and cotton seed have a peculiar commercial relation to each other. The oils produced from them are so nearly alike that lard makers use cotton seed oil to cheapen their output. A large part of what is sold as pure leaf lard comes from the cotton plant.

A hundred years ago a good spinner used to make four miles of thread in a day. This was cut into eight skeins. Now one man can do the work of a thousand spinners because of machinery. One gin does to-day what it took a thousand workers to do then. Five men are employed in the running of one gin, so the gin alone makes one man equal to two hundred. Because one workman cleans two hundred times as much cotton since Whitney's time as before, cotton-raising has become a broad industry. The reason more cotton was not raised in the olden times is that it could not be used. Now we can use as much cotton as we can possibly raise.

At first there was strong opposition to these improvements in machinery because the workmen felt their occupation would be taken away. But the cotton workers are to be congratulated, for there are four times as many men working in the cotton industries as there were a hundred years ago, and yarn thread is produced at less than one-tenth the cost while the workmen are all better paid for their labor.

James Hargreaves invented the spinning jenny in 1767. He was an illiterate man, and yet his machinery has not been materially improved upon. The poor fellow was mobbed by the infuriated workmen who saw that their labor was apparently to be taken from them by machinery. He was nearly killed. He sold out his invention and died in poverty. He received nothing from the government nor from the business world for his great invention. But after his death his daughter received a bounty.

Two years after the jenny, in 1769, Richard Arkwright invented the spinning frame. He was a barber by trade, but through the appreciation of crazy old George III., he was struck upon the shoulder with a sword and rose Sir Richard Arkwright. He amassed a great fortune from his invention. His spinning frame and Hargreaves' spinning jenny each needed the other to perfect its work. The jenny made yarn which was not smooth and hard. So it was used only for woof, and could not be stretched for warping. The result of the two inventions was a strong, even thread which was better for all purposes than any which had been made before.

Parliament imposed a fine of \$2,500 for sending American cotton cloth to England, and another for exporting machinery to America. Massachusetts at once gave a bonus of \$2,500, and afterwards \$10,000 to encourage the introduction of cotton machinery. Francis Cabot Lowell was an American inventor. He brought the business of weaving cotton cloth to this country. There had been some small attempts before his time, but he introduced it extensively and profitably. He established a cotton factory in Massachusetts in 1810, and was very successful. In that year he was in England, dealing with makers of cotton goods. The idea occurred to him that it would be more profitable to make the goods on his side of the water where the cotton was raised. He acted promptly. Lowell, Massachusetts, is named after him, and stands as a monument to his good judgment and inventive genius.

Three years after he had established the manufacture of cotton goods in this country, he invented the famous power loom. That was a great step in advance. It has done more for the industry than anything since the days of Hargreaves and Arkwright. By the use of power these looms set the spindles running at a remarkable rate of speed. Twenty years ago the world wondered at the velocity of our spindles, 5,000 revolutions in one minute. But it has kept on wondering ever since, and the speed of spindles has constantly increased as if there could be no limit. 15,000 revolutions are now common.

In Great Britain there are 45,000,000 spindles running at a wondrous rate, and 17,000,000 are running in America. With cheaper labor and more extended experience, they are doing more of it across the water than we. For our consumption we make all the coarse grades, but all the fine cottons are imported. They get large quantities of cotton now in India. Egypt also is a great cotton country, producing the best cotton grown with the one exception of our famous sea island cotton. Her crop is worth \$48,000,000 annually. England has hunted the world over for cotton and good cotton ground, and while we were engaged in war she was increasing her endeavors in this direction with much earnestness.

If you will notice the contents of a boll of cotton you will be surprised to find that the fiber is not the main thing there. The seed is far heavier than the fiber, and it really occupies more space when the two are crowded into their closest possible limits. You can press the cotton down upon the seed till the whole is but little larger than the seed.

The fiber clings to the seed with great firmness, and you find it difficult to tear them from each other. There is no wonder it was such a slow process to separate them in the good old days. The Yankee, Eli Whitney, went to Georgia to teach school, but by the time he arrived there the school was taken by another, and he was out of employment. That was a happy misfortune for him and for the country.

He was a nailer, a cane maker, and a worker in wood and metal. A Yankee nailer cannot be idle in a strange land. The expression, "as busy as a nailer," is a good one. Whitney looked about him to see what was the popular demand in his line. He found the greatest difficulty the southern people had to contend with was the separating of cotton from its seed. He went at the business of inventing a machine to do the work for them.

He placed a saw in a slit in a table so that cotton could be pushed against its teeth as it revolved. The teeth caught into the fiber and pulled it away from the seeds. As the seeds were too large to pass through the slit in the table they flew away as the fiber let go its hold upon them, and Whitney soon found he had solved the problem.

This is the first step in what may be called the manufacture of cotton fabrics. In another article we shall examine all the various sorts of textiles that are made from this interesting fiber, and speak of their manufacture, treatment, sale, and use.

Under Whitney's gin the bulky seeds soon began to pile up astonishingly, and it became customary to remove the gins as the piles of this useless seed accumulated. It was left to rot upon the ground in these heaps just as it fell from the gin. Another ingenious Yankee saw there was a great deal of material going to waste in these piles, and he experimented to see what could be done with the seed.

It was found to be very good for use on ground that had become poor by exhaustive farming. An excellent fertilizer is made from it. The cake is used for feed for cattle to great advantage. Dairymen regulate the quality and color of the milk they get from their cows by varying the amount of oil cake given in their food. The oil extracted from this seed is used in the arts. It is not equal to linseed oil for painters' use, but it is a great substance for use in mixing in with better oils to make them go farther. In other words, it is largely used for the purposes of adulterating other oils. Not only is it used in making lard, but it is now sold on its own merits for cooking purposes.

Two days out of New York we sighted the black smoke of a great steamer. At sea everybody is on the lookout for vessels and much interested in the passengers that may be on the craft casually met. So we kept watch of the horizon and were glad to see that a big one was coming our way. She was headed so nearly towards us that we hoped to get a good view of the many passengers that might be expected on so large a ship. When she was near enough to show some of her side, she looked rusty and ill kept. We wondered what the fare must be for a ride across the water on such a cheap-looking monster. As she came nearer we saw there were no passengers. "What is she?" "What does she carry?" The first mate told us she was a tank steamer, running between the United States and Belgium, carrying 4,200 tons of cotton-seed oil at a trip.

THE WISE LITTLE BIRD

A little cock sparrow sat on a limb
And shivered and shook and whined;
And his little mate went and sat by him
And asked what was on his mind.

"The snow comes down and the north wind blows,"
The little cock sparrow said.
"And the cold, cold world is so full of woes
That I wish that I were dead."

So his little mate chirped, "Come, fly with me,"
And they left that frosty limb,
And they fluttered about from tree to tree,
And she gayly chattered to him.

And the little cock sparrow forgot the snow
And the chilling wind that blew,
Nor thought again of his weight of woe;
He had something else to do.

THE GRASSHOPPER SPIDER

CHARLES CRISTADORO

OUT in the garden where the western sun flooded the nasturtiums along the garden wall, a large yellow and black-bodied spider made his lair. The driving rain of the night before had so torn and disarranged his web that he had set about building himself a new one lower down. Already he had spun and placed the spokes or bars of his gigantic web and was now making the circles to complete his geometric diagram.

From his tail he exuded a white, sticky substance, which, when stretched, instantly became dry. As he stepped from one spoke to another he would spin out his web and, stretching the spoke towards the preceding one, bring the fresh-spun web in contact with it and then exude upon the jointure an atom of fresh web, which immediately cemented the two parts, when the spoke settled back into place, pulling the cross web straight and taut. The process of house-building continued uninterruptedly, every movement of the spider producing some result. No useless steps were taken, and as the work progressed the uniformity of the work was simply amazing; every square, every cross piece, was placed exactly in the same relative position as to distance, etc. A micrometer seemingly would not have shown the deviation of .000001 of an inch between any two of the squares.

When the web was three-fourths finished a lusty grasshopper went blundering up against one of the yet uncovered spokes of the web and escaped. The spider noticed this and visibly increased his efforts and sped from spoke to spoke, trailing his never ending film of silky web behind him. At last the trap was set and, hastening to the center, he quickly covered the point with web after web, until he had a smooth, solid floor with an opening that allowed the tenant to occupy either side of the house at will. The spot was well selected, the hoppers in the heat of the day finding the heavy shade of the broad nasturtium leaves particularly grateful.

Our friend the spider had not long to wait for his breakfast, for presto! – a great, brown-winged hopper flew right into the net. Before he could, with his strong wings and powerful legs, tear the silken gossamer asunder and free himself, like lightning our spider was upon him. In the flash of an eye the grasshopper was actually enshrouded in a sheet of white film of web, and with the utmost rapidity was rolled over and over by the spider, which used its long legs with the utmost dexterity. Wound in his graveyard suit of white silk, the grasshopper became absolutely helpless. His broad wings and sinewy legs were now useless. The spider retreated to the center of the web and watched the throes of his prey. By much effort the hopper loosed one leg and was bidding fair to kick the net to shreds when the spider made another sally and, putting a fresh coating of sticky web around him, rolled him over once or twice more and left him.

In a few moments, when all was over, the spider attacked his prey and began his breakfast. Before his meal was well under way, a second hopper flew into the parlor of the spider and, leaving his meal, the agile creature soon had hopper number two securely and safely ensnared. No experienced football tackle ever downed his opponent with any such skill or celerity as the spider displayed as he rolled over and bundled up into a helpless web-covered roll the foolish and careless hopper.

"The spiders touch, how exquisitely fine!
Feels at each thread, and lives along the line."

THE BLUE-WINGED TEAL

(*Anas discors*.)

SO many names have been applied to this duck that much confusion exists in the minds of many as to which to distinguish it by. A few of them are blue-winged; white-face, or white-faced teal; summer teal, and *cerceta comun* (Mexico.) It inhabits North America in general, but chiefly the eastern provinces; north to Alaska, south in winter throughout West Indies, Central America, and northern South America as far as Ecuador. It is accidental in Europe.

The blue-winged teal is stated to be probably the most numerous of our smaller ducks, and, though by far the larger number occur only during the migrations, individuals may be found at all times of the year under favorable circumstances of locality and weather. The bulk of the species, says Ridgway, winters in the Gulf states and southward, while the breeding-range is difficult to make out, owing to the fact that it is not gregarious during the nesting-season, but occurs scatteringly in isolated localities where it is most likely to escape observation.

The flight of this duck, according to "Water Birds of North America," is fully as swift as that of the passenger pigeon. "When advancing against a stiff breeze it shows alternately its upper and lower surface. During its flight it utters a soft, lisping note, which it also emits when apprehensive of danger. It swims buoyantly, and when in a flock so closely together that the individuals nearly touch each other. In consequence of this habit hunters are able to make a frightful havoc among these birds on their first appearance in the fall, when they are easily approached. Audubon saw as many as eighty-four killed by a single discharge of a double-barreled gun.

"It may readily be kept in confinement, soon becomes very docile, feeds readily on coarse corn meal, and might easily be domesticated. Prof. Kumlein, however, has made several unsuccessful attempts to raise this duck by placing its eggs under a domestic hen. He informs me that this species is the latest duck to arrive in the spring." It nests on the ground among the reeds and coarse herbage, generally near the water, but its nest has been met with at least half a mile from the nearest water, though always on low land. The nest is merely an accumulation of reeds and rushes lined in the middle with down and feathers. This duck prefers the dryer marshes near streams. The nests are generally well lined with down, and when the female leaves the nest she always covers her eggs with down, and draws the grass, of which the outside of the nest is composed, over the top. Prof. Kumlein does not think that she ever lays more than twelve eggs. These are of a clear ivory white. They range from 1.80 to 1.95 inches in length and 1.25 to 1.35 in breadth.

The male whistles and the female "quacks."

The food of the blue-wing is chiefly vegetable matter, and its flesh is tender and excellent. It may be known by its small size, blue wings, and narrow bill.

Mr. Fred Mather, for many years superintendent of the State Fish Hatchery of Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island, domesticated the mallard and black duck, bred wood ducks, green and blue-winged teal, pin-tails, and other wild fowl. He made a distinction between breeding and domestication. He does not believe that blue-winged teal can be domesticated as the mallard and black duck can, *i. e.*, to be allowed their liberty to go and come like domestic ducks.

The hind toe of this family of ducks is without a flap or lobe, and the front of the foot is furnished with transverse scales, which are the two features of these birds which have led scientists to separate them into a distinct sub-family. They do not dive for their food, but nibble at the aquatic plants they live among; or, with head immersed and tail in air, "probe the bottom of shallow waters for small mollusks, crustaceans, and roots of plants." The bill acts as a sieve.

THE GRAY STUMP

NELL KIMBERLY MC ELHONE

"I BEG your pardon, my dear," said Mr. Flicker, "but you are quite mistaken. That is *not* a tree stump."

"Excuse me," said Mrs. Flicker gently, "but I still believe it is."

Now if they had been the sparrows, or the robins, or the red-winged blackbirds, they would have gone on chattering and contradicting until they came to using claws and bills, and many feathers would have been shed; but they were the quiet, well-bred Flickers, and so they stopped just here, and once more critically regarded the object in question.

"Whoever heard of a stump, old and gray and moss-covered, appearing in one night?" said Mr. Flicker, after a pause. "I have seen more of the world than you have, my dear, and I do assure you it would take centuries to make a stump like that." Let it be here recorded that in this Mr. Flicker was perfectly correct.

"Well, then," reasoned Mrs. Flicker, "if it is not a stump, *what is it?*"

Mr. Flicker looked very wise. He turned his head first to one side and then the other – flashing his beautiful scarlet crescent in the sunlight. Then he sidled nearer to his wife and darting his head down to her, whispered, "It is a *person*."

The timid Mrs. Flicker drew back into the nest in horror, and it was some moments before she felt like putting her head out of the door again. In the meantime she had quieted down to the thoughtful little flicker she really was, and had gathered together her reasoning powers. So out came the pretty fawn-colored head and again the argument began.

Though still quivering a little from the fright, Mrs. Flicker said, in the firm tones of conviction, "No, Mr. Flicker, *that* is not a person. Persons move about with awkward motions. Persons make terrible sounds with their bills. Persons have straight, ugly wings without feathers – not made to fly with, but just to carry burdens instead of carrying them in their bills. Persons wear colors that nature disapproves. Persons point things at us that make a horrible sound and sometimes kill. *Persons cannot keep still*. That is not a person."

Mr. Flicker was greatly impressed, and stood like a statue, gazing at what his wife called a gray stump. She went back to ponder the matter over her eggs.

The sprightly little warblers and goldfinches flashed in and out through the bushes that grew thickly together on a small island opposite Mr. Flicker's nest; the orioles called to one another in the orchard back of him; the catbirds performed their ever-varying tricks in the cherry tree near by; Mr. Water Wagtail came and splashed about on the shore of the creek, and Mr. Kingfisher perched on a stump in the water, watching for a dainty morsel, and still Mr. Flicker sat regarding his new puzzle. He paid no attention to any of his neighbors – but for that matter he seldom did, for the flickers are aristocratic bird-folk, and mingle very little with their kind. But on this day he was particularly oblivious, so greatly occupied was he with the gray stump.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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