

VARIOUS

BIRDS AND ALL NATURE,
VOL. VII, NO. 4, APRIL
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Various

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APRIL

These rugged, wintry days I scarce could bear,
Did I not know, that, in the early spring,
When wild March winds upon their errands sing,
Thou wouldst return, bursting on this still air
Like those same winds, when, startled from their lair,
They hunt up violets, and free swift brooks
From icy cares, even as thy clear looks
Bid my heart bloom, and sing, and break all care:
When drops with welcome rain the April day,
My flowers shall find their April in thine eyes,
Save there the rain in dreamy clouds doth stay,
As loath to fall out of those happy skies;
Yet sure, my love, thou art most like to May,
That comes with steady sun when April dies.

— *Lowell.*

THE PROCESSION OF SPRING

A morning of radiant lids
O'er the dance of the earth opened wide;
The bees chose their flowers, the snub kids
Upon hind legs went sportive, or plied,
Nosing, hard at the dugs to be filled;
There was milk, honey, music to make;
Up their branches the little birds billed;
Chirrup, drone, bleat, and buzz ringed the lake.
O shining in sunlight, chief
After water and water's caress,
Was the young bronze orange leaf,
That clung to the trees as a tress,
Shooting lucid tendrils to wed
With the vine hook tree or pole,
Like Arachne launched out on her thread.
Then the maiden her dusky stole,
In the span of the black-starred zone,
Gathered up for her footing fleet.
As one that had toil of her own
She followed the lines of wheat
Tripping straight through the field, green blades,
To the groves of olive gray,
Downy gray, golden-tinged; and to glades
Where the pear blossom thickens the spray
In a night, like the snow-packed storm;
Pear, apple, almond, plum;
Not wintry now; pushing warm.
And she touched them with finger and thumb,
As the vine hook closes; she smiled,
Recounting again and again,
Corn, wine, fruit, oil! like a child,
With the meaning known to men.

– *George Meredith.*

THE AMERICAN BITTERN

(*Botaurus lentiginosus*.)

THIS curious bird has several local names. It is called the "stake-driver," "booming bittern," and "thunder-pumper," in consequence of its peculiar cry. It was once thought that this noise was made by using a hollow reed, but the peculiar tone is possibly due to the odd shaped neck of the bird. Gibson says you hear of the stake-driver but can not find his "stake."

We have never seen a bittern except along water courses. He is a solitary bird. When alarmed by the approach of someone the bird sometimes escapes recognition by standing on its short tail motionless with its bill pointing skyward, in which position, aided by its dull coloring, it personates a small snag or stump or some other growth about it.

This bird has long legs, yellow green in color, which trail awkwardly behind it and serve as a sort of rudder when it flies. It has a long, crooked neck, and lengthy yellow bill edged with black. The body is variable as to size, but sometimes is said to measure thirty-four inches. The tail is short and rounded. In color this peculiar bird is yellowish brown mottled with various shades of brown above, and below buff, white and brown.

It is not a skillful architect, but places its rude nest on the ground, in which may be found three to five grayish brown eggs.

The habitat of the American bittern covers the whole of temperate and tropical North America, north to latitude about 60 degrees, south to Guatemala, Cuba, Jamaica and the Bermudas. It is occasionally found in Europe.

Frank Forrester included the bittern among the list of his game birds, and it is asked what higher authority we can have than his. The flesh is regarded as excellent food.

OUR LITTLE MARTYRS

GEORGE KLINGLE

Do we care, you and I,
For the song-birds winging by,
Ruffled throat and bosom's sheen,
Thrill of wing of gold or green,
Sapphire, crimson – gorgeous dye
Lost or found across the sky,
Midst the glory of the air;
Birds who tenderer colors wear?

What to us the free-bird's song,
Breath of passion, breath of wrong;
Wood-heart's orchestra, her life;
Breath of love and breath of strife;
Joy's fantasies; anguish breath;
Cries of doubt, and cries of death?

Shall we care when nesting-time
Brings no birds from any clime;
Not a voice or ruby wing,
Not a single nest to swing

Midst the reeds, or, higher up,
Like a dainty fairy-cup;
Not a single little friend,
All the way, as footsteps wend
Here and there through every clime,
Not a bird at any time?

Does it matter? Do we care
What the feathers women wear
Cost the world? Must all birds die?
May they never, never fly
Safely through their native air?
Slaughter meets them everywhere.

Scorned be the hands that touch such spoil!
Let women pity and recoil
From traffic barbarous and grave,
And quickly strive the birds to save.

LITTLE GUESTS IN FEATHERS

NELLY HART WOODWORTH

A BROOKLYN naturalist who gives much time to bird-study told me that as his rooms became overfull of birds he decided to thin them out before the approach of winter. Accordingly he selected two song sparrows and turned one of them adrift, thinking to let the other go the next morning.

The little captive was very happy for a few hours, flying about the "wild garden" in the rear of the house – a few square rods where more than 400 varieties of native plants were growing. It was not long, however, before a homesick longing replaced the new happiness and the bird returned to the cage which was left upon the piazza roof.

The next morning the second sparrow was given his freedom. Nothing was seen of him for a week, when he came to the window, beat his tired wings against the pane, and sank down upon the window sill so overjoyed at finding himself at home that he was fairly bursting with song. His throat trembled with the ecstasy; the feathers ruffling as the melody rose from his heart and deluged the air with sweetness. His joy was too complete for further experiment.

The first sparrow was again released only to return at nightfall and go promptly to bed at the general retiring hour.

This hour, by the way, varied indefinitely; the whole aviary accommodating their hours to those of their master, rising with him and settling for the night as he turned off the gas. After this same bird was repeatedly sent out, like Noah's dove, coming home at evening, till after many days it came no more – an implicit confidence in the rightness of all intention doubtless making it an easy prey to some evil design.

A handsome hermit thrush from the same aviary, domesticated in my room, after an hour or two "abroad" is as homesick for his cage as is a child for its mother.

When this bird came into my possession his open and discourteous disapproval of women was humiliating. His attitude was not simply endurance but open revolt, a deep-rooted hatred for the entire sex. When, after long weeks of acquaintance, this hostility was overcome he followed me about the room, stood beside me at my work, and has since been unchanging in a pathetic devotion.

He plants his tiny feet in my pen-tray and throws the pens upon the floor. He stands on tiptoe before the mirror, staring with curious eyes at the strange rival till awe is replaced by anger and the brown wings beat in unavailing effort to reach the insolent mimic. When shown a worm he trembles in excited anticipation, his little feet dancing upon the floor, his wings moving rapidly, while he utters a coaxing, entreating syllable. The song is sweetest when raindrops fall or when the room is noisy and confused. I notice, too, that he is more tuneful before a rain.

I must confess that he keeps late hours, that he is often busy getting breakfast when orthodox birds should be dreaming, his active periods being liable to fall at any hour of the night, more especially if there be a moon. An intensely sentimental nature may be unable to sleep when the beauty of the world is so strongly emphasized.

His last frolic was with a frog the children smuggled into the house, chasing it around the room, darting at it with wide-open beak, advancing and retreating in a frenzied merriment.

As the cage door is often left open he is sometimes "lost" briefly. At one of these times I decided that he had gone to sleep under the bed and would be quite safe till morning. Before day-light my mother called to me from the next room that there was "something in her bed," and, sure enough, the truant stood upon her pillow, his wings almost brushing her face.

The song of an indigo bird, kept in my room, is often followed by from two to four subdued notes of exceeding richness and sweetness. Aside from the ordinary song, sometimes reduced to the syllables, "meet, meet, I'll meet you," words unheard save by aid of a vivid imagination, the bird has an exquisite warble, loud and exhilarating, as rounded and velvety as the bluebird's.

When the bird became familiar with the room, its occupants and the sunshine streaming in through the window, his happiness crystallized in song, a rarely beautiful strain unheard before. The feathers on his throat would ruffle as a wave of song ran upward filling the room with a delicious music.

Unlike the hermit thrush, which has silent, preoccupied hours and is given to meditation, the indigo has no indolent days and is a happy, sunny-hearted creature.

His attitudes are like the catbird's – erecting crest, flirting body and tail, or drooping the latter in the precise manner of the catbird. Judged by indigo dress-standards, this bird is in an undress uniform, quite as undress as it is uniform; as somebody says, a result of the late moult.

For all this his changeable suit is not only becoming, but decidedly modern – warp of blue and woof of green that change with changing light from indigo to intense emerald. Then there are browns and drabs in striking contrasts – colors worn by indigoes while young and inexperienced, the confused shades of the upper breast replaced by sparrowy stripes beneath.

My bird is a night singer, pouring out his tuneful plaint as freely in the "wee, sma' hours," as when the sun is shining; its notes as sweet as if he knew that if we *must* sing a night song it should be sweet that some heart may hear and be the better for our singing. Later in the day a purple finch in the cedar tangle challenged the vocalist in notes so entrancing that one's breath was hushed involuntarily.

The same finch sang freely during the entire season in notes replete with personality, a distinct translation of the heart language. Others might sing and sing, but this superb voice rose easily above them all, a warbling, gurgling, effervescing strain, finished and polished in notes of infinite tenderness. Short conversations preceded and followed the musical ecstasy, a love song intended for one ear only, while wings twinkled and fluttered in rhythm with the pulsing heart of the melodist. No doubt he was telling of a future castle in the air beside which castles in Spain are of little value.

PLANTING THE TREES

What do we plant when we plant the trees?
We plant the ships which will cross the seas.
We plant the mast to carry the sails,
We plant the planks to withstand the gales —
The keel, the keelson, and beams and knee;
We plant the ship when we plant the tree.

What do we plant when we plant the tree?
We plant the homes for you and me.
We plant the rafters, the shingles, the floors,
We plant the studding, the laths, the doors,
The beams, the sidings, all parts that be;
We plant the home when we plant the tree.

What do we plant when we plant the tree?
A thousand things that we daily see.
We plant the spires that outtower the crag,
We plant the staff for our country's flag,
We plant the shade, from the hot sun free;
We plant all these when we plant the tree.

ORIGIN OF THE EASTER EGG

ELANORA KINSLEY MARBLE

NOW is the time of year when we feel called upon to inform our readers that the peacock does not lay the pretty colored Easter eggs.

This valuable bit of information the great American humorist feels called upon to make year after year, and though we elder folk smile, and the young query, how many of us are familiar with the history of the custom of observing the closing of Lent with the egg feast?

One must go back to the Persians for the first observance of the egg day. According to one of the ancient cosmogonies, all things were produced from an egg, hence called the mundane egg. This cosmogony was received in Persia, and on this account there obtained, among the people of that country, a custom of presenting each other with an egg, the symbol of a new beginning of time on every New Year's day; that is, on the day when the sun enters Aries, the Persians reckoning the beginning of the new year from that day, which occurred in March. The doctrine of the mundane egg was not confined to the limits of Persia, but was spread, together with the practice of presenting New Year's eggs, through various other countries. But the New Year was not kept on the day when the sun enters Aries, or at least it ceased, in process of time, to be so kept. In Persia itself the introduction of the Mohammedan faith brought with it the removal of New Year's day.

Among the Jews the season of the ancient New Year became that of the Passover, and among the Christians the season of the Passover has become that of Easter. Among all these changes the custom of giving an egg at the sun's entrance into Aries still prevails. The egg has also continued to be held as a symbol, and the sole alteration is the prototype. At first it was said to be the beginning of time and now it is called the symbol of the resurrection. One sees, therefore, what was the real origin of the Easter egg of the Greek and Roman churches.

From a book entitled "An Extract from the Ritual of Pope Paul V.," made for Great Britain, it appears that the paschal egg is held by the Roman church to be an emblem of the resurrection, and that it is made holy by a special blessing of a priest.

In Russia Easter day is set apart for paying visits. The men go to each other's house in the morning and introduce themselves by saying "Christ is arisen." The answer is "Yes, he is risen!" Then they embrace, exchange eggs, and sad to relate, drink a great deal of brandy.

An account of far older date says, "Every year against Easter day, the Russians color or dye red with Brazil wood a great number of eggs, of which every man and woman giveth one unto the priest of the parish upon Easter day in the morning. And, moreover, the common people carry in their hands one of these red eggs, not only upon Easter day but also three or four days after. And gentlewomen and gentlemen have eggs gilded, which they carry in like manner. They use the eggs, as they say, for a great love and in token of the resurrection whereof they rejoice. For when two friends meet during the Easter holidays, they come and take one another by the hand; the one of them saith, 'The Lord, our Christ, is risen!' The other answereth, 'It is so of a truth!' Then they kiss and exchange their eggs, both men and women continuing in kissing four days together."

There is an old English proverb on the subject of Easter eggs, namely: "I'll warrant you an egg for Easter." In some parts of England, notably in the north, the eggs are colored by means of dyeing drugs, in which the eggs are boiled. These eggs are called "paste" eggs, also "pace" and "pasche," all derived from "pascha" – Easter.

MORAL VALUE OF FORESTS

A COMPARATIVELY untouched phase of the question of forest destruction is brought out in a book called "North American Forests and Forestry," by Ernest Bruncken, a prominent western forester. The author incidentally discusses the part which our forests have had in shaping American character and our national history. This phase of the matter is interesting both as a historical study and as a suggestion of the moral as well as economic loss which must come with the denudation of our forest areas.

All thinking Americans know that the forests are an important factor in our commercial life, and Mr. Bruncken makes an impressive statement of the way in which the lumber industry permeates all the nation's activities. But the part played by the vast primeval forests in creating American character is not so generally realized. From the earliest colonial times the forests have had a moral and political effect in shaping our history. In the seventeenth century England was dependent upon Norway and the Baltic provinces for its timber for ships. This was in various ways disadvantageous for England, so the American colonists were encouraged with bounties to cut ship timbers, masts and other lumber for European export. This trade, however, was found to be unprofitable on account of the long ocean voyage, so the American lumbermen began to develop a profitable market in the West Indies. This was straightway interdicted by the short-sighted British government, and the bitter and violent opposition of the colonists against this tyrannical policy ceased only with the end of British dominion.

From that time to the present the forests of America have exercised a most important influence upon the nation, especially in creating the self-reliance which is the chief trait of the American character. The trappers, hunters, explorers and backwoods settlers who went forth alone into the dense forests received a schooling such as nothing else could give. As the forest closed behind the settler he knew his future and that of his family must henceforth depend upon himself, his ax, his rifle, and the few simple utensils he had brought with him. It was a school that did not teach the graces, but it made men past masters in courage, pertinacity, and resourcefulness. It bred a new, simple, and forceful type of man. Out of the midst of that backwoods life came Abraham Lincoln, the greatest example of American statesmanship the nation has produced. In him was embodied all the inherent greatness of his early wilderness surroundings, with scarcely a trace of its coarser characteristics.

As Mr. Bruncken says, mere remembrance of what the forests have given us in the past should be enough to inspire a wish to preserve them as long as possible, to stop wanton waste by forest fires, and even to repair our losses by planting new forests, as they do in Europe. The time has gone when the silence and dangers of the forest were our chief molders of sturdy character, but it is undeniable that the pioneer blood that still runs so richly in American veins has much to do with causing the idea of Philippine expansion to appeal so powerfully to the popular imagination. The prophets who see in the expansion idea the downfall of the nation forget that the same spirit subdued the American wilderness and created the freest government and some of the finest specimens of manhood the world has ever seen.

EASTER LILIES

Though long in wintry sleep ye lay,
The powers of darkness could not stay
Your coming at the call of day,
Proclaiming spring.

Nay, like the faithful virgins wise,
With lamps replenished ye arise
Ere dawn the death-anointed eyes
Of Christ, the king.

— *John B. Tabb.*

THE SCARLET IBIS

(*Guara rubra*.)

IBISES are distributed throughout the warmer parts of the globe and number, according to the best authorities, about thirty species, of which four occur in North America. The scarlet ibis is a South American species, though it has been recorded from Florida, Louisiana, and New Mexico. The ibises are silent birds, and live in flocks during the entire year. They feed along the shores of lakes, bays, and salt-water lagoons, and on mud flats, over which the tide rises and falls. Their food consists of crustaceans, frogs, and small fish.

Colonies of ibises build nests in reedy marshes, or in low trees and bushes not far from good feeding-grounds. Three to five pale greenish eggs, marked with chocolate, are found in the coarse, bulky nest of reeds and weed stalks.

These birds are not so numerous as they once were. They have been wantonly destroyed for their plumage alone, the flesh being unfit for food.

CHIPPY – A BABY MOCKING BIRD

MARTHA CROMBIE WOOD

ONE bright day early in August I sat by my window writing. My attention was soon attracted by a pair of mocking birds which were flying back and forth between a peach-tree and a plum-tree near by.

These birds having been near neighbors of mine for some time, I had named them Jack and Jill.

A family quarrel seemed brewing, for Jack evidently found more good points in the plum-tree and scolded Jill for spending any time in the peach-tree, while Jill was equally impressed with the favorable aspect of the peach-tree. I thought they were trying to decide upon a location for a nest and was soon convinced that I was right, for Jack ended the family disagreement by taking a twig in his bill and carrying it to the plum-tree, where he began balancing it among some of the small branches. His mate continued to scold from her place in the peach-tree, but when he paid no attention to her and went on with his work she soon relented and flew down to offer her assistance.

With very little difficulty these birds could carry a twig six or eight inches long and a quarter of an inch in diameter. Several of these large twigs were laid loosely among the forks of three small branches and then a more compact structure was placed upon this foundation. This was made of smaller twigs, with roots and stems of Bermuda grass twisted among them. A lining composed of horse hair, grass, cotton, a piece of satin ribbon some three inches long, bits of paper, string and rag completed the home.

There was very little weaving in the construction of the nest and the most wonderful as well as the most curious thing about it was how it could be made so loosely and not fall apart during the very high winds which we have in central Texas.

While the eggs were being hatched there was a violent storm which lasted all day, and several times I saw the tree bend nearly to the ground. Each time I was afraid I should see the destruction of this home, which had become so interesting to me. As I watched the tree writhe in the storm I began to appreciate the wisdom shown by the bird in the selection of the place for his nest, for it was in the part of the tree least disturbed by the wind and most thoroughly protected from the rain.

During the long nights the mocking bird often sang to his mate as she patiently sat on the nest.

Nothing can be more delightful than the song of our mocking birds, heard when the moonlight makes the night almost as light as the day and the south wind is laden with the delicious odors of roses and honeysuckle.

At last the eggs were hatched and five baby birds demanded food. The parent birds worked constantly from dawn till dark, but, from the loud "*ce-ce-ce*" which greeted them each time they neared the nest, one might suppose the supply of food never equaled the demand.

A young mocking bird seems all mouth and legs. He is a comical little creature with his scant covering of gray down, long legs, large feet and ever-open mouth, with its lining of bright orange.

As the old bird approaches the little ones squat flat in the nest, throw back their heads and open their enormous mouths, which must seem like so many bottomless pits to the parent birds when they are tired.

If my favorite cat, Mephistopheles, tried to take his nap anywhere in the vicinity of their nest Jack and Jill would fly at him, screaming, and, boldly lighting upon his head, try to peck at his eyes. He would strike at them and spit, but they would only fly upon the fence or rose-trellis and in a moment dart at him again. The battle would continue until Mephistopheles retired to a safer place.

I have seen many such battles, but never one where the bird was not victorious.

One morning, when the birds were still quite small, one of them tumbled from the nest. At first I thought the mother-bird might have pushed it out that it might learn to fly, but after seeing the feathers of its wings had only reached the tiny pin-feather stage, I knew it was too young for such efforts and concluded that the nest was overcrowded. I tried to put it in the nest for it was drenched with the dew from the grass.

Jack and Jill objected so seriously to my assistance that I had to give up this plan, for they flew at me just as they did at Mephistopheles. Fearing the cat would hurt it I was compelled to take it into the house.

Then my troubles began. It seemed to take all of my time to feed this one bird, and I could not imagine how Jack and Jill could take care of it and four others.

For awhile it seemed very much frightened, but at length began to chirp. The old birds answered at once and soon came to the screen on the window and called to it. Knowing they would feed it if they could reach it I had to keep it away from them, for, should they discover it was a prisoner, they would give it poison.

We named it Chippy and it soon became a great pet. Whenever anyone entered the room where it was its mouth flew open, and from its shrill "*chee-chee-chee*," one might easily imagine it was on the verge of starvation.

When I had had it a week it would try to fly from the floor to the lower rounds of a chair. When it had learned to fly, if left alone it would call until someone answered, and then follow the sound until it found them. I have known it to fly through two rooms, a downstairs hall, up the stair-steps, through the upper hall, and into my room in response to my whistle.

When it first made this journey it could fly only two or three feet at a time and had to fly from step to step up the stairway.

Soon after this I took Chippy out of doors. He was very much delighted when placed in a young hackberry tree, where he could fly from branch to branch. When he reached the top of the tree Jill flew into a tree near by and tried to coax him to come to her. I saw Chippy spread his wings and supposed I had lost my pet. Imagine my surprise when he gave a shrill scream and flew straight to me, lighting on my shoulder and nestling against my face.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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