

VARIOUS

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Various

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EASTER CAROL

Hepatica, anemone,
And bloodroot snowy white,
With their pretty wildwood sisters,
Are opening to the light.

Each blossom bears a message
That a little child may read,
Of the wondrous miracle of life
Hid in the buried seed.

In the woods and fields and gardens
We may find the blessed words
Writ in beauty, and may hear them,
Set in music by the birds.

It is Nature's Easter carol,
And we, too, with gladness sing,
For we see the Life immortal
In the promise of the spring.

– *Anna M. Pratt,*
From "Among Flowers and Trees with the Poets."

SPRING

O beautiful world of green!
When bluebirds carol clear,
And rills outleap,
And new buds peep,
And the soft sky seems more near;
With billowy green and leaves, – what then?
How soon we greet the red again!

G. Cooper, "Round the Year."

THE WINTER WREN (*Troglodytes hiemalis.*)

How rich the varied choir! The unquiet finch
Calls from the distant hollows, and the wren
Uttereth her sweet and mellow plaint at times.

– *Isaac McLellan, "The Notes of the Birds."*

The Winter Wren inhabits that part of North America east of the Rocky Mountains, breeding chiefly north of the United States and migrating at the approach of winter nearly or quite to the Gulf of Mexico.

This diminutive form of bird life, which is also called Bunty Wren and Little Log Wren, is a denizen of the forest, and it is more common in those forests found on bottom lands adjacent to rivers. It is a shy bird, and does not seek the intimacy of man as will its cousin, the house wren. It is seldom seen far above the ground. In many places where it does not seem abundant it may be quite common, for it readily eludes observation in the underbrush because of its neutral color. It frequents old logs, where it may be seen "hopping nimbly in and out among the knotholes and other hollow places, then flitting like a brown butterfly to another place of refuge on the too near approach of an intruder." Some one has said, "Its actions are almost as much like that of a mouse as of a bird, rarely using its wings except for a short flutter from one bush or stone-heap to another; it creeps slyly and rapidly about, appearing for an instant and is then suddenly lost to view."

The Winter Wren builds its nest in the matted roots of an overturned tree, in brush-heaps, in moss-covered stumps, or on the side of a tree trunk. It may be attached to a ledge of rock, and is occasionally found in some unoccupied building, especially if it be a log hut in the woods. The nest is very large and bulky when compared with the size of the bird. Dr. Minot describes a nest that he found in a moss-covered stump in a dark, swampy forest filled with tangled piles of fallen trees and branches. This nest was made of small twigs and moss. It had a very narrow entrance on one side, which was covered by an overhanging bit of moss, which the bird pushed aside on entering. The nests are usually more or less globular and thickly lined with feathers and hair.

This little brown bird, which carries its tail pertly cocked on high, is a notable singer. Many have described this song, or perhaps it is better to say have tried to do so. But words are too inadequate to portray this sweetest of woodland sounds. Reverend Mr. Langille says: "I stand entranced and amazed, my very soul vibrating to this gushing melody, which seems at once expressive of the wildest joy and the tenderest sadness. Is it the voice of some woodland elf, breaking forth into an ecstasy of delight, but ending its lyric in melting notes of sorrow?"

Of this song Florence A. Merriam says: "Full of trills, runs, and grace notes, it was a tinkling, rippling roundelay. It made me think of the song of the ruby-crowned kinglet, the volume and ringing quality of both being startling from birds of their size. But while the kinglet's may be less hampered by considerations of tune, the Wren's song has a more appealing, human character. It is like the bird itself. The dark swamps are made glad by the joyous, wonderful song."

And Audubon beautifully expresses the song as it appealed to him: "The song of the Winter Wren excels that of any other bird of its size with which I am acquainted. It is truly musical, full of cadence, energetic and melodious; its very continuance is surprising, and dull indeed must be the ear that thrills not on hearing it. When emitted, as it often is, from the dark depths of the unwholesome swamps, it operates so powerfully on the mind that it by contrast inspires a feeling of wonder and delight, and on such occasions has impressed me with a sense of the goodness of the

Almighty Creator, who has rendered every spot of earth in some way subservient to the welfare of His creatures.”

VOICES IN THE GARDEN

As the snows were being guarded on the mountain tops by the gentle herder Spring two small seeds, dropped from the same busy hand, fell so near together in a fresh furrow that they could hear each other shiver as they struck the cold, damp earth and were covered over by the same.

“How cold our bed is,” said seed number One, as a cold chill ran down her back.

“Yes,” replied seed number Two. “But we will soon get used to this cold, and when Father Sun sends the sunbeams to play on our top cover we will get warmth from their little hot feet.”

With this thought seed number Two snuggled down in her new bed of earth and pulled the tiny clods around her and shut her eyes to sleep. But seed number One still shivered and complained and wished that she was back in the paper package so loudly that all her companions in the furrow were disturbed, especially number Two, who was lying so near.

“Aren’t you feeling more comfortable?” asked seed number Two.

“No, I am not. I am freezing, and these cold clods are mashing me. I wish I was back in the paper though we were crowded on top of each other.”

“But you could not grow there.”

“No, but I could be more comfortable. If it takes these old black clods to make me grow I don’t know that I want to grow,” and she gave a sniff to show her contempt.

“Stop! You don’t realize what you are saying! You are near committing the unpardonable sin. Do you remember your promise to Mother Nature as she placed within your bosom the sacred germ of life? That promise which you gave to grow, at the first opportunity, and to do all within your power to become strong and vigorous, producing seeds in which she could place like germs. Then have you forgotten your dying mother’s request that you live up to this solemn promise?”

Seed number One did not reply, but gave a little rebellious grunt to show her state of feelings and remained silent.

This was a great relief to the other seeds, who were enduring the discomforts of their new and chilly environments with as much fortitude as possible, hoping and believing that their new home would yet become more comfortable. Finally all became quiet and they shut their eyes and waited and dreamed.

The cold, dark night was at last over. The seeds in their little dark chambers could not see this, but they knew it was so when they felt the warm influence of the sunbeams as it crept stealthily down through the damp soil and warmed their cold, wet wrappings. Oh, how it did revive them! They grew larger as they tried to express their thankfulness. The quickening power within pictured to them bright sunshine, refreshing showers and warm, balmy nights. But there they lay helpless in the dark, waiting and dreaming and dimly feeling that —

Instinct within that reaches and towers
And, groping blindly above for light,
Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers.

But the greatest change of all was in seed number One. She had spent the dark, cold night in thinking of the promise she had given and about which she had been reminded by seed number Two. Gradually the angry, rebellious feelings passed away and she began to realize how sinful her spirit had been. And now that the warm sunshine had turned the cold, wet clods into a blessing she most heartily felt ashamed of herself and could get no rest until she gave some expression to this feeling. She began by snuggling closer down among the clods and trying to make them feel that she was glad to be among them.

Then she whispered to them softly: "I am so sorry for the rude, impatient, angry words I spoke yesterday when I first came among you. Can you forgive me?"

"Certainly we will," said the big clod that the seed had accused of mashing her. "I know we are rough looking companions for a tiny seed and oftentimes we are forced, by influences from without, to act rudely. But Mother Nature knows our needs and will send water to soften our natures and men will lift and stir us about so that we can do our very best work in helping you and other seeds to perform life's obligations."

"Yes," replied the seed, "I now remember how my mother used to praise you and tell us children that the nice juicy food she brought for us to eat came from the soil surrounding her roots."

"I am glad you can remember us so kindly," responded the clod. "Though we are the lowest of God's creation, we are also the oldest, and He has most graciously used us as an instrument in performing His higher works. We hold a very humble place, and are trodden upon by all of His creatures, yet we are happy in realizing that we, too, have a direct commission from him and a part to perform in the creation of the great living world above us. Our most extensive and immediate work is helping Mother Nature to produce the vegetable kingdom, to which you belong, and we want you to feel," continued the clod, "that you are among friends who are waiting and anxious to serve you."

"Thank you," replied the seed; "you are very, very kind, and I am sure I shall learn to love you dearly." Saying this she crept down closer into the warm little crevice and the clod, absorbing the water that had been turned into the furrow, melted around her and gave her protection, moisture and food.

The next night did not seem so cold to the seeds. They had become better acquainted with the soil and through the influence of the sun and water were clasped more warmly and tenderly in his arms. There they lay and waited until the little germ within them began to stir and knock for egress. The kind soil had by his own virtues softened their walls so that it was not difficult for the swelling germs to make an opening through which they stretched tiny white hands and laid them lovingly into the strong ones of their benefactor. In these handclasps were pledged mutual co-operation, sympathy and love throughout life. "Useless each without the other."

No sooner had these little hands made sure of their hold upon the soil than there came an irrepressible longing in the heart bud to reach up and to know another world. In obedience to this call the little bud peeped out of its own hull and crept softly through the soil, up to the sunshine and air. There it unfolded two tiny leaves in thankfulness and praise to One who had made possible this new life. As the fullness of the higher world was comprehended, other leaves were thrown out until the little plant became a whorl of praise and gladness.

At this juncture new difficulties arose. These little leaves forgot their higher mission of love and praise and began to crowd and push each other, each striving to grow tallest and command the greatest space. As seeds number One and Two lay very near each other it was not long before their leaves came together in the air world. They had been so busy growing that they had talked but little to each other since the first night. Seed number One had grown so happy, gentle and meek that she was fast gaining friends on all sides. Every one regretted that they had so harshly condemned her. But now this new trial was a severe test to her genuine heart goodness. At first she made some show of patience, for seed number Two, her closest neighbor, was so unselfish and gentle in all that she did that there was little excuse to be otherwise. But no sooner did other leaves come into the space she considered her own than her leaves began to rustle and complain and to say: "It is no use for me to try to grow, crowded up like this. I wish I had been planted somewhere all by myself."

Then seed number Two gently whispered: "He who took you from your mother's dead arms, kept you from freezing during the cold winter months and prepared for you this nice loose furrow in which to grow had a right to plant you where He wished and to do with you what He thinks best. As for 'growing room,' there is likely to be plenty of it within a few days for all those who have the

good fortune to be here.” At this there was a rustle of surprise among the bystanders and they asked what she meant.

“I remember mother telling about her early life,” continued seed number Two, “how at first she and her companions were so crowded together that some lost all their beautiful green color and became white and sickly. But one day a girl, with a bucket on her arm and a knife in her hand, came and sat down near them. They all held their breath, not knowing what she intended to do. Then the girl took the knife and, catching a number of mother’s companions by the leaves, cut them off just below their bud. This she continued to do until her bucket was full. When she left there was plenty of room for those remaining to grow, but their hearts were sad and anxious.

“Each day the girl came back to some portion of the bed and acted in the same manner until the bunches were so scattering that the leaves did not touch each other. Each time mother expected that she would be one of the number and be cut off from the life she loved and in which she was hoping to redeem her promise to bear seeds for Mother Nature. Finally she and her companions began to notice that the girl always chose the largest and freshest looking bunches. Then some of them began to say: ‘What is the use of us trying our best to grow strong and vigorous? That very state endangers our lives. Mother Nature surely did not understand these surroundings when she exacted this promise from us!’ One bold, rebellious spirit said: ‘I am going to have my roots stop their work that my leaves may turn yellow and brown; and then I will get the wind to split and break them.’ ‘But,’ said mother, ‘that will be death.’

“‘Well, what does it matter? I would as lief die one way as another,’ gruffly responded the bold speaker.

“Most of mother’s companions nodded their assent, so she said nothing more until she had time to quietly think over the matter. That night mother stood, awake, looking up at the stars and trying to know what was best to do. Finally, when the first whispers of morning could be heard, they brought her this message: ‘Always and under all circumstances do your best. Live up to the highest and noblest within you and leave the result to Him who knows the heart.’

“Then there came peace and courage, and mother rose above the fear of death and resolved that she would not relax one effort to grow and carry out in detail the promise she had given. She was convinced that Mother Nature wanted her best each day rather than a mere existence in order that she might bear some puny seeds.

“Several days went by and the girl did not appear. The contrast became greater and greater between mother and her companions. She stood erect, holding her broad green leaves up to the sun, while in the midst of them could be seen a young, vigorous seed stalk crowned with the precious promises of the future. The leaves of her companions were fast turning yellow and brown and their whole attitude was dejected and forlorn.

“One day they heard voices in the garden. They thought this must be the girl coming to fill her bucket. All eyes were turned toward mother. They felt sure she would be the first chosen. But mother was calm and possessed, rejoicing in the knowledge that she had lived up to her higher duties and therefore was better prepared to either be cut down or left standing as fate would decide.

“As the voices came nearer they recognized the owner of the garden and with her John, who had always been their good friend, pulling up the weeds and loosening the soil around their roots. The owner and John were soon standing beside the bed where mother and her companions grew, and then the voice of the woman could be heard saying: ‘John, this bed is doing no good. The season is about over, anyway, so you can spade it up and sow it to early turnips. But look!’ and the woman stooped and touched mother’s crisp leaves. ‘Isn’t this a beautiful specimen of fine lettuce? John, you may leave this bunch for seed.’

“So it came about that mother only, of all her companions, was allowed to complete a natural life and to realize the hope that we all have in common.”

As seed number Two finished this narrative they were all very thoughtful and felt more considerate for each other in their crowded condition.

Sure enough, within the next day or two a woman with a pan and knife came down the row and began to thin out their number. Seed numbers One and Two trembled as she passed them, but she did not stop to take either.

That evening seed number One whispered to her companion: "You are very fortunate to have had such a noble mother. I know now why it is so easy for you to be patient and good."

"Ah! you do not know nor understand, or you would not call me good nor think that it is easy for me to be always patient. I love and honor the memory of my mother, but she does not possess the power to make me good. Mother Nature holds each of us responsible for our own acts and judges us accordingly."

After a thoughtful silence seed number One said: "I am growing to try to be good and to grow strong and upright," and she stretched herself a little bit higher in her own effort to appear so.

A few days after this a small, tiny worm came creeping and shivering along the ground and stopped first under the leaves of seed number One and asked for a nibble.

"No," replied the seed, "my leaves must be kept whole and beautiful, for it is only in this way that I can be my best self and thereby win Mother Nature's approval."

"But I am starving," replied the worm. "I cannot find a morsel to eat anywhere. Please give me one of your under leaves that I may gain strength to crawl on and hunt other food. I do not ask your life, but only a bit of your under leaves, which you can well spare."

"But it will spoil my appearance," said the seed, "and Mother Nature wants me to be beautiful. And then I can't bear to have a nasty worm touch me," and she rustled and drew up her beautiful green leaves to show her disgust.

"Very well," said the worm, "I will not take by force what you are not willing to give through mercy. Some day you will know me better," and the worm crawled away.

He stopped at seed number Two and made the same request. At first she hesitated, but seeing how near starved the poor worm was and how humbly and meekly he asked for the food, she relented.

"I know," said the seed, "you will spoil the appearance of my leaves and I shall look shabby among my companions, but knowing that you, too, are one of Mother Nature's children, I cannot believe that she would have me withhold life from you. Therefore, I give you of my leaves as giving unto her, leaving the result with her."

The worm most heartily thanked the seed and began eating. He stayed a day or two, making several large holes through the under leaves, but at the end of that time he had become strong and vigorous, and again thanking her, he crawled away.

Several days after the worm had departed and seeds numbers One and Two had grown to be quite large bunches, the woman with her knife came down the row. She seemed to be in a great hurry and was gathering the largest bunches as she came along. When she reached the two companions she stooped and laid her knife at the root of number Two, but noticing the holes in her leaves she quickly changed to seed number One and the knife went home. Poor seed number One fell over on her side and was gathered up and placed in the pan. The woman passed on and seed number Two was left standing, but shaking with the emotions of fear, thankfulness and regret. For after all, she loved seed number One and was truly sorry that she had been taken.

All that afternoon seed number Two remained very quiet and her companions knew why.

"How strange!" they murmured. "What we thought was her degradation and destruction has really been her salvation."

And they looked upon her with awe and whispered:

"How strange! How strange!"

M. Alice Spradlin.

THE LECONTE'S SPARROW (*Ammodramus leconteii*.)

The Leconte's Sparrow has an interesting history. It was first discovered and named by Audubon in 1843. Later, his account seemed almost a myth, for no more individuals were taken, and even the specimen on which he based his published report of the new species was lost. It was not seen again until Dr. Coues rediscovered it in 1873, obtaining his specimens on the Turtle Mountain, near the border of Dakota.

Of their habits, Dr. Coues says: "In their mode of flight the birds resemble wrens; a simile which suggested itself to me at the time was that of a bee returning home laden with pollen; they flew straight and steady enough, but rather feebly, as if heavily freighted for their very short wings."

Its range is quite extensive, for it is found from the Great Plains eastward through Illinois and Indiana and from Manitoba southward. During the winter months it frequents the States bordering the Gulf of Mexico. This Sparrow is often seen in the stubble of grain fields which have become covered with grass and low weeds, to the cover of which it will retreat when frightened. In this respect it resembles the grasshopper sparrow, and like it is easily overlooked. Mr. Nelson found it on moist prairies that were covered with a growth of coarse grass. It is also frequently seen in the swampy prairies of the Mississippi bottom lands.

Mr. Oliver Davie quotes the following description of the bird's habits from an observer who studied their habits in Manitoba, where they nest extensively: "Leconte's Sparrows are fairly numerous in Manitoba. Their peculiar note can be heard both day and night in fine weather; the only sound I can compare it to is the note of the grasshopper. It is one of the most difficult of all the small birds to collect that I know of. They are great skulkers. I have often followed them, guided by their chirping, in the grass until I was sure the bird was not more than a few yards away; then he would suddenly 'crowd on all sail' and dart away at a high rate of speed, gyrating from side to side in a manner that would test the skill of any collector."

The nests are described as concealed in a thick tuft of grass and are rather deep and cup shaped. They are constructed of fine grass and fibers.

Though this elegant little Sparrow baffled bird lovers for so many years, it is now known to be abundant in many localities, and it is only because of its peculiar and retiring habits, living as it does in grassy places not easily accessible, that it is not more often observed.

EASTER LILIES

The one delight of Grace Newton's life was to visit Aunt Chatty White. Winter or summer, autumn or spring – no matter what the season nor how bright or how gloomy the weather – there was sure to be found some unusually fascinating pleasure or employment. There were books of every description with which to while away the winter days. And in summer the trees were full of fruit, the yard with flowers, the fields and garden with good things, while the birds saucily claimed possession of all.

But when she was told by Mamma that she should open Easter with Aunt Chatty her heart was a-flutter with a joy not known before. Easter – her first away from home! And she was sure that there would be presents, and new books to read, and new stories to hear, and rabbits' nests to visit, and – well, it would be the gladdest Easter of her life, she was certain.

It was Good Friday when she arrived at her aunt's quiet country home. The winter was dying away and spring was making itself known and felt, while a few birds were venturing to sing of summer's return. The buds were swelling, the lawns and meadows were becoming green, and in the woods Grace was sure she could find, should she try, a violet, a bloodroot bloom, or a dainty snowdrop. For these were the first flowers, and sometimes appeared, her mother told her, before the snow was fairly gone.

A surprise awaited her, however; for, as she was wandering aimlessly about the garden borders that afternoon, she suddenly came upon a bed of golden buds and blossoms. After gazing at them a few moments to make sure she was not dreaming, she hastened away to Aunt Chatty for an explanation.

“Why, dearie, those are Easter flowers,” laughed her aunt.

“But I thought Easter lilies were white.”

“Not all of them. I have some white ones – in another part of the garden. Those you saw are daffodils and jonquils.”

“John – who?” queried Grace, in astonishment.

“Jonquils,” repeated Mrs. White, amused not a little at Grace's ignorance and wonder. “Come! I'll show you which is which.”

Grace ran on ahead, and was minutely inspecting the tender young blossoms when her aunt arrived.

“The large double yellow ones are daffodils. Those across yonder are the white ones. Wait!” she called, for the impatient child had already started toward the bed of more familiar lilies. “Here are the jonquils – these with cups. Really the name for these, both the yellow and the white, is Narcissus. Presently I'll tell you how they came to have that name. There are twenty or thirty kinds, but the most perfect forms grow in Europe and Japan. Cultivation has done a great deal for the Narcissus, both in this and other countries, but these of mine are but the old-fashioned sort that grandmother planted here. Now let's go see the white ones. Will they be in full bloom for Easter?”

“Yes,” replied Grace. “See, here are two now. Mamma has this kind,” and she fondled the snowy blossoms as though they were friends of long standing.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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