

VARIOUS

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Various Birds and Nature, Vol. 12 No. 1 [June 1902]

JUNE

O month whose promise and fulfillment blend,
And burst in one! it seems the earth can store
In all her roomy house no treasure more;
Of all her wealth no farthing have to spend
On fruit, when once this stintless flowering end.
And yet no tiniest flower shall fall before
It hath made ready at its hidden core
Its tithe of seed, which we may count and tend
Till harvest. Joy of blossomed love, for thee
Seems it no fairer thing can yet have birth?
No room is left for deeper ecstasy?
Watch well if seeds grow strong, to scatter free
Germs for thy future summers on the earth.
A joy which is but joy soon comes to dearth.

— *Helen Hunt Jackson.*

WAY OF JUNE

Dark-red roses in a honeyed wind swinging,
Silk-soft hollyhock, colored like the moon;
Larks high overhead lost in light, and singing —
That's the way of June.

Dark red roses in the warm wind falling
Velvet leaf by velvet leaf, all the breathless noon;
Far off sea waves calling, calling, calling —
That's the way of June.

Sweet as scarlet strawberry under wet leaves hidden,
Honeyed as the damask rose, lavish as the moon,
Shedding lovely light on things forgotten, hopes forbidden —
That's the way of June.

— *Pall Mall Gazette.*

THE SWALLOW-TAILED KITE

(Elanoides forficatus.)

Hawks in highest heaven hover,
Soar in sight of all their victims:
None can charge them with deception,
All their crimes are deeds of daring.

— Frank Bolles, “*The Blue Jay.*”

The late Dr. Cones enthusiastically writes of the beauty of the Swallow-tailed Kite in the following words:

“Marked among its kind by no ordinary beauty of form and brilliancy of color, the Kite courses through the air with a grace and buoyancy it would be vain to rival. By a stroke of the thin-bladed wings and a lashing of the cleft tail, its flight is swayed to this or that side in a moment, or instantly arrested. Now it swoops with incredible swiftness, seizes without a pause, and bears its struggling captive aloft, feeding from its talons as it flies. Now it mounts in airy circles till it is a speck in the blue ether and disappears. All its actions, in wantonness or in severity of the chase, display the dash of the athletic bird, which, if lacking the brute strength and brutal ferocity of some, becomes their peer in prowess – like the trained gymnast, whose tight-strung thews, supple joints, and swelling muscles, under marvelous control,

enable him to execute feats that to the more massive or not so well conditioned frame would be impossible. One cannot watch the flight of the Kite without comparing it with the thoroughbred racer.”

The Swallow-tailed Kite inhabits the southern United States as far north as the Carolinas. In the interior, it frequents the Mississippi valley, commonly as far north as Minnesota and westward to the Great Plains. As a casual visitor, it is found in New York, New England and Canada. Though some may winter within the United States, the majority make their winter home in Central and South America.

Swallow-like, this Kite never seems contented unless coursing through the air. There is its home and it seems to frequent trees but little except during the breeding season, when “flocks consisting of from two or three to ten or twelve birds, but oftener of three, may be seen following one another around, frequently uttering their calls and circling in and out among the tree tops so fast as to make one dizzy to look at them.” It captures its food, eats and drinks while on the wing, and some one has said that he often wondered if it did not, at times, even sleep while flying. Its wonderful endurance and power of flight have more than once taken it across the ocean, where it has happily surprised the ornithologists of Europe.

The legs of the Swallow-tailed Kite are so short that they are practically useless for locomotion and it seldom lights on the ground. Like the marsh hawks, it obtains its food while flying

close to the ground; or, if its prey be an insect, it pursues it in the air. Dragon flies are dainty morsels for this graceful bird. At no time is the Kite's alertness and control of every muscle in its body more clearly shown than when it is pursuing these insects. The peculiar zigzag and vacillating flight of the dragon fly must puzzle the keenest vision, yet this bird will instantly change the direction of its flight, swooping downward, upward or to the side, without a moment's hesitation, and sometimes in order to secure the fly "it is necessary for it to turn completely over in its evolutions." It also feeds extensively on snakes and other reptiles, insect larvæ and grasshoppers. It is very useful in cotton fields, which it frequents, feeding on the cotton worm and other injurious insects. The smaller snakes, however, form a large part of the Kite's diet and they are so frequently seen with these reptiles in their talons that in the south they are sometimes called Snake Hawks. So far as known, they do not capture the smaller birds or mammals.

The Swallow-tailed Kite usually builds its nest in the tallest trees of wild localities, where it is quite concealed by the foliage of the smaller branches. The nest is often constructed with sticks and twigs, but when obtainable, Spanish moss or the fibrous inner bark of the cottonwood is used to make a thick and substantial lining. Some observers state that the material is collected by the female, but that the male assists in the construction of the nest. He is certainly a faithful mate, for during the period of incubation she seldom leaves the nest and he brings food to her. Both birds

assist in feeding the young. During this time, both sexes are vicious and will attack any intruder, be it bird, beast or even man.

An interesting habit of this Kite is its method of leaving its nest. It does not fly from the side, but seems to rise directly upward, "as if it were pushed up with a spring." On alighting, it hovers over the nest and with an almost imperceptible motion of its wings gently lowers itself until the nest is reached.

The antics of the Swallow-tailed Kite during the mating season are particularly interesting. An observer of bird life says: "Of all aerial performances I have ever witnessed, the mating of the Swallow-tailed Kite excels. Ever charming and elegant, they outdo themselves at this season. In Becker County, Minnesota, in the spring of 1886, they chose as their mating ground an open space over the mouth of an ice-cold brook that made its way out from a dark, tangled larch swamp. From my boat on the lake I had an excellent view of them. All the afternoon seven of these matchless objects sported, chasing each other here and there, far and near, sailing along in easy curves, floating, falling and rising, then darting with meteor-like swiftness, commingling and separating with an abandon and airy ease that is difficult to imagine. The next day three pairs were selecting nesting sites."

TO THE BIRDS

Dear birds, an easy life was yours
E'er man, the slayer, trod
Your earth from all its seas and shores
Went up your praise to God.

What though to weasel, stoat and fox
Your toll of lives you paid,
And hungry hawks might tithe your flocks
That through the woodland play'd?

Short fears were yours and sudden death,
Long life and boundless room;
No cities choked you with their breath,
Or scared you with their gloom.

Pure streams and quiet vales you had;
No snare nor line nor gun
Made war against your legions glad
That wanton'd in the sun.

Hope on, and some day you shall see,
When these ill days have end,
That man the slayer — who but he? —
Is changed to man, the friend.

– *Henry Johnstone.*

OLD-FASHIONED OUTINGS

PART I

The western shore of Gloucester harbor rises in a succession of wooded ridges from the sea-rocks, which redden westward to a degree fully bearing out the sketching-books in the statement that rocks are among the most highly colored of objects. – A sketch is brought home. – “Your rocks are too red.” “Too red!” exclaims the aggrieved sketcher, “they aren’t half red enough. They fairly blazed!” These rocks abound in chasms where trap-dikes have worn away; and when some trap is left, the contrast in color is very striking, but the main charm of this shore is the intimate association of woods with rocks and water. Next the rocks, as a rule, on high knolls and hedges thinly veiled with a dry, light soil stand the pitch pines, those gnarled and fragrant dwarfs with their stout prickly needles and prevailing shape of a double umbrella. Under favorable circumstances these grow quite tall. The Lone Pine, standing in a low, moist place near the mouth of a creek, attained a height of thirty or forty feet, and its characteristic, interesting shape was long a landmark on that shore. Great was the sorrow when it fell. Fortunately a portrait of it still exists.

The white pines stand back from the water on their great purple trunks, and rain their rust-red needles down among the purple boulders of exactly the same shade, which encumber

lowland and hillside, while trunks and boulders are alike besprinkled with lichens of palest green. Some giants used to shade the new road where it passes the Red Brook; and the perfect level, deep shadow and general dampness somehow recalled the Wood at the Hague, although that is beech forest. Oaks clothe the more easterly ridges or stand alone in open pastures near the shore, but the present tendency of fields which have lain open since our infancy to grow up to woodland in the last half-dozen years is deplored if not resented.

A ruined stone wall with a hedge-row running down toward the water divides two dear familiar fields bounded by woodland on either hand, and in the row once stood alone a delightful white pine with double crown. Through these fields we pass on our way to certain parts of the shore, and we always had a view of rocky headland, white sails and dancing water, over a sloping foreground dotted with fern and yellow St. John's wort or golden-rod and asters, according to season, while we paused to pick blue curls and Nuttall's polygala or spiranthus and little purple gerardia. At present that stylish pine is all mixed up with dowdy maples and poplars, the water view is completely blocked, and we wedge our way with difficulty where we once stepped freely along a tiny track beaten hard in the thin sunburnt pasture grass, running diagonally to a breach in the wall flanked by barberries, and out into the big field which, dipping suddenly to the level of the beach, becomes a grassy swamp. Half way down stands a magnificent pitch pine of most luxuriant growth and very

peculiar shape, quite tall, yet stretching one broad curving arm down the slope close to the ground, like a great delicious tufted green mattress. The path, bearing a little to the right, comes out on the beach, while beyond the swamp the land rises in quite a high "hog-backed" hill, of which, after a very considerable dip on the outside, enough is left to form a very bold shore.

Ah, what a view! two views, in fact, from that outpost, the inland slope of that hill eastward, up the harbor, over a bold headland clothed all but the crown in oak woods, beautiful background to a pretty cove beyond the sloping pasture; and westward past the Rock, along the wooded shore of Norman's Woe to the cliffs at Rafe's Chasm and the sunset. One fairy sunset there was never matched anywhere in my experience, the sky one dome of soft luminous pink, the sea another sky, the earth translucent floating between, like the firmament that divided the waters.

A little way back from that shore ran in our day over hill, dale and brook an old grass-grown road, by each brook a ruined cellar, reputed trace of Acadian dwelling. The hills are among the sharpest little pitches ever seen. Driving at our ease about New England nowadays, we are fain to exclaim: Of a truth our forefathers would seem to have climbed hills by preference (and laid stone walls for exercise). But swamps were their horror, and the poor creatures had to thread their way through mazes of them. There can be no doubt that these wet areas are much restricted now, leaving us but a faint idea of ancestral difficulties

in this regard; but even up to our time grandmothers told awe-struck children fragments of half-forgotten stories of the horrors of the swamps. Ours told of an already nameless young soldier, perhaps in the Great Swamp Fight, who, sinking slowly before the eyes of his comrades, pushed his watch to them over the bog, bidding them take it back to his mother. How it was they could do nothing to help him, did not appear.

The Magnolia Swamp lies north of the ridges, and some magnolia trees grow in an arm of it more accessible than the rest. Long before you reach a tree the dead swamp air is redeemed by their fresh fragrance if any flowers are in bloom; and redeemed is well said; for the swamp-air of the dog days is rendered doubly oppressive by millions of stiff white spikes borne by the obnoxious clethra in odor “overbearin’ and upsettin’,” – as Aunt Semantha said widders were in temper. You enter over turf wherein remain divers small deep swamp-holes surrounded by crimson calopogon, yellow-eyed grass, white cotton-grass and the pretty little yellow-horned bladder root. Further in, the path becomes miry, and you have to put aside the long swaying wands of the swamp loosestrife with its whorls of magenta bloom, and catch at the shrubs to keep you out of the mud. (At this point the poison sumach officiously tenders aid), but the path to your goal, the magnolia tree, leads aside into the bush where the footing is perfectly hard and peculiarly flat; and it doesn’t exactly quake and doesn’t exactly sound hollow, yet something tells you the bog is beneath, and you are walking on a crust.

To return to the old road: it forded two brooks, the Red Brook which runs into the sea behind Norman's Woe Rock, and the White Brook which runs out (amid much ivy) over the rocky beach by the Dry Chasm. The Red Brook must have been much bigger formerly, for it turned a saw-mill before 1700, and the ruined dam is still to be seen a little way below the ford, where it serves as a bridge. This brook is charged with coloring-matter from the swamps, so that it lines your tin cup with gold (if you chance to have "escaped from the Bastille of civilization"), and it furnishes the most unsatisfying draught ever swallowed. Not a drop ever seems to go lower than your collar-button. It makes one thirsty to think of it. But it was lovely to look at! It ran out of a great bed of cardinal, jewel-weed and raspberry-bushes (which bore monstrous berries because they stood with their feet in the water) and spread out in a big red pool at the foot of a gentle dip in the grassy road; and from the upper level you looked over the brook at a preternaturally steep little pitch beyond, where the road climbed a pine-clad hill, bowing out to the very verge of the dark descent to a ferny swamp, cradle of the brook. The dark background was faced with bright growth, and all in the light of sweet summer mornings with water sparkling in the bay and in the brook! Above, the road turned sharply, broadening into a level glade set round with barberry-bushes, door-yard of a vanished dwelling, and then turned another corner round the cellar and away. This was a cherished haunt. A little sidelong, slippery path, parallel with the brook led down a rugged slope of

pine and cedar to a little bluff behind Norman's Woe Rock.

Here we camped out before that way of life became general, except for Uncle Sam. He had just been camping out on a large scale, and so it chanced that two large round tents and sundry new rubber blankets came our way and did not go a-begging. The Red Brook filled our kettles in a shady little glen with sides so steep we had to lower and raise ourselves by the trees, and then it ran away and spread out over the sea-rocks in a series of big, shallow basins – a famous dressing-room – but the way to it was of the roughest, for the red rock scaled off, and literally cut the soles from our boots.

The summer of 1865 was very dry, and so was the brook in many places. Therefore we slept in peace in our tents; but the next year the mosquitoes fairly drove us out, and we were fain to betake ourselves and our bed-sacks down that jagged path to the rocks just above high-water mark where the mosquitoes left us alone until four o'clock. Then they descended in force, and we had to get up. The crows wanted us to get up at three, at which unseemly hour they used to be discussing mussels at the other end of the rough bar between us and the Rock. We, on the other hand, held that meals attended with clamor, especially at such an hour, were "tolerable and not to be endured," and so arose one of those painful differences not uncommon between neighbors who cannot sympathize with each other's needs. Remonstrance growing vain, one of the family employed a rifle; a convincing argument apparently, for the sitting dissolved instantly, and

gathered no more.

Having learned the constellations at school, we had been poking our heads out of window at all hours to see things that were not up when we went to bed; and we thought it would now be very convenient to observe these matters from our beds without stirring, but we never did. Dear Robert Louis in the course of his donkey-drive averred, on the authority of shepherds and old folk, that “to the man who sleeps afield – there is one stirring hour – when a wakeful influence goes abroad over the sleeping hemisphere, and all the outdoor world are on their feet.” But we knew nothing of it, perhaps because we never went to bed with the fowls, and had no cows or sheep to browse around us. At all events – and we were really disappointed – that starry show was thrown away on us. Nobody ever woke.

But we woke one morning in a thick fog, with the Boston boat shouting its way out past us, and water standing in the dimples in our blankets enough to wash our faces very passably if we had had no better chance. When the sun broke through, some one faced it and struck up:

“When the sun gloriously – ”

and the rest, like so many troop-horses, bounded and stood in choir-order and went on:

– “comes forth from the ocean,
Making earth glorious, chasing shadows away,

Then do we offer Thee our prayer of devotion:
God of the fatherless, guide us, guard us today.”

The other verse we sometimes sang at sunset, undaunted in our heyday by its melancholy tone, and then we piled a big fire of the fragrant red cedar to light our supper table and our evening. Pretty silver-mounted trinkets cut from the rich heart of this thenceforth precious wood, and polished on the spot, are still in being, ready, as our camp-laureate had it,

“To sing in praise
Of summer days
In camp at Norman’s Woe.”

— *Helen Mansfield.*

THE ALICE'S THRUSH

(Turdus aliciae.)

Alice's Thrush, or the Gray-cheeked Thrush, has an extensive range covering the whole of North America from the Atlantic coast westward to the Plains and northward to the regions beyond the Arctic Circle and is abundant along the Arctic Coast. Mr. Ridgway says: "This bird and the robin are the only species of our thrushes that cross the Arctic Circle to any distance, or reach the shores of the Arctic Ocean. It occurs from Labrador all around the American Coast to the Aleutian Islands." It also frequents Siberia. From its breeding grounds in northern North America, on the approach of winter, it migrates southward to Central America, and finally reaches Costa Rica.

Alice's Thrush closely resembles the olive-backed thrush with which it is frequently associated during its migrations. When thus associated, only the trained eye of an expert can discriminate between them. The two may be distinguished, however, by the much stronger buff coloring on the throat and breast, and on the sides of the head around the eyes, of the olive-backed species.

Alice's Thrush is a shy bird during the nesting period and remains within the friendly shelter of thickets and though unseen "their low sweet song is frequently heard." Mr. Ridgway says: "The notes are said to be quite distinctive, the song being most

like that of the hermit thrush, 'but differs in being its exact inverse,' beginning with its highest and concluding with its lowest notes, instead of the reverse." However, when their family cares are over, their retiring nature disappears to a great extent and they seem to seek a closer association with the habitation of man and frequent more open places in the vicinity of villages. In his report on "The Birds of Alaska," Mr. E. W. Nelson says that during the period following the breeding season and before the migration begins, "many are killed by the native boys, armed with their bows and arrows. Their skins are removed and hung in rows or bunches to dry in the smoky huts and are preserved as trophies of the young hunter's prowess. In the winter festivals, when the older hunters bring out the trophies of their skill, the boys proudly display the skins of these thrushes and hang them alongside."

So closely does this bird resemble some of its sister thrushes that it was not until the year 1858 that its distinctive characteristics were recognized and it was given a name of its own. In that year it was described from specimens collected in southern Illinois by the eminent naturalist Robert Kennicott and his sister Alice.

For many years it was considered a rare bird, for in its typical form it is only a migrant in the United States, silently winging its way through the forests to and from its summer home.

Its nests are usually placed in shrubs or low branching trees at a height of but two to seven feet from the ground and in a few

instances it has been known to nest on the ground. The nest is usually compact and “composed of an elaborate interweaving of fine sedges, leaves, stems, dry grasses, strips of fine bark and lined with fine grass. Occasionally nests are constructed with mud, like those of the common robin.” It is said that this thrush will easily modify its nesting habits to suit the requirements of its environment. In the land of the deer, nests have been found that were wholly constructed of hair and lined with the hair of deer, feathers and some moss.

In our illustration is shown its habit of scratching away the dead leaves that accumulate under the trees, in its search for grubs and worms.

A BIT OF FICTION FROM BIRDLAND

It was a radiant May day, so invitingly fresh and sunshiny that I found it impossible to stay indoors with any degree of resignation. Far up the hillside sloping southward was a favorite nook, and thither I turned my springing steps, so full of life and gladness that I could hardly contain it all.

Robins and bluebirds along my path saluted me, sparrows caroled from shrub and tree top their sweet, glad-spirited chorus, swallows were skimming the meadow with graceful wing, and bobolinks sang everywhere, jubilant, hilarious, in their “rollicking holiday spirit,” evidently intensely amused over some episode of recent date in the blithe bobolink world.

An old orchard of gnarled and tangled trees – a veritable “antique” – ended my ramble; here I threw myself down upon a mossy bank, turning to face the direction whence I had come. Down the valley, with its willow and alder fringed brook threading the meadow flats, I could look far away and over to the distant hills, woods and tilled lands on the other side.

The old orchard stands like the leafy porch to the sylvan halls behind it. Upon either side is a wild unbroken tangle of small growth – saplings of birch, poplar and maple; in front is a stubbly slope cut off by a picturesque brook from the meadows beyond;

upon the farther side a deep forest of many years' standing.

Ah, the restfulness of a retreat like this, shut in from the rustle, bustle and petty cares of the world and the everyday scramble for the bread and butter of mere existence! And the witchery of an hour like this – the whole earth steeped in sunshine, the air exhilarant and inspiring with freshness and fragrance, the woodsy odors of the tender new life but just awakened from the torpidity of frost-bound inanition, and the honeyed fragrance of the abundant apple blossoms inviting bird and bee and human flower lovers.

Evidently the birds were in sympathy with my mood, for there were literally flocks of them all about me; and the air was freighted with the enchanting melody of their rejoicing voices, Robert O'Lincoln as usual making himself delightfully prominent. I threw myself back upon the lap of Mother Earth and mentally rehearsed that characteristic bobolink poem:

“A flock of merry singing birds were sporting in the grove,
Some were warbling cheerily and some were making love.
There were Bobolincon, Wadolincon, Winterseble,
Conquedle, —

A livelier set were never led by taber, pipe or fiddle.”

Presently the soporific influence of the atmosphere and surroundings began to take effect; and, soothed by Nature's lullaby, I fell asleep with Wadolincon, Bobolincon, Conquedle, Winterseble, all in a confused jumble in my brain.

Immediately my companions began a lively discussion about house-building. At first I could not make out even the subject of the conversation, for all were talking together in such determined I-will-have-my-say accents that they out-babeled Babel with the confusion of tongues and senseless racket.

Soon, however, came a diversion, a hawk flew screaming across the arena, and, in the lull that followed, Mrs. Crow seized the opportunity to mount the platform of a tall spruce and call the meeting to order, suggesting that as the subject under consideration was of common interest and importance, it would be more profitably discussed if each were allowed to speak separately.

I was grateful indeed for this timely suggestion of the sable intruder, for, being myself especially interested in the subject under debate, I was anxious for information, and knew that among so divers opinions one might expect new light upon it.

Mrs. Robin Redbreast came forward just then and opened the discussion by expressing her own choice of "use before beauty" and a dry and airy situation.

Mrs. Bluebird liked privacy and retirement from the public gaze, and declared that no place more conspicuous than a hollow post or stump is a fitting home for the bringing up of baby bluebirds.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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