

VARIOUS

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**MY NEIGHBOR IN
THE APPLE TREE**

NELLY HART WOODWORTH

TROPICAL portions of the American continent, rich in an endless variety and beauty of bird-life, have shared with New England but a single species of Trochilidæ, *Trochilus colubris*, the ruby-throated humming bird.

This "glittering fragment of a rainbow" adds a decorative feature to our gardens, its nest so protected through diminutive size and perfect adaptation to the surroundings that it rarely comes under one's observation.

It is commonly asserted that the male is an arrant shirk, that he leaves the entire labor of building and furnishing the house as

well as the heavy duties of housekeeping to the faithful mother, being in the fullest sense a *silent* partner either from choice or otherwise, a mere apology for a husband and head of a family.

Nor does he redeem himself when the prospective "twins" arrive and slender bills are lifted appealingly for food! No thanks to him that the naked, squirming little atoms replacing the two white eggs become gradually stronger, that some hint of plumage duly covers their nudeness, or that bye-and-bye they become birds in reality.

Two years ago this "little lady in green" made her nest upon an apple tree branch, concealing it so deftly that the gardener at work near by was unaware of the distinguished guests until the brooding was nearly over. When the little birds had flown the lichened residence, becoming a family possession, was considered the daintiest souvenir of the summer.

Being anxious to know if this rare, interesting episode would be repeated, the following summer I watched carefully for its repetition. Promptly in June I found that a humming bird was again "at home," this time upon a horizontal maple branch, twelve feet from the ground and directly over the sidewalk. This nest was soldered upon a long slender bough half an inch in thickness at the intersection of another, a mere twig a quarter of an inch through, the latter inwrought with, and concealed for a full inch in the structural fiber. Upon the 22d of the same month, by the aid of a ladder I found that two eggs "the size of yellow beans" were lying inside the downy cup shaped nest. Before this

luckless visitation the tail of the brooding bird could be seen from the ground, but during the next two days there was no sign of life thereabout.

In the afternoon of the third day my bird was in the maple, darting hither and thither like a swallow, plunging into the insect swarms and securing several before they realized her presence. Then she came to the honeysuckle beside me, hovering over it in a bewildered, irresolute manner as if debating whether she could safely probe its scarlet cups. Just at this moment a big miller flew by and off she went in close chase, capturing it upon the wing. Then she rested upon a maple twig, leisurely preened her feathers, drawing each one gently through her beak, and after a second visit to the honeysuckles darted toward the nest. Now, I thought, is the time, if ever, to decide if she is still housekeeping, and following quickly, I saw her standing upon the edge of the silken cradle. Her head moved rapidly from side to side as she regarded its contents, after which she rose lightly in the air, dropped upon the nest with the airy grace of a thistledown, and spread above it the feathered blanket of her soft, warm breast. For several minutes she ignored my presence, drawing her beak across the leaves or springing into the air for a passing insect which was captured and apparently given to her family. Once I detected a "squeak," and her head was instantly thrown to one side in a listening attitude. If it was the note of the mate he did not approach the nest, the thick leaves hiding the tree-top from which the sound proceeded.

There was a furious wind that night and the warm days were followed by a sudden fall in temperature.

From that time the nest was deserted; I could only conjecture that I had presumed too much upon her defenselessness, or, that the young, if young there were, were dislodged by the wind. This abandoned homestead was as round and perfect as a new coin just issued from nature's mint, a marvel of elegance in which all the instinctive gifts of decorative art united.

There were no visible signs of rebuilding during the twelve days that followed; casual trips to the honeysuckle, hovering over the flowers like some gorgeous insect with colors scintillating in the full sunshine, alone gave evidence of further interest or intention.

Upon the thirteenth day there was a marked change. Again she flew excitedly about the lawn, stopping abruptly to wheel about and dart off in an opposite direction, a vitalized complement of the spirit of the trees, mingling with and pervading the garden as freely as did the light and air. She threw herself against a summer warbler almost knocking him off his perch and, not content with this treatment, drew him from the lawn, which, by the way, was his own harvest field where he had gleaned diligently for several days.

Then the bird poised before me in mid-air, circled about my head before plunging into an apple tree in whose leafy mazes she disappeared. Just at that moment an accommodating breeze displaced the leaves; there was a flutter within, a flash of wings,

an unusual agitation that told of something quite beyond the ordinary. As the breeze died away the leaves resumed their place thus preventing all further inspection. From the parlor windows, fortunately, there was less obstruction, – she was still twisting about, going and returning, dropping within the foliage and going through the most singular antics.

An opera-glass revealed the meaning; she dropped into a half-finished nest that had all this time been directly in range of vision. The tiny tenement was so deftly concealed, blending in color and apparent texture with the bough that held it, and so sheltered by overhanging leaves that it was still difficult to locate a second time.

With unbounded delight I watched her come and go a dozen times in less than that number of minutes, bringing at each arrival a quantity of vegetable fiber soft as a silken cobweb, adjusted invariably while standing inside the nest and turning completely around several times as if shaping the interior to her better satisfaction. She reached far over and pulled the fluffy cotton into place, beating it here and jerking it there, sinking her little breast into and shaping it to fit the soft contours of her body; or, covering the outside with trailing wings, beat them rapidly against the felted foundation which at these times was entirely hidden beneath their iridescence. Though still unfinished the delicate structure was lichen-decorated, simply perfect so far as it went, in this case defying the assertion that humming birds' nests are always completed before this ornate decoration is added.

After working rapidly for two full hours she paused to rest upon a dead twig, opening and closing her wings in the twinkling fashion of a bluebird, an exercise prefacing a breakfast taken in the nearest tree as she poised beneath the leaves.

With appetite appeased she dropped upon the unfinished cradle and sat so still for twenty minutes that I was certain an egg was deposited. Doubtless the misfortunes attending previous nesting had interrupted the even tenor of life, the second housekeeping was more urgent than was anticipated.

For ten minutes more her form was motionless though her head moved from side to side in a ceaseless surveillance – a warbler lunching in the next tree glanced casually in her direction, and was evidently just wild with curiosity.

The situation was too much for him; he left his post hurriedly, flew over her and looked down, flew under and looked up, peered at her from an airy poise, still undecided as to who was rocking in that wonderful cradle. Craning his neck he hopped along the branch till he stood beside her, so near that his yellow coat literally brushed her garments, his attitude a quick pantomime of his thoughts, half paralyzed with questioning surprise as to what this remnant of a bird might be, not by any means to be bought *cheap* because it was a remnant.

A quick thrust from the hummer's beak brought him to his senses; he took leave for a few seconds, returning cross-lots to stare again from the same near point of view, which unwarranted impertinence was borne without flinching or changing her

position. Later on these tours of inspection were thoroughly resented, the right of territory contested in many a battle when the defendant advanced and retreated with the rapidity of lightning, making furious thrusts at her adversary, and chasing him about till sheer exhaustion compelled her to desist. Then she would drop upon the nest still regarding him with undistinguished contempt till he took her to the tree-top, keeping an eye upon her as he dropped a song or swallowed an insect.

A young woodpecker came one day to her door; two quarrelsome robins stopped to say good morning; and goldfinches lisped their soft love notes, while she only hugged her eggs more closely with the dear, delicious shyness of affection.

When my little house-builder left that morning I was sure that the edge of a white egg rose above the low rim of the nest. From the attic window it was plainly visible, the cradled egg rocking in the wind, but, though the warbler was close by, to his credit be it said he did not once trespass upon other people's property.

Twice that afternoon my lady buzzed through the trees without halting to look in at home, nor when night came down did the wanderer return. She was busy about the next morning, all work being done in the early hours, and by eight o'clock a second egg lay beside the first. By nine o'clock the following morning the regular brooding began, the finishing touches being given to the nest long before the breakfast hour.

It was a noisy location, what with the clatter of lawn mowers, the drumming of pianos, and the singing of canaries, to which she

listened with neighborly interest. In that chosen place, directly over the path leading from the sidewalk to the door, it was impossible to find even a degree of seclusion. The weather was fine, the piazza rarely vacant, and there were few hours in the day but someone passed the nest.

Nor did the trouble end with daylight; bicycle parties made the yard a starting-point for evening excursions, lanterns flashed while parting guests halted beneath the little house-beautiful, until I trembled for poor "Queenie" thus barred away from her own door.

Though she unvaryingly left the nest, the persons passing were never once conscious of the nearness of bird or nest, swinging breezes often bringing the latter so near that it almost touched their faces.

I could see it hourly from my window, the overhanging leaf, the opalized lustre of the brooding bird, as if a store of sunshine was shivered, and falling over her feathers, then momentarily hidden as the swinging leaf intervened. More solid pursuits were forgotten or for the time regarded as of little importance; each delicate outline became familiar; the brooding leaf assumed a personality; it was a guardian of the home, vitalized, spiritualized, protective. It seemed to change position as the sun made the need apparent, shielding the little one in the long waiting days, so patient and passive in the sweet expectancy of nearing motherhood. My memory pictures her still, while a more tangible photograph upon my desk gives permanence to

my "bird of the musical wing" as she brooded over the apple-tree nest.

With this home as a focus, lawn and garden seemed to hold the sunshine in suspension; uplifted grasses gave it recognition in smiling approval; shadows were invested with humane and beneficent attributes, and the very air was radiant with scent and gracious influence.

Sometimes the bird came to my window, her beak clicking against the glass in a vain effort to probe the flowers within.

There were visits, too, to the piazza, when the family were gathered there, poising above the embroidered flowers upon a lady's slipper and trying persistently to taste their illusive sweetness.

Thrice upon the fourth day of sitting she improved the nest with an extra beakful of cotton, holding it firmly for five or ten minutes before it was inwrought. This was repeated after two weeks when there was a decided change – the little, warm breast was pressed less closely against the nest treasures. Some amazing instinct, directly opposed to that dear experience by which *we* find a short path to a long wandering, taught her that their increased fragility would yield to her full weight, and her touch was of exquisite softness.

When three full weeks had passed a homely baby no bigger than a honey bee lay in the nest, a one day's advantage kept to the end, and noticeable in both size and strength. The next morning this mite was duplicated, their whole bodies trembling with every

heart beat.

Life became now a problem of supply and demand, only a clearer expression of the one that has from all time agitated humanity. Then began that marvel of marvels, the feeding of the newly hatched birds. It was hardly worth while to question the wisdom of the process, though I confess that after each feeding I expected only two little mangled corpses would remain!

The food, partially digested in the mother's stomach, was given by regurgitation, her beak being thrust so far down their throats that I surmised it would pierce the bottom of the nest, to say nothing of the frail bodies churned violently up and down meanwhile. The great wonder was that the infants survived this seemingly brutal and dangerous exercise in which they were sometimes lifted above the nest, the food being given alternately at intervals of half an hour to an hour. They thrived, however, under a treatment that gave strength to the muscles, besides aiding in the digestion of food.

From the first, the comparative length of beak was their most noticeable feature, the proportion becoming less marked by the fourth day when fine hairy pin-feathers appeared, these increasing in size and reinforced by a decided plumage seen above the rim of the nest before the second week ended.

By the ninth day they attempted their first toilet, drawing the incipient feathers, mere hairs, through the beak, and on the tenth day, more surprising still, they had found their voices. Several times daily the branch was pulled down to the level of

my eyes, the twins regarding me with the surprise and innocence of babyhood, sinking low into the nest meanwhile, and emitting a plaintive cry almost human in its pathos and expression.

So far as I know no observer has recorded this pleading, pathetic note from the infant hummers so noticeable whenever I came too near. The branch replaced and the disturbing element removed, they reappeared above the nest's rim, the slight form of the mother palpitant as she hovered near. Early in their lives when a cold rain followed the long drouth, her enforced absences were brief; hasty trips merely to the flower garden in the rear of the house, or to the flowering beans in the next yard, a favorite lunch counter patronized every hour ordinarily.

The leaf that served to so good purpose in the sunny days became heavy with raindrops, tilted to one side, and little streams trickled down upon her back and ran off her tail, while big drops splashing down from the higher branches threatened to annihilate the whole affair. Undaunted still, my Lilliputian mother hugged her precious charges, with drooping tail hanging over the edge of the nest, head drawn into her feathers, her whole appearance as limp and bedraggled as a hen caught out in a shower. When the infants had seen two weeks of life they refused to be longer brooded. From this time on they matured rapidly, filling the nest so full that my lady found no place for the sole of her foot, and often alighted upon their backs to give them food. In four days more their baby dresses were quite outgrown. These were replaced by green graduating gowns of stylish texture and fit,

and, as my bird book stated that young hummers left the nest when a week old, I was watching eagerly for their debut.

Long before this the nest proper began to show signs of hard service. Before its occupants left it became a thing of the past, positively dissolving to a mere shelf or platform, and one side falling out entirely, the imperturbable twins sitting or standing upon what remained, content in the silence that all completed tasks deserve.

As I have said before, one of these little grown-ups surpassed the other in size and vigor, insisting gently or forcibly upon the best standing-place, and vibrating its wings for several seconds at a time. Plainly this one would be the first to launch upon the world.

Twenty-two days after hatching it spread its wings without apparent effort and alighted upon a neighboring twig. Clearly, life was regarded from a mature standard as it preened its plumage and looked about with an undaunted air.

Two days later the smaller twin followed the example, reaching the upper branches as easily as if flight were an everyday occurrence, both birds flitting about the familiar tree, and fed by the parent, until after the third day, they were seen no more.

There is something noble, simple, and pure in a taste for trees. It argues, I think, a sweet and generous nature to have this strong relish for beauties of vegetation, and this friendship for the hardy and glorious sons of the forest. There is a grandeur of thought connected with this part of rural economy. It is worthy of liberal

and freeborn and aspiring men. He who plants an oak looks forward to future ages, and plants for posterity. Nothing can be less selfish than this. He cannot expect to sit in its shade nor enjoy its shelter, but he exults in the idea that the acorn which he has buried in the earth shall grow up into a lofty pile and shall keep on flourishing and increasing and benefiting mankind long after he shall have ceased to tread his paternal fields. —*Washington Irving.*

A DAY IN JUNE

Bright is this day of smiling June,
When nature's voice is all atune

In music's swelling flow, to sing
Sweet songs of praise to nature's king.

From azure heights the lark's loud song
Is borne the balmy breeze along;

The robin tunes his sweetest strain,
And blithely sings his glad refrain

Of summer days and summer joys;
The tawny thrush his voice employs,

In chorus with the warbling throng,
To fill his measure of the song.

The river, too, with rippling flow,
As it winds through its banks below,

And leaps and plays in merry glee,
O'er rocky bed, 'neath grassy lea,

Or silent glides through sylvan shade,
To laugh again in sunny glade,

Sends back its murm'ring voice to swell
The music of each lovely dell,

Where Flora decks with brilliant sheen
The virgin sward of velvet green.

– From a forthcoming poem by Geo. H. Cooke, Chicago.

WESTERN YELLOW-THROAT

(*Geothlypis trichas occidentalis*.)

The birds are here, for all the season's late.
They take the sun's height, an' don' never wait;
Soon's he officially declares it's spring,
Their light hearts lift 'em on a north'ard wing,
An' th' aint an acre, fur ez you can hear,
Can't by the music tell the time o' year.

— *Lowell*.

THIS common, but beautiful resident of the western United States begins to arrive about the middle of April and leaves during the month of September. It is one of the most conspicuous of the warbler family, is very numerous and familiar, and is decked with such a marked plumage that it cannot fail to be noticed. The adult male is olive-green above, becoming browner on the nape. The female is duller in color than the male without black, gray, or white on head, which is mostly dull brownish. The yellow of throat is much duller than in the male. The young are somewhat like the adult female. This is said to be the prevailing form in Illinois and Indiana, the larger number of specimens

having the more extensively yellow lower parts of the western form, though there is much variation.

This little fellow is found among the briars or weed-stalks, in rose bushes and brambles, where it sings throughout the day. Its nest, generally built between upright weed-stalks or coarse grass in damp meadow land, is shaped like a cup, the opening at the top. The eggs vary from four to six, and are of a delicate pinkish-white, the larger end marked by a ring of specks and lines of different shades of brown. The western yellow-throat inhabits the Mississippi valley to the Pacific coast. It is found as far north as Manitoba; south in winter from the southern United States, through central and western Mexico to Guatemala. With a few exceptions the warblers are migratory birds, the majority of them passing rapidly across the United States in the spring on the way to the northern breeding-grounds. It is for this reason that they are known to few except the close observers of bird life, though in season they are known to literally swarm where their insect food is most plentiful – "always where the green leaves are, whether in lofty tree-top, by an embowered coppice, or budding orchard. When the apple trees bloom the warblers revel among the flowers, vying in activity and numbers with the bees; now probing the recesses of a blossom for an insect which has effected lodgment there, then darting to another, where, poised daintily upon a slender twig, or suspended from it, he explores, hastily, but carefully for another morsel. Every movement is the personification of nervous activity, as if the

time for the journey was short; and, indeed, such appears to be the case, for two or three days, at most, suffice some species in a single locality; a day spent in gleaning through the woods and orchards of one neighborhood, with occasional brief siestas among the leafy bowers, then the following night in continuous flight toward its northern destination, is probably the history of every individual of the moving throng."

CHARLEY AND THE ANGLEWORM

ALICE DE BERDT

CHARLEY was going fishing and he took great pride in the quantity of squirming bait he carried in the tin box.

He was quite a small boy, only eight years old, but country boys learn to take care of themselves sooner than city children.

When he reached the little stream where he meant to fish, he found some one before him. It was a stranger whom Charley had seen once or twice at a neighbor's, where he was boarding during the summer.

The old mill was the best place in miles for fish, and Charley wished that the city boarder had chosen some other spot in which to read his book.

He gave a shy, not very cordial reply to the stranger's pleasant "Good morning!" and began to arrange his line. In a few minutes one of the largest earthworms was wriggling in the water at the end of Charley's hook, and he himself was sprawled out upon the ground at the end of a long beam projecting from the mill intently regarding the water.

"No luck, my boy?" asked the stranger, watching Charley

work with the struggling worm that was as hard to get off the hook as it had been to put on.

"No, sir," replied the little boy. "The fishes don't seem to bite."

"Not hungry to-day, eh?" said the stranger. "I should think that would be a good thing for the worms."

Charley opened his eyes. It had never occurred to him to consider the worms in the matter. They were to him nothing but ugly, stupid things, which, his father said, injured the roots of plants.

"Don't you think the worms are as fond of their life as you are of yours?" went on Charley's new friend. "In their little underground earth houses they are very comfortable and happy."

Charley smiled. This was a new view of the case to him, and he edged nearer to the stranger to hear what more he would say.

"They's on'y worms," said Charley.

"And a worm is a very good sort of creature in its way. They are harmless, cleanly animals. See, I can take that one of yours in the palm of my hand and it will not harm me in the least. Let me put it down on the ground and see how it hurries to get away. It is frightened. Now it is trying to force a way into that damp earth. I wonder if you know just how the worm makes its way through the ground."

Charley shook his head, and the stranger said:

"You have often noticed the shape of the worm, I dare say. One end of its body is much thicker than the other, which runs to a point. The thicker end of the body is the head. The body

itself, you will see, is made of many small rings, held together by tiny muscles and skin, making it possible for the worm to bend and curl and wriggle in a way that is impossible for you and me, whose bones are fewer and fitted tightly together, so that they move about less easily.

"Now, if you will take this one in your hand," said the stranger, "and run your fingers very gently down its sides from tail to head, you will find that the body of the worm is covered with fine hooks. If you run your fingers along the worm in the other direction, you will think the body perfectly smooth. This is because all the hooks point in the other direction.

"When the worm wishes to enter the earth, it pushes its blunt head through the soil, lengthening its body by means of the muscles that hold together the soft, cartilage-like rings. At first only a few rings go into the ground. Master Worm then draws up his body into a thick roll by shortening his muscles. In this way he forces apart the soft earth to make room for his body, the points on the sides holding it there while he again lengthens his head, pushing more earth apart. It is in this way, by alternately or in turn lengthening or shortening his body that he makes his way through the earth, which is pushed aside to give him passage through its dark depths.

"As his home is underground, eyes would not be of much use to him, so Mother Nature, whose children we all are, has given him none. One of her laws is that none of us shall have what we cannot or do not make use of. He has a strong mouth, however.

It is placed on the second ring of the body. His food is earth, which he swallows to obtain the organic particles contained in it. This makes him especially interesting, for nearly all animals obtain their food from the soil quite indirectly. Some get it from plants, the plants themselves having gathered theirs from the earth through their roots. Certain animals depend on other creatures, which in turn get food from the plants.

"The life-giving particles which go to build up all bodies come directly or indirectly from the earth itself. It seems odd that a man who is starving, no matter where he may be, starves with the very food which he needs directly beneath his feet, only he does not know, nor has the wisest man yet learned, how to convert it into food which will directly sustain and give health to the body. Yet the little earthworm, which you despise as stupid, has this wonderful secret, which day by day it puts into operation for its own benefit. Worms also eat leaves, which sometimes they drag into their homes.

"The worm has no feet as we understand them, but moves along the ground by sticking its sharp claws into the ground and by in turn lengthening and shortening its flexible body.

"The young worms grow from eggs, which are deposited in the earth in the autumn. They have to look out for themselves. During the winter they burrow deep into the ground, coming to the surface with the warm rains of spring. Worms also come to the earth's surface at night. If you look carefully in the garden with a lantern some evening, you may see them."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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