

VARIOUS

BIRDS AND ALL NATURE,
VOL. VI, NO. 5,
DECEMBER 1899

Various

**Birds and All Nature, Vol.
VI, No. 5, December 1899**

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Birds and All Nature, Vol. VI, No. 5, December 1899 / Illustrated by Color Photography

THE TRAMPS OF BIRDLAND

ELANORA KINSLEY MARBLE

THE birds had met in council that morning, and from the great chattering and chirping I judged some very serious question was up before the board.

"Something must be done," Mr. Red-eyed Vireo was saying, as I sauntered down to the orchard and seated myself beneath an apple tree, "we have stood the imposition long enough. Every year we meet and draw up resolutions, with many 'whereases' and 'wherefores,' and 'aforesaid's' – resolutions with nothing resolute about them. To-day, I say, something must be done."

Mr. Wood-thrush, Mr. Towhee, Mr. Chipping Sparrow, Mr. Yellow-breasted Chat, Mr. Song Sparrow, and several Mr. Flycatchers, beside a number of other small birds, nodded their heads in unequivocal assent.

"We have enemies enough," continued Mr. Vireo, "how many only Mother Nature knows. Even in the darkness of night we are not safe from the owls, skunks, snakes, and other robbers, and in the day-time, besides our feathered foes, we have the ruthless 'collector,' and the ever-present bad boy. Enemies without are bad enough, but to have in our very midst a – a – " Mr. Vireo paused, presumably choking with indignation, but really because he had quite forgotten what he had prepared to say.

"Hear, hear!" cried the assembled birds, making a great clamor and clatter in order that the speaker might have a chance to slyly consult his notes.

"A tribe of social outcasts – tramps, in fact," continued Mr. Vireo, "whose females, disliking the cares of family life, build no homes of their own, but instead deposit their eggs in some other bird's nest that their young may be hatched and reared without any trouble to themselves. Our mates have enough to do to bring up their own families, so I say the tribe of cowbirds must be driven from this community, or else, like the rest of us, be forced to work."

"H'm! yes," sighed Mr. Towhee, "that's what we say every year, and every year the conditions remain just the same. The cowbirds are tramps by nature, and you can't change their natures, you know."

I judged, from the great chattering and chirping, that grave exceptions were taken to this remark, but quiet at length being restored, Mr. Towhee continued:

"My mate says it depends upon ourselves whether the whole tribe shall be exterminated. She, for one, does not intend to hatch out any more of Mrs. Cowbird's babies. This spring we found one of her speckled eggs in our nest, but it wasn't hatched out, I warrant you. We simply pierced the shell with our bills, picked it up by the opening, and carried it out of the nest."

A round of applause greeted these remarks, much to Mr. Towhee's gratification.

"It strikes me," said Mr. Indigo Bunting, "that the whole fault lies with our mates. From the size and different markings of Mrs. Cowbird's eggs they can always be distinguished from their own. No self-respecting bird should ever brood one; in that way we can exterminate the race."

"'Tis the mother-instinct, I presume," said Mr. Vireo, "or the kindly nature of some females, not to neglect a forlorn little egg abandoned by its parents at their very door. Ah," he broke off, pointing in a certain direction, "is not that a sad sight for an affectionate husband to see?"

On a fence near by stood two birds – a very small one, with a worried, harassed air, endeavoring upon tip-toe to drop into the mouth of the great fat baby towering above her a green caterpillar which she held in her bill.

"That is Mrs. Vireo, my mate, and her foster child," continued the speaker. "The egg of the cowbird being larger than her own, received all the warmth of her breast, so that her own little ones perished in the shell. It takes all her time and strength to feed that great hulking baby, who will accept her nursing long after he can take care of himself, then desert her to join his own tribe in the grain fields."

"Last year my mate had no better sense than to brood one of Mrs. Cowbird's eggs," said Mr. Chipping Sparrow. "It emerged from the shell first, of course, and in attending to its everlasting clamor for food she neglected her own birdlings so that all but one of them died. That one has always been a puny, weak little thing. We were greatly astonished, I assure you, at the size of our first offspring, neither of us being acquainted with the habits of Mrs. Cowbird, and disappointed that in neither feather nor feature it resembled her or me."

"I got the best of the lazy tribe, this year," chuckled Mr. Yellow Warbler. "Our nest was just completed, and my mate had deposited one egg, when in our absence one day Mrs. Cowbird sneaked in, laid one of her own beside it and then stealthily crept away. My mate said nothing, and might have brooded it with her own, but the next day the same thing, in our absence, occurred again; another female of the lazy tribe, I presume, finding our home quite to her liking."

"Two to one," said the Chat with a laugh, "that was not fair. Well, what did you do then?"

"Why we concluded to abandon the nest and build another, but on second thought gave up that plan. We simply built a floor over the lower portion of the nest, and on the upper floor, or second story, so to speak, my mate deposited four eggs, those, with the one shut in with the Cowbird's, making her full complement, you see."

"It would have been far easier, it seems to me," said Mr. Towhee, "to have thrown Mrs. Cowbird's eggs out of the nest as we did. But then you and your mate must learn by experience and you will know better what to do the next time."

"Doubtless," said Mr. Yellow-throat, a trifle stiffly, "but my mate is a very dainty bird and wouldn't for a moment think of using a cradle for her little ones that had been occupied, even for a short time, by two female tramps."

"Hm!" replied Mr. Towhee, in his turn not altogether pleased, "that accounts probably for the number of abandoned nests one meets with every year, containing a speckled egg of Mrs. Cowbird's. Too dainty, indeed!"

"Did you ever happen to see one of the homeless creatures seeking somebody else's nest in which to lay her egg?" interrupted Mr. Chipping Sparrow, scenting a quarrel in the air. "I saw one in the woods once sneaking through the undergrowth, and when Mr. and Mrs. Red-eyed Vireo had flown away for a little time, out she crept, inspected their nest, and, finding it to her taste, entered and deposited her egg. She felt sure, you see, that Mrs. Vireo had a kind heart and would hatch out the foundling with her own."

"And she did," sadly said Mr. Vireo, "she did."

"The company the tribe keeps is no better than themselves," said Mr. Wood Thrush. "During the breeding-season you will see the grackles, and red-winged blackbirds, and the cowbirds chattering and gossiping together, as they roost for the night. They are a lawless crew. No self-respecting bird will be found in such company."

"I saw a number of the cowbird tribe perching on the backs of a bunch of cattle in the pasture-land to-day," said a very young Mr. Flycatcher. "What do you suppose they were doing?"

"Searching for parasites," gruffly said an old bird; "that's the reason they are called cowbirds. They were once called 'buffalo birds' for the same reason."

No one spoke for the space of several minutes.

"If there are no further remarks," said Mr. Red-eyed Vireo, "the question will be put. All in favor – "

"What is the question, Mr. Chairman?" meekly asked a very young Mr. Flycatcher.

"Is it or is it not our duty to destroy every egg of Mrs. Cowbird's we find in our nests, thus forcing the tribe to build homes of their own in which to bring up their families? All in favor – "

"Ay," chirruped every bird at once.

"Contrary minded?"

There was no response, so the meeting was declared adjourned.

THE NARCISSUS

THE NARCISSUS

WILLIAM KERR HIGLEY,

Secretary of The Chicago Academy of Sciences

THE genus of plants called Narcissus, many of the species of which are highly esteemed by the floriculturist and lover of cultivated plants, belongs to the Amaryllis family (*Amaryllidaceæ*.)

This family includes about seventy genera and over eight hundred species that are mostly native in tropical or semi-tropical countries, though a few are found in temperate climates.

Many of the species are sought for ornamental purposes and, on account of their beauty and remarkable odor, they are more prized by many than are the species of the Lily family.

In this group is classed the American Aloe (*Agave americana*) valued not only for cultivation, but also by the Mexicans on account of the sweet fluid which is yielded by its central bud. This liquid, after fermentation, forms an intoxicating liquor known as *pulque*. By distillation, this yields a liquid, very similar to rum, called by the Mexicans *mescal*. The leaves furnish a strong fiber, known as vegetable silk, from which, since remote times, paper has been manufactured.

The popular opinion is that this plant flowers but once in a century; hence the name "Century Plant" is often applied to it, though under proper culture it will blossom more frequently.

Other plants of equal economic and historic interest, but less known, belong to this family. It is said that one species furnished the fluid used by the Hottentots for poisoning their arrows.

The genus Narcissus derives its name from a Greek word meaning "stupor" because of the narcotic effect produced by the odor and by portions of the plants of some species.

There are about twenty-five species, chiefly natives of southern Europe, but some of them, either natural or modified by the gardener's art, are world-wide in cultivation.

Blossoming early in the season they are frequently referred to as "harbingers of spring." The flowers are handsome, large, varying in color from yellow to white and sometimes marked with crimson. They are usually borne on a nearly naked stem. Some of the species are very fragrant. The leaves are elongated, nearly sword-shaped and usually about a foot in length, rising from the bulbous underground stem.

Among the forms that are familiar are the daffodils, the jonquils, and the poet's narcissus.

An interesting feature in the structure of the flowers is the cup or crown which is found at the base of the flower segments. The length and character of this is an important feature in the separation of the species.

In Grecian mythology Narcissus was the son of the river god, Cephissus. He failed to return the love of the mountain nymph, Echo, which so grieved her that she pined away till nothing remained but her voice, which gave back with absolute fidelity all sounds uttered in the hills and dales.

Narcissus was punished for this by Aphrodite, who caused him to love his own image as it was reflected in the water of a neighboring fountain. "Consumed with unrequited love, he too, wasted away and was changed into the flower which bears his name."

FASHION'S CLAMOR

E. K. M

JUDGING from late millinery creations, and the appearance of windows and showcases, women, in spite of the efforts of the Audubon societies, still elect to adorn themselves with the stuffed remains of rare or common birds.

A live bird is a beautiful and graceful object, but a dead duck, pigeon, or gull peering with glassy eyes over the brim of a woman's hat is, to the thinking mind, both unbecoming and repulsive. In deference to "sentimental" bird lovers and at the same time the behest of Dame Fashion, wings and breasts are said to be manufactured out of bits of feathers and quills which have all the appearance of the original. Wings and breasts, yes, but never the entire creature, which the bird lover – in a millinery sense – chooses above all other adornments for her headgear. Apart from the humanitarian side of the subject, one cannot but marvel that such women cannot be brought to regard the matter from the esthetic point of view.

"Esthetic," repeats my lady, glancing admiringly in the mirror at the death's head above her brow, "esthetic point of view, indeed! Why, the point of view with most women is to wear whatever they consider becoming, striking, or *outré*. Now I flatter myself in selecting this large gull with spreading wings for my hat, that I attained all three of these effects, don't you?"

"Especially the *outré*," muttered one of her listeners, at which my lady laughed, evidently well pleased.

Five women out of every ten who walk the streets of Chicago and other Illinois cities, says a prominent journal, by wearing dead birds upon their hats proclaim themselves as lawbreakers. For the first time in the history of Illinois laws it has been made an offense punishable by fine and imprisonment, or both, to have in possession any dead, harmless bird except game birds, which may be "possessed in their proper season." The wearing of a tern, or a gull, a woodpecker, or a jay is an offense against the law's majesty, and any policeman with a mind rigidly bent upon enforcing the law could round up, without a written warrant, a wagon load of the offenders any hour in the day, and carry them off to the lockup. What moral suasion cannot do, a crusade of this sort undoubtedly would.

Thanks to the personal influence of the Princess of Wales, the osprey plume, so long a feature of the uniforms of a number of the cavalry regiments of the British army, has been abolished. After Dec. 31, 1899, the osprey plume, by order of Field Marshal Lord Wolseley, is to be replaced by one of ostrich feathers. It was the wearing of these plumes by the officers of all the hussar and rifle regiments, as well as of the Royal Horse Artillery, which so sadly interfered with the crusade inaugurated by the Princess against the use of osprey plumes. The fact that these plumes, to be of any marketable value, have to be torn from the living bird during the nesting season induced the Queen, the Princess of Wales, and other ladies of the royal family to set their faces against the use of both the osprey plume and the aigrette as articles of fashionable wear.

If this can be done in the interest of the white heron and osprey, on the other side of the water, why cannot the autocrats of style in this country pronounce against the barbarous practice of bird adornment entirely, by steadfastly refusing to wear them themselves? The tireless energy of all societies for the protection of birds will not begin to do the cause among the masses so much good as would the total abandonment of them for millinery purposes by what is termed society's 400.

COCA.¹

(*Erythroxylon Coca* Lam.)

DR. ALBERT SCHNEIDER,

Northwestern University School of Pharmacy

It is an aromatic tonic and cerebral stimulant, developing a remarkable power of enduring hunger and fatigue. —*Gould: Dictionary of Medicine.*

AT THE very outset I wish to state that coca is in no wise related to cocoa, a mistake which is very often made. The term coca, or cuca, as it is sometimes spelled, applies usually to the leaves of *Erythroxylon coca*, which are used as a stimulant by the natives of South America and which yield cocaine, a very important local anæsthetic. Cocoa or cacao refers to the seeds of *Theobroma cacao*, from which cocoa and chocolate are prepared, so highly prized in all civilized countries. With these preliminary statements I shall begin the description of coca, hoping at some future time to describe the even more interesting and important cocoa-yielding plant.

Coca and cuca are South American words of Spanish origin and apply to the plant itself as well as to the leaves. The plant is a native of Brazil, Peru, and Bolivia. It is a shrub varying in height from three to ten feet. The leaves resemble the leaves of tea in general outline. The margin, however, is smooth and entire, the leaf-stock (*petiole*) short; upper and lower surfaces smooth; they are rather thin, leathery, and somewhat bluish-green in color. The characteristic feature of the leaf is two lines or ridges which extend from the base of the blade, curving out on either side of the mid-rib and again uniting at the apex of the leaf. The flowers are short pedicled, small, perfect, white or greenish-yellow, and occur singly or in clusters in the axil of the leaves or bracts. The shrub is rather straggling and not at all showy.

Coca has been under cultivation in South America for many centuries. According to A. de Caudolle the plant was very extensively cultivated under the rule of the Incas. In fact it is generally believed that the original wild stock no longer exists; such eminent authorities as D'Orbigny and Poeppig maintaining that the wild growing specimens now found in South America are plants which have escaped from cultivation. Coca is now extensively cultivated in Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, and other South American countries, particularly in the Andes region. It is also extensively cultivated in British India and in Java. Attempts have been made to introduce it into Southern Europe but without success.

The plants are grown from seeds sown in pots or boxes in which they are kept until they are from eight to ten inches high, after which they are transplanted during the rainy season. Coca thrives best in a warm, well-drained soil, with considerable atmospheric moisture. In the Andes region an elevation of 2,000 feet to 5,000 feet is most suitable. The young growing plants must be protected against the heat of the sun. The maximum growth is attained in about five years.

The leaves are the only parts used although the active principle, cocaine, is present in small quantities in all parts of the plant. As soon as the shrubs are several years old the leaves are picked, usually several times each year. This work is done principally by women and children who pick the

¹ Cvea on plate, typographical error; Coca correct. — Ed.

leaves by hand and place them in aprons. They are then spread upon large mats, awnings, or cemented floors, and exposed to the sun for from five or six hours to two or three days. During very warm, bright weather drying may be completed in one day. If the process of drying is slow or if it rains upon the leaves they assume a dark color and are of less value. On the first indications of rain the leaves are placed in sheds specially made for that purpose.

Coca leaves have been used for many centuries by the natives of South America who employed them principally as a stimulant, rarely medicinally. The leaves were at one time highly prized. Acosta states that during the reign of the Incas the common people were not permitted to use the leaves without permission from the governor. After the passing of the Incas and after coca was more extensively cultivated all classes chewed the leaves. Children were, however, not allowed to use them. According to Mariani, the young Indian on arriving at the proper age was sent to an old woman whose duty it was to instruct him and to invest him with authority to chew coca leaves. The native carries the leaves in a little pouch (*huallqui* or *chuspa*) suspended from the belt. This pouch also contains a small bottle-gourd or calabash (*ishcupura*) in which is carried the ash of some plant (species of *Chenopodium*), known as *Llipta*. A few leaves are placed in the mouth and rolled into a ball; a stick moistened with saliva is now dipped into the ash and wiped upon the leaves. The ash is supposed to develop the flavor and to cause a flow of saliva which is either entirely swallowed or partially expectorated. It is said that the use of the leaves enabled the Indians to undergo extreme hardships. A French missionary states that the leaves were absolutely necessary to the slaves employed in the quicksilver mines of Peru. They were also used in dressing wounds, ulcers, and taken internally for the cure of intestinal troubles, jaundice, and various spasmodic troubles. Historians seem to agree that the constant chewing of the leaves by the Indians did not produce any very marked deleterious effects. Mariani, upon the authority of several authors, states that it even seems to be conducive to longevity. The dead of the South American Indians were always supplied with a liberal quantity of coca to enable them to make the long and fatiguing journey to the promised land.

Chewing coca leaves is a habit which may be compared to the habit of chewing tobacco with the difference that the former is by far less injurious though there are good reasons to believe that it is far from harmless. Dr. Wedell says an habitual coca chewer is known as *coquero* and is recognized by his haggard look, gloomy and solitary habit, listless inability, and disinclination for any active employment. The same authority states further that the habitual use of coca acts more prejudicially upon Europeans than upon the Indians accustomed to it from their early years. Occasionally it causes a peculiar aberration of intellect, characterized by hallucinations.

Chewing coca leaves has never become common among civilized nations. Large quantities of leaves are, however, imported for the purposes of extracting the active principle cocaine, whose effects are very marked. Cocaine causes a feeling of depression, and a marked reduction in the activity of the senses preceded by stimulation. Cocaine solutions are very extensively employed to produce local anæsthesia in minor surgical operations. Dentists employ it very extensively. Its use has several serious drawbacks. Occasionally it produces no effects whatever and again an ordinary medicinal dose has caused fatal poisoning. For these reasons dentists, physicians, and surgeons often hesitate in using it. According to some authorities the poisonous effects are due to a second alkaloid which occurs in the leaves of some varieties of coca. If that is the case, then poisoning may be prevented by excluding these varieties from the market, which is not an easy matter considering that the leaves are collected, dried, and shipped by ignorant natives. It is also known that the active principle is rapidly destroyed, hence the necessity of using fresh leaves. In the course of one year most of the cocaine has undergone a chemical change and the leaves are absolutely worthless. Careless drying also destroys much or all of the cocaine.

OUR NATIVE WOODS

REST H. METCALF

HOW many different varieties of wood are there in your own town? If you never have considered this question you will be surprised at the variety, and, I am sure, will enjoy making a collection for yourself. A pretty cabinet size is two inches in length and the same in diameter. This size is very convenient, unless you have an abundance of room, and will show fibre, grain, and color quite distinctly. If you will plane off two sides of the block you will see the grain plainly, and, if possible to polish one side, you will see what a beautiful finish some of our own woods will take.

All that is necessary in obtaining your collection is a small saw, but a congenial companion will greatly add to your pleasure. Saw your specimen considerably longer than you call for after it is prepared, for most of the varieties will check in drying; then let it thoroughly dry before preparing for your collection. The fruit trees around your home may first take your attention. You will be interested in noting the differences in the grain of the apple, apricot, barberry, cherry, pear, peach, plum, and quince; and while you are becoming interested in the fruit trees, notice the variety of birds that visit the different trees, for you will find each bird has its favorite fruit and favorite nesting-place. The mountain ash will perhaps feed as many birds in the fall and winter as any tree, and is a pretty tree for the lawn, holding its place with the maples, the ever graceful elm, admired by all, except the man who is trying to split it into fire-wood, and a favorite with the Baltimore oriole. If you wonder why the horse chestnut was so named, just examine the scars after the leaves fall and you will think it rightly named. Who has not tried carrying a horse chestnut in his pocket to prevent rheumatism? The weeping birch, as well as the weeping maple, are much admired for shade and ornamentation, but are not very common. We were told recently that the Lombardy poplar was coming back as a tree for our lawns, but many prefer the balm-of-gilead, so popular for its medicinal qualities. In the United States there are thirty-six varieties of the oak; you will find several in your own town and I trust will add a collection of acorns to your cabinet, and friends from the South and West will help make your collection a complete one. Then you will become interested in the cone-bearing trees and a variety of cones will also be added to your evergrowing collection, you will enjoy gathering some green cones and listening to the report as the seed chambers open, and if you gather a small vial of the common pine and hemlock seeds you will puzzle many a friend. One person remarked, when shown a vial of hemlock seed, "O yes, I have seen something like that, that came from Palestine, but I have forgotten the name." Some of the fir trees are pitted with holes where the woodpeckers insert grub-bearing acorns, leaving the grub to fatten, and in the fullness of time devouring it. Then the trees bearing edible nuts will call for their share of attention. The chestnut is familiar to all, as well as the butternut and hazelnut, but I knew one collector who called an ash tree butternut. There are twelve varieties of ash in our country, a wood that is coming more and more into prominence, and deservedly so; its toughness is proverbial, and it has long been utilized by carriage-makers for certain parts of wheels. A fine, handsome wood, combining in itself the qualities of oak and pine.

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