

VARIOUS

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APRIL

No days such honored days as these! While yet
Fair Aphrodite reigned, men seeking wide
For some fair thing which should forever bide
On earth, her beauteous memory to set
In fitting frame that no age could forget,
Her name in lovely April's name did hide,
And leave it there, eternally allied
To all the fairest flowers Spring did beget.
And when fair Aphrodite passed from earth,
Her shrines forgotten and her feasts of mirth,
A holier symbol still in seal and sign,
Sweet April took, of kingdom most divine,
When Christ ascended, in the time of birth
Of spring anemones, in Palestine.

— *Helen Hunt Jackson.*

I come, like a hope to a gloomy breast,

With comforting smiles, and tears
Of sympathy for the earth's unrest;
And news that the summer nears,
For the feet of the young year every day
Patter and patter and patter away.

I thrill the world with a strange delight;
The birds sing out with a will,
And the herb-lorn lea is swift bedight
With cowslip and daffodil;
While the rain for an hour or two every day
Patters and patters and patters away.

– *Bernard Malcolm Ramsay, in the Pall Mall Magazine.*

THE CURASSOW

An interesting race of birds, known as the Curassows, has its range throughout that part of South America, east of the Andes Mountain range and north of Paraguay. All the species are confined to this region except one, which is found in Central America and Mexico. This is the bird of our illustration (*Crax globicera*).

The Curassows belong to the order of Gallinaceous birds and bear the same relation to South America that the pheasants and grouse bear to the Old World. They are in every respect the most important and the most perfect game birds of the district which they inhabit. In all there are twelve species placed under four genera. As the hind toes of the feet are placed on a level with the others they resemble the pigeon and are unlike many of the other gallinaceous birds.

The Curassows are very large and rather heavy birds and some of them are larger than our turkey. They have short wings and a strong bill. At the base of the upper mandible and on the upper side there is a large tubercle-like excrescence which is of a yellow color and quite hard. Upon the head there is a gracefully arched crest of feathers which is made of curled feathers, the tips of which are white in some of the species. This crest can be lowered or raised at the will of the bird. The plumage of the species illustrated is a beautiful and velvety black, except the white on

the lower portion of the body. It is said that their motions are much more graceful than are those of our common domestic turkey. "They live in small flocks, and are arboreal in their habits, only occasionally descending to the ground, while roosting and building their nests on the branches of trees." The nests are large and made of twigs and willowy branches held in place by the stems of grasses, which are neatly interwoven between them. The nest is lined with down, feathers and leaves.

It is said that they are easily domesticated and that in some parts of South America they may be found in tame flocks around the homes of the planters. One authority states that at about the beginning of the present century a large number of Curassows were taken from Dutch Guiana to Holland, where they became thoroughly domesticated, breeding as readily as any other kind of domestic poultry. Though a tropical bird, it would seem that they might be acclimatized. They would certainly form a valuable addition to the list of our farm fowls, for their flesh is said to be "exceedingly white and delicate."

The female is not as large as the male and is usually reddish in color. Their food consists almost entirely of fruit and insects.

About the middle of the eighteenth century Eleazar Albin wrote "A Natural History of Birds," in which he gives a very interesting account of the Curassow and an excellent illustration of the bird. He says: "I took a pourtray of this bird at Chelmsford in Essex; it was very tame and sociable, eating and drinking with any company. The Cock I had of a man from the West

Indies. They are generally brought from Carasow, from whence they take their Name. They are called by the Indians Tecuecholi, Mountain-Bird or American Pheasant.”

SOME NOTABLE NESTS

The Clymer boys and girls, of Cloverdale, New England, belonged to a Bird Club; they were proposed to membership by their neighbors, the Walkers; in fact, the two families composed the club, and it partook of the nature of a secret society.

All this was before the young people of Cloverdale knew of Clark University, and Dr. Hodges' "Ten to One Clubs," wherein the members pledged themselves to strive by all imaginable means – provided they were also practical – to induce ten song birds to live and sing each year, where only one was found the year before.

It was not necessary for the Cloverdale Club to put up carefully constructed and artistic bird houses, or to hang cotton and the like fine nest-building materials in choicest ornamental shade trees – not at all. The English Sparrow had not found the village in those days; the song birds were there, they knew all the good locations and just where to find the best stuffs for constructing, furnishing and decorating their homes; the work of the club was to find these homes, to study them, with the ways and habits of their occupants, and to record their discoveries in a big book labeled, "Things Not Generally Known."

Many of the statements in this book were as broad and conclusive as scientific dogmas, but the Cloverdale Club did not waste its time searching for hundreds of instances to establish

a single truth; one was enough to be worthy of record; then, if some time the big book should be given to the public, and some naturalist or investigator should choose to confirm its statements by patient research, of course he would be welcome so to do. The club had the distinction of discovery, that was enough.

One interesting item recorded was this: "Birds – such as Orioles – who build in conspicuous places, like to decorate the outside of their nests, and in so doing are known to use manufactured materials and patterns." Strange statement, but of course thereby hangs a tale, and here it is.

At the spring house-cleaning time, Mrs. Clymer had the big, bright sitting-room carpet taken out under one of the old colonial elms, at the east of the house, to be cleaned. Mrs. Baltimore Oriole was up in the elm that morning looking for a building spot that should be a bit superior to the old one; she had spent three summers in that tree, was familiar with the ways of the club, and habits of the family; like the birds of Eugene Field's boyhood, "she knew her business when she built the old fire-hang-bird's nest."

No one was near when Mrs. Oriole fixed her eyes on the great red, green and white ingrain carpet, and admired it; what she thought we know not, but when she glanced at the hitching post under the tree, she instantly descended from high, waving branch, to lowly square post, for exactly covering the top of the same was a miniature carpet, a piece just six by six inches which Patrick should have left indoors; not having done so, he laid it on the

inviting post for safe-keeping. That bit of wool fabric was very valuable, it exactly filled a jog right by the fireplace, in which, alas! ever after was seen an ugly piece of oil cloth!

All summer long the club girls and boys gazed with wonder at the gay nest in the elm, hanging like a solitary blossom among the leaves; their speculations about it would fill a long chapter; but after the birds were flown far to the south, and the leaves were gone, that nest was finally cut down and told its story: thread by thread, just as pulled from the bit of carpet, had been woven into a decoration for the outer wall of that hanging house, till a rude reproduction of the original tiny rug was under the feet of the birdlings, and over the heads of the boys.

The club held a special exhibition of that nest, and at Thanksgiving time one of the home-coming guests, who was an enthusiastic kindergartener in the city, persuaded those generous nature students to let her take their treasure to the poor children who seldom saw the commonest kind of a hang-bird's nest, and in that kindergarten it may be seen today.

Another entry in the club book was this: "Birds building on the ground, especially Vesper Sparrows, locate if possible where they have a fine outlook, and give great attention to the arrangement of the front yard."

This was discovered when Emily Clymer took her small brother Jo up in the "side hill pasture" to see the finest mountain view in all the county, and to find wild strawberries; while picking the berries they found what was afterward called the

juniper house; this was a Vesper Sparrow's home, roofed by green growing juniper.

Everybody knows that the prophet Elijah could never have sat and wept under a New England juniper tree; no tree is less high or more nearly horizontal than this; in fact, we call it a bush – where it is big – this one was not larger than Emily Clymer's two hands, and growing straight out from descending ground, it formed a flat, green roof to the Sparrow homestead; then, while my lady sat upon her nest, she looked out of her tiny front door, across a gently sloping lawn, upon a whole range of mountains. But most remarkable of all were the ornamental shade trees, for just ten inches from the door, on either side, waved two big brakes, symmetrical in size and shape; they gracefully arched across the entrance, and were to the Sparrow domicile as the giant elms to the big Clymer homestead. A sketch of this beautiful residence was made by a member of the club – for cameras were not common in Cloverdale then – the picture cannot be taken from the club book, but I think we can see it all with our mind's eye.

Here is one of the most astounding statements in that book of many observations: "Some Phoebes are like the Golden Eagle in three ways – first, they build on rocky and inaccessible cliffs, second, they build in the same place for one hundred years; and, third, when the young are big enough to fly, they know how, and just go up without any practicing." All this can be proved to any one who will go in nesting time to a cliff overhanging the river just below Cloverdale, and who will accept the testimony of some

of the most reliable and respectable men who have honored that place in the past century.

You must go in a boat and hug the shore; of course you need a member of the club for guide; at an unexpected moment you are told to look over your head, and there, glued to a shelf of rock so small as to be entirely covered by the same, is the nest! No porch, or even doorstep, beyond its wall – an overhanging roof of rock above, a shoreless expanse of water below; now, if some one can keep the boat steady, and you have the nerve to stand at the highest point of the bow, then by reaching over your head you can gently touch some fuzzy bits of life in the nest. Now you know the first and last of the facts recorded are correct: there is the nest on the inaccessible cliff; there are the birds, and if they did not fly up and out into the world the first time they stood on the edge of the nest, would they not be in the dark water below, instead of coming back to the old home for a hundred years?

The evidence of successive occupation for a century is this: The present family of Walkers – father and children – have watched that nest, never finding it empty a summer for twenty years. Old Deacon Walker, grandfather of our club members – who, of course, initiated their father – proved that Phoebes had hatched in the cliff nest during eighty years previous, in this wise: After he had stood guard forty years, as the deacon loved to relate, didn't his Uncle Israel – who had been spending just those two-score years in the South – come home one spring evening, and the very next morning that ancient worthy demanded a boat

and a boy to take him under the old Phoebe's nest on the ledge, which he affirmed had never been without tenants during the forty years before he left Cloverdale?

So there are the figures and facts showing how not only the nest, but bird love and bird lore had come down through the century, and with such an inheritance, no wonder the Walkers are on the best of terms with feathered folk, or that they, with their confidential friends, the Clymers, are still adding to their bird book things not generally known.

Elizabeth Reed Brownell.

THE BLACKBIRD'S SONG

The bee is asleep in the heart of the rose,
The lark's nestled soft in the cloud,
The swallow lies snug close under the eaves —
But the blackbird's fluting is loud;
He pipes as no hermit would or should,
Half a mile deep in the heart of the wood,
In the green dark heart of the wood.

The raven's asleep in the thick of the oak,
His head close under his wing;
The lark's come down to his home on the earth —
But the blackbird still will sing,
Making the heart of the dark wood thrill
With the notes that come from his golden bill,
That flow from his golden bill.

— *Walter Thornbury.*

A GOLDEN EAGLE

In January, 1900, I had given me a Golden Eagle. He had been picked up in a stunned condition in the foot-hills, having received a shock from the electric wires, on which he had probably alighted for a moment or struck in his flight. There is an electric power-house in the Sierras opposite Fresno, from which pole lines carry the strong current down to be used for power and light in the valley, and this was by no means the first record of eagles and other large birds being stunned or killed by them.

The person who found him had brought him down with the idea of having him stuffed, but as he showed a good deal of life, I begged to keep him alive, and he was handed over to me. He was evidently a young bird of the previous season, though nearly full grown. From tip to tip of his wings he was over five feet, and his wonderful black talons measured one and one-half to two inches beyond the feathers. His legs were handsomely feathered down to the claws, and his proud head, with its strong beak, large, piercing eyes, and red and yellow-brown feathers, was a thing of beauty. The rest of his body was dark, almost black, with the exception of three or four white diamonds showing on the upper tail feathers.

I kept him in a big box open on one side. When I first brought him home and had put him into the box, a neighbor's poodle came sniffing around for the meat I had brought for the eagle. He

was on the back side of the box, and so could not see that there was anything in it, nor did he hear anything, but all at once the scent of the bird must have struck his nostrils, for with a squall of fear he disappeared from the yard and never afterward would venture near the cage.

During the time I kept the eagle, some two months, he never showed any desire to attack me, though his claws would have gone through my hand like a knife, nor did he display any fear of me. He never made any attempt to get out while anyone was in sight of him, nor did I catch him in any such attempt, but sometimes at night I would hear him, and every morning his wings, beak and feathers showed he never gave up the hope of getting free.

I never fed him to the full extent of his capacity, but gave him from a pound to a pound and a half of meat daily at noon, which he devoured in a very short time, sticking his claws through the toughest beef and tearing it like ribbons with his beak. It was wonderful to see how clean he could pick a bone with his clumsy-looking great beak. I never knew him to touch any kind of food but raw meat. When anything was handed in to him, no matter how high up, he never accepted it in his bill, but struck at it with a lightning-like movement of his claws, scarcely ever missing it.

One day he snapped in two one of the bars across his cage, pried off another and got out. I was telephoned that my eagle was out, and hurried home to find all the children in the neighborhood blockaded indoors. The eagle was perched on the grape-arbor

easily surveying the lay of things. A cat had crawled into the wood-pile and under the doorsteps the venerable cock of the yard was congratulating himself on his safety, but feeling rather undignified. I procured a rope and took my first lessons in lassoing. The eagle had been so closely confined that he had not been able to gain the full use of his wings, and so could only run or flutter a few feet from the ground. I finally recaptured him and brought him back. He showed no fear and offered little resistance.

About the middle of March the weather became very hot, and it was really cruel to keep the bird penned up in such close quarters in such weather, so I took him out to the plains and set him free. He could not use his wings much, and it is very doubtful if he escaped the shotgun or rifle of some predatory small boy, but it was the best I could do for him. He was a beautiful specimen of a bird, and I only wish I could have kept him.

Charles Elmer Jenney.

THE HARLEQUIN DUCK

(Histrionicus histrionicus.)

The Harlequin Duck is the sole representative of the genus to which it belongs. The generic and the specific names (*Histrionicus*), which unfortunately the strict rules of scientific naming require in the case of this bird to be the same, are from the Latin word meaning harlequin. This word, meaning a buffoon, is especially appropriate, for the arrangement of the colors on its head, neck and back give the bird a peculiar appearance, especially during the mating season. At this time, too, the drollery of their actions is very noticeable.

Harlequin is not the only name by which this bird is known. In the New England States and northward along the Atlantic coast it is frequently called the "Lord and Lady," because of the white crescents and spots of its plumage and the proud bearing of the male. It is also called the Rock Duck, the Mountain Duck and the Squealer.

Its range covers the northern portion of North America, Europe and Asia. "It is not common wherever found. In many parts of the Old World it is only a rare or occasional visitor; this is the case in Great Britain, France and Germany." In the United States, during the winter, it passes southward into Illinois, Missouri and California. It breeds only in the northern part of

its range.

It is a mountain duck and “frequents swiftly running streams, where it delights to sport among the eddies below water falls or in the brawling rapids.” It is not only an adept in the art of swimming and diving, but it also flies swiftly and to a great height. During the winter it frequents northern sea coasts and exhibits the characteristics of other sea ducks, and is occasionally found far out at sea. It is known that the Harlequin will lead a solitary life, and it is sometimes observed in pairs or even alone on streams of remote and unfrequented localities.

The sexes vary greatly. While the male, which is the sex of the bird of our illustration, is brightly colored, the female is much more somber. The young resemble the adult female.

The food of the Harlequin consists almost entirely of the parts of aquatic plants and the smaller crustaceans and mollusks. The food is obtained by diving, frequently through several feet of water. Mr. Chapman tells us that the sea ducks in diving to obtain food, will “sometimes descend one hundred and fifty feet or more.”

Its nest, though usually placed on the ground, is sometimes built in the hollow of a tree or a hollow stump, though always near a body of water. The nest is usually a simple structure made of the stems of water plants, twigs and grass thickly lined with the downy feathers from the breast of the duck. The eggs are occasionally laid on the grass, and no effort is made to build a nest. The female thoroughly covers the eggs when she leaves the

nest.

The number of eggs varies from six to eight, though ten have been recorded. They are of a “yellowish buff or greenish yellow” color.

This duck is considered an excellent food and is much sought for by the natives of those regions which it frequents.

AN ORCHARD BIRD-WAY

“A rodless Walton of the brooks,
A bloodless sportsman I;
I hunt for the thoughts that throng the woods,
The dreams that haunt the sky.”

– *Samuel Walter Foss.*

An isolated orchard certainly comes very near being an inner sanctuary of bird life. For some reason or other, the gnarled old trees and matted June grass touch either the practical or artistic sense of bird nature very closely, and appeal strongly to many a bird heart, for therein do congregate all sorts and conditions of feathered life. Probably it is an exceptional feeding-ground, for the curled and misshapen leaves testify to the abundance of the hairy caterpillar and leaf-worm supply, which proves such delectable tidbit to the bird palate. When I see the birds feasting upon these unsavory looking morsels, I can but wonder at the unregenerate farmer who so loudly decries the bird as a fruit-destroyer, when a few hours' observation will teach him that to one cherry stolen there are a hundred tree destroyers gobbled up, and a thousand weed seeds devoured. It is Wilson Flagg who so curtly says:

“The fact, not yet understood in America, that the birds

which are the most mischievous as consumers of fruit are the most useful as destroyers of insects, is well known by all the farmers of Europe; and while we destroy the birds to save the fruit, and sometimes cut down the fruit trees to starve the birds, the Europeans more wisely plant them for their sustenance and accommodation.”

Our orchard is surrounded by a fence of weather-stained chestnut rails, whose punctured surface has been the scene of many a worm tragedy resulting in the survival of the fittest. We enter through a pair of lichen-covered bars, grey-tinted and sobered by age. How far less picturesque is our field and hedgerow when inclosed by that inhuman human invention, a barbed-wire fence, and trim swing gate. To be neat and up to date, is never to be picturesque, and seldom to be artistic. But our quiet entrance into the orchard has caused something of a disturbance among the inhabitants, if no great alarm. Fluttering hastily to a convenient tree top goes a dainty red-eyed vireo, who seems to me to have more of a grey than olive gleam to his shining back. As he alights upon the topmost bough —

“A bird’s bright gleam on me he bent,
A bird’s glance, fearless, yet discreet,”

but to show that he is in no way seriously alarmed he flings down to us some sweet notes of liquid song. It is Wilson Flagg, I believe, that has dubbed him the Preacher, but to me he seems

more correctly termed the Lover, for I can but interpret his accentuated notes into "Sweet Spirit, Sweet – Sweet – Spirit," a continuous cry, as it were, of loving eulogy to the devoted little wife who is so carefully hidden in her pocket nest in a distant thorn tree. But all of this time we understand his clever machinations, as he carefully leads us in an opposite direction by his song allurements. He flits from tree to tree with a naive turn and flutter, keeping upon us all the time, an eye alert and keen, until he deems us at a safe distance enough to be left to our own clumsy device, when, with a quick turn, he wheels backward to the starting-point, and we hear a triumphant praise call to the beloved "Sweet Spirit." Near a corner of the old orchard where there are great bunches of Elder and Sumach, we hear vehemently stitching, a busy little Maryland yellow throat, doing up his summer song work with an energetic "Stitch-a-wiggle, Stitch-a-wiggle, Stitch-a-wiggle, stitch 'em," the "stitch 'em" brought out with such emphatic force that it seems the last satisfactory utterance of a work accomplished. His pert vivacity has been most delightfully illustrated by Ernest Seton-Thompson, in Frank Chapman's "Bird Life," and I am sure the snap-shot caught him on his last accentuated "stitch 'em." Dr. Abbot tells us that these busy little people usually build their nests in the skunk cabbage plants, indicating that they must have an abnormal odor sense, but perhaps they allow their sense of safety to overcome their sense of smell. However, this pair of yellowthroats have built instead, among some thickly matted Elders,

just above the ground.

Another fact that favors our orchard in bird minds, is its close proximity to a thickly foliated ravine which affords such delightful security to feathered people. It is also a charming background for our sunny orchard, filled in below, as it is, with tall, ghostly stalks of black cohosh gleaming white in the shadows.

Near by, upon a bit of high ground, quivers a group of prim American aspens, the pale green of their bark gleaming against the dark shadows of a hemlock hedge. As we look at them, not a leaf is in motion, when all of a sudden one little leaf begins to gesticulate frantically, throwing itself about with violent wildness, then another leaf catches the enthusiasm of the soft summer air, then another, and another until all of the trees are a mass of gesticulating, seething little serrated atoms, for all the world like a congregation of human beings, vociferating, demonstrating, or contradicting some poor little human leaf that has dared to be moved by some passing thought in advance of his fellow kind. Darting through the quivering foliage comes a gleam of fire, which resolves itself into a scarlet tanager who calls to us, "look-see," demanding our attention to his bright beauty, remembering possibly that his brilliant coloring is but a thing of short duration, for too soon will come winter and plain clothes. Perched upon a fence rail, but somewhat out of place in this shady corner, sits a blatant meadow lark, about whose golden breast is hung a gleaming neck chain and locket of shining black

feathers, of which, from the pert poise of his head, we deem him justly proud, and he is at least a conspicuous spot of color against the green of the hillside. He eyes us impertinently as he inconsistently but musically calls to us, “You-can’t-see-me, You-can’t-see-me,” in the face of the most contradictory evidence of his own conspicuousness, varying his song to “Erie-lake-Erie,” with every other breath. As a child I used to wonder who taught him the name of the great lake on whose borders he makes his summer home. But to other people, other interpretations, for to Neltje Blanchan he says “Spring-o’-the-year, spring-o’-the-year,” and to Frank Chapman his song is a bar of high, trilling notes. Sing on, you wary warbler, for we have not time to search out your carefully hidden nest among the timothy grasses of the distant meadow, for we know that it would be like looking for the pearl in the oyster, so carefully is it concealed among the dried grasses, but which snakes and field mice depredate so effectually. In the distant valley we hear the soft echo of the Italian liquids of the wood thrush’s “A-o-le-le, a-oa-o-le.” Shy little songster, who so sweetly trills to us long after his feathered kind have tucked their busy little bills away in soft wings. Across the orchard comes the romantic “Coo-coo-coo-coo,” sometimes interpreted into “I-thou-thou-thou,” of the purple plumaged mourning dove, starting out on a high minor and softly falling to a low contralto. There are no more delightful representatives of romantic bird love, than these birds illustrate. More frequently than in any other species you see the devoted pair going about together, on the

telegraph wire, on the tree top, on the wing, always together, undulating their graceful necks with marked devotion. Many a bird lover has criticised Mr. Dove for his remarkable fondness for a lady who is a so decidedly slack housekeeper, and who is satisfied with so shiftless a nest in which to deposit the two white eggs, for the few carelessly thrown together sticks can prove anything but a bed of down to the tender bird babies. However, perhaps these romantic birds consider that “love is enough” as they follow Le Gallienne’s refrain of:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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