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BIRDS.

ILLUSTRATED BY COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY.

VOL. III. FEBRUARY, 1898. NO. 2.

GILBERT WHITE AND "SELBORNE."

I SUPPOSE that a habit of minute observation of nature is one of the most difficult things to acquire, as it is one which is less generally pursued than any other study. In almost all departments of learning and investigation there have been numberless works published to illustrate them, and text books would fill the shelves of a large library. Thoreau in his "Walden" has shown an extremely fine and close observation of the scenes in which his all too short life was passed, but his object does not seem at any time to have been the study of nature from an essential love of it, or to add to his own or the world's knowledge. On the contrary, nature was the one resource which enabled him to exemplify his notions of independence, which were of such a sturdy and uncompromising character that Mr. Emerson, who had suffered some inconvenience from his experience of Thoreau as an inmate of his household, thought him fitter to meet occasionally in the open air than as a guest at table and fireside. There is a delicious harmony with nature in all that he has written, but his descriptions of out-of-door life invite us rather to indolent musing than to investigation or study. Who after reading Izaak Walton ever went a-fishing with the vigor and enterprise of Piscator? Washington Irving allowed his cork to drift with the current and lay down in the shadow of a spreading oak to dream with the beloved old author.

In White's "Natural History of Selborne" we have a unique book indeed, but of a far more general interest than its title would indicate. Pliny, the elder, was the father of natural history but to many of us Gilbert White is entitled to that honor. To an early edition of the book, without engravings, and much abridged, as compared with Bohn's, published in 1851, many owe their first interest in the subject.

Mr. Ireland in his charming little "Book Lover's Enchiridion," tells us that when a boy he was so delighted with it, that in order to possess a copy of his own (books were not so cheap as now) he actually copied out the

whole work. In a list of one hundred books, Sir John Lubbock mentions it as “an inestimable blessing.” Edward Jesse, author of “Gleanings in Natural History” attributes his own pursuits as an out-door naturalist entirely to White’s example. Much of the charm of the book consists in the amiable character of the author, who

> “——lived in solitude, midst trees and flowers,
> Life’s sunshine mingling with its passing showers;
> No storms to startle, and few clouds to shade
> The even path his Christian virtues made.”

Very little is known of him beyond what he has chosen to mention in his diaries, which were chiefly records of his daily studies and observations, and in his correspondence, from which the “history” is in fact made up. From these it is evident that his habits were secluded and that he was strongly attached to the charms of rural life. He says the greater part of his time was spent in literary occupations, and especially in the study of nature. He was born July 18, 1720, in the house in which he died. His father was his first instructor in natural history, and to his brother Thomas, a fellow of the Royal Society, he was indebted for many suggestions for his work. It is also to his brother’s influence that we owe the publication of the book, as it required much persuasion to induce the philosopher to pass through the ordeal of criticism, “having a great dread of Reviewers,” those incorrigible *bêtes noires* of authors. His brother promising himself to review the work in the “Gentleman’s Magazine,” White reluctantly consented to its publication. The following short abstract from the review will show its quality, as well as suggest a possible answer to the current question propounded by students of the census.

“Contemplative persons see with regret the country more and more deserted every day, as they know that every well-regulated family of property which quits a village to reside in a town, injures the place that is forsaken in material circumstances. It is with pleasure, therefore, we observe that so rational an employment of leisure hours as the study of nature promises to become popular, since whatever adds to the number of rural amusements, and consequently counteracts the allurements of the metropolis is, on this consideration, of national importance.”

It is to be feared, however, that many stronger influences than this of the study of nature will be necessary to keep the young men of the present day from the great cities. Indeed, modern naturalists themselves spend the greater part of their lives at the centers of knowledge and only make temporary sallies into the woods and fields to gather data. White was a noble pioneer. The very minuteness—almost painful—of his observation required him to occupy himself for days and weeks and months with what to the average mind would seem of the slightest importance. As an example of his patient investigation, his famous study of the tortoise may be given. It was more than thirty years old when it came into his possession, and for many years—perhaps twenty—we find White watching the habits of the interesting old reptile, until, we may assume, he knew all about him and his species.

There are over three hundred and fifty different species of animals and birds treated by White, most of them exhaustively; the beech tree, the elm, and the oak are described and watched from year to year; and the geology and fossil remains of Selborne district are presented. We have daily accounts of the weather, information of the first tree in leaf, the appearance of the first fungi and the plants first in blossom. He tells us when mosses vegetate, when insects first appear and disappear, when birds are first seen and when they migrate—and a thousand other things; all in a style of such simplicity, united with rare scholarship, that it is well worth the attention and imitation of students of the English language. White was educated at Oxford. He had frequent opportunities, ’tis said, of accepting college livings, but his fondness for his native village made him decline all preferment. To this we owe “Selborne” of which Dr. Beardmore, a distinguished scholar, made the prophetic remark to a nephew of White’s: “Your uncle has sent into the world a publication with nothing to attract attention to it but an advertisement or two in the newspapers; but depend upon it, the time will come when very few who buy books will be without it.”

The village was far less attractive than our imaginations would depict it to have been, and the traveler who would “view fair Selborne aright,” according to a contemporary writer, should humor the caprices of the English climate and visit it only when its fields and foliage are clothed in their summer verdure.

—Charles C. Marble.

A FRIEND OF BIRDS

IT is told of George H. Corliss, the famous engine builder of Providence, R. I., that when building a foundry at the Corliss works, some Blue Birds took the opportunity to build in some holes in the interior framework into which horizontal timbers were to go. The birds flew in and out—as Blue Birds will—and went on with their housekeeping, until in the natural course of things the workmen would have evicted them to put the apertures to their intended use of receiving timbers. But Mr. Corliss interfered and showed how the particular aperture the birds were occupying could be left undisturbed until they were done with it, without any serious delay to the building. So the pair came and went in the midst of the noise of building and brought up their little family safely, and after they had flown away, and not until then, that particular part of the framework was completed.

At another time, Mr. Corliss was working on a contract with the city of Providence to supply a steam pumping apparatus, power house and all, at Sockonosset, and the time was short, and there were forfeitures nominated in the bond for every day beyond a a specified date for its completion.

The power house was to be upon virgin soil where were rocks and trees —little trees growing among rocks. In blasting and clearing the necessary place for the foundations of the building, a Robin's nest was discovered in a little tree within the space where the upheavals were to be made. When Mr. Corliss knew this he had the work transferred to the other side of the square or parallelogram around which the digging and blasting were to go, saying that it was just as well to do the other side first.

But it proved that when the workmen had got clear around and back to the Robin's tree, the young birds were still not quite ready to fly. This called for a new exercise of an inventor's power of adapting means to a worthy end. Looking at the little tree with its nest and little birds high in the branches he bade the men support the tree carefully while it was sawed through the trunk a little above the ground, and then carry it in an upright position to a safe distance and stick it into the ground with proper support.

The Robin family continued to thrive after this novel house-moving and all flew away together after a few more days.

QUEER DOINGS OF A CRANE.

A WRITER on "Animal Helpers and Servers" gives a remarkable account of a tame Crane, communicated by Von Seyffert. Von Seyffert had a pair of tame Cranes which soon lost all fear of man and of domestic animals, and became strongly attached to the former. Their life in a German village, in which agriculture was the sole employment and the communal system of joint herding of cattle and swine and driving them together to the common pasture prevailed, was very much to their taste. They soon knew all the inhabitants in the place and used to call regularly at the houses to be fed. Then the female died and the survivor at once took as a new friend a bull. He stood by the bull in the stall and kept the flies off him, screamed when he roared, danced before him and followed him out with the herd. In this association the Crane learned the duties of cowherd, so that one evening he brought home the whole of the village herd of heifers unaided and drove them into the stable. From that time the Crane undertook so many duties that he was busy from dawn till night. He acted as policeman among the poultry, stopping all fights and disorder. He stood by a horse when left in a cart and prevented it from

moving by pecking its nose and screaming. A Turkey and a Game Cock were found fighting, whereon the Crane first fought the Turkey, then sought out and thrashed the cock. Meantime it herded the cattle, not always with complete success. The bovines were collected in the morning by the sound of a horn and some would lag behind. On one occasion the Crane went back, drove up some lagging heifers through the street and then frightened them so much that they broke away and ran two miles in the wrong direction. The bird could not bring them back, but drove them into a field, where it guarded them until they were fetched. It would drive out trespassing cattle as courageously as a dog and, unlike most busybodies, was a universal favorite and pride of the village.—*Cornhill Magazine.*

LEAST BITTERN.

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THE LEAST BITTERN.

THROUGHOUT the whole of temperate North America and tropical America to Brazil, this, the smallest of the Bittern family, is a well-known bird, but being a nocturnal species, inhabiting the almost inaccessible swamps and boggy lands that are covered with a dense growth of canes, reeds, and rushes, it is seldom met with. Mr. Davis calls it an extremely interesting little bird, of quiet, retiring habits. In some places as many as a dozen or twenty pairs breed along the grassy shores of a small lake or pond. The nest is placed on the ground or in the midst of the rankest grass, or in a bush. It is often placed on floating bog, and is simply a platform of dead rushes.

This bird has many odd habits. When standing on the edge of a stream, with its neck drawn in, it is often taken for a Woodcock, the long bill giving it this appearance. It is so stupid at times that it may be caught with the hand.

The Least Bittern is usually seen just before or after sunset. When startled it utters a low *gua*, and in daylight flies but a short distance, in a weak, uncertain manner, but at dusk it flaps along on strong easy wing, with neck drawn in and legs extended.

The eggs of this species are usually from two to six in number, and of a pale bluish or greenish-white. If approached while on the nest, the female generally steps quietly to one side, but if suddenly surprised,

takes to flight.

The Least Bittern is known by many local names. In Jamaica it is called Tortoise-shell Bird and Minute Bittern, and in many localities Little Bittern.

"All Nature is a unit in herself,
Yet but a part of a far greater whole.
Little by little you may teach your child
To know her ways and live in harmony
With her; and then, in turn, help him through her
To find those verities within himself,
Of which all outward things are but the type.
So when he passes from your sheltering care
To walk the ways of men, his soul shall be
Knit to all things that are, and still most free;
And of him shall be writ at last this word—
'At peace with nature, with himself, and God.'"

THE BALDPATE DUCK.

"There seem to be as many Ducks as there are Owls," remarks Bobbie. "This fellow is called Baldpate, but he's not bare on top of his head like Gran'pa, at all."

"No, his head is feathered as well as any Duck's head," replies mamma. "I remember hearing him called the Widgeon, I think."

"Yes, that's what it says here, the American Widgeon, a game bird, you know, mamma."

"Yes, its flesh is very delicious, almost as good as the Canvas-back."

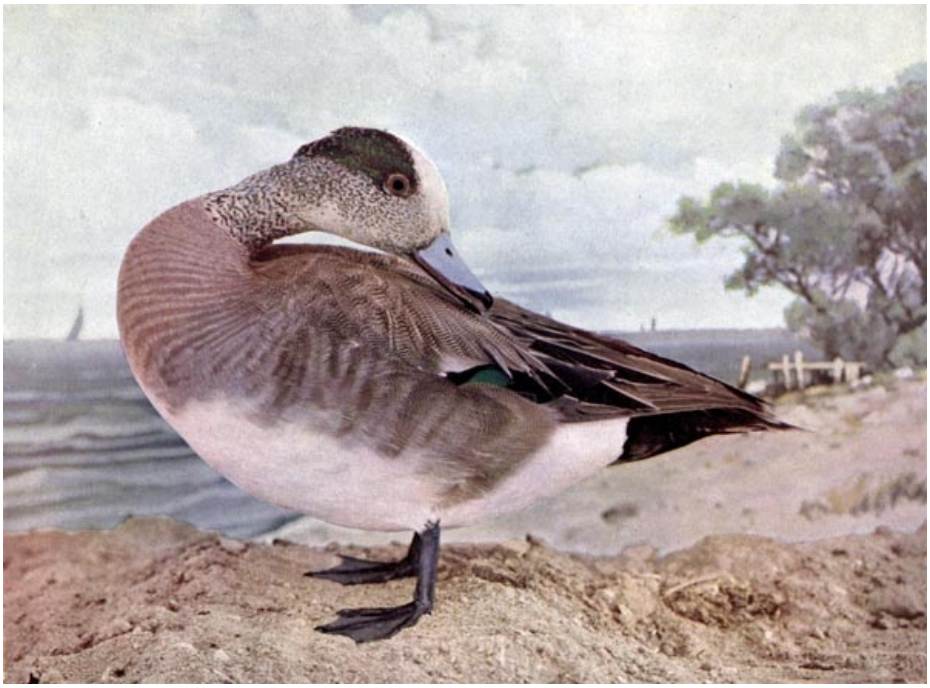
"Oh, but these Baldpates are cunning fellows," exclaims Bobbie, continuing his reading, "It says they are fond of a certain grass plant which grows deep in both salt and fresh water, but they don't dive for it as the Canvas-back and other deep water Ducks do."

"Well?" says mamma, as Bobbie stops, his lips moving, but uttering no sound.

"I stopped to spell a word," explains Bobbie. "It says they closely follow and watch the Canvas-back and other Ducks, and when they rise to the surface of the water with the roots of the plant in their bills, Mr. Baldpate quickly snatches a part, or all of the catch, and hurries off to eat it at his leisure."

"A mean fellow, indeed," remarks mamma, "but he has no reason to guide him, as you have, you know."

"Indeed I *don't* know," quickly says Bobbie. "You remember that story about the imprisoned Duck that had its leg broken and was put under a small crate, or coop, to keep it from running about? Well, some of the other Ducks pitied the little prisoner and tried to release him by forcing their necks under the crate and thus lifting it up. They found they weren't strong enough to do that, and so they *quacked*, and *quacked*, and *quacked* among themselves, then marched away in a body. Soon they came back with forty ducks, every one in the farm yard. They surrounded the crate and tried to lift it as before, but again they failed. Then they *quacked* some more, and after a long talk the whole of them went to one side of the crate. As many as could thrust their necks underneath it, and the rest pushed them forward from behind. A good push, a strong push, up went the crate a little way, and out waddled the little prisoner. I want to know if they didn't reason that out, mamma?"



BALDPATE DUCK.

THE BALDPATE.

We would have you to wit, that on eggs though we sit,
And are spiked on a spit, and are baked in a pan,
Birds are older by far than your ancestors are,
And made love and made war, ere the making of man!
—ANDREW LANG.

THERE is much variation in the plumage of adult males of this species of Widgeon, but as Dr. Coues says: "The bird cannot be mistaken under any condition; the extensive white of the under parts and wings is recognizable at gun-range." The female is similar, but lacks the white crown and iridescence on the head.

The Baldpate ranges over the whole of North America. In winter it is common in the Gulf states and lower part of the Mississippi Valley. Cooke says it breeds chiefly in the north, but is known to nest in Manitoba, the Dakotas, Minnesota, Nebraska, Kansas, Illinois, and Texas. Throughout the whole of British America, as far north as the Arctic ocean, it is very abundant. In October and April it visits in large numbers the rivers and marshes, as well as both sea coasts of the northern United States, and is much sought by hunters, its flesh being of the finest quality, as when in good condition it cannot easily be distinguished from that of the Canvas-back. It is regarded by hunters as a great nuisance. It is not only so shy that it avoids the points of land, but by its whistling and confused manner of flight is said to alarm the other species. During its stay in the waters of the Chesapeake, it is the constant companion of the Canvas-backs, upon whose superiority in diving it depends in a large degree for its food, stealing from them, as they rise to the surface of the water, the tender roots of the plant of which both are so fond—*vallisneria* grass, or wild celery. The Baldpate is said to visit the rice fields of the south during the winter in considerable numbers. It winters in the Southern states, Mexico, and the West Indies. In the north, the Widgeon exhibits a greater preference for rivers and open lakes than most of the other fresh-water Ducks.

The favorite situation of the nest is remarkable, for while the other Ducks —except, perhaps, the Teal, according to Mr. Kennicott—choose the immediate vicinity of water, he found the Baldpate always breeding at a considerable distance from it. Several of the nests observed on the Yukon were fully half a mile from the nearest water. He invariably found the nest among dry leaves, upon high, dry ground, either under large trees

or in thick groves of small ones—frequently among thick spruces. The nest is small, simply a depression among the leaves, but thickly lined with down, with which after setting is begun, the eggs are covered when left by the parent. They are from eight to twelve in number, and pale buff. The food of the Baldpate consists of aquatic insects, small shells, and the seeds and roots of various plants.

The call of this bird is a plaintive whistle of two and then three notes of nearly equal duration. Col. N. S. Goss states that, as a rule, Widgeons "are not shy, and their note, a sort of *whew, whew, whew*, uttered while feeding and swimming, enables the hunter to locate them in the thickest growth of water plants."

WOOING BIRDS' ODD WAYS.

Of all the interesting points on which Mr. Dixon touches in his "Curiosities of Bird Life," perhaps none is more remarkable than the strange antics in which some birds indulge, especially at the pairing season. With what odd gestures will a smartly dressed Cock sparrow, for instance, endeavor to cut a good figure in the eyes of his demure and sober-tinted lady-love!

To a similar performance, though with more of dignity and action about it, the Blackcock treats his wives, for, unlike the better conducted though often much calumniated sparrow, he is not satisfied with a single mate. One of the most characteristic of spring sounds on Exmoor, as evening darkens, or, still more, in the early hours of the morning, is the challenge of the Blackcock. In the month of April he who is abroad early enough may watch, upon the russet slopes of Dunkery, a little party of Blackcock at one of their recognized and probably ancestral meeting-places, by one of the little moorland streams, or on the wet edge of some swampy hollow. Each bird crouches on a hillock, in the oddest of attitudes—its head down, its wings a-droop, its beautiful tail raised—and utters at intervals strange, almost weird notes, sometimes suggestive of the purr of a Turtle-dove, and sometimes more like the cry of chamois.

Presently an old cock, grand in his new black coat, will get up and march backward and forward with his neck stretched out and his wings trailing on the ground. Now he leaps into the air, sometimes turning right round before he alights, and now again he crouches close upon his hillock. It is said that in places where black game are few a single cock will go through all this by himself, or at least with only his wives for witnesses. But if there are more cocks than one, the proceedings generally end with a fight. Where the birds are numerous the young cocks, who are not allowed to enter the arena with their elders, hold unauthorized celebrations of their own.

There are many birds which thus, like higher mortals, have their fits of madness in the days of courtship. But there are some, such as the spur-winged Lapwing of La Plata, which are, like the lady in the song, so fond of dancing, especially of what the natives call their serious dance, meaning a square one, that they indulge in such performances all the year, not in the daytime only, but even on moonlight nights. "If," says Mr. Hudson, who tells the story, "a person watches any two birds for some time—for they live in pairs—he will see another Lapwing, one of a neighboring couple, rise up and fly to them, leaving his own mate to guard their chosen ground, and instead of resenting this visit as an unwarranted intrusion on their domain, as they would certainly resent the approach of almost any other bird, they welcome it with notes and signs of pleasure. Advancing to the visitor, they place themselves behind it; then all three keeping step, begin a rapid march, uttering resonant drumming notes in time with their movements; the notes of the pair behind them being emitted in a stream, like a drum roll, while the leader utters loud single notes at regular intervals. The march ceases; the leader elevates his wings and stands motionless and erect, still uttering loud notes, while the other two with puffed-out plumage, and standing exactly abreast, stoop forward and downward until the top of their beaks touch the ground, and, sinking their rhythmical voices to a murmur, remain for some time in this posture. The performance is then over and the visitor goes back to his own ground and mate, to receive a visitor himself later on."—*London Daily News.*

PURPLE FINCH.

THE PURPLE FINCH.

"The wind blows cold, the birds are still,
And skies are gray."

PURPLE GROSBEAK, Crimson Finch, Strawberry Bird, and Linnet are some of the common names by which this bird of bright colors, sweet song, and sociable disposition is known. It is very numerous in New England, but is found nesting regularly in the northern tier of states, North and South Dakota, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, etc., northward, and it is said to breed in northern Illinois. In Nova Scotia it is exceeding abundant.

Robert Ridgway says he first made the acquaintance of the Purple Finch at Mt. Carmel, in mid-winter, "under circumstances of delightful memory. The ground was covered with snow,—the weather clear and bright, but cold. Crossing a field in the outskirts of the town, and approaching the line of tall, dead rag-weeds which grew thickly in the fence corners, a straggling flock of birds was startled, flew a short distance, and again alighted on the tall weed-stalks, uttering as they flew, a musical, metallic *chink, chink*. The beautiful crimson color of the adult males, heightened by contrast with the snow, was a great surprise to the writer, then a boy of thirteen, and excited intense interest in this, to him, new bird. On subsequent occasions during the same winter, they were found under like circumstances, and also in 'sycamore' or buttonwood trees, feeding on the small seeds contained within the balls of this tree."

Dr. Brewer says that the song of the Purple Finch resembles that of the Canary, and though less varied and powerful, is softer, sweeter, and more touching and pleasing. The notes may be heard from the last of May until late in September, and in the long summer evening are often

continued until it is quite dark. Their song has all the beauty and pathos of the Warbling Vireo, and greatly resembles it, but is more powerful and full in tone. It is a very interesting sight to watch one of these little performers in the midst of his song. He appears perfectly absorbed in his work,—his form is dilated, his crest is erected, his throat expands, and he seems to be utterly unconscious of all around him. But let an intruder of his own race appear within a few feet of the singer, the song instantly ceases, and in a violent fit of indignation, he chases him away. S. P. Cheney says that a careful observer told him that he had seen the Linnet fly from the side of his mate directly upward fifteen or twenty feet, singing every instant in the most excited manner till he dropped to the point of starting. The Yellow-breasted Chat has a like performance. See Vol. II of BIRDS, p. 238.

The nest of the Finch is usually placed in evergreens or orchard trees, at a moderate distance from the ground. It is composed of weed-stalks, bark strips, rootlets, grasses, and vegetable fibres, and lined with hair. The eggs are four or five in number, dull green, and spotted with dark brown.

Study his picture and habits and be prepared to welcome this charming spring visitant.

THE RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER.

A little Woodpecker am I,
  And you may always know
When I am searching for a worm,
  For tap, tap, tap, I go.

Oh yes, I am proud of my appearance, but really I am not proud of my name. Sometimes I am called the “Zebra Bird,” on account of the bands of white and black on my back and wings. That is a much prettier name, I think, than the Red-bellied Woodpecker, don’t you? Certainly it is more genteel.

I know a bird that is called the Red-eyed Vireo, because his eyes are red. Well, my eyes are red, too. Then why not call me the Red-eyed Woodpecker? Still the Woodpeckers are such a common family I don’t much care about that either.

In the last February number of BIRDS that saucy red-headed cousin of mine had his picture and a letter. Before very long the Red-cockaded Woodpecker will have his picture taken too, I suppose.

Dear, dear! If all the Woodpeckers are going to write to you, you will have a merry time. Why, I can count twenty-four different species of that family and I have only four fingers, or toes, to count on, and you little folks have five. There may be more of them, Woodpeckers I mean, for all I know.

Speaking about toes! I have two in front and two behind. There are some Woodpeckers that have only three, two in front and one behind. It’s a fact, I assure you. I thought I would tell you about it before one of the three toed fellows got a chance to write to you about it himself.

I am not so shy and wary a bird as some people think I am. When I want an insect, or worm, I don’t care how many eyes are watching me, but up the tree I climb in my zigzag fashion, crying *chaw-chaw*, or *chow-chow* in a noisy sort of way. Sometimes I say *chuck, chuck, chuck*! The first is Chinese, and the last English, you know. You might think it sounded like the bark of a small dog, though.

I am fond of flies and catch them on the wing. I like ripe apples, too; and oh, what a *good* time I have in winter raiding the farmer’s corn crib! I have only to hammer at the logs with my sharp bill, and soon I can squeeze myself in between them and eat my fill. I understand the farmer doesn’t like it very much.

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER.
From col. Chi. Acad. Sciences.

THE RED BELLIED WOODPECKER.

"ZEBRA BIRD" is the name by which this handsome Woodpecker will be recognized by many readers. Some regard it as the most beautiful of the smaller species of its tribe. As may be seen, the whole crown and nape are scarlet in the male. In the female they are only partly so, but sufficiently to make the identification easy. A bird generally of retired habits, seeking the deepest and most unfrequented forests to breed, it is nevertheless often found in numbers in the vicinity of villages where there are a few dead and partially decayed trees, in which they drill their holes, high up on a limb, or in the bole of the tree. When engaged in hammering for insects it frequently utters a short, singular note, which Wilson likens to the bark of a small dog. We could never liken it to anything, it is so characteristic, and must be heard to be appreciated. *Chaw, chaw*, repeated twice, and with vigor, somewhat resembles the hoarse utterance.

Prof. D. E. Lantz states that this species in the vicinity of Manhattan, Kansas, exhibits the same familiarity as the Flicker, the Red-headed and Downy Woodpeckers. About a dozen nests were observed, the excavations ranging usually less than twenty feet from the ground. One nest in a burrow of a large dead limb of an elm tree was found May 12, and contained five eggs. The birds are very much attached to their nests. If the nest is destroyed by man or beast, the birds almost immediately begin excavating another nest cavity for the second set, always in the vicinity of the first nest, often in the same tree.

In its search for food, the "Zebra Bird," regardless of the presence of man, climbs in its usual spiral or zigzag manner the trees and their branches boldly uttering now and then its familiar *chaw, chaw*, darting off occasionally to catch a passing insect upon the wing. Its flight is undulating, and its habits in many respects are like those of the Red-headed, but it is not so much of an upland bird, or lover of berries and fruits, and therefore more respected by the farmer. In contest with the Red-head it is said to be invariably vanquished.

The North American family of Woodpeckers—consisting of about twenty-

five species—is likely to be brought together in BIRDS for the first time. We have already presented several species, and will figure others as we may secure the finest specimens. Occasionally a foreign Woodpecker will appear. About three hundred and fifty species are known, and they are found in all the wooded parts of the world except Australia and Madagascar.

A FORCED PARTNERSHIP.

A pair of Robins had made their nest on the horizontal branch of an evergreen tree which stood near a dwelling house, and the four young had hatched when a pair of English Sparrows selected the same branch for their nest. When the Robins refused to vacate their nest, the Sparrows proceeded to build theirs upon the outside of the Robin's nest. To this the Robins made no objection, so both families lived and thrived together on the same branch, with nests touching. The young of both species developed normally, and in due time left their nests. The branch bearing both nests is now preserved in the college museum.—*Oberlin College Bulletin.*

WHAT IS AN EGG?

How many people crack an egg, swallow the meat, and give it no further thought. Yet, to a reflective mind the egg constitutes, it has been said, the greatest wonder of nature. The highest problems of organic development, and even of the succession of animals on the earth, are embraced here. "Every animal springs from an egg," is a dictum of Harvey that has become an axiom.

In an egg one would suppose the yolk to be the animal. This is not so. It is merely food—the animal is the little whitish circle seen on the membrane enveloping the yolk.

We hope to group a number of eggs, to enable our readers to compare their size and shape, from that of the Epyornis, six times the size of an Ostrich egg, down to the tiny egg that is found in the soft nest of the Humming-bird. This gigantic egg is a foot long and nine inches across, and would hold as much as fifty thousand Humming-bird's eggs.

THE SAW-WHET OWL.

"The Lark is but a bumpkin fowl;
He sleeps in his nest till morn;
But my blessing upon the jolly Owl
That all night blows his horn."

A CURIOUS name for a bird, we are inclined to say when we meet with it for the first time, but when we hear its shrill, rasping call note, uttered perhaps at midnight, we admit the appropriateness of "saw-whet." It resembles the sound made when a large-toothed saw is being filed.

Mr. Goss says that the natural home of this sprightly little Owl is within the wild woodlands, though it is occasionally found about farm houses and even cities. According to Mr. Nelson, it is of frequent occurrence in Chicago, where, upon some of the most frequented streets in the residence portion of the city, a dozen specimens have been taken within two years. It is very shy and retiring in its habits, however, rarely leaving its secluded retreats until late at eve, for which reason it is doubtless much more common throughout its range than is generally supposed. It

is not migratory but is more or less of an irregular wanderer in search of food during the autumn and winter. It may be quite common in a locality and then not be seen again for several years. It is nocturnal, seldom moving about in the day time, but passing the time in sleeping in some dark retreat; and so soundly does it sleep that ofttimes it may be captured alive.

The flight of the Saw-whet so closely resembles that of the Woodcock that it has been killed by sportsmen, when flying over the alders, through being mistaken for the game bird.

These birds nest in old deserted squirrel or Woodpecker holes and small hollows in trees. The eggs—usually four—are laid on the rotten wood or decayed material at the bottom. They are white and nearly round.

In spite of the societies formed to prevent the killing of birds for ornamenting millinery, and the thousands of signatures affixed to the numerous petitions sent broadcast all over the country, in which women pledged themselves not to wear birds or feathers of any kind on their hats, this is essentially a bird killing year, and the favorite of all the feathers is that of the Owl. There is an old superstition about him too. He has always been considered an unlucky bird, and many persons will not have one in the house. He may, says a recent writer, like the Peacock, lose his unlucky prestige, now that Dame Fashion has stamped him with her approval. Li Hung Chang rescued the Peacock feather from the odium of ill luck, and hundreds of persons bought them after his visit who would never permit them to be taken inside their homes prior to it. So the Owl seems to have lost his ill luck since fair woman has decided that the Owl hat is “the thing.”

The small size of the Saw-whet and absence of ears, at once distinguish this species from any Owl of eastern North America, except Richardson’s, which has the head and back spotted with white, and legs barred with grayish-brown.

THE SAW-WHET OWL.

“Whew!” exclaims Bobbie. “Here’s another Owl. I never knew there were so many different species, mamma.”

Mamma smiled at that word “species.” It was a word Bobbie had learned in his study of Birds.

“The *Saw-whet Owl*,” said she, looking at the picture. “A good looking little fellow, but not handsome as the Snowy Owl in the June number of Birds.”

“He *was* a beauty,” assented Bobbie, “such great yellow eyes looking at you out of a snow bank of feathers. This little fellow’s feet have on black shoes with yellow soles, not white fur overshoes like the *Snowy Owl’s*.”

“His eyes glow like topaz, though, just as the others did,” said mamma. “Let us see what he says about himself.

“As stupid as an Owl. That’s the way some people talk about us. Then again I’ve heard them say, ‘tough as a b’iled owl.’ B’iled Owls may be tough, I don’t know anything about that, for I have been too shy and wary to be caught.

“I had a neighbor once who was very fond of chickens. He was a Night Owl and said he found it easy to catch them when roosting out at night. Well he caught so many that Mr. Owl grew very fat, and the farmer whose chickens he ate, caught, cooked, and ate him. His flesh, the farmer said, was tender and sweet. So, my little friends, when you want to call anything ‘tough,’ don’t mention the Owl any more.

“A foreigner?

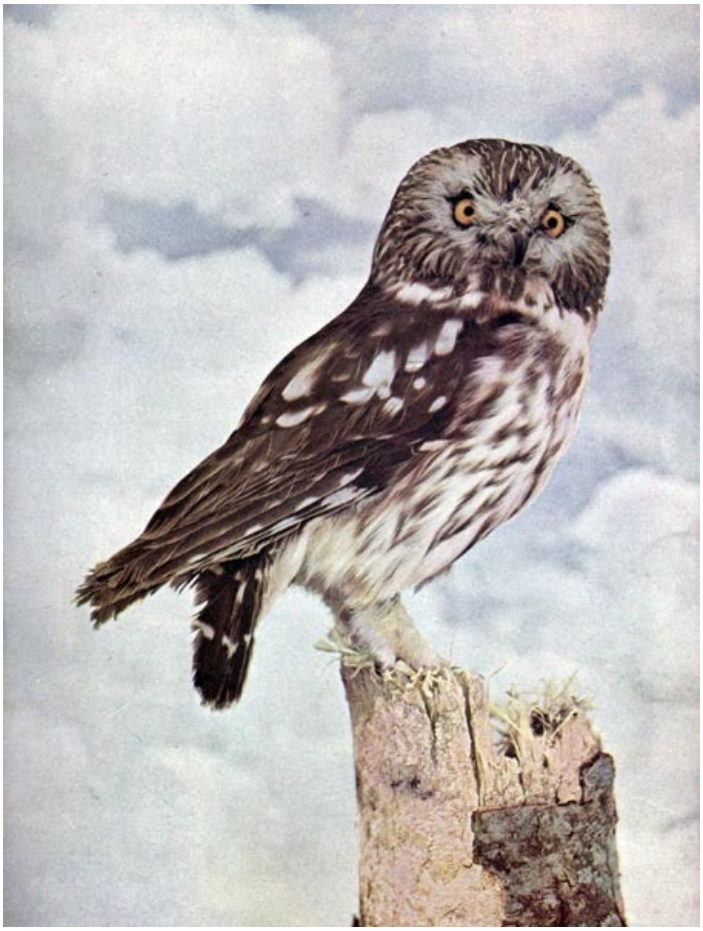
“Oh, my, no! I’m proud to say I am an American, and so are all my folks. A branch of the family, however, lives way up north in a region where they sing ‘God save the Queen’ instead of the ‘Star Spangled Banner.’ They call themselves English Owls, I guess, because they live on British soil.

“Do I sing?

“Well, not exactly. I can hoot though, and my *Ah-ee, ah-ee, ah-oo, ah-oo*, has a pleasant sound, very much like filing a saw. That is the reason they call me the Saw-whet Owl. My mate says it doesn’t sound that way to her, but then as she hasn’t any ears maybe she doesn’t hear very well.

“You never see me out in the day time, no indeed! I know when the mice come out of their holes; I am very fond of mice, also insects. I like small birds, too—to eat—but I find them very hard to catch.

“Don’t you?”



SAW-WHET OWL.

THE BLACK SWAN.

I advise you little folks to take a good look at me. You don’t often see a Black Swan. White Swans are very common, common as white Geese. I only wish I could have had my picture taken while gliding through the water. I am so stately and handsome there. My feet wouldn’t have shown either.

Really I don’t think my feet are pretty. They always remind me when I look down at them of a windmill or the sails of a vessel. But if they hadn’t been made that way, webbed-like, I wouldn’t be able to swim as I do. They really are a pair of fine paddles, you know.

There was a time when people in certain countries thought a Black Swan was an impossibility. As long as there were black sheep in the world, I don’t see why there shouldn’t have been Black Swans, do you?

Well, one day, a Dutch captain exploring a river in Australia, saw and captured four of the black fellows. That was way back in sixteen hundred and something, so that one of those very Black Swans must have been my great, great, great, *great* grandfather. Indeed he may have been even

greater than that, but as I have never been to school, you know, I can't very well count backward. I can move forward, however, when in the water. I make good time there, too.

Well, to go back to the Dutch captain. Two of the Swans he took alive to Dutchland and everybody was greatly surprised. They said "Ach!" and "Himmel," and many other things which I do not remember. Since that time they say the Black Swans have greatly diminished in numbers in Australia. You will find us all over the world now, because we are so ornamental; people like to have a few of us in their ponds and lakes.

They say that river in Australia which the captain explored was named Swan river, and Australia took one of us for its armorial symbol. Well, a Black Swan may look well on a shield, but no matter how hard you may pull his tail-feathers, he'll never scream like the American Eagle.

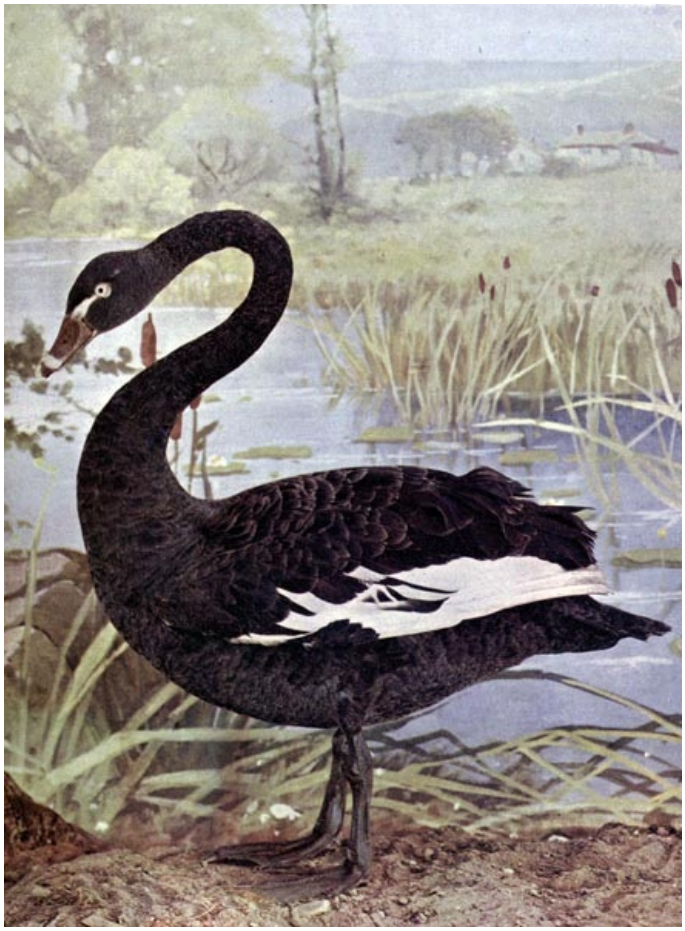
THE BLACK SWAN.

AUSTRALIA is the home of the Black Swan, and it is invested by an even greater interest than attaches to the South American bird, which is white. For many centuries it was considered to be an impossibility, but by a singular stroke of fortune, says a celebrated naturalist, we are able to name the precise day on which this unexpected discovery was made. The Dutch navigator William de Vlaming, visiting the west coast of Southland, sent two of his boats on the 6th of January, 1697, to explore an estuary he had found. There their crews saw at first two and then more Black Swans, of which they caught four, taking two of them alive to Batavia; and Valentyn, who several years later recounted this voyage, gives in his work a plate representing the ship, boats, and birds, at the mouth of what is now known from this circumstance as the Swan River, the most important stream of the thriving colony of West Australia, which has adopted this Swan as its armorial symbol. Subsequent voyagers, Cook and others, found that the range of the species extended over the greater part of Australia, in many districts of which it was abundant. It has since rapidly decreased in number there, and will most likely soon cease to exist as a wild bird, but its singular and ornamental appearance will probably preserve it as a modified captive in most civilized countries, and it is said, perhaps even now there are more Black Swans in a reclaimed condition in other lands than are at large in their mother country.

The erect and graceful carriage of the Swan always excites the admiration of the beholder, but the gentle bird has other qualities not commonly known, one of which is great power of wing. The *Zoologist* gives a curious incident relating to this subject. An American physician writing to that journal, says that the first case of fracture with which he had to deal was one of the forearm caused by the blows of a Swan's wing. It was during the winter of 1870, at the Lake of Swans, in Mississippi, that the patient was hunting at night, in a small boat and by the light of torches. In the course of their maneuvers a flock of Swans was suddenly encountered which took to flight without regard to anything that might be in the way. As the man raised his arm instinctively to ward off the swiftly rising birds, he was struck on his forearm by the wing of one of the Swans in the act of getting under motion, and as the action and labor of lifting itself were very great, the arm was badly broken, both bones being fractured.

When left to itself the nest of the Swan is a large mass of aquatic plants, often piled to the height of a couple of feet and about six feet in diameter. In the midst of this is a hollow which contains the eggs, generally from five to ten in number. They sit upon the eggs between five and six weeks.

It is a curious coincidence that this biographical sketch should have been written and a faithful portrait for the first time shown on the two hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the Black Swan.



BLACK SWAN.

LIFE IN THE NEST.

Blithely twitting, gayly flitting
Thro' the budding glen;
Golden-crested, sunny-breasted,
Goes the tiny Wren.
Peeping, musing, picking, choosing,
Nook is found at last;
Moss and feather, twined together—
Home is shaped at last.

Brisk as ever, quick and clever,
Brimming with delight—
Six wee beauties, bring new duties,
Work from morn to night.
Peeping, musing, picking, choosing,
Nook is found at last;
Moss and feather, twined together—
Home is shaped at last.

—J. L. H.

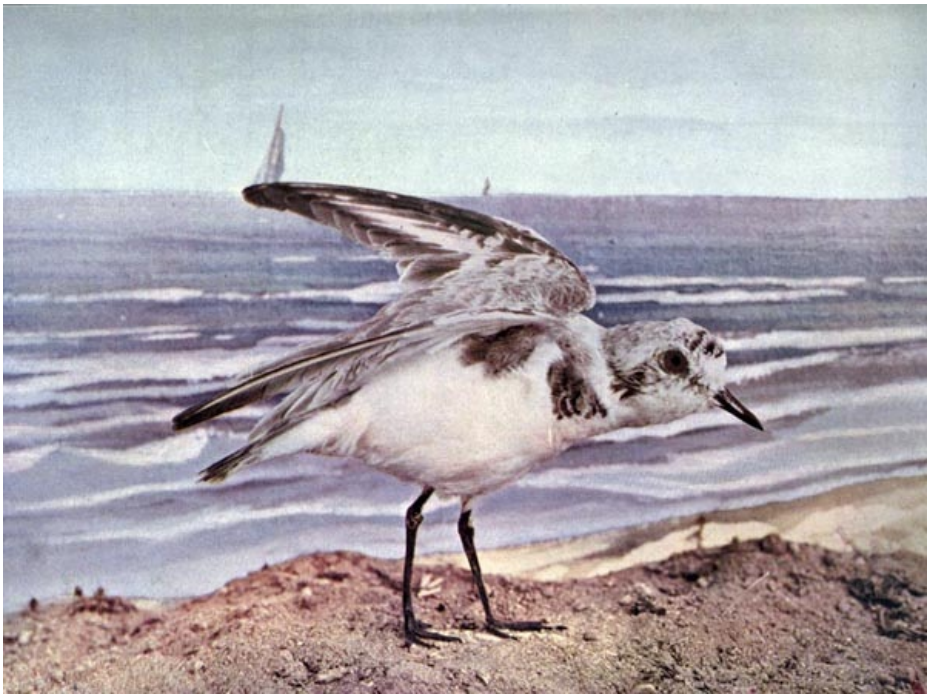
THE SNOWY PLOVER.

ABOUT one hundred species are comprised in the Plover family, which are distributed throughout the world. Only eight species are found in North America. Their habits in a general way resemble those of the true Snipes, but their

much shorter, stouter bills are not fitted for probing, and they obtain their food from the surface of the ground. Probably for this reason several species are so frequently found on the uplands instead of wading about in shallow ponds or the margins of streams. They frequent meadows and sandy tracts, where they run swiftly along the ground in a peculiarly graceful manner. The Plovers are small or medium-sized shore-birds. The Snowy Plover is found chiefly west of the Rocky Mountains, and is a constant resident along the California coast. It nests along the sandy beaches of the ocean. Mr. N. S. Goss found it nesting on the salt plains along the Cimarron River in the Indian Territory, the northern limits of which extend into southwestern Kansas. The birds are described as being very much lighter in color than those of California. Four eggs are usually laid, in ground color, pale buff or clay color, with blackish-brown markings. Mr. Cory says the nest is a mere depression in the sand. He says also that the Snowy Plover is found in winter in many of the Gulf States, and is not uncommon in Northwestern Florida.

When the female Snowy Plover is disturbed on the nest she will run over the sand with outstretched wings and distressing gait, and endeavor to lead the trespasser away from it. It sometimes utters a peculiar cry, but is usually silent. The food of these birds consists of various minute forms of life. They are similar in actions to the Semi-palmated (see July BIRDS), and fully as silent. Indeed they are rarely heard to utter a note except as the young are approached—when they are very demonstrative—or when suddenly flushed, which, in the nesting season, is a very rare thing, as they prefer to escape by running, dodging, and squatting the moment they think they are out of danger, in hopes you will pass without seeing them as the sandy lands they inhabit closely resemble their plumage in color, and says Mr. Goss, you will certainly do so should you look away or fail to go directly to the spot.

The first discovery of these interesting birds east of Great Salt Lake was in June, 1886. A nest was found which contained three eggs, a full set. It was a mere depression worked out in the sand to fit the body. It was without lining, and had nothing near to shelter or hide it from view.



SNOWY PLOVER.

ONLY A BIRD.

Only a bird! and a vagrant boy
Fits a pebble with boyish skill
Into the folds of a supple sling.

"Watch me hit him. I can, an' I will."
Whirr! and a silence chill and sad
Falls like a pall on the vibrant air,
From a birchen tree, whence a shower of song
Has fallen in ripples everywhere.

Only a bird! and the tiny throat
With quaver and trill and whistle of flute
Bruised and bleeding and silent lies
There at his feet. Its chords are mute.
And the boy with a loud and boisterous laugh,
Proud of his prowess and brutal skill,
Throws it aside with a careless toss.
"Only a bird! it was made to kill."

Only a bird! yet far away
Little ones clamor and cry for food—
Clamor and cry, and the chill of night
Settles over the orphan brood.
Weaker and fainter the moaning call
For a brooding breast that shall never come.
Morning breaks o'er a lonely nest,
Songless and lifeless; mute and dumb.

—Mary Morrison.

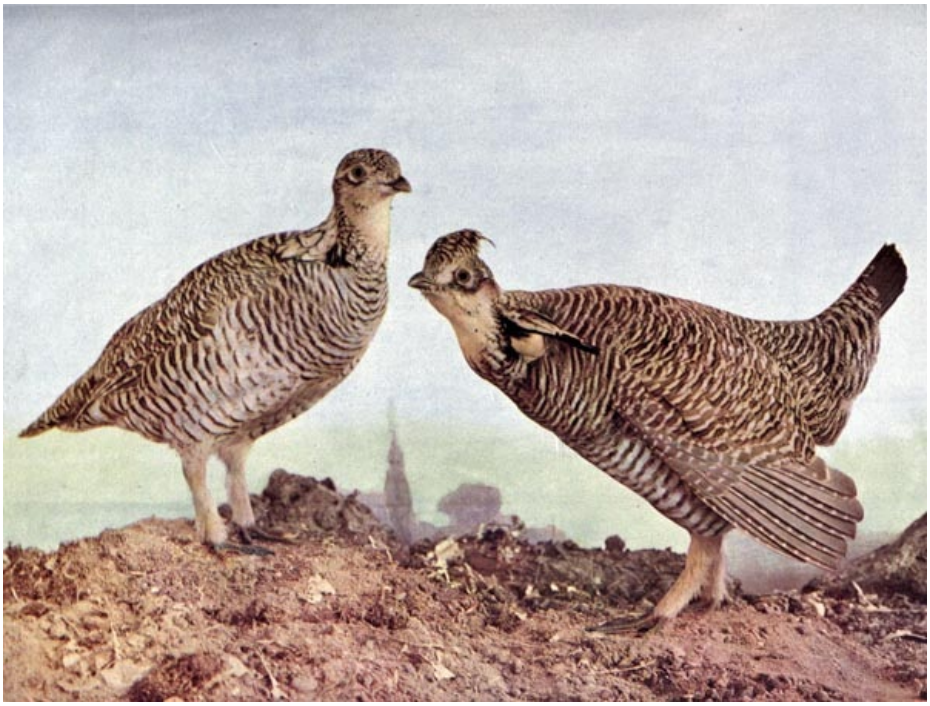
THE LESSER PRAIRIE HEN.

EXTENDING over the Great Plains from western and probably southern Texas northward through Indian Territory to Kansas is said to be the habitation of the Lesser Prairie Hen, though it is not fully known. It inhabits the fertile prairies, seldom frequenting the timbered lands, except during sleety storms, or when the ground is covered with snow. Its flesh is dark and it is not very highly esteemed as a table bird.

The habits of these birds are similar to those of the Prairie Hen. During the early breeding season they feed upon grasshoppers, crickets, and other forms of insect life, but afterwards upon cultivated grains, gleaned from the stubble in autumn and the corn fields in winter. They are also fond of tender buds, berries, and fruits. When flushed, these birds rise from the ground with a less whirring sound than the Ruffed Grouse or Bob White, and their flight is not as swift, but more protracted, and with less apparent effort, flapping and sailing along, often to the distance of a mile or more. In the fall the birds come together, and remain in flocks until the warmth of spring awakes the passions of love; then, in the language of Col. Goss, as with a view to fairness and the survival of the fittest, they select a smooth, open courtship ground, usually called a scratching ground, where the males assemble at the early dawn, to vie with each other in carnage and pompous display, uttering at the same time their love call, a loud, booming noise. As soon as this is heard by the hen birds desirous of mating, they quietly appear, squat upon the ground, apparently indifferent observers, until claimed by victorious rivals, whom they gladly accept, and whose caresses they receive. Audubon states that the vanquished and victors alike leave the grounds to search for the females, but he omits to state that many are present, and mate upon the "scratching grounds."

The nest of the Prairie Hen is placed on the ground in the thick prairie grass and at the foot of bushes when the earth is barren; a hollow is scratched in the soil, and sparingly lined with grasses and a few feathers. There are from eight to twelve eggs, tawny brown, sometimes with an olive hue and occasionally sprinkled with brown.

During the years 1869 and 1870, while the writer was living in southwestern Kansas, which was then the far west, Prairie Chickens as they were called there, were so numerous that they were rarely used for food by the inhabitants, and as there was then no readily accessible market the birds were slaughtered for wanton sport.



LESSER PRAIRIE HEN.

THE NEW TENANTS.

By Elanora Kinsley Marble.

The next day Mrs. Jenny retired into the tin pot, and later, when Mr. Wren peeped in, lo! an egg, all spotted with red and brown, lay upon the soft lining of the nest.

“It’s quite the prettiest thing in the world,” proudly said Mr. Wren. “Why, my dear, I don’t believe your cousin, Mrs. John Wren, ever laid one like it. It seems to me those spots upon the shell are very remarkable. I shouldn’t be surprised if the bird hatched from that shell will make a name for himself in bird-land some day, I really shouldn’t.”

“You foolish fellow,” laughed Mrs. Wren, playfully pecking him with her bill, “if you were a Goose your Goslings, in your eyes, would all be Swans. That’s what I heard our landlady say to her husband last night, out on the porch, when he wondered which one of his boys would be president of the United States.”

Mr. Wren chuckled in a truly papa-like manner and pecked her bill in return, then fairly bubbling over with happiness flew to a neighboring limb, and burst into such a merry roundelay, one note tumbling over another in Wren fashion, that every member of the household came out to hear and see.

“There he is,” cried Pierre, as Mrs. Wren left her nest and flew over beside him, “with tail down and head up, singing as though he were mad with joy.”

“Such a rapturous song,” said mamma. “It reminds me of two almost forgotten lines:

> ‘Brown Wren, from out whose swelling throat
> Unstinted joys of music float.’

“How well we are repaid for the litter they made, are we not?”

“And sure, mum,” said Bridget, whose big heart had also been touched by the sweet song, “it’s glad I am, for sure, that I wasn’t afther dispossessin’ your tinents. It’s innocent craythurs they be, God bless ’em,

a harmin' ov no wan. Sthill—"

"Well," queried her mistress, as Bridget paused.

"Sthill, mum, I do be afther wonderin' if the tin pot had been a hangin' under the front porch instead of the back, would ye's been after takin' the litter so philosophyky like as ye have, mum, to be sure."

The mistress looked at Bridget and laughingly shook her head.

"That's a pretty hard nut to crack, Bridget," said she. "Under those conditions I am afraid I——" What ever admission she was going to make was cut short by a burst of laughter from the children.

"Look at him, mamma, just look at him," they cried, pointing to Mr. Wren, who, too happy to keep still had flown to the gable at the extremity of the ridge-pole of the house, and after a gush of song, to express his happiness was jerking himself along the ridge-pole in a truly funny fashion. From thence he flew into the lower branches of a neighboring tree, singing and chattering, and whisking himself in and out of the foliage: then back to the roof again, and from roof to tree.

"I know what makes him so happy," announced Henry, who, standing upon a chair, had peeped into the nest. "There's a dear little egg in here. Hurrah for Mrs. Wren!"

"Do not touch it," commanded mamma, "but each one of us will take a peep in turn."

Mrs. Wren's bead-like eyes had taken in the whole proceeding, and with fluttering wings she stood on a shrub level with the porch and gave voice to her motherly anxiety and anger.

"*Dee, dee, dee,*" she shrilly cried, fluttering her little wings, which in bird language means, "oh dear, oh dear, what shall I do?"

Her cries of distress were heard by Mr. Wren, and with all haste he flew down beside her.

"What is it?" cried he, very nearly out of breath from his late exertions. "Has that rascally Mr. Jay——"

"No, no!" she interrupted, wringing her sharp little toes, "It's not Mr. Jay this time, Mr. Wren. It's the family over there, *our* family, robbing our nest of its one little egg."

"Pooh! nonsense!" coolly said Mr. Wren, taking one long breath of relief. "Why, my dear, you nearly frighten me to death. You know, or *ought* to know by this time, that our landlord's family have been taught not to do such things. Besides you yourself admit them to be exceptionally good children and good children never rob nests. Fie, I'm ashamed of you. Really my heart flew to my bill when I heard your call of distress."

Mrs. Wren, whose fears were quite allayed by this time, looked at her mate scornfully.

"Oh!" said she, with fine sarcasm, "your heart flew into your bill did it? Well, let me say, Mr. Wren, that if it had been my mother in distress, father at the first note of warning, would have flown to her assistance with his heart in his *claws*. He kept them well sharpened for just such occasions, and woe to any enemy *he* found prowling about his premises."

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Wren, "I presume he would have attacked Bridget over there, and the whole family. To hear you talk, Mrs. Wren, one would think your father was a whole host in himself."

"And so he was," said she, loftily, "I have seen him attack a *Bluebird* and a *Martin* at the same time and put them both to flight. An *Owl* had no terrors for him, and as for squirrels, why——" Mrs. Wren raised her wings and shrugged her shoulders in a very Frenchy and wholly contemptuous manner.

"I'm a peace-loving sort of a fellow, that you know, Mrs. Wren, deploring the reputation our tribe has so justly earned for fighting, and scolding, and jeering at everything and everybody. Indeed they go so far as to say we trust no one, not even our kindred. But mark me, Mrs. Wren, mark me, I say! Should any rascally Jay, neighbor or not, ever dare approach that tin pot over yonder, or ever alight on the roof of the porch, I'll, I'll ——" Mr. Wren fairly snorted in his anger, and standing on one foot, doubled up the toes of the other and struck it defiantly at the imaginary foe.

“Oh, I dare say!” tauntingly said Mrs. Wren, “you are the sort of fellow that I heard little Dorothy reading about the other day. You would fight and run away, Mr. Wren, that you might live to fight another day.”

Mr. Wren lifted one foot and scratched himself meditatively behind the ear.

“Good, *very* good, indeed, my dear! It must have been a pretty wise chap that wrote that.” And Mr. Wren, who seemed to find the idea very amusing, laughed until the tears stood in his eyes.

Mrs. Wren smoothed her ruffled feathers and smiled too.

“Tut, tut, Jenny,” said the good-natured fellow, “what is the use of us newly married folk quarreling in this fashion. Think how joyous we were less than one short hour ago. Come, my dear, the family have all left the porch, save Emmett. Let us fly over there and take a look at our treasure.” And Mrs. Wren, entirely restored to good humor, flirted her tail over her back, hopped about a little in a coquettish manner, then spread her wings, and off they flew together.

Mrs. Wren the next day deposited another egg, and the next, and the next, till six little speckled beauties lay huddled together in the cosy nest.

“Exactly the number of our landlord’s family,” said she, fluffing her feathers and gathering the eggs under her in that truly delightful fashion common to all mother birds. “I am so glad. I was greatly puzzled to know what names we should have given the babies had there been more than six.”

“I hadn’t thought of that,” admitted Mr. Wren, who in his joy had been treating his mate to one of his fine wooing songs, and at length coaxed her from the nest, “but I dare say we would have named them after some of our relatives.”

“Why, of course,” assented Mrs. Wren, “I certainly would have named one after my dear, brave papa. Mrs. John Wren says that boys named after a great personage generally develop all the qualities of that person.”

“Oh, indeed!” sniffed Mr. Wren, “that was the reason she named one of her numerous brood last year after our rascally neighbor, Mr. Jay, I presume. Certainly the youngster turned out as great a rascal as the one he was named after.”

Mrs. Wren’s head feathers stood on end at once.

“For the life of me,” she said tartly, “I cannot see why you always fly into a passion, Mr. Wren, whenever I mention dear papa, or Mrs. John, or in fact *any* of my relatives. Indeed—but sh-sh! There’s one of our neighbors coming this way. I verily believe it is, oh yes, it is, it *is*——” and Mrs. Wren wrung her toes, and cried *cheet, cheet, cheet*, and *dee, dee, dee*! in a truly anxious and alarming manner.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

SUMMARY.

Page 46.

LEAST BITTERN.—*Botaurus exilis.*

RANGE—Temperate North America, from the British Provinces to the West Indies and South America.

NEST—In the thick rushes, along the edge of the water, bending down the tops of water grass and plaiting it into a snug little nest, about two or three feet above the water.

EGGS—Three or five, pale bluish or greenish-white.

Page 50.

BALDPATE.—*Anas americana.*

RANGE—North America from the Arctic ocean south to Guatemala and Cuba.

NEST—On the ground in marshes, of grass and weeds, neatly arranged and nicely hollowed; usually lined with the down and feathers from its own breast.

EGGS—Eight to twelve, of pale buff.

Page 54.

PURPLE FINCH.—*Carpodacus purpureus.* Other names: "Purple Grosbeak," "Crimson Finch," "Linnet."

RANGE—Eastern North America, breeding from Northern United States northward.

NEST—In evergreens or orchard trees, at a moderate distance from the ground. Composed of weed-stalks, bark-strips, rootlets, grasses, all kinds of vegetable fibres, and lined with hairs.

EGGS—Four or five, of a dull green, spotted with very dark brown, chiefly about the larger end.

Page 58.

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER.—*Melanerpes carolinus.* Other name: "Zebra Bird."

RANGE—Eastern United States, west to the Rocky Mountains, south to Florida and Central Texas.

NEST—In holes in decayed trees, twenty or thirty feet from the ground.

EGGS—Four or six, glossy white.

Page 63.

SAW-WHET OWL.—*Nyctale acadica.* Other name: "Acadian Owl."

RANGE—Whole of North America; breeding from middle United States northward.

NEST—In holes, trees, or hollow trunks.

EGGS—Four to seven, white.

Page 67.

BLACK SWAN.—*Cygnus atratus.*

RANGE—Australia.

NEST—On a tussock entirely surrounded by water.

EGGS—Two to five.

Page 71.

SNOWY PLOVER.—*Aegialitis nivosa.*

RANGE—Western North America, south to Mexico in winter, both coasts of Central America, and in western South America to Chile.

NEST—On the ground.

EGGS—Three, ground color, pale buff or clay color, marked with blackish-brown spots, small splashes and fine dots.

Page 75.

LESSER PRAIRIE HEN.—*Tympanuchus pallidicinctus.*

RANGE—Eastern edge of the Great Plains, from western and probably southern Texas northward through Indian Territory to Kansas.

NEST—On the ground in thick prairie grass, and at the foot of bushes on the barren ground; a hollow scratched out in the soil, and sparingly lined with grasses and a few feathers.

EGGS—Eight to twelve, tawny brown.

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