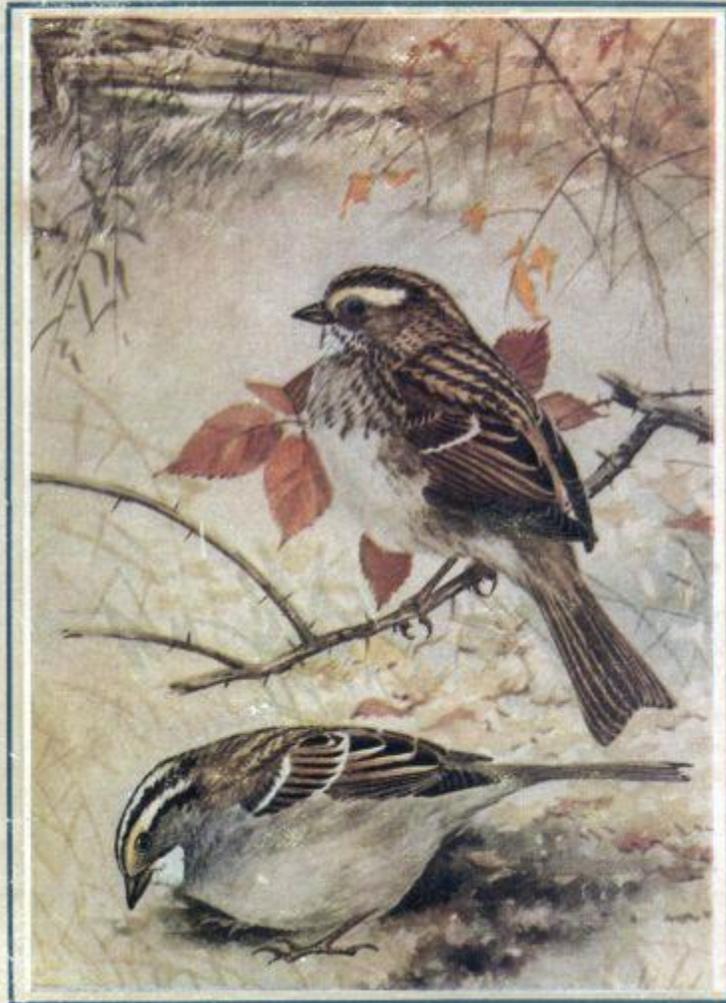


STORIES OF BIRDS

LENORE E. MULETS



L. C. PAGE & COMPANY

Cover Art

[Frontispiece: "He came quite close and stared at the little girl" (missing from book)]

STORIES OF BIRDS

By

Lenore Elizabeth Mulets

Illustrated by

Sophie Schneider

"When our babe he goeth walking in his garden
Around his tinkling feet the sunbeams play;
The posies they are good to him
And bow them as they should to him
As he fareth upon his kingly way:
The birdlings of the wood to him
Make music, gentle music, all the day
When our babe he goeth walking in his garden."
—*Eugene Field.*

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PREFACE

Where can you find a lad who does not treasure among his secrets the nesting-place of some pair of birds? Where can you find a child who does not watch for the first robin of spring-time? Where can you find one who does not know when the wild ducks in the wedge-shaped flocks fly southward?

This little book of "Bird Stories" is written both for the children who already know our common birds, and for those who may know them if they choose.

For those children who know, the book is a verification of their own facts, with an addition of stories, poems, and songs to make facts beautiful; for the children who do not know, the book is a simple set of facts placed before them for verification and entertainment.

To all, may the knowledge obtained be a pleasure and a delight.

LENORE ELIZABETH MULETS.

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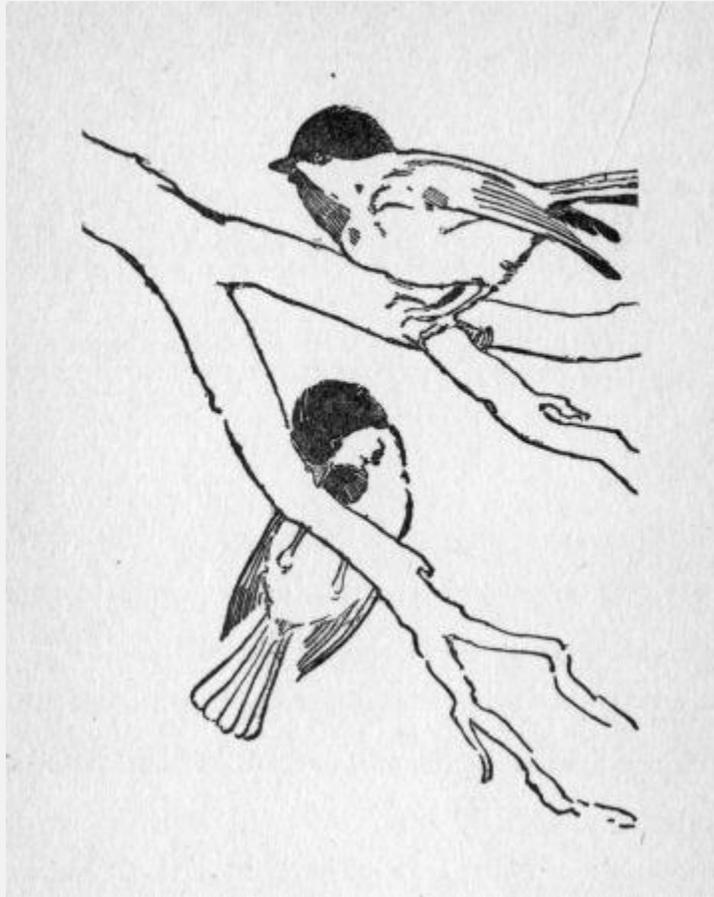
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THE CHICKADEE OR SNOWBIRD



The Chickadee

IN THE SNOW

It was a bright, wintry day. The frost jewels sparkled on the snow. The winds blew cutting cold from the north.

Phyllis, in her scarlet coat and cap, and long, warm leggings, waded in the deepest drifts she could find.

Out by the garden fence was the greatest drift. After floundering through it, Phyllis climbed up and perched on the top rail of the fence.

She sat quite still, for she was almost breathless after her struggle in the snow.

Suddenly, just over her head, Phyllis heard a whistle. She started so that she almost fell from the fence.

Again came the whistle, clear, sweet, and long drawn out. Phyllis looked up, and there on the branch of the elm-tree sat a cheery little bird.

With a third whistle he flew down to the fence and perched beside Phyllis.

He came quite close and stared at the little girl in a gay, curious manner, as though he might be looking for a playfellow.

"Who are you?" asked Phyllis, looking like a great red bird as she perched on the fence.

"Chick-a-dee! Chick-a-dee! Chick-a-dee-dee-dee!" twittered the little fellow. It seemed to Phyllis that he laughed because she did not know him.

"Oh, to be sure," said she. "How stupid of me not to remember. I have met you a hundred times.

"I should have remembered your black head and throat. The sides of your head and neck are white. Your breasts and sides are light yellow. Your tail and wings are of a much darker shade, and how daintily they are edged with white!"

The chickadee fluttered about for a moment, and noticing the friendliness in Phyllis's tones he perched a little closer to her side.

"I do not believe you noticed the large white feathers in my shoulders," he said. "You may always know a chickadee by the white markings there."

"I did not notice your white shoulders at first," said Phyllis, "but I saw at once what fine downy feathers you have. They are beautifully soft. Do they make a warm winter dress? How do you chance to be here in the winter-time?"

"I think it is time you were in the South, Mr. Chickadee! Did your family leave you behind?"

"No, indeed," replied Mr. Chickadee. "No, indeed, Phyllis! My entire family are wintering here in the North. We never go South for the winter.

"We are quite happy to remain here at home, and to come out on sunshiny days and whistle and sing and be happy.

"Only half an hour ago some boys went coasting down that hill. I whistled at them but they did not hear me.

"Soon they came up the hill, drawing their sleds behind them. I whistled again and called my name.

"'Why, hello,' cried a boy in a blue reefer and a blue stocking cap. 'Hello, chickadee, you're a jolly little fellow! We call you our fair weather friend because you sing so cheerily on these clear frosty days.'

"'Oho!' laughed another boy, who had a big scratch on his nose, 'I saw a chickadee flying about among the fir-trees on that very stormy day last week. He sang just as cheerily through the storm.' Then the boy whistled back to me and called my name."

"That was my brother Jack," laughed Phyllis. "He got that scratch while out coasting. He told me that he saw you on that stormy day. He loves the winter quite as well as you do. You should hear him sing and whistle when the snow falls for coasting. You should hear him shout when the cold skating days come. He says that Jack Frost is a fellow's best friend."

"Indeed," said the jolly little chickadee, blinking his eyes in a funny way, "my brothers say the very same thing!"

"But how do you find anything to eat in the winter-time?" Phyllis asked. "The insects and worms have long been dead. What did you have for breakfast this morning?"

"We had eggs and—"

"Eggs?" cried Phyllis, not waiting for the bird to finish. "You had eggs?"

"Yes, moth's eggs," said the bird. "The moths leave their eggs about in all sorts of places. We chickadees know where to find them!"

"Are they—good?" asked Phyllis.

"Delicious!" replied the chickadee. "I think I have eaten more than a million insects' eggs in my life. I shall never tire of them."

"Where do you sleep?" Phyllis asked.

"In the fir-trees, to be sure," was the reply. "It is quite warm in there, among the many branches, and as soon as we waken we can get our breakfasts. There are all sorts of eggs and sleeping insects among the fir branches."

Phyllis looked from her own thick red leggings to the chickadee's light blue legs.

"Don't your feet get very cold?" she asked. "You surely need some leggings."

The chickadee chirruped and twittered and fluttered until Phyllis suddenly saw that he was laughing at her.

"I don't know what cold feet are!" he said. "I'm glad no one gave me red leggings for Christmas."

"What did you get for Christmas?"

"A wonderfully fine dinner spread on a white snow table-cloth under the cherry-tree!" replied the bird.

"Oh, did you come to my bird feast?" cried the little girl. "I spread crumbs and bird seed for you. Jack wanted to hang a meat bone in the cedar-tree. He said that you would like it better. Indeed, I believe he did hang one there. Did you ever see it?"

"Oh, yes, Phyllis, many a day have we pecked away at that meat bone. It was really very good."

"Jack read in a book that you were fond of pecking at meat bones. He will be glad to know that it is true!"

"Thank him for us," said the chickadee. "You were kind to remember us!"

"Ah," said Phyllis, "but it was kind of you to remain behind to cheer us when all the other birds have gone to warmer lands.

"But, chickadee, though you are so cheery and gay in winter, are you not really happier in the summer-time?"

"Oh, we are so busy in summer," the chickadee replied. "Last May I travelled miles and miles looking for a vacant house."

"Looking for a vacant house?" cried Phyllis, with wide brown eyes.

"For housekeeping," said the chickadee. "You see my mate and I had never kept house before. She was very anxious to find a most suitable place.

"My wife said a woodpecker's nest was the very place, but I rather preferred a squirrel's hole.

"For a long time we could find neither to suit us. But at length I heard Mrs. Chickadee calling loudly. I flew to her side at once.

"What is it?" I cried.

"Look!" cried Mrs. Chickadee, pointing with her bill and flapping her wings with joy.

"Through the thick of the woods ran a gray old rail fence. Woodbine and wild hop vines wellnigh covered it. The posts were gray where they were not moss-covered.

"In one of these gray-green posts was a hole where a pair of woodpeckers had once built their nest.

"This is the very place for us!" cried Mrs. Chickadee. "It could not be better though we hollowed it out for ourselves."

"Could you?" asked Phyllis, looking at the bird's little short black bill.

"If need be, we could, indeed," replied the chickadee. "But we would far rather find a knot-hole, or a squirrel's or woodpecker's deserted nest.

"When we had decided on the spot," the bird went on, "we at once began lining the nest. We carried fine grasses and soft feathers. We found mosses and rabbits' fur to make it soft.

"Those were indeed happy days for us. They were also exciting days. We were very careful to let no one know what we were about.

"Once, as I flew home with a bit of moss, I saw a boy lying on the grass not far from our fence-post. It would never do to let him know our secret. Boys are not to be trusted.

"I perched upon the fence and pretended that I had never a thought of nest building.

"In a moment Mrs. Chickadee came flying home with a soft, downy feather. When I called out warningly she at once flew to me.

"Then the boy called softly to his little sister.

"Come quick,' he said, 'if you want to watch these birds build their nest.'

"A little dark-eyed girl crept up beside the boy. We scarcely knew what to do. Soon a bright idea occurred to me. I began to sing my very best. I also performed my most wonderful tricks. I whirled round and round. I darted between the rails. I spun about.

"The children became so interested in my performance that they forgot to watch Mrs. Chickadee. When they were not looking her way, she flew to the nest and arranged the feather.

"When she returned she took my place on the fence. Now my wife and I look very much alike, and though she cannot perform quite as nimbly as I, the children did not know when we changed places.

"While the children watched her I flew to the nest with my bit of moss.

"What a pity!" said the little girl, as we flew away laughing to ourselves. "They stopped to play and they lost the bits of moss and feathers with which they meant to make their nest!"

"Chick-a-dee! Chick-a-dee! Chick-a-dee!" called back my wife happily."

All this time Phyllis's eyes were growing rounder and bigger.

"Why," said she, "I never knew there was but one bird performing on the fence. I thought the other flew away!"

"That was because Mrs. Chickadee and I look so much alike," replied Mr. Chickadee.

"But we did find your nest a few days later," said Phyllis. "In it were six small white eggs covered with tiny red specks. We went to look at the nest every day until the eggs hatched. Then we went several times a day until the baby birds learned to fly and left the nest empty.

"But you did not disturb us," said the chickadee, "though we were dreadfully frightened at first."

At that moment a great soft snowball went plump! against Phyllis's red cap.

"Jack!" she cried, scrambling off the fence and running after the boy with the scratch on his nose. "Jack, take me for a ride on your sled!"

Then she looked back. The chickadee now sat in the tree-top.

"Tell Mrs. Chickadee," called Phyllis, "that I shall spread some more crumbs and seeds on the white table-cloth this afternoon. We'll hang another bone in the cedar-tree, too!"

"Chick-a-dee-dee-dee!" cried the little bird in a flutter of delight.

TWENTY LITTLE CHICKADEES

Twenty little chickadees,
Sitting in a row;
Twenty pairs of naked feet
Buried in the snow.
I should think you'd fly away
Where the weather's warm,
Then you wouldn't have to be
Out there in the storm.

Sorry little chickadees,
Don't you know the way?
Can't you find the road to go
Where 'tis always May?
Robins all have found it out,
Wrens and bluebirds too,
Don't you wish you'd thought to ask
Ere away they flew?

THE SNOWBIRD'S SONG[1]

The ground was all covered with snow, one day,
And two little sisters were busy at play—
A snowbird was sitting close by on a tree,
And merrily singing his chick-a-de-dee!

He had not been singing that tune very long,
When Emily heard him, so loud was his song.
"Oh, sister, look out of the window!" said she,
"Here's a dear little bird, singing chick-a-de-dee!"

"Poor fellow! he walks in the snow and the sleet
And has neither stockings nor shoes on his feet,
I wonder what makes him so full of his glee,
And why he keeps singing, his chick-a-de-dee.

"If I were a barefooted snowbird, I know,
I would not stay out in the cold and the snow.
I pity him so! Oh, how cold he must be,
And yet he keeps singing his chick-a-de-dee.

"Oh, mother, do get him some stockings and shoes,
And a nice little frock, and a hat, let him choose.
I wish he'd come into the parlour, and see
How warm we would make him, poor chick-a-de-dee!"

The bird had flown down for some sweet crumbs of bread,
And heard every word little Emily said.
"How funny I'd look in that costume!" thought he,
And he laughed, as he warbled his chick-a-de-dee.

"I am grateful," said he, "for the wish you express,
But I have no occasion for such a fine dress.
I'd rather remain with my little limbs free,
Than to hobble about singing chick-a-de-dee.

"There is One, my dear child, though I cannot tell who,
Has clothed me already, and warm enough, too.
Good morning! Oh, who are so happy as we?"
And away he flew, singing his chick-a-de-dee.

[1] From "The Second Reader—of the Rational Method In Reading."

HOW THE BIRDS GOT THEIR FEATHERS
(IROQUOIS MYTH)

That evening, as the family sat beside the hearth, Phyllis thought of the brave little chickadees out in the fir-trees.

"I wonder if they are really warm enough," she said. "Do feathers make a warm dress, mother? Why do birds have feathers instead of fur?"

"I have heard the story that the Indians tell of how the birds got their feathers," said mother. "Bring your chairs closer and I will tell the story to you."

So the children drew their chairs up into the firelight, and listened to this little Indian story:

"Once some little Indian children," began the mother, "gathered about the fire inside their deerskin wigwam and begged their mother for a story.

"Each little Indian was wrapped in a bright coloured blanket. Each little Indian wore long turkey buzzard feathers in his hair.

"The Indian mother looked at her baby braves proudly. She thought of the time when each of the children was a tiny papoose and swung in a deerskin cradle like a bird in its nest.

"There was a time," said the Indian squaw, "when the birds had no feathers.

"Being naked, they remained hidden among the leaves. Being ashamed they were silent, and no bird-note sweetened the stillness of the forest.

"At last with faint chirpings the mother birds prayed the Great Spirit for blankets in which to wrap their little ones.

"Then the Great Spirit, seeing their sorry plight, sent a messenger to the birds, who told them that even now coverings were ready for every bird.

"The messenger said that hereafter each family of birds should dress in uniform, so that the forest people, seeing a bird, might know at once, by its dress, to what bird family it belonged.

"But alas! the messenger also said that the uniforms were a great way off. He himself could not bring them to the forest. The birds must choose one who was strong of wing and able to endure great hardships, to go back with him and bring the uniforms home.

"The poor featherless birds looked about for one who was brave and fearless and untiring. A council was held to induce some bird to go on this long journey.

"But one and all pleaded some excuse. Some must remain to care for the babes still in the nest. Some were too old to undertake the journey. Some were too young to find the way.

"Some had been ill and were still too weak to travel. Indeed, the birds seemed to be in as sad a plight as before.

"At last there stepped forth a bird, who, truth to tell, was not a general favourite among his fellows. His name was turkey buzzard.

"The bird agreed to undertake the long journey and bring back the feathery uniforms, if he could choose the most beautiful coat of feathers for himself and his family for ever.

"To this the other birds consented, and the featherless turkey buzzard flew away.

"It was indeed a long and a dangerous journey. Sometimes the poor bird nearly dropped from weariness and hunger. Sometimes, so hungry was he, that he was forced to make a meal off from some dead animal which lay in the way. Indeed so often did he do this that in time he came to like this food.

"It came to pass, after many days, that the turkey buzzard, being directed by the Great Spirit, found the feathery uniforms.

"He at once began to look them over. He intended to choose the most beautiful coat of feathers for himself and his family.

"Soon he found a suit of most gorgeous colours. He tried it on, and looked at his own reflection in the water. The dress was very beautiful. Well pleased with himself

and his dress the turkey buzzard gathered up the remaining uniforms and started for home.

"But alas! the new dress, although so beautiful, did not fit comfortably. The poor bird found that he could not fly well in his new dress. He tried another and still another bright coloured dress, but in none of them was he comfortable.

"At length, quite discouraged, he slipped into a quiet, dark uniform. Although this suit was the least beautiful it fitted comfortably and gracefully. In it the turkey buzzard flew away home, and in such uniform have his family ever since been content to dress.

"The turkey buzzards are quite willing to leave the more gorgeous dresses for those birds who cannot fly so far nor so gracefully as they."

CHILLY LITTLE CHICKADEES[1]

Chilly little chickadees,
Sitting in a row,
Chilly little chickadees,
Buried in the snow,
Don't you find it very cold
For your little feet?
Don't you find it hard to
Anything to eat?

Hungry little chickadees,
Would you like some bread?
I will give you all you want,
Or some seed, instead,
Anything you like to eat
I will give you free,
Every morning, every night,
If you come to me.

Jolly little chickadees,
Have you had enough?
Don't forget to come again
When the weather's rough.
Bye, bye, happy little birds!

Off the wee things swarm,
Plying through the driving snow,
Singing in the storm.

[1] From "Songs and Games for Little Ones," by permission of Oliver Ditson Company, owners of the copyright.

ALL ABOUT THE CHICKADEE
SUGGESTIONS FOR FIELD LESSONS.

Does not go south in winter.

Song—two or three clear long whistles and the chirping of his own name, "chickadee."

A gay, curious little bird.

Black head and throat—sides of head and neck white—breast grayish buff—wings and tail darker shade edged with white—larger feathers of shoulders white.

Food—seeds and dormant insects or larval eggs.—Valuable as an insect destroyer.

Builds in hollow places—usually deserted woodpeckers' or squirrels' nests—sometimes hollows place for itself.

Six white eggs speckled with red—young birds, male and female much alike in colouring.

ROBIN REDBREAST

MERRY ROBIN REDBREAST

"Robin, robin redbreast,
Singing on the bough,
Come and get your breakfast,
We will feed you now.
Robin likes the golden grain,
Nods his head and sings again:
'Chirping, chirping cheerily,
Here I come so merrily,
Thank you, children dear!'"

Thus sang Phyllis one morning during the second week in March.

In the topmost bough of the old apple-tree sat Robin Redbreast, looking altogether doubtful as to whether he liked the little girl's song.

But when he saw the grains of wheat which the child was scattering on the ground for his breakfast, he thought better of his doubt.

He hopped lower on the branches. He turned his little head on one side and looked at Phyllis in a very friendly fashion.

"Come on down!" Phyllis begged. "I am so glad that you have returned. I am so glad that you came to this very apple-tree and sang so strong and loud and clear!"

"Chirp! Chirp!" and the robin hopped again nearer.

"You see," Phyllis went on, in her coaxing little voice, "my brother Jack, being a boy, said he would be the one to see the first robin this year.

"But I made up my mind that if watchful eyes and careful ears could help a little girl, I would get ahead of Jack.

"Sure enough, the first thing I heard this morning was your sweet song. When did you arrive? Aren't you rather early?"

By this time the robin was on the ground, pecking away at the grain. As he ate his breakfast he told his story.

[Illustration: "By this time the robin was on the ground"
(missing from book)]

"I have been south all winter long," he said. "It is very lovely in the southland. Food is plenty, the days are long, and the sunshine is golden, bright, and warm.

"But as soon as the spring days came I grew restless. I knew the snow was beginning to melt and the grass to grow green in my old home country. I wanted to start north at once.

"I spoke to my little mate about it, and found her to be as homesick as I. So we flew north a little earlier than usual this year, and arrived ahead of the others. We are now quite anxious to get to housekeeping, and are already looking for a suitable place for a nest."

"If you will build near us," said Phyllis, "I will help you care for your little ones. I will give you all the crumbs that you can eat."

"Oh! oh!" chirped the robin; "you are very kind, Phyllis, but I hardly think you would know how to feed bird babies.

"You see our babies are so fond of bugs and worms and all sorts of insects, that they do not care for crumbs when they can have nice fat worms.

"We sometimes feed berries and cherries to our babies. We older birds often eat fruit, but really we like worms and bugs better."

"The robins ate all the cherries from the top of our cherry-tree last year," said Phyllis.

"Yes, we did eat some of your cherries," admitted the robin. "They were very sweet and juicy.

"There are people who say that we robins are a nuisance, and that we destroy so much fruit that they wish we would never come near them. The fact is, we do more good than harm to your orchards and berry patches. Just think how many insects we destroy! If it were not for us I think much more fruit would be destroyed by insects. And worms and caterpillars would be crawling everywhere.

"A robin is a very greedy fellow. He eats nearly all the time. I could not begin to tell you how many insects I have eaten during my life.

"There are cutworms, too, which live underground. During the night they come out for food. We robins are early risers, and often catch the slow worms before they can get back to their underground homes."

"Ah," laughed Phyllis, "that must be the reason that we say that the early bird catches the worm."

"When our babies come," said the robin, "we are very busy, indeed. Those young mouths seem always to be open, begging for more food."

"My mother says that when I was a baby robin she was kept busy all day long."

"There were four baby birds in the nest. I myself ate about seventy worms in a day. My brother and sisters had as good appetites as I."

"Will you build here in the apple-tree?" asked Phyllis. "I should so like to watch you. Besides, there is a garden just beneath with millions of bugs and insects there."

"Oh, yes," replied the robin. "We shall surely build there. You will find that robins like to build near your home. We have a very friendly feeling towards people. That is the reason that we hop about your lawn so much and that we waken you by singing near your window in the early morning."

"I have heard that robins are not very good nest-builders," said Phyllis. "I was told that a great number of robins' nests were blown down by every hard storm."

"More are destroyed than I like to think about," said the robin. "But my father and mother raised three families of birds in their nest last season."

"Early in the spring they were very busy about their nest-building. First they brought sticks, straw, weeds, and roots. With these they laid the foundation in what seemed a very careless fashion, among the boughs."

"Then here on this foundation they wove the round nest of straws and weeds. They plastered it with mud. They lined it with soft grasses and moss."

"In this nest my mother laid four beautiful greenish-blue eggs. From the first egg that cracked open I crept out. From the three other eggs came my brother and sisters."

"We were not handsome babies. I don't believe bird babies ever are beautiful at first. We had no feathers, and our mouths were so big and yellow."

"We were always hungry, for we were growing very fast. Our mouths flew open at every little noise. We thought every sound was the flutter of our parents' wings. They always brought such fine food for us."

The robin pecked away at his breakfast for some time before he spoke again. Then he again took up the story of his life.

"How well I remember being taught to fly," he said. "How our mother coaxed us to try our wings. How timid and feeble we were. One of my sisters fell to the ground and a great gray cat caught her.

"Our wings were very weak then and our feathers were still short. I then had no beautiful red breast. It was just a rusty looking white spotted with black.

"My mother's breast was not so red as my father's. She was of a paler colour and she sang much less than he. She was a very happy little mother, however, and she chirped very sweetly to her babies.

"After we flew from the nest, and were able to look out for ourselves, my mother laid four more greenish-blue eggs in the same nest. By and bye four more young robins were chirping about in the garden.

"Quite late in the season my parents were again nesting. But it was rather unfortunate that they did so. A great storm came up and a branch broke from the tree and destroyed the four blue eggs.

"It was shortly after this mishap that the robins flew south for the winter.

"My brother, who was always a brave, cheery fellow, thought he would rather stay here. I wonder how he fared. I have not yet seen him."

"I have not seen him lately, but he was here during the winter," said Phyllis. "I dare say you will find him soon."

"Well," said the robin, picking up the last grain of wheat, "I thank you, Phyllis, for this fine breakfast.

"I will only say 'good morning.' I think you will see me again. Perhaps I will show you where we build our nest."

"I am grateful to you," replied Phyllis. "You see the cherry-tree grows beside Jack's window. You might have sung your morning song there."

THE ROBIN'S RED BREAST[1]

It was very cold in the north country. The ice was thick and the snow was deep.

The seal and the white bear were happy. They liked the ice, the snow, and the cutting north wind, for their fur was thick and warm.

One night the great white bear climbed to the top of an immense iceberg. He looked far across the country. The fields of snow and the beautiful northern lights made the night almost as light as day.

The white bear saw no living thing save a few fur-clad animals and a little gray robin chirping cheerily as it picked away at an old bone.

Again the white bear looked down. Almost at the foot of the iceberg crouched a hunter and his little son. Between the two a tiny fire was blazing.

When the white bear saw the hunter and the boy guarding the fire he growled terribly. He leaped across from one iceberg to another. He went into his icy cave still growling.

"It is the only fire in the whole north country," growled the white bear to himself. "If I could only put out that fire the land of ice and snow would be mine.

"Neither the hunter nor the hunter's son could live, without fire. I will watch my chance. Perhaps some day I shall be so lucky as to put the fire out."

Now the Eskimo night is weeks long. All through the long night the hunter kept the fire. All through the long night the white bear crouched near and growled deeply.

At length the hunter fell ill. The brave little boy kept the fire burning. He also cared for his sick father.

The white bear crept closer now, and growled more loudly.

He longed to jump on the fire with his wet feet and tramp it out. But he dared not. The boy's bright eyes watched faithfully. The hunter's arrows were deadly, and the boy's aim was true.

But by and by the boy could endure the long watch no longer. His head drooped. His eyes closed. He slept.

The white bear's growl sounded like a hideous laugh. The little gray robin twittered loudly in warning. But the poor tired little fellow heard neither the white bear's growl nor the gray robin's twitter.

Then the white bear ran swiftly to the fire. He tramped upon it with his cold wet feet. He rolled upon it with his cold wet fur. The cheerful blaze died out.

When he arose the white bear saw only a little pile of gray ashes. He laughed so loudly that the boy awoke and snatched up his bow and arrows.

But the white bear ran away to his cave, still growling laughingly. He knew that no human being could live in that cruelly cold north country without fire.

Now when the white bear was gone, the little gray robin hopped near. Her chirp was quite sad. She, too, saw nothing but a little heap of ashes as gray as her own feathers.

She hopped nearer. She scratched among the ashes with her cold little claws. She looked eagerly at each cinder with her sharp little eyes. She found—a tiny live coal.

It was only the tiniest spark! The least flake of the fast-falling snow would put it out!

The little gray robin hovered over it that the cold wind might not reach the spark. She fanned it softly with her wings for a long, long time.

The gray robin hovered so close that the coal touched her gray breast. As she fanned it glowed larger and redder. Her breast was scorched quite red, as the coal grew.

But the robin did not leave until a fine red flame blazed up.

Then the robin with her poor scorched red breast flew away. She flew wearily, for she was very tired. Now and again she touched the ground.

And wherever the robin's red breast touched the earth a fire was kindled. Soon the whole north country was blazing with tiny fires over which the Eskimos might cook their food and dry their clothes.

The white bear crept far, far back into his cave. He growled fiercely. He knew now that he could never have the north country to himself.

[1] Adapted from Flora J. Cook's "Nature Myths," by permission of A. Flanigan, Chicago.

WHICH WAS THE WISER?[1]

One morning in the early spring a raven was sitting on one of the branches of an old oak. He felt very ugly and cross, and could only say, "Croak! Croak!"

Soon a little robin, who was looking for a place to build her nest, came, with a merry song, into the same tree. "Good morning to you," she said to the raven.

But the raven made no answer; he only looked at the clouds and croaked something about the cold wind. "I said good morning to you," said the robin, hopping from branch to branch.

"You seem very merry this morning about nothing," croaked the raven.

"Why should I not be merry?" asked the robin. "Spring has come, and everybody should be glad and happy."

"I am not happy," said the raven. "Don't you see those black clouds above us? It is going to snow."

"Very well," answered the robin, "I shall keep on singing till it comes, at any rate. A merry song will not make it any colder."

"You are very silly," croaked the raven.

The robin flew to another tree and kept on singing; but the raven sat still and made himself very unhappy.

"The wind is so cold," he said. "It always blows the wrong way for me."

Very soon the sun came out warm and bright, and the clouds went away. But the raven was as sad as ever.

The grass began to spring up in the meadows. Green leaves and flowers were seen in the woods. Birds and bees flew here and there in the glad sunshine. The raven sat alone on the branch of the old oak.

"It is always too warm or too cold," said he. "To be sure it is quite pleasant just now; but I know that the sun will soon shine hot enough to burn one up. Then to-morrow it will be colder than ever before. I do not see how any one can be so silly as to sing at such a time as this."

Just then the robin came back to the tree, carrying a straw in her mouth.

"Well, my friend," asked she, "where is your snow?"

"Don't say anything," croaked the raven. "It will snow all the harder for this sunshine."

"And snow or shine," said the robin, "you will keep on croaking. For my part, I shall look on the bright side of everything, and have a song for every day in the year."

Which was the wiser, the raven or the robin?

[1] Permission of American Book Company.

ALL ABOUT THE ROBIN
SUGGESTIONS FOR FIELD LESSONS

One of the first birds to return in the spring—migrates north early in March—sometimes remains during winter—stays north as late as October or November.

Domestic—generally preferring to live near the home of man.

Song—though short and always the same is in tone wonderfully expressive of happiness, love, anger, or fear, as the case may be.

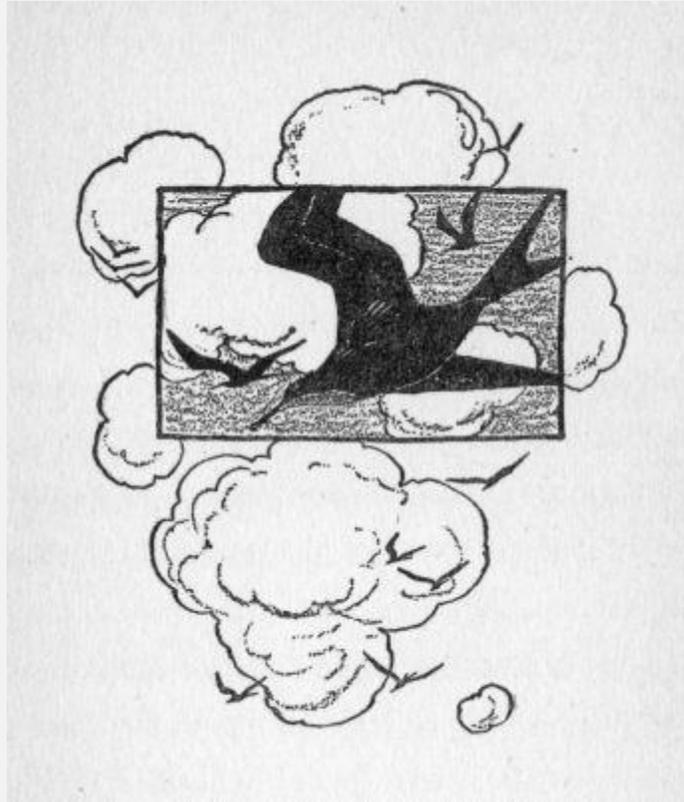
Black head—wings and tail brown—touches of white on throat—entire breast a rusty red.—Female duller and paler in colouring, growing almost as bright as the male in the autumn.

Food—principally insects and worms—does not disdain fruit, berries, cherries, etc., but prefers insect food—a ravenous eater.

Nest—outer layer composed of sticks, coarse grasses, etc., seemingly rather carelessly arranged—on this the rather large round nest is woven with grasses—plastered with mud—lined with softer grasses.

Eggs—greenish blue—four in number—young have black spots on breast—generally two broods reared in a season—sometimes three.

THE SWALLOW



The Swallow
UNDER THE EAVES

It was the tenth day of April. Phyllis knew the date because it chanced to be her birthday. She was just eight years old.

The sun shone very warm and bright, and the buds were growing big and red on the horse-chestnut-trees.

"I shall go down to the brook to look for pussy-willows this afternoon," said the little girl.

Phyllis was sitting in the window of the barn loft with the sun shining full upon her. All was very quiet and the little girl was half asleep.

Suddenly, with a flash of blue wings and a funny little twitter, a bird darted right across her face. Phyllis sat up straight, and, leaning out of the window, looked up at the eaves.

There she saw the merry twitterer, with several of his companions, who seemed very busy and very talkative.

They darted here and there, they skimmed through the air so swiftly that Phyllis could only catch a gleam of blue. They wheeled and circled and darted. All the time they twittered, twittered, twittered.

"What are they up to?" said Phyllis, leaning farther out and looking more closely.

For an instant one of the birds clung to the eaves and seemed to be pecking away at a bit of mud which was stuck to the eaves.

Phyllis noticed the deeply forked tail of the bird. Its back and wings and tail were steel blue. Its throat and chest were bright chestnut, becoming paler near the back of the body.

"Oh, I know you," laughed Phyllis. "I have no fear of frightening you, for you are a swallow.

"How does it happen that you are so fearless? You are scarcely more afraid of us than our chickens. Why do you build so near our homes? You are even more tame than the robin!"

The swallow twittered in a way which made Phyllis feel that he was laughing at her. He darted so near that had she been quick enough she might have caught him.

"We are not afraid of you!" laughed the swallow, darting close again and then whirling away.

"What a funny bird!" said Phyllis.

In a moment the bird was back with a bit of mud in his mouth. He plastered it up against the rest of the mud under the eaves. Then he flew again near Phyllis.

"I suppose there was a time," said the bird, "when all swallows built their nests on the sides and ledges of caves or cliffs. But that was hundreds of years ago, before men came and made barns with such comfortable places for building.

"To be sure there are swallows to this day who prefer the bank of a brook or the side of a cave for their nesting-place. But we barn swallows like the eaves best."

"You, too, are an early bird," said Phyllis. "Where did you spend the winter?"

There was a great twittering among the returning swallows just then and Phyllis was obliged to wait for a reply. Back came the bird after a moment.

"We went south last October," he said. "Late in September we gathered in great flocks in the marshes.

"For days we stayed there waiting for the entire company to gather. At length on one of the blue October days we flew southward.

"There were hundreds of birds in the flock. We looked like a small cloud, as we skimmed and darted through the air. As we flew, the flock was a half mile long.

"We spent the winter in South America. There are delicious insects there. But for all that we love the north country best.

"By and bye Mother Nature whispered to us. She said that it was nest-building time in the northland. Such a twittering and fluttering there was when this news came.

"That very afternoon we started north. Day after day we flew. We met other great flocks as we travelled, who joined us.

"Day after day we flew northward. We did not stop to eat, but caught our food on the wing.

"Now we lunched on moths and flies. Again we dined on grasshoppers. Any insect foolish enough to trust itself in the air at the time we passed served as food.

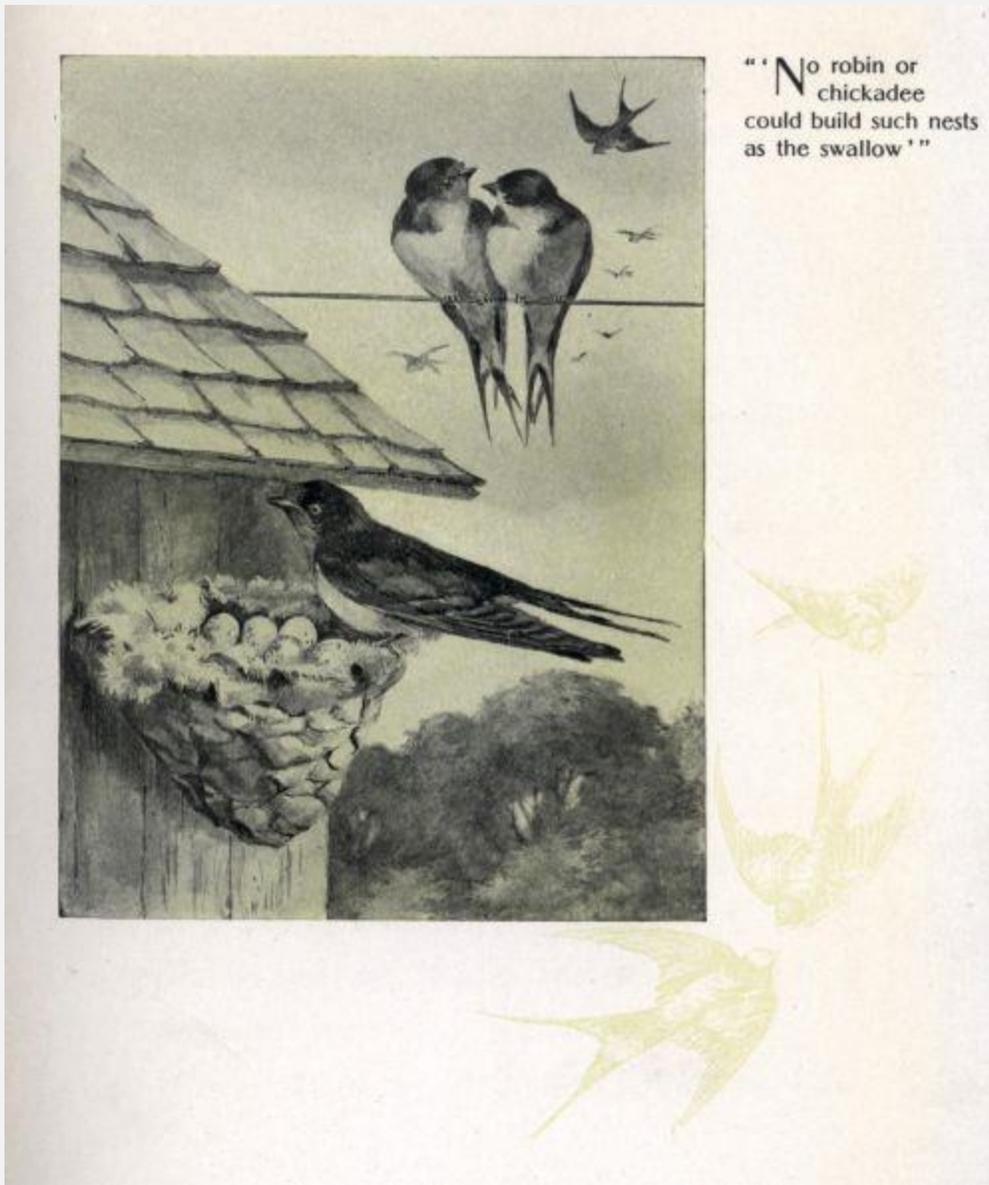
"We arrived here only a few days ago. It is not yet very warm, but here under the eaves on the sunny side of the barn it is quite comfortable.

"We are so busy with this nest-building and settling for the summer. You see we swallows do not live alone. There are always flocks of us together.

"We should be lonely if we lived only in pairs. That is the reason that we build a whole little village of nests under your eaves."

"You build very queer nests," said Phyllis. "They are neither like the robin's nor the chickadee's nests."

"No, indeed, no robin or chickadee could build such nests as the swallow. You see we make the soft mud from the brookside into little balls and carry it in our bills. With it we mix straws and grasses. This holds the clay together. When the outer clay wall is finished we line the nest with soft grasses and feathers."



"No robin or chickadee could build such nests as the swallow"

"I notice there are a great many chicken feathers in the barnyard. I shall line my nest with the softest, fluffiest feathers that I can find there.

"By and bye my little mate will sit in the dear clay nest and over four or five or possibly six little eggs."

"I shall never be able to see them," sighed Phyllis. "They are up so high. Tell me about them."

"Oh, my eggs are beautiful," said the swallow. "They are white with just a little rose tint. They are spotted with fine dots of brown and purple, and are about three-quarters of an inch long.

"We shall probably have three broods of birdlings this summer. What a happy, happy time we shall have!"

All this time the swallow was darting and wheeling and circling about Phyllis in a most graceful manner.

"Are you never still?" asked Phyllis, at last. "I do not believe you even stop to eat."

"I do not," said the swallow, darting after a big blue fly. "I eat on the fly." And then he burst into a giggling twitter.

"I catch nearly all my food on the wing. No one can complain—as they do of the robin—of our destroying fruit.

"We do not care for fruit at all. I would rather have a dozen nice fat flies than all the cherries in the world!"

"Well," laughed Phyllis, "I'd rather have a dozen ripe cherries than all the flies in the world!"

"Tastes differ," twittered the swallow.

THE SWALLOWS

Once upon a time some Eskimo children were playing in the wet clay by the seashore. They were making tiny toy houses of the clay. These houses they fastened high on the face of the cliff.

The children chattered and laughed. They ran gaily to and fro in their happy play.

The people of the village heard their merry voices. Their busy mother paused with her long bone needle between her fingers. She looked up and smiled at her little ones.

"How happy my children are to-day!" she said, and she hummed a little tune to herself.

"They are very wise children!" said a neighbour. "They say so many wonderful things. Indeed, they seem to know more of some things than even the wise men of the village!"

"Yes, they are quite wonderful," said the mother. "I sometimes listen to their chatter and watch their nimble little fingers, and I wonder who taught them all they know."

"Oh," said another woman, "they do not seem so extraordinary to me. In fact, they look to me like little birds, flitting about in their dark dresses."

"They do look like birds!" said the mother, gazing at the children.

"I do believe they are birds," said the neighbour.

"But the voices are my children's voices," said the mother, looking again in wonder.

"And they are still building tiny clay houses on the cliffs!" said the other woman.

"But those toy clay houses are birds' nests," said the neighbour, "and those little figures darting back and forth are no longer children. They have changed to birds!"

"Yes," said the mother, peering from under her hand. "Yes, those are birds building their funny clay nests on the cliffs yonder.

"But the birds have the happy twittering voices of my children. You were right. They were wonderful children!"

"Ah, well, my only wish is that they may remain near us. They will cheer us and keep us from becoming lonely!"

"Surely that is a reasonable wish—since they are your own little ones," said the neighbour. "I, too, hope that the little birds will remain near our village!"

And indeed the mother's wish was granted. Even to this day the little swallows do not fear man.

In fact, they still choose to build their nests near the camps of the people. They still fix their tiny toy houses on the faces of the sea cliffs.

ALL ABOUT THE BARN SWALLOW
SUGGESTIONS FOR FIELD LESSONS

Comes north about first or second week in April. Remains until late September or October—builds and travels in flocks or companies—winters in South or Central America.

Song—a constant twitter.

Head and upper parts except forehead steel blue—tail feathers marked with white—forehead and throat clear chestnut colour—chest and lower body paler chestnut.

Food—chiefly insects caught while on the wing.

Nest—built chiefly of mud—chooses under eaves or cavelike places for building—mud mixed with grasses and (one authority also asserts) a sticky saliva from the bird's mouth.

Eggs—white, tinted a delicate rose, and speckled finely with brown and purple.—Two or three broods in a season.

THE HAWK AND THE RAVEN



The Hawk

FROM THE BARNYARD FENCE

Had not the old hen been such a watchful mother she would never have been able to care for such a big, fluffy family.

Had not Phyllis been such a wide-awake little girl, she would have never heard and seen all that I am about to tell you.

Mother Speckle was scratching patiently in the barnyard. Now and again she gave a loud call and her ten little ones ran wildly for the bug or worm which their mother had found for them.

Phyllis was just coming into the barnyard with a cup of meal for Mother Speckle's family, when a strange cry from the old hen startled her.

Phyllis looked and saw every chick running as fast as its little legs could carry it to the hovering mother wings. Soon every chicken baby was hidden from sight and the chicken mother was clucking less loudly.

"What can be the matter?" cried Phyllis, and then looking up she saw a hawk circling in the air above.

She snatched off her hat and waved it wildly at the hawk. At the same time she shouted as fiercely as she could.

The hawk soared calmly in the air, rising ever higher and higher. The mother hen, calling softly to her babies, led the little ones to the protecting shelter of some low bushes. Then Phyllis sprinkled the meal and soon the chicken hawk was quite forgotten by Mother Speckle and her brood.

But Phyllis still watched eagerly for the hawk. She feared that he would return. But she could now see nothing of him.

On the fence post, not far away, sat a big black raven croaking gravely to himself.

"You are not a lovely bird either," said the little girl, but the raven did not hear her.

When she had crept up very close to the post on which the raven sat, Phyllis again saw the hawk sailing in wide circles nearer and nearer.

"Caw! Caw!" cried the raven, rising in the air, high above the barn. "I, too, can sail about in circles! Caw! Caw! Caw!"

The hawk said nothing, but quietly settled on the fence post. The raven still circled in the air, but ever nearer.

The hawk looked up. The raven wagged his head solemnly and uttered his sad, harsh cry. He shook out his black feathers and sat down again on the post.

"I am called the bird of ill omen," said the raven. "Some people think that I bring bad luck. Others think I eat too much of their corn. No one likes me. No one thinks me beautiful.

"Yet if you will look at my black coat you will see how glossy it is. My back fairly gleams in the sunlight. Sometimes I catch gleams of purple and green on my wings. See how soft and loose are the feathers about my throat. They make a fringe about my neck of which I am somewhat proud.

"I do not harm people, and I surely should not be blamed for my appetite. To be sure, I do eat corn and grain. I also eat grubs, worms, field mice, in fact anything which comes in my way.

"I have a home up in the top of the cedar-tree. My nest is round and firm. It is woven of sticks and grasses and lined with wool which I myself pick from the sheep's back.

"We reline the old nest and repair it beautifully every housecleaning time.

"My babies are good children, but they do not in fact look much like me. Perhaps you might think them better looking than their parents. They are black and white.

"Their mother says that the raven babies will outgrow the white feathers soon. She declares that she and I had once as many white feathers as our babies. It seems hard to believe, but perhaps she is right.

"At any rate, they are my children and I do the best I can for them. To me they are very dear, but I fear they will go through life as unloved as I! Caw! Caw! Caw!"

The chicken-hawk ruffled his brown feathers carelessly. He drew in his breath, making a whistling noise which to Phyllis, hiding so quietly below, sounded quite like escaping steam.

"People do not like me either," said the hawk, shrugging his shoulders. "But for all that I shall not sit and mourn.

"I know that my feathers are handsome. I know that I am a good husband and father. I know that I can sail about in the air as gracefully as any bird in the world.

"I sometimes eat insects, but I wonder, Mr. Raven, at your fondness for corn and grain. You should try some of these small birds which are flying about."

"I fear—" began the raven.

"Fear?" cried the hawk, striking out with his strong curved claws. "I do not know what fear is! Look at my short curved bill! Look at my sharp claws! Look at my long wings, which can carry me so swiftly and so far!

"There is scarcely a bird of the air which does not fear me. They skim out of sight at my approach.

"You should see me pounce upon young ducks. It is great fun. Yesterday I was soaring above the pond, when I saw a whole family of young ducks out for their first swim. Without a sound I dropped down, seized one, and bore it off in my claws. I sat in the tree-top to eat it. It was very tender, but also very small. I decided to have another. This time the young ducks saw me. They dived head first into the water.

"I laughed to myself. I knew that they would soon come up. When in half a minute one appeared, I was quick enough to catch him.

"Later I carried a small chicken home to my nest in the big oak on the hill yonder. My nest is a very simple affair,—just a few crooked sticks. The lining is of leaves and a few pieces of loose bark which we picked up.

"Come and see me sometime, Mr. Raven. I will show my babies to you. They are wonderful birdlings with bright yellow eyes and bluish bills.

"Just now I must be off. I see Mrs. Speckle has ventured out from the bushes again and that little girl with the flapping hat—"

The little girl and the "flapping hat" sprang up from the fence-corner with such a shout that the chicken-hawk circled away into the air and did not return that day.

The raven flew away, crying sadly, "Caw! Caw! Caw!" Mother Speckle went on quietly catching bugs for her downy babies.

THE FIRST HAWK

During the short Greenland summer the Eskimos live along the seacoast. They put up their strange skin huts and hunt and fish and make merry through the season when the sun shines at midnight.

Now in places along the Greenland coast there are steep high cliffs. Here the birds which fly farther north in summer make their nests.

Often, as the Eskimo sits by his campfire, he hears the half-angry, half-sad cry of "Kea! Kea! Kea!" Looking up then, he often sees a lonely hawk sitting on the highest, most desolate cliff.

The Eskimo father laughs when he hears this cry and sees the lonely bird on the cliff top. Then the little Eskimo children creep nearer to their father with certainty that a new story is in store for them.

"Tell us the story of the hawk!" the Eskimo children cry eagerly.

This then is the story which the Eskimo father tells to his little ones "in their funny furry clothes."

"Long, long ago in a tiny Eskimo village, there lived a strange-looking old woman. Her neck was so short that she really looked as though she had no neck at all and as though her head was set upon her shoulders.

"People laughed when they saw the funny-looking old woman. Some were so unkind as to make fun of her strange appearance.

"This unkindness made the old woman very unhappy.

"By and bye the children of the village went every day to the hut of the old woman to play.

"They teased and tormented her. If she raised the bearskin curtain at the doorway and spoke to them they did not heed her.

"'Short neck! Short neck!' the rude children shouted. Then they stood and laughed at her.

"So it came that the poor old woman grew more and more unhappy. To escape her tormentors she often climbed to the cliff tops and sat on the edges of high rocks where it was difficult to follow.

"Here, safe and quiet, she would sit for hours. Sometimes in her loneliness she raised her arms above her head and cried aloud.

"The people of the tiny Eskimo village often saw the lonely figure on the cliffs. They noticed that the old woman stayed less and less in her little snow hut in the village.

"Then one morning an Eskimo child, looking up, thought she saw the old woman sitting as usual on the rocks. But the child's brother said that he saw only a strange bird with a very short neck.

"At that moment the bird raised its wings and flapped them above its head.

"'Kea! Kea! Kea!' cried the strange new bird. 'Kea! Kea! Kea! who was it called me short neck?'

"'Ah,' said the children's father, looking up from his fishing-nets, 'I think you both were right.'"

ORIGIN OF THE RAVEN AND THE MACAW
(ZUNI CREATION MYTH)

Long, long ago there were but few Indians on the earth. The world was not as it is now. The earth people did not understand things as they now understand them.

It therefore happened that a beautiful Indian prince came to live with the earth people.

In his hand he carried a plume stick. It was a magic wand and was covered with feathers of beautiful colours.

There were yellow feathers. There were red feathers. There were blue-green feathers. There were black and white and gray feathers.

Fastened to this magic wand were also many strange shells and charms which the earth children did not understand and which the strange prince did not explain fully.

"What is this strange plume stick?" asked the earth children.

"It is the magic wand which tests the hearts of earth children," was the reply.

The earth children wondered, but they did not understand.

"Ah, but show us what you mean!" they cried, eagerly.

"Look!" replied the strange prince.

Then amid the plumes and charms of the magic wand there appeared four round things.

"They are eggs!" cried the earth children. "Two are blue like the sky. Two are red-brown like the dust of our own pleasant earth!"

Then the earth children asked many questions which the strange prince tried patiently to explain.

"Now," said the strange prince, "choose whichever eggs you will. By and bye they will hatch. From them will come birds such as you never before have seen. From each pair of eggs will come a pair of birds."

"You who choose the blue eggs shall follow the birds which come from the blue shells. You and your children and your children's children shall dwell in the land in which these birds nest.

"You who choose the red-brown eggs shall follow the birds which come from the red-brown shells. You and your children and your children's children shall dwell in the land in which these birds nest!"

"But which shall we choose?" cried the eager earth children.

"Nay," said the strange prince, "that I may not tell. But this much you may know:

"From one pair of eggs shall come forth beautiful birds. Their feathers shall be coloured, like the leaves and fruits of summer. They shall nest in the land of everlasting summer-time and plenty.

"They who choose those eggs will follow these birds to the beautiful country of summer-time. The fruits will ripen daily and fall into the hands of the lucky earth children. Their food will come to them without labour and they shall know neither hunger nor cold."

"And what will happen if we choose the other pair of eggs?"

The strange prince shook his head half sadly and smiled on the earth children.

"From the other pair of eggs," he said, "shall come forth birds with black feathers, piebald with white. This pair will nest in a land where you may gain food by labour only.

"Those who follow this pair of birds shall struggle summer and winter. By long days of toil they shall provide food. By long nights of watchfulness they shall keep warmth within their homes."

Then the strange prince ceased speaking. The earth children looked at each other and forgot to speak. Each looked into the eyes of the other and asked a question. Each wished to follow the birds which would lead them to the land of everlasting summer-time and idleness and plenty.

"Which eggs do you choose?" asked the strange prince.

"The blue—the blue!" cried the earth children. Then those who were strongest and quickest pushed forward.

They fought for the blue eggs, and getting them hurried away with gladness.

They buried the blue eggs in the soft loam on the sunny side of the cliff. They sat down to watch when the young birds should hatch.

Now there remained those weaker earth children who had been pushed aside. For them there was no choice. The strange prince gave into their hand the red-brown eggs.

The red-brown eggs were placed amid the soft green grasses by the riverside. The earth children into whose care they were given sat also by the riverside and waited.

Sometimes, as they waited for the hatching of the red-brown eggs, they looked up to the place in the cliff where the stronger ones watched the beautiful blue eggs.

Then the weaker ones sighed and turned to the ugly red-brown eggs amid the grasses.

By and bye, as those on the cliff waited, they heard faint tappings inside the blue shells.

"Ah," they said, "the birds will come soon now. They will lead us to the land of summer-time."

When at length the shells burst and the young birds came out, they looked much as other birds look. They had large mouths and panting sides and tiny featherless bodies. Soon the pin-feathers appeared.

"See!" cried the watchers, "now the beautiful plumage is starting!"

And those by the riverside, hearing the cry, looked up, and looking up they sighed. The red-brown eggs also were cracking open and the young birds coming out of the shells. Soon the earth children must follow their bird leaders. They fed and tended the young birds for still a few days.

Then one morning there were sighs and discontent on the cliff. For the birds which came from the blue shells were feathered and ready for flight. Their colours were black and white! So also is all the bare earth and the new-fallen snow!

It was a pair of ravens, which the stronger earth children followed to the country where winter follows summer and where men work for food. As the earth children laboured, the ravens taunted them with hoarse, laughing cries.

Now those other earth children who watched the red-brown eggs stood up by the riverside and smiled.

From the red-brown eggs had come birds of gorgeous plumage. On the breath of a sweet-scented breeze they were wafted far to southward—to the summer land. And those earth children who followed the beautiful birds still live easily in the land of everlasting summer-time.

ALL ABOUT THE CHICKEN-HAWK
SUGGESTIONS FOR FIELD LESSONS

Voice—sharp, harsh, discordant cries—queer "whistling" noises.

Upper parts brownish black mixed with white—throat and under tail coverts white—other under parts having darker markings.

Bill—short, curved, and very sharp.

Claws—strong, curved, and very sharp,—middle toe longest.

Wings—long and pointed—made for rapid flight and long journeys.

Female larger than male.

Food—other smaller birds of the air—small ducks and chickens—occasionally larger insects, snakes, etc.

Nest in the fork of a tree—made of crooked sticks and lined with leaves, bark, etc.

Eggs—two to four in number, bluish white, thickly speckled with brown.

Iris in young bird's eyes yellow—turning to reddish brown with maturity.

ALL ABOUT THE RAVEN
SUGGESTIONS FOR FIELD LESSONS

Three times the size of robin.

Does not migrate, but is usually resident in the place where it can best provide for itself and family.

Is glossy black in colour, with gleams of purple and green above—duller underneath.

Flies in wide circles high above the tree-tops, and utters a weird, uncanny cry, which has given it the name of being a bird of ill omen, and to many people the cry of the raven is deemed a sign of approaching evil.

Nest very compactly built of sticks and grasses and lined with wool from sheep's back. Nest is used year after year, being often relined and made habitable.

Young when first hatched are black and white—they however change to entire black in a very short time.

Food of the raven is varied, apparently anything edible which comes in his way—grain, seeds, grubs, worms, field-mice, fruit, are found on his menu.

THE KINGFISHER OR HALCYON BIRD

WITH THE WATER WATCHMAN

"Please, Jack," begged Phyllis.

"Girls always talk," replied Jack.

"I will not say a word to you—indeed I will not."

"Well, if you spoil my fishing—" began Jack.

"And I'll pick thimbleberries for our lunch," said Phyllis, eagerly.

So it happened that a small girl in a great sunbonnet followed a small boy with a still larger straw hat and a fishing-pole and line, out of the back gate and down the lane.

True to her promise, Phyllis said nothing, but trudged along behind Jack with wide open, watchful brown eyes.

By and bye the children came to a pond of shining, clear water. How still everything seemed, how brightly the sun shone!

"Now if you talk you'll scare the fish," said Jack, with an air of great importance.

"I will not talk," Phyllis whispered back, shutting her lips very tightly and sitting down beside her brother with a little sigh.

Jack threw his line—Phyllis watched with awe. They sat for a moment waiting for a "bite."

Then Jack jerked the line up sharply, not so much because he thought he had caught something, as because he hoped he would catch something.

"I don't believe there are any fish here," he grumbled at last.

But Phyllis's bright eyes had caught sight of something and she forgot all about the fishing and her resolve not to speak.

"Look!" she cried, pointing to a fallen tree-trunk which hung over the water.

On a branch sat a bird. He was considerably larger than a robin.



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"On a branch sat a bird. He was considerably larger than a robin"

On the top of his head was a tall crest, which reached to the nape of his neck.

His back and the entire upper part of his body was blue. His wings and short tail bore spots and bars of white.

The lower part of his body was white and across his breast ran two bands of blue.

"His bill is longer than his head!" laughed Phyllis. "What a funny big head and what funny little feet! Who is he, Jackie?"

"A kingfisher!" Jack replied.

"What is he doing?" asked Phyllis.

"Fishing," said Jack, shortly.

In a moment Jack spoke again.

"There must be fish here if Mr. Kingfisher is on the lookout. He is a famous old fisherman. He could not live without fish to eat. Did you notice the white spot above each eye?"

Encouraged by the sight of the other fisherman, Jack again cast his line and waited for a bite.

Phyllis watched the bird. Suddenly it seemed to drop from the branch. It dived into the water.

There was a great flutter and splash—a struggle. Then the bird in the blue and white uniform perched again on the old branch.

The children watched eagerly.

In the bird's strong bill was a scaly, glittering fish. It wriggled and flopped helplessly, but could not escape.

The bird held the fish firmly in its strong grasp, raised his head and struck the fish three or four sharp knocks against the branch. Then the fish wriggled no longer.

"He can never swallow that big fellow!" cried Jack, forgetting his own fishing. "I have seen kingfishers swallow minnows alive and whole, but that fish is too large for him to manage!"

The bird, however, seemed to think that he could "manage" it. He started to swallow the fish. When it was half-way down his throat it stuck.

With much sputtering and gagging the bird brought the fish up again. But he must have his dinner, and not in the least discouraged, tried again.

He gagged and writhed. The scales and fins stuck in his throat. Up came the fish again.

Four—five times he struggled to swallow the fish. Five times he failed to succeed. Five times the fish-scales glittered again in the sunlight. Such strange wriggings and twistings the bird made.

"The poor fellow is having an unhappy time with his lunch," laughed the children.

At the sixth effort the fish was safely landed in the bird's stomach.

With a flash of blue wings he circled through the air. He gave a noisy rattling cry as he alighted on a branch nearer to the children.

Again the bird watched the water intently. Again he dived like a flash. Again he bore a fish to the surface and killed it by striking it against the tree.

But this time the kingfisher did not swallow the fish. He rose with it in his bill and flew gracefully away.

The children watched for some time, but the strange blue bird did not return. Then Jack turned again to his fishing.

"I thought you were to furnish the thimbleberries for lunch," he said.

"So I shall," Phyllis replied, snatching up her basket and starting off in the direction of some bushes which she could see.

So Jack was left to his fishing and Phyllis went berrying.

Sure enough the bushes proved to be loaded with beautiful ripe berries. Soon the little fingers were stained quite purple and the little basket was half filled with berries.

As she started to return to her brother, Phyllis passed along the foot of a high bank. She was singing softly to herself when she heard the rattling cry of the kingfisher quite near.

He gracefully swung into sight on wide-spread wings. He bore another fish in his strong bill.

When he saw Phyllis he stopped short and held himself perfectly still in the air while he looked at her.

At length, deciding that she was harmless, he circled past the little girl and entered a small hole on the face of the bank.

"Why!" said Phyllis. "I wonder why he has gone in there. I shall wait for him to return."

So Phyllis waited until the bird came out. Then she held out her basket of berries.

"Will you have some of my berries?" she said. "I'm sure that your throat must be sore from the scratching of those fish-scales. You had to try so many times before you got it down. Tell me, did this last fish also stick in your throat?"

The kingfisher "chuckled" deep down in his throat.

"I do not eat berries," he said. "I usually eat fish. I sometimes eat large insects or shrimps, but I love to fish."

"So does my brother," said Phyllis, politely, glancing at Jack sitting motionless on a rock in the sunshine.

"Why did you go into that hole to eat?"

The kingfisher chuckled again.

"That is my nest," he said. "My wife is in there. I took the fish to her. She can fish quite as well as I, but our eggs are just hatching and she dare not leave them."

"That a bird's nest?" cried Phyllis. "Who made it?"

"Mrs. Kingfisher and I did," was the reply. "We found this fine steep bank when we came from the south in March.

"I began the nest myself. I held myself still in the air before the bank just as I did when I first noticed you. Then I drove my beak into the soft bank with quick plunges. How the clay rattled and rolled and splashed into the water below!

"It was but a very short time before I had a foothold on the bank. Mrs. Kingfisher and I worked very quickly. Soon we dug ourselves out of sight."

"But how do you dig—"

"Oh, just look at my bill, Phyllis. With it I loosen the earth. With my feet I scratch the dirt out in a perfect shower behind me. Our tunnel is so narrow that we could not turn around in it."

"How deep is it?" asked the little girl, pushing back her big hat and peering in.

The kingfisher did not seem to hear her. He just went on with his story.

"Perhaps a little less than two feet from the outside we made a turn to the right. After that we were obliged to bring the earth out in our beaks.

"Two could not work at once. While I worked at the tunnel Mrs. Kingfisher fished. While she worked, I fished. At last the tunnel was eight feet long.

"'That is a very safe distance,' said Mrs. Kingfisher to me. 'Let us dig no more, but make our nest here at the end of the tunnel.'

"We built a wonderful nest," the bird went on, "a fine prickly nest for our little ones. We did not line it with feathers and moss. We carefully arranged a pile of fish-bones and scales at the farthest end of the tunnel. On these bones and scales my wife laid six white eggs. Already four little baby kingfishers have pecked their way out of the white shells. The others will be out soon.

"I must be off about my fishing. Mrs. Kingfisher and I will both be very busy now catching minnows for those blue babies of ours."

With another chuckle and rattle the kingfisher flew away to his fishing station over the pond.

Phyllis picked up her basket of berries and returned to the spot where Jack still sat patiently holding his pole.

"Oh, Jack—" Phyllis began.

"Sh-h-h-h!" whispered Jack. "You promised not to talk. You'll scare the fish away. Girls always talk."

"I'm sorry," said Phyllis. "How many have you now?"

"None—but I've had a nibble several times. I think they'd bite better if the sun would go under a cloud."

"Let's eat our lunch now," begged Phyllis. "Perhaps there'll be some clouds by the time we finish."

As they ate Phyllis told her brother about the kingfisher's nest and babies. When they finished the sky was as blue as ever.

"These are halcyon days," said Jack, looking very wise.

"Wh-a-a-t—?" said Phyllis, wholly puzzled and half frightened at the new word.

"Well, you see father told me about them the other day when we were fishing in this same place.

"It seems that long ago when people were not very wise, they believed all sorts of queer things. They told strange stories about the things which they did not understand.

"In those days kingfishers were called halcyons. Some said these birds made nests which floated on the sea.

"As long as these eggs or birdlings were in the nest, the people said, the sea would remain smooth and the weather fair.

"Ever since then, when we hear any one speak of 'halcyon days,' we know that they mean pleasant happy days."

"Then," laughed Phyllis, "this has been one of the 'halcyon days' even though you failed to catch any fish."

Then two tired little people trudged home through the river reeds and down the lane.

On their way the blue kingfisher flashed by, chuckling harshly deep down in his throat.

THE HALCYON BIRDS

That evening Phyllis opened a new book and on almost the first page she saw something about the halcyon birds.

"Perhaps it is Jack's story," she said. Then she curled herself up on the soft sofa and this is the story she read.

In the beautiful long ago, in the wonderful country of Greece there lived a king, wise and just and peaceful. His people loved him.

The king lived in a marble palace on the top of a low hill. With him lived his wife, the lovely Queen Halcyone.

But though the king was wise and just and good, his heart was sad. There was unrest in the land. Troubles were rife in Greece.

At length one day the king came to the room where Queen Halcyone sat with her maids. They were spinning carefully and happily together.

"My Halcyone—my queen," said the king, "as you know, I am greatly troubled and disturbed. I do not know what is the best thing for me to do. I must seek wise advice from the gods."

Queen Halcyone dropped her distaff and looked in fear at the king.

"I must go," said the king to Halcyone, "on a long journey across the seas. As you know, in the Temple of Apollo there is a wise oracle. To this oracle must I go in search of counsel."

Then the lovely Queen Halcyone's heart was filled with sorrow. She feared that harm might come to the king, whom she loved for his goodness and his kindness.

Halcyone fell on her knees before the king. She begged him to postpone this terrible journey across the seas.

"Indeed," cried she, "there are cruel dangers, O my king! The journey is long and wearisome. Remain at home with me!"

The king smiled pityingly upon his lovely queen. He kissed her gently before he answered.

"It seems to me," he said, sadly, "that there is no other way. I must go."

"Ah, then, I pray, take me also. Let me share the dangers and the weariness."

"You could not—" the king began.

"In truth it would be easier far than to bear the loneliness and dread when you are gone. It would be weary waiting for your return!"

Now the king loved Halcyone. He longed to remain at home with her. But already the boat lay ready for departure—and there was no place for Halcyone.

Already the oarsmen sat at their benches ready to row away. So the king bade Halcyone farewell and stepped on board and quickly pushed off.

With bitter tears Halcyone stood on the bank and watched the king's boat push out from shore.

When it looked but a speck she shaded her eyes with her hand and still watched. But when in the purple distance the tiny speck could no longer be seen, Halcyone turned with a sigh to the marble palace and her maidens.

On and on across the waters the little boat sped. For a time all went well. At night the stars shone. In the morning the sun arose from the blue waters and travelled across a cloudless sky. Gentle winds blew, filling the sails and pushing the little boat quietly on its way.

But one day a change came over the sea. The moaning of the wind was heard. Dark clouds scurried across the sky.

The waves rose high and broke in white crests of foam. The rain poured down. The wind crept up and sprang upon the little boat with fury.

For a time the boat rose and fell with the waves. It pitched and rolled and reeled. Great waves splashed over it, washing the oarsmen overboard.

The masts were torn away. At last the little boat, buried in the trough of the wave, sank beneath the water.

The king and all his crew lay buried deep beneath the deep blue sea.

Weeks passed. Months passed. A year went by.

Queen Halcyone wandered restlessly up and down the shore. With weary eyes she watched the purple distance. But the king did not return.

She prayed to the gods that they would guard and protect the king whom she loved so dearly. She went to the sacred altars of her country, and burned incense there.

When the goddess Juno heard the prayers and saw the tears of the lovely Queen Halcyone, she was sad for her. Juno called to her side the beautiful rainbow messenger, Iris.

"Iris," said Juno, "this night I wish you to go down on your rainbow bridge to the god of dreams.

"Ask him to send to Halcyone a dream which shall tell her of the fate of her husband, the king. It is better that she should know what has befallen him whom she loved than to wander thus in uncertainty."

So Iris, the beautiful messenger, swept down to the god of dreams—and that night Halcyone dreamed that the king came to her and told her his story. He told her how the boat and all therein had long since been buried under the sea.

"Be brave, my Halcyone," said the shade of the dead king. "Be brave and patient, and soon perchance, if the gods will, thou shalt come to me in the land of shades."

When the dream left her, Halcyone sprang from her couch and ran again to the seashore. She stretched out her arms and called aloud to Aeolus, the father of the winds.

"O great father Aeolus," she prayed, "give me wings so large and strong that they will carry me to the spot where the king now lies."

"Hear me, Aeolus! Hear Halcyone, thy child!"

And as she prayed, lo, she rose slowly into the air. The folds of her blue robe enwrapped her.

Halcyone floated out across the sea. Again and again her breast touched the white crest of the waves and left its foam on her throat and on the bosom of her dress.

On and on she sped across the billowy waters. Her wings were firm, strong, untiring.

At last, floating upon the water she spied the form of the king. With a hoarse rattling in her throat she called to him.

With her strong wings outspread, Halcyone hung motionless above the king. Those broken cries came again and again from her throat.

And Juno, looking down from her cloudland home, saw Halcyone kneeling on the waves beside the dead king. She leaned down from her place in the heavens and touched the king's forehead.

Lo! there rose from the water two strong-winged birds in dresses of blue and white.

"Ah," sighed Aeolus, "let us call them the halcyon birds, for the lovely Halcyone, whose love did not fail her."

"Let these birds live ever beside the waters and rear their young in peace and quiet.

"Behold, when Halcyone broods over her little ones I will hold my winds in check. The waters shall be quiet and the sun shall shine merrily.

"And these days of peace and quiet and happiness shall be called 'halcyon days,' for ever."

ALL ABOUT THE KINGFISHER
SUGGESTIONS FOR FIELD LESSONS

Comes north in early March—remains until December, often throughout the year.

Song—harsh, discordant, laughing chuckle or rattle—never musical.

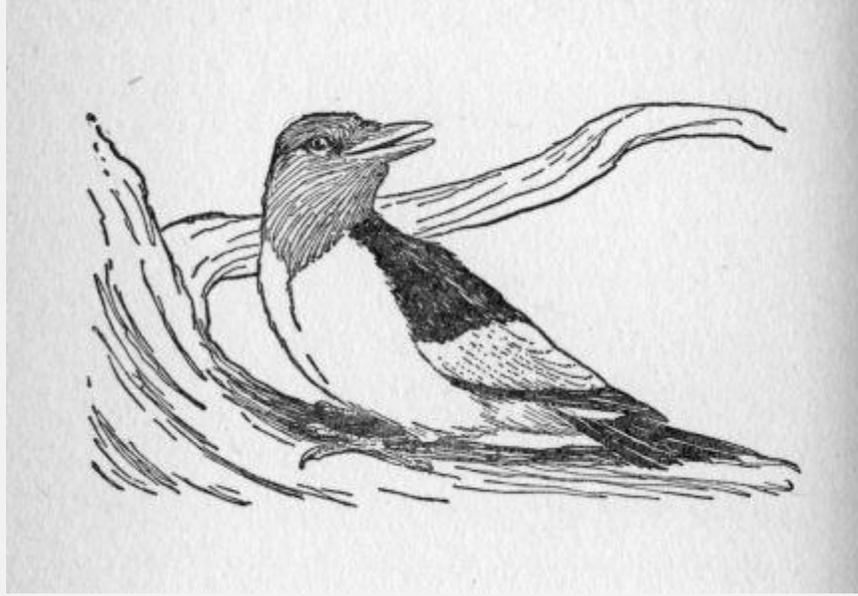
Upper parts blue—wings and tail with white markings—lower parts white with two blue bands across breast—bluish tinge on sides—a white spot in front of each eye.—Head large and crested—bill longer than head—feet small.

Food—principally fish which it obtains by diving and kills by striking against a tree if large, or swallows alive if small.—This food supplemented by larger insects, shrimps, etc.

Nest—tunnelled out of bank—six to eight feet deep—at the extreme end of tunnel is the nest made of fish-bones and scales.

Eggs—pure white—four to six in one brood.

THE RED-HEADED WOODPECKER



Woodpecker

IN CAP OF RED

Phyllis sat in her own room, rocking her doll to sleep. The window was open and the curtain flapped idly in the breeze.

Presently into the room darted a bird. He was beautifully dressed. His soft gray uniform was spotted and barred with white.

He did not seem in the least alarmed when he found himself in the room with Phyllis. He perched on the window-ledge and did not even glance at the little girl.

In a moment he flew to the ledge above her door. With his strong little bill he began to rap, rap, rap at the wood.

"You act like a woodpecker, but you do not look like one," said Phyllis.

"That shows that you do not know all about woodpeckers," said the gray, downy bird. "I belong to the family of red-headed woodpeckers."

"You?" cried Phyllis, amazed. "But where is your red cap, and where is your white vest, and where is your black coat? You are trying to fool me, my friend."

"My father and mother have crimson heads and necks and throats. They have white breasts. They have black backs and wings and tails. When they fly, the broad white bands on the wings are quite plain to be seen.

"My home nest is that in the trunk of the old oak by the gate."

"It is very queer," said Phyllis. "Perhaps some other bird laid an egg in the woodpeckers' nest by mistake."

The small bird fluttered quite helplessly with laughter.

"Oh, no, Phyllis, I see I have to tell you all about it. I am a woodpecker, surely. But I am quite young yet. It is not a week since I had my first lesson in flying."

"You fly very well for a young bird," said Phyllis.

"Well, my mother is very wise," said the bird.

"She does not think it well for her babies to get out of the nest until they have grown quite large. She says that if we wait until our wings are strong we will not be so apt to fall into danger.

"So I remained inside the nest until I was quite a large, strong bird. Then my parents called me out and taught me to fly.

"Only yesterday I asked my mother why I did not wear a dress and cap like her own.

"She said, 'Wait a little longer, my child. When you are quite grown your cap will be as red as my own. You will look so much like your father and me that those children down there will be unable to tell us apart.'

"It is little wonder that you did not know me for a woodpecker in this simple gray dress. All woodpecker children, however, dress in this quiet fashion at first. I shall be happy when I get my gorgeous red cap."

"Well," said Phyllis, "I am very glad you came to see me. I knew there was a nest in the old oak-tree. I watched your father and mother one whole morning a few weeks ago. I think they chose the oak because of those old dead branches.

"I saw your mother brace herself against the tree with her stiff tail. Then how her wedge-shaped bill rapped and rapped against the wood. For fully twenty minutes she rapped away at the rotten wood. Then she grew tired and your father took her place at the tree-trunk.

"Soon they pecked a hole deep enough to hide them from sight, but their constant rap, rap, rap could still be heard.

"I wondered how deep they made the hole, but it was too high for me to climb to find out."

"Having just come from the nest I can tell you all about it," replied the young woodpecker. "My parents dug down into the soft trunk to a depth of perhaps eighteen inches. At the bottom they hollowed out a large roomy place for the nest. They did not line it with feathers or grasses. Instead of a bed of moss was a little sawdust and the smooth white sides of the oak.

"In this nest my mother laid six pure white eggs. She sat on them and kept them warm until at last six downy birds came out of the shells.

"We were hungry little things. Both our mother and father were kept busy filling our greedy, ever-open mouths.

"And whatever they brought was sure to be very nice. Sometimes it was a cherry or a berry, sometimes a bit of pear or apple.

"But, best of all, were the fat, juicy little grubs which they often brought.

"I asked my father where he got the grubs. He made fun of me and called out to my mother in his shrill, lively way.

"She said that that was a thing which every young woodpecker should find out for himself.

"After that, every time a fat grub was brought to me, I wondered if I should ever be able to find them when I began to shift for myself.

"At last my wings were strong enough and my parents called me out of the nest. I very soon found that the fat grubs lived beneath the bark of my own oak-tree. All I had to do was to strike my bill into the bark and bear off the prize."

"Were you sorry to leave your safe high nest?" asked Phyllis.

"Indeed it was not so safe," said the young woodpecker. "On the day that I left the nest a great black snake crept in. He swallowed my little brothers and sisters.

"My parents were wild with grief. They said that was the thing they always dreaded, that such things often happened in woodpeckers' nests."

"How sad!" said Phyllis. "I should never have thought of snakes!"

"They are our greatest danger," was the reply. "Squirrels sometimes come in and steal the nuts and corn we have stored away, but the snake is the most to be feared."

"So you store away food?" Phyllis asked. "Do you stay here in the winter, then?"

"Oh, yes, we often stay all winter. Have you not seen us flying about among the trees in the winter-time?"

By this time the bird sat on the window-sill.

"Must you go?" asked Phyllis. "Here is a strawberry for you."

"Thanks," said the bird, pecking away at the fruit. "I am just off to the corn-field. My father showed me this morning how to open the husks of the green corn to get at the rich, milky kernels inside."

"When you get your red cap, come back," cried Phyllis, and the young woodpecker's lively cry answered from the corn-field.

A LEGEND OF THE NORTHLAND[1]

Away, away in the Northland,
Where the hours of the day are few,
And the nights are so long in winter
They cannot sleep them through;

Where they harness the swift reindeer
To the sledges, when it snows;
And the children look like bears' cubs
In their funny, furry clothes;

They tell them a curious story—
I don't believe 'tis true;
And yet you may learn a lesson
If I tell the tale to you.

Once, when the good Saint Peter
Lived in the world below,

And walked about it, preaching,
Just as he did, you know,

He came to the door of a cottage,
In travelling round the earth,
Where a little woman was making cakes
And baking them on the hearth;

And being faint with fasting,
For the day was almost done,
He asked her from her store of cakes
To give him a single one.

So she made a very little cake,
But as it baking lay,
She looked at it, and thought it seemed
Too large to give away.

Therefore she kneaded another,
And still a smaller one,
But it looked, when she turned it over,
As large as the first had done.

Then she took a tiny scrap of dough,
And rolled and rolled it flat;
And baked it as thin as a wafer—
But she couldn't part with that.

For she said, "My cakes that seem too small,
When I eat them myself,
Are yet too large to give away."
So she put them on the shelf.

Then the good Saint Peter grew angry,
For he was hungry and faint;
And surely such a woman
Was enough to provoke a saint.

And he said, "You are far too selfish
To dwell in a human form,
To have both food and shelter,
And fire to keep you warm.

"Now, you shall build as the birds do,
And shall get your scanty food

By boring, and boring, and boring,
All day in the hard dry wood."

Then up she went through the chimney,
Never speaking a word,
And out of the top flew a woodpecker,
For she was changed to a bird.

She had a scarlet cap on her head,
And that was left the same,
But all the rest of her clothes were burned
Black as a coal in the flame.

And every country schoolboy
Has seen her in the wood;
Where she lives in the trees till this very day,
Boring and boring for food.

And this is the lesson she teaches:
Live not for yourself alone,
Lest the needs you will not pity
Shall one day be your own.

Give plenty of what is given you,
Listen to pity's call;
Don't think the little you give is great,
And the much you get is small.

Now, my little boy, remember that,
And try to be kind and good,
When you see the woodpecker's sooty dress,
And see her scarlet hood.

You mayn't be changed to a bird, though you live
As selfishly as you can;
But you will be changed to a smaller thing—
A mean and a selfish man.

—Phoebe Cary.

[1] Used by permission of and special arrangement with Houghton, Mifflin & Co.

ALL ABOUT THE WOODPECKER
SUGGESTIONS FOR FIELD LESSONS

Comes north in May—often stays all winter—most commonly seen in the fall.

Song—shrill, lively call resembling the voice of the tree-frog.

Male and female have crimson head and neck—upper parts black with white marking—white band across wings—most conspicuous when bird is in flight.

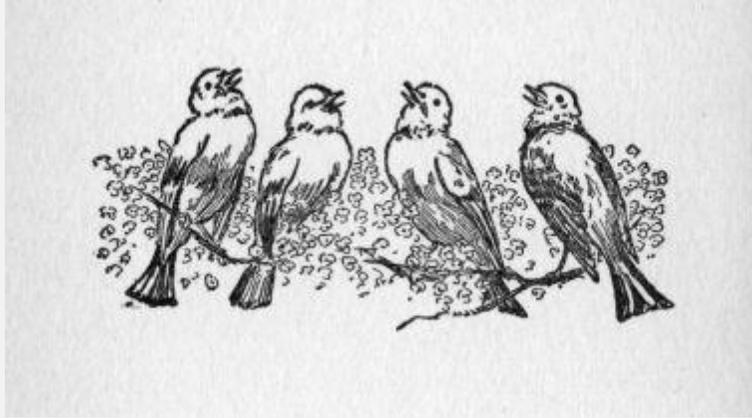
Lower parts white—bill wedge-shaped, strong, and sharp—tail strong and stiff, used as a brace when clinging to a tree-trunk and tapping with bill—toes arranged two in front and two behind for better support in clinging to tree trunks, etc.

Young birds resemble the parents, except that in colour they are a mottled gray.

Food is largely fruit—green corn, nuts, and larval insects procured from tree-trunks.—Sometimes stores away nuts, etc.

Place chosen for nest is usually a rotting tree, which is easier to bore.—Hollow from fifteen to eighteen inches deep.—Eggs pure white, generally six in number.

THE LARK



Larks

IN THE MEADOW

If Jack's big black dog, Nero, had not chanced to snatch Phyllis's rag doll by the head and run away with it this story would have never been written.

You see, Nero bounded straight across the meadow and Phyllis, fearing that she would lose the doll, ran shrieking after him.

Nero was only playing, and soon dropped the doll and ran off. Phyllis regained her property and started to return, when a bird rose from the grass at her feet with a queer whirring sound.

Phyllis looked up at the bird and then down to the spot from which it had flown.

In another moment she would have stepped in the nest. This meadow lark's nest was unlike any other Phyllis had found. Indeed, it could scarcely be called a nest at all.

But when she looked at it Phyllis thought what a wise little bird the meadow lark must be to choose such a place for the nest.

Had Phyllis not chanced upon it in just the way she did she might have looked all day long and not discovered it.

The nest was flat upon the ground. Around it and over it arched the tall meadow grasses. The nest itself was made of grass—it seemed to Phyllis that it was made in a somewhat careless manner, and that the eggs might easily roll out upon the ground.

There were four beautiful oval eggs in the nest—the largest birds' eggs Phyllis had as yet discovered. They were over an inch long, and were of a beautiful rosy white colour, speckled closely with reddish brown spots.

As Phyllis sat very still, the mother bird crept softly back to her home. She carefully settled herself on the grassy nest and with her bill tenderly tucked the eggs under her soft feathers.

"How careful you are!" exclaimed Phyllis. "No fear of your breaking the eggs."

The brown bird rose up quickly in fright and looked uncertainly toward the fence. Phyllis thought to see her whirr off again.

"Oh, don't go," she cried. "I will not harm you! Truly I will not disturb you!"

The meadow lark looked again toward the fence, and then settled herself once more over her precious eggs.

"Why do you look toward the fence so often?" asked Phyllis.

"Do you not see that bird perched upon the fence?" asked the meadow lark.

"Yes," Phyllis answered, "what is he doing there?"

"He is our sentinel," said the meadow lark. "He is on the lookout for danger. When he gives the alarm, the rest of the flock know there is danger near.

"When we hear the sentinel's alarm we are off in an instant. We fly high into the air. Did you not notice how I hovered near the grass-tops for a moment and then rose high into the air?"

"Yes," answered Phyllis, "and I knew that you were a lark because of that whirring sound you made when flying."

"Ah, but I am not really a lark at all," said the bird. "I am called the meadow lark, but in truth I belong to the blackbird family. The red-winged blackbird is an own cousin of mine. So also is the oriole, who builds a queer hanging nest in the tree-tops.

"The oriole is very proud of her woven nest, but I should consider it a dangerous place for bird babies. My little ones will never be hurt by falling from their nest.

"Neither can I imagine how any bird can dare to build in such an open place.

"My home is hidden here amid the grasses. Sometimes we find places like this, where the grass blades naturally arch over and hide the nest.

"Sometimes we weave a sort of arch over the nest with the downy, fine fibres from the grass leaves.

"Did you notice the little lane down which I returned to my tiny home?"

"No," said Phyllis, "I thought you just came through the grasses by the easiest way."

"If you will look closely," said the meadow lark, pecking away at her own brown feathers, "if you look very, very closely, you will see the tiny path which leads directly to my door."

Phyllis leaned down and peered very curiously among the grass stems. Sure enough, there was a tiny winding path, almost hidden from sight. It led directly to the meadow lark's nest.

"You are a very wonderful little bird," she cried.

"I shall have some very wonderful babies one of these fine days," said the meadow lark, proudly.

"How safely they will be hidden from danger," said Phyllis.

"Well," said the mother bird, shaking her head, sadly, "I am very sure that I build in a safer manner than my cousins. But, alas, even meadow larks are not free from danger."

"I might have stepped on your nest?" said Phyllis.

"Yes," said the bird, "but what makes me fear most are the field-mice and the snakes. They make great havoc in our nests when they discover them. Many a tiny fledgling has been swallowed by a great creeping, crawling snake. Many a beautiful egg has been eaten by the hungry little field-mice."

"I hope no harm will come to your little home," said Phyllis. "I notice one thing which you have for a protection from harm."

"What is that?" asked the meadow lark.

"It is your colour."

The meadow lark raised her head in gentle surprise.

"And what has my colour to do with my danger?" she asked.

"Why," said the little girl, feeling wondrous wise, "do you not see that the browns of your feathery dress are the same colours as the grass stems and the stubble amid which you brood and feed?"

"Why, so it is," said the meadow lark. "My back is brown, edged with brownish white. That is like the grass stems. I am streaked with black and brown and cream colours. That is like the blades of grass."

"My throat and breast are yellow like the stubble amid which I feed. You are wonderfully wise, Miss Phyllis."

"What a beautiful black crescent you have upon your breast," said Phyllis. "It was almost the first thing I noticed when I met you."

"Did you observe the dark brown lines on my head? They seem to cross my eyes."

"I think you are quite beautiful," said Phyllis.

"Ah, but you should see my mate," said the meadow lark. "He is much more beautiful than I. My feathers seem pale and faded when I walk beside him. When fall comes, however, my own colours will brighten."

"On what shall you feed your little ones?"

"When I tell you, you will see again that I am wise in choosing this place for a nest."

"My babies need never grow hungry, for the grass seeds are always falling. The beetles and worms and ants are always walking by. The moths and the butterflies are for ever laying their eggs in all sorts of convenient places. You remember how their eggs do not hatch out into butterflies and moths at once. They are just ugly little worms called grubs."

"Yes," said Phyllis, "I remember."

The meadow lark carefully tucked an egg farther under her soft brown feathers.

"I am glad," she said, "that my eggs do not hatch out as grubs. Perhaps if they did, I should care no more for my babies than the butterfly does for hers. I am told that she does not even know her own children."

"You are quite right," said Phyllis. "She herself told me so."

The meadow lark gave a low whistle and nervously flitted her tail, showing the white feathers with which it was edged.

"It has been some time since I have heard your clear, sweet whistle," said Phyllis. "I thought you must have left our meadow. You have a most beautiful voice."

"Oh, no, we shall not soon leave your meadow, Phyllis. In the autumn we may join a party of larks and take our family to the marshes for awhile, but we shall return. Meadow larks do sometimes go south for the winter, but usually they live their lives in their home meadows."

"Then you will sing for me again?" asked the little girl.

"Oh, with pleasure," said the meadow lark.

"You remember how we used to sing in the spring? Just now our thoughts are so taken up with our nesting that we have little time for song. But later, when the little ones are able to care for themselves, I shall gladly whistle to you once more."

"I shall listen for you," said Phyllis. "Just now I must go, for I hear my mother's voice. Good-bye, meadow lark!"

And the meadow lark from her nest whistled a low good-bye.

THE SONG OF THE MERRY LARK[1]

Once there was an old gray pussy, and she went down into the meadow, where she saw a merry lark flying among the tall reeds; and pussy said, "Where are you going, little lark?"

And the merry lark answered, "I am going to the king to sing him a song this fine May morning."

And pussy said, "Come here, little lark, and I'll let you see a pretty ring round my neck."

But the lark said, "No, no, gray pussy; no, no! You worried the little mouse, but you shall not worry me."

Then the lark flew away till he came to a high oak-tree, and there he saw a gray, greedy hawk sitting. And the gray, greedy hawk said, "Where are you going, pretty lark?"

And the lark answered, "I am going to the king, to sing him a song this fine May morning."

And the gray, greedy hawk said, "Come here, little lark, and I'll let you see a pretty feather in my wing."

But the merry lark said, "No, no, gray, greedy hawk, no, no! You pecked at the little linnet, but you shall not peck at me."

Then the lark flew away till he came to the side of a rock, and there he saw a sly fox sitting. And the sly fox said, "Where are you going, sweet lark?"

And the lark answered, "I am going to the king, to sing him a song this fine May morning."

And the sly fox said, "Come, little lark, and I'll let you see a pretty white spot on the tip of my tail."

But the lark said, "No, no, sly fox; no, no! You worried the little lamb, but you shall not worry me."

Then the merry lark flew away till he came to the garden of the king; and there he sat among the red clover blossoms and sang his sweetest song.

And the king said to the queen, "What shall we do for this little lark who has sung so sweet a song to us?"

And the queen said to the king, "I think we must have some May-day games for the little lark, and invite robin redbreast to sing with him."

So the gay robin redbreast came and sang with the lark.

And the king and the queen and all the fine lords and ladies danced and made merry while the little birds sang.

And after that the lark flew away home to his own green meadow, where the old gray pussy-cat still lived among the tall reeds.

[1] Permission of American Book Company.

SAVED BY A LARK[1]

Little Helen was four years old. She lived in the country in a white house with green window blinds. The house stood in a large yard, and had pretty flowers in front of it and a row of big maple-trees on each side.

Behind the house was an orchard, where the birds liked to build their nests and sing their sweet songs. Helen had a swing between two large apple-trees which stood a little way from the back door. She could swing ever so high, and could almost touch the green apples on one of the branches.

Back of the orchard and garden stood three big red barns. These barns were full of wonders for Helen. She was always glad to go into them with her father, and see the piles of corn and wheat, the plows and wagons, and the many other things that were there.

One morning in the harvest-time Helen was standing alone upon the door-step. The sun shone bright; the robins were singing in the apple-trees; the grasshoppers were chirping in the lane; but Helen heard only the sound of the far-off reaper, as it came to her through the soft morning air. She knew that her father was with the reaper.

Don't you know what a reaper is? It is that with which the farmer cuts his grain when it is ripe. It is drawn by horses, and it cuts down the grain stalks with many sharp knives, which move back and forth very fast.

"I think I will go out to the field and help father," said Helen to herself.

In another moment the little feet were turned toward the harvest field.

Across the orchard and down the lane she went, carrying her sunbonnet in her hand and talking to the grasshoppers, which would somehow get in her way.

But when at last she came to the field, she saw the men and the reaper far away toward the other side.

Helen kept on across the field, for she thought that she would soon catch up with the men. But it did not take long for the little feet to grow very tired.

Then she sat down on a sheaf of wheat and looked around her, wishing that her father would come.

Just in front of her the tall yellow grain was still standing. Helen wondered why her father had not cut it down.

As she was looking, a lark flew out from among the grain singing a rich, clear song. The little child clapped her hands for joy. Then she jumped from her seat and ran toward the place from which the bird had flown.

"There is a nest in there, and I am going to find it," said Helen to herself. She parted the tall yellow wheat-stalks to right and left, and went forward, looking all about her with her bright, sharp eyes. She did not have to go very far, for right before her was the nest, sure enough, and in it were three little birds.

Was there ever anything so cunning as those little heads, with their tiny bills wide open! It was such a pretty place for a nest, too. Helen clapped her hands again, she was so happy.

Then she sat down by the nest, but she did not touch the birdies. It was like being in a golden forest, for the grain was high above her head.

Soon her eyes began to feel heavy, for she was very tired after her long walk. She sat down, with her head upon her arm, and in a short time was fast asleep.

On came the horses, drawing the great reaper with its sharp cutting knives. Helen's father was driving, and they were coming right toward the spot where the little child was lying!

Oh, Helen, little does your father think that you are hidden there in the tall grain!

What was it that made the farmer check his horses all at once? Did something tell him that his dear baby was in danger?

Oh, no! he thought that she was safe at home with her mother. But he was a good man with a kind heart, and he saw something that made him stop.

The lark was flying wildly about over the grain that was in front of the reaper. She seemed to say, "Stop! stop!" The farmer thought that he knew what she meant, and he was too kind-hearted to harm a bird's nest. So he said to one of the men, "Here, Tom, come and hold the horses. There must be a nest somewhere among this grain. I will walk in and look for it."

What a cry the men heard when he found little Helen fast asleep by the lark's nest! How his heart almost stood still when he thought of the danger that she had been in! He caught her up in his arms and covered her face with kisses. "Oh, my darling!" he said, "it was the lark that saved you!"

Yes, it was the lark, and his own kind heart, that had saved her. Helen was carried home in her father's strong arms. She could not understand what made the tears run down his cheeks.

It was some time before the men could go on with their work. They left the grain standing around the lark's nest, to thank her, as they said, for saving little Helen.

As they stood looking at the little birds in the nest, one of the men, with big tears in his eyes, said, "God bless the birds! Come away, boys, and let the little mother feed her babies."

[1] Permission of American Book Company.

ALL ABOUT THE MEADOW LARK
SUGGESTIONS FOR FIELD LESSONS

Usually resident—sometimes goes south in late October, returning in April.

Song—a very beautiful sweet, clear whistle—heard in the early spring and in the autumn—usually quite silent during brooding season.

Female much paler in colour than male. General colour brown streaked with brown and black and cream—breast and throat yellow—conspicuous black crescent on breast—brown streak on head appearing to run through the eyes—tail feathers edged with white, which is seen most plainly when bird is in flight.

Food—seeds, insects, larval insects, also swallows gravel to aid in digestion.

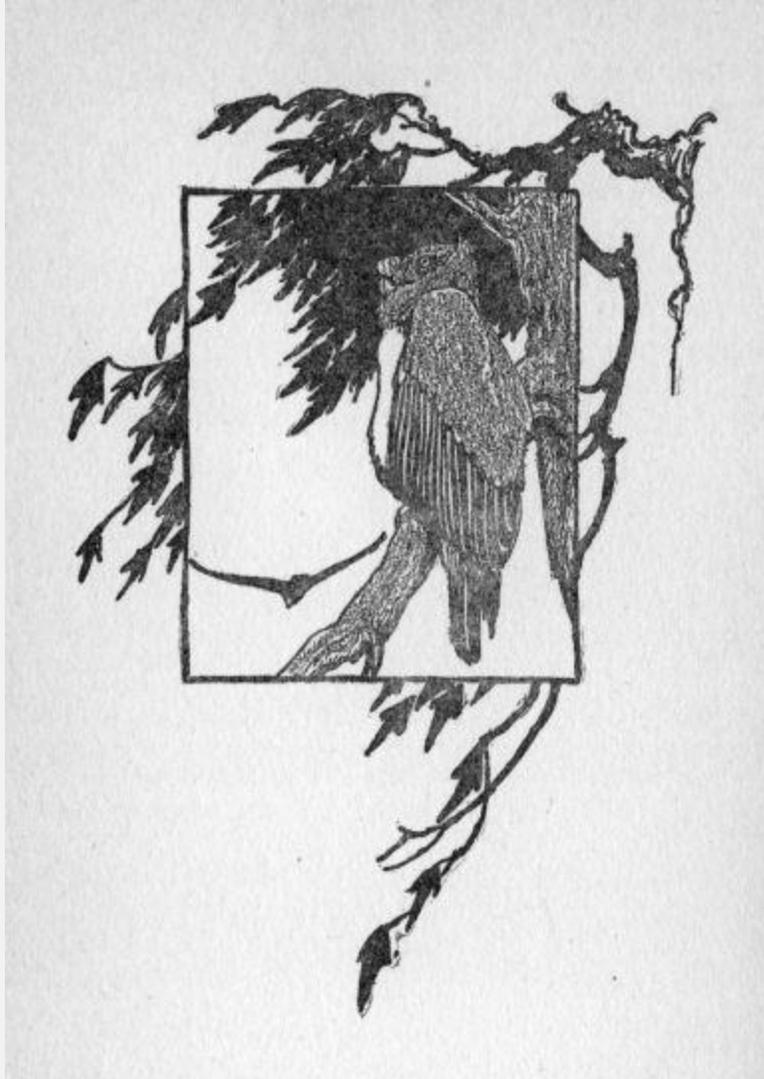
Nest made of grasses—built on the ground amid tall grass or grain—usually quite skilfully hidden and arched or roofed over in a very ingenious way.

Eggs—four in number—about an inch and an eighth in length, a pure white, speckled with brown.

Greatest danger from snakes and field-mice.

Meadow lark is not really a lark, but belongs to the blackbird family.

THE OWL



The Owl
A GOOD-NIGHT

"Haw-haw! Hoo! hoo!"

Phyllis listened again.

"Haw-haw! Hoo! hoo! Hoo! Hoo!"

"Oh, I see you now!" laughed Phyllis.

The owl moved silently as a shadow and perched very near to the little girl. His great round eyes and his yellow bill gleamed in the starlight.

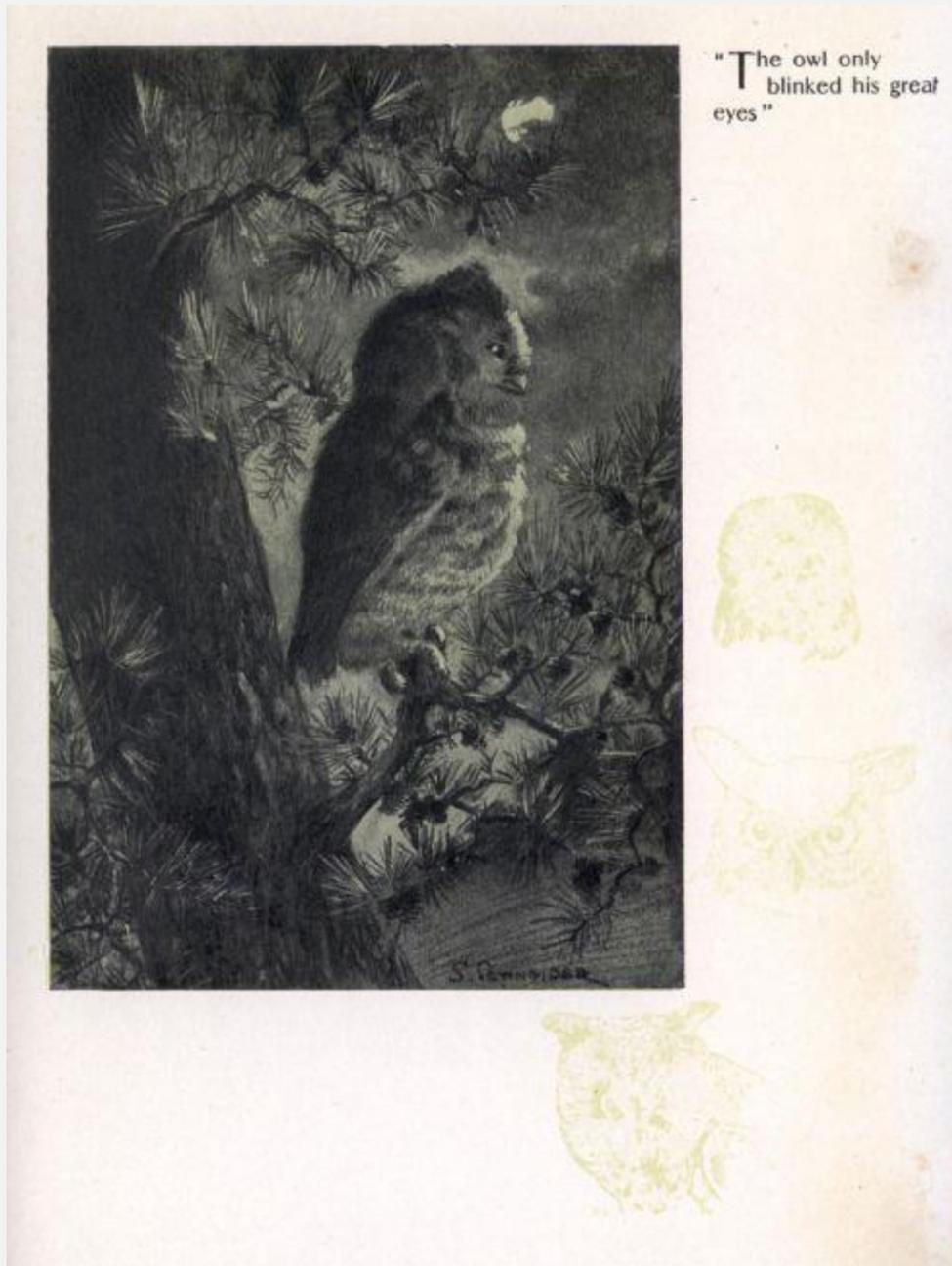
"I heard you calling!" said Phyllis. "But I could not at first tell just where you were. I looked in a dozen trees before I came to you."

"To-who? To-who-who-oo-oo?" questioned the owl.

Phyllis laughed again. The owl blinked wisely.

"I am going home to-morrow," Phyllis said. "I shall start to school next week. Some day, perhaps, I shall be as wise as you, Mr. Owl."

The owl only blinked his great eyes.



"The owl only
blinked his great
eyes"

"The owl only blinked his great eyes"

"But I'm sure I can never look so wise," she added, politely.

"Hoo-hoo-hoo-oo!" hooted the owl, blinking sleepily.

"If you will not talk with me I shall say good-night to you at once!" said Phyllis.

"To-who? To-who-ooo-oo-oo?"

"To-you! To-you-oo-oo-oo!" called Phyllis, running off laughing.

"Papa," she said, a few moments later. "Papa, the hoot-owl would not talk with me!"

"Wise, wise owl!" said papa, smiling at her over his newspaper.

THE OWL

When cats run home, and light is come
And dew is cold upon the ground,
And the far-off stream is dumb,
And the whirring sail goes round,
And the whirring sail goes round,
Alone and warming his five wits
The white owl in the belfry sits.

—Tennyson.

THE OWL GIRL

Once a very queer little girl lived in a village beside the great Yukon River.

This little girl did not care to play with other children. Indeed, all day long she would sit inside the stone hut and sleep.

But as soon as evening came the little girl would awaken. She would run out to the river-bank to play. She would shout and laugh.

She did not mind the dark. In fact she declared that the sun hurt her eyes and that she could see far better in the dark.

The child's mother said that for all her queerness the little girl was very wise. She knew many things which grown-up people had never heard.

The people of the village shook their heads. They said there was magic in it all, and that some day something strange would surely happen.

So, when at sunset the queer little girl ran shouting to the river, the people of the village watched from the bushes.

And sure enough, something very wonderful did happen!

One evening the little girl with her big shiny eyes ran shouting among the trees which grew beside the river.

She was chasing a little field-mouse, which at last ran tremblingly up the low branch of a tree and hid in the dark.

But the queer little girl, who could see quite well in the dark, jumped to follow the mouse.

Lo, as she jumped, the queer little girl changed into a bird with a long, long beak and great shining eyes!

Now when she saw what had happened to her she was frightened. In her fright she flew back to her mother's stone hut.

But now that she was a bird she did not remember about the doors and windows. She flew wildly against the stone wall of the house.

So rapid was her flight that she struck the wall with great force. Her long bill and her face were quite flattened by the blow.

She forgot her mother's house, and in pain flew again to the trees by the river.

The next night the mother heard the voice of her queer little girl among the leaves calling, "Whoo-who-who!"

But when she looked she saw only a flat-faced, big-eyed bird who was making a supper of the poor little field-mouse.

THE OWL AND THE RAVEN[1]

Once upon a time the owl and the raven were fast friends.

They lived beside the same stream. They built their nests in a tree side by side. They sang the same songs. They ate the same food. They wore dresses of the same pale gray.

There was nothing that these friends would not do for each other. So great was their friendship that each was always finding ways to surprise and please the other.

At one time the raven was absent for two whole days.

"What can he be doing?" said the owl to herself. "I know he is planning some new surprise for me."

When, on the third day, the raven returned, the owl knew from his contented looks that the present must be unusually fine.

"It is something more than a beetle or a field-mouse this time," she thought. "Now what can I do for him? He is always so kind to me!"

Then the owl began to look about for something to do for her friend the raven.

On the shore near their home tree a huge whale had once been caught and cut up by the Eskimo hunters. Some of the bones still lay upon the sandy beach.

"Oh," said the owl, as she chanced upon these whalebones, "I know the very thing which will please my dear friend the raven!"

"I will make for him a pair of beautiful whalebone boots! With them he can walk over the sharp rocks and the icy cliffs in comfort and safety!"

Thereupon the owl sat down in the sand and went to work. It was not long until the boots were finished. They were beautifully smooth and slender and graceful.

"The raven cannot help being pleased," she said, as she carried the boots toward the home tree. "I wonder if he is in!"

As she drew near the owl heard the raven calling her name. Answering loudly, she hurried to the place where he waited. But before the raven saw her she hid the whalebone boots among the grasses, that she might surprise him later.

She found the raven hopping impatiently about and calling loudly.

"Here—here I am!" she cried. "I have been away for but a short time—but you were away for days!"

"Oh, owl, dear," replied the raven, "though I have been absent I have thought only of you!"

"See! here is a beautiful new dress which I have made for you!" And the raven spread before his friend a beautiful dress of dappled black and white.

It was made of the softest, most beautiful feathers, lovely enough to delight the heart of any bird.

"Oh, how very beautiful!" cried the owl. "How kind you are to me! How did you ever think of anything so lovely?"

The raven smiled, well pleased with himself.

"Try it on," he said. "I am sure it will become you. I am certain that when you see how lovely you look, you will never again wish to wear anything but black and white."

Quickly the owl slipped from her old gray dress into the splendid new one. Gently she fluttered about and ruffled the soft black and white feathers.

"Where did you get them?" she said, circling about and looking at her tail for the twentieth time.

"Sit down," commanded the raven, "and I will tell you!" So the owl settled down on the branch beside the raven.

"I found the feathers on that steep, rocky cliff beside the sea," he said. "The stones were sharp and the winds were wearying, but at last I finished the dress just as I planned.

"I am glad that you are pleased. I am very tired now, and must sit still and rest."

So delighted was the owl that for a moment she had forgotten the whalebone boots. Now as she looked at the raven she saw that in scratching about for the feathers he had broken one of his pink toes.

With a little cry of pity she flew to the grasses where the boots were hidden. Quickly she snatched them up and flew back to the poor tired raven.

"Here," she cried, "here!—I thought of you while you were away. Now you shall put your tired feet into these strong whale-bone boots. The stones and the ice cannot hurt you again."

"Oh, oh!" croaked the raven. "They are the very things for which I have been longing!"

"Put them on! Put them on!" cried the owl. "See how they will rest you! They will make you feel quite young again!"

The raven slipped his tired feet into the whalebone boots. Straight away the old tired ache left him. He hopped gladly about and croaked cheerfully.

"How graceful!" he said. "How perfectly they fit! How comfortable."

"Now I shall make a coat for you," said the owl. "It shall be pure white. The feathers shall be the shiniest and the loveliest that I can find!"

By and by the raven's white coat was ready to be fitted.

"Come," commanded the owl. "Come and stand still while I fit your coat."

The raven came, but so delighted was he with the whalebone boots that he could not stand still. As the owl worked over him he kept hopping and dancing about.

"Stand still!" cried the owl. "I can do nothing with you hopping about so. I shall stick the pin-feathers into you!"

For an instant the raven stood still, looking down at the boots. Then he jumped so suddenly that the owl dropped a whole clawful of the soft white feathers with which she was finishing the neck.

Then the owl grew very angry.

"Stand still!" she hooted. "If you jump another time I will throw the oil from the lamp on you!"

Now the lamp was filled with whale-oil. In it wicks of moss and twisted grass had been burned. With time and many wicks the oil had become as black as soot.

The raven looked at the black, sooty oil and then at his new white coat. He really stood still for as much as two minutes.

Just as the owl was trying to decide whether or not the coat should be longer, to cover the tops of the new boots, the raven caught sight of his own reflection in the clear water below.

So pleased was he with his appearance that he flapped his wings, and jumped up and down.

The loose white feathers flew in every direction. The pin-feathers dropped to the ground. The angry owl gasped for breath.

Then in a rage she seized the lamp. She flung it at the raven. Alas, for the poor fellow! The oil struck him full on the head. It ran down before. It ran down behind! There was not a dry feather on him!

"Quag! Quag!" croaked he, the oil dripping down on all sides. "Quag! Quag! I shall never speak to you again!"

"No," cried the owl. "Do not speak to me again. I would not have such a sooty friend as you!" and she flew far away.

[1] Adapted from Ethnological Bureau Report.

THE OWL

When	icicles	hang	by	the	wall,		
And	Dick	the	shepherd	blows	his	nail,	
And	Tom	bears	logs	into	the	hall,	
And	milk	comes	frozen	home	in	pail;	
When	blood	is	nipped	and	ways	be	foul,
Then	nightly	sings	the	staring	owl,		

"Tu-who!
Tu-whit! tu-who!" a merry note,
While greasy Jean doth clean the pot.

—"Love's Labour's Lost," Shakespeare.

ALL ABOUT THE BARRED OR HOOT OWL
SUGGESTIONS FOR FIELD LESSONS

Notes—deep-toned, startling hoot.

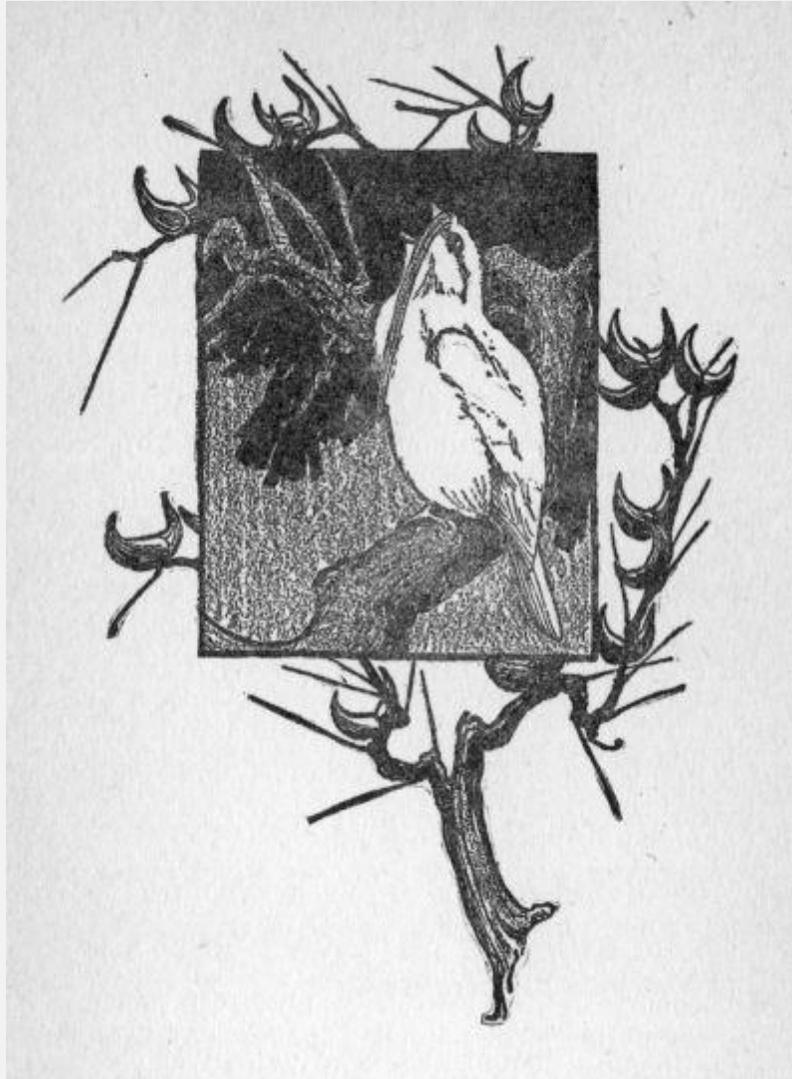
Heard most frequently at nesting time.

Upper parts brown, marked with white—face gray, mottled with black, wings and tail barred with brown, eyes blue black, bill yellow, under parts buff marked with darker, legs and feet feathered, bill and claws dark, hooked, strong.

Feeds on chicken, mice, etc.

Usually take an old crow's or woodpecker's nest for their own use—rarely make nests for themselves. Nest very early in the season, young being sometimes ready to fly early in March.

THE BOBOLINK



The Bobolink

A SUMMER SONG

He sat upon the tallest bending grass stalk. He paid not the slightest attention to Phyllis. He just swung lightly with the June breezes, and sang his little heart out.

Such a careless, joyous, jingling song Phyllis had never before heard. It seemed just a bubbling-over of happiness and gladness.

And such a common-looking little fellow to have such a wonderful voice! He was but a little larger than a sparrow.

His plumage was mostly black. His wings and tail were edged with pale yellow, and there were splashes of white in places on his body. There was a light yellow spot on the back of his neck.

"You seem filled with gladness," said Phyllis.

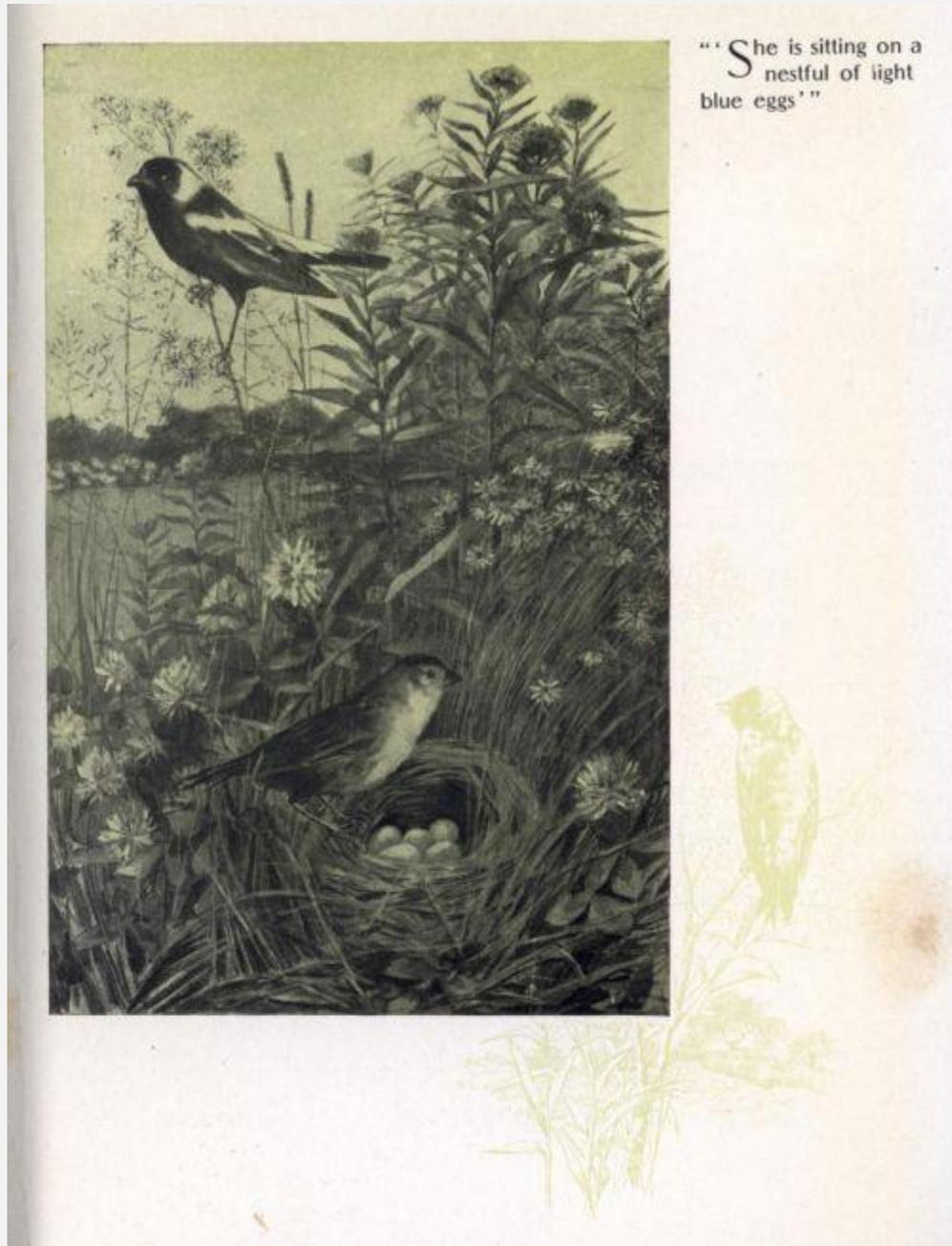
The little bird stared at her for a moment. Then he nodded his head, and quivered his small wings. He opened his mouth again and warbled out the jolliest, sweetest tune that bird throat ever sang.

"How very beautiful!" cried Phyllis. "What a world of happiness you send out in that song!"

"Ah, but I should be happy," warbled the sweet-voiced bobolink. "I have all that bird heart can wish!"

"Tell me—" said Phyllis.

"I at last have won my wife," sang the bobolink. "At this very moment, in this very field, she is sitting on a nestful of light blue eggs."



"She is sitting on a nestful of light blue eggs"

"She is sitting on a nestful of light blue eggs"

"Listen, Phyllis, and I will tell you all about it.

"It was about the middle of May when my brothers and I started north. All winter long we had wandered through the rice-fields of the South.

"We were not happy there. We feared for our lives. There we are not called bobolinks and the people of the South never listen for our songs.

"In fact we seldom sing when we are in the South. The hunters call us 'rice-birds' or 'reed-birds.' With their terrible guns they hunt us early and late.

"It was no wonder, then, that we were so glad to return to the North. It was a long journey, but we did not tire. In fact we travelled mostly at night. During the day we feasted in the fields or at grain stacks.

"For a few days we flew about here, and sang out our names to every passer-by.

"Just ten days after our arrival something very wonderful happened. Our sisters and wives and sweethearts came with fluttering wings and sweet, quiet ways.

"On that very day I met the lovely bird who now broods so gently over our eggs.

"She seemed to me the most beautiful bobolink that ever was. Early and late I sang to her. My most beautiful songs seemed not half good enough for so lovely a bird.

"I, alas, was not the only bobolink who admired her. My own brother was quite as delighted with her. He, too, sang to her.

"Sometimes we sat in the same tree, each of us singing our hearts out to the shy little creature whom we both loved.

"I am sorry to say we did more than sing for the demure little bird. We fought for her. We quarrelled fiercely. But at last it was I who won her, and my brother found for himself another wife."

"I wish I could find your nest," said Phyllis.

"It is in this field," said the bobolink. "It is near the brook, and every morning we both fly down there for a refreshing bath.

"I have told you all this, and yet, Phyllis, I venture to say that you might hunt all day among the grasses and not find my nest. For the leaves and the grasses bend over and about the nest where my little mate sits.

"Should I call to her she would come to me. You perhaps would run to the spot where she rose from the grass. But you would not find the nest.

"My wife in her quiet brown dress is too wise for that. She never flies up directly from the nest. She runs a distance among the grass stems and then starts up from the grasses.

"There are five eggs in the nest, light blue with spots of blackish brown.

"When they are hatched, you will hear very little music from me. I shall put on a quiet dress, much like the one which my mate now wears, and will work early and late bringing food to my babies.

"They shall have the very choicest grains and bugs and grasshoppers. There will soon be no time for singing."

"But when the little ones are grown—" said Phyllis.

"Oh, yes, then I will sing again for you. But listen, Phyllis!"

Phyllis heard a sweet little "Chink! Chink! Chink!"

"My little mate is calling," gurgled the bobolink, flying away and leaving the grass-top swaying wildly.

ROBERT OF LINCOLN

Merrily swinging on brier and weed,
Near to the nest of his little dame,
Over the mountainside or mead,
Robert of Lincoln is telling his name.
"Bobolink, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;
Snug and safe is that nest of ours,
Hidden among the summer flowers,
Chee, chee, chee!"

Robert of Lincoln is gaily drest,
Wearing a bright black wedding-coat,
White are his shoulders and white his crest.
Hear him call in his merry note:
"Bobolink, bob-o'-link,
Spink, spank, spink;
Look what a nice new coat is mine,

Sure there was never a bird so fine!
Chee, chee, chee!"

Robert of Lincoln's Quaker wife,
Pretty and quiet in plain brown wings,
Passing at home a patient life,
Broods in the grass while her husband sings:
"Bobolink, bob-o-link,
Spink, spank, spink;
Brood, kind creature, you need not fear
Thieves and robbers while I am here!
Chee, chee, chee!"

—Bryant.

ALL ABOUT THE BOBOLINK OR RICEBIRD
SUGGESTIONS FOR FIELD LESSONS

Male arrives north middle of May.—Female comes some ten or twelve days later—travel generally by night and in flocks.—Flies south from August to October.

Song is most musical and sweet, expressing joy and careless happiness—the song of the female is but a short, sweet "Chink, chink."—While the young are being cared for, the male does not sing as he does earlier in the season, but takes up the plaintive "chink" of his mate.

Male in spring is black with pale yellow markings on back and wings and tail. Yellow spot on back of neck—a patch of white on breast and other white markings.

Female pale yellow beneath—upper parts generally brown—two dark stripes on top of the head. In autumn plumage of male resembles female.

Nest of grasses well hidden by thick leaves and stems.—Usually built in clump of grasses and always on the ground and very shallow.

Eggs are pale blue with dark brown spots.—Four or five in number.—Young birds when fully feathered are so alike that in a flock young cannot be distinguished from old.

THE SEA-DOVES AND THE GREAT BLUE HERON



Great Blue Heron

BESIDE THE SEA

One hot August day Phyllis went to the seashore to live.

"Such fun," she cried, as the train drew up at the seaside station. "Such fun as I shall have playing in the sand and wading in the water."

It was not half an hour before she was running along the beach beside the cliffs. Her feet were bare, and she wriggled her toes in the sand and splashed into the puddles of water.

Presently she saw a number of little birds running along the beach and flying over the water.

"How swiftly they fly, and how well they dive," she said. "How easily they swim, and they sometimes settle on the waves and rest. I wish they would come nearer!"

"I will tell you about them," said a solemn voice near by. Phyllis stumbled in her surprise and splashed the water into her eyes. When she could see again, a great blue heron was standing near.

"Oh!" cried Phyllis, a bit frightened. "It is strange that I did not see you. Yes, do tell me about the little sea-bird—and about yourself also!"

So the blue heron drew his head down between his shoulders, and, standing on one leg, told Phyllis what he knew of the little sea-doves.

"That little bird with brown back and white breast loves the sea," said the heron. "He is never tired of the blue waves.

"In stormy weather the little sea-dove is most happy, because it is then that the waves are laden with small fish and crabs. During stormy weather the little fisherman grows fat.

"Watch them as they fly. Do you see how they are constantly dipping their bills into the water? That is their way of fishing.

"The sea-doves' nests are among the cliffs. In them they lay just two bluish-white little eggs.

"Sometimes, when the winds are very strong, the sea-doves are blown far inland. Sometimes they find their way back to the sea. But there are other times when they do not return."

"And where is your own nest, O Great Blue Heron?" asked Phyllis, half laughing at the queer, long-legged bird.

"It is over yonder on a rock," said the heron. "There are now four dull blue-green eggs in the nest.

"Soon there will be four ugly, helpless birdlings, who will sit up and cry for food. It will be at least three weeks after they are hatched before they will try to wade out into these flat sea-marshes. I shall have to let no fish escape me, if I do not wish the fledglings to starve."

"You do not think your babies pretty?" asked Phyllis.

"No," said the heron, truthfully, "they are not even so good-looking as other birds' babies. But that I do not mind, for will they not some day be as beautiful as I myself?"

"Yes," said Phyllis, "I have seen your picture many a time. In mother's room is a large screen and on it is your likeness embroidered in silks. The long green grasses are growing about you in the picture. One foot is drawn up and your head is drawn down between your shoulders just as it now is."

"That is the way to rest," said the heron.

"What were you doing here?" Phyllis asked, wading a little closer to the long-legged bird.

"I was fishing," said the great blue heron. "It is the one thing I delight in. From morning till night—"

"My brother Jack—" began Phyllis, but the bird paid no attention.

"I sometimes stand here perfectly still for hours. I wait patiently for the fish or the frogs to appear.

"Then I strike suddenly with my strong, sharp bill. I snap up the fish or frog and give it a knock or two to kill it.

"Then I eat it. If it is a fish I swallow it, head first, so that the scales shall not scratch my throat.

"But see, Phyllis, the sun has set, and I have not yet had my supper. I really must leave you!"

Then the great blue heron rose slowly and silently and circled away over the flat sea-marshes. Barefooted Phyllis scampered back to the little seaside cottage, where a fish supper was awaiting her.

SEA-PIGEONS

It was very early in the spring. The sun rose, stayed for only a moment above the horizon, and then sank again from the sight of Eskimo children.

But already huge icebergs broke from the shore and floated out to sea. Already the icy winds hurried away farther north. Already a few of the bravest birds were returning for the summer season.

It happened that a whole family of Eskimo children ran shouting and laughing along the top of a cliff which overhung the sea.

The older ones cared for the little ones. All were as happy and thoughtless as children could be. In their glee they took off their boots and ran with bare feet.

Now below the cliff on the ice waited some Eskimo hunters. They watched the huge cakes of ice farther out break off and float away. They knew that soon the ice nearer shore would crack and float off in the same manner.

They knew also that when the shore ice cracked the seals would rise and push their noses out of the water for air.

The hunters, therefore, sat for hours upon their three-legged stools, waiting with ever-ready spears.

The children, not seeing the hunters, ran more noisily among the high rocks of the cliff.

At last with a booming sound the ice cracked and spread apart. The water gushed up and spread lightly over the ice. The hunters waited breathlessly.

It was but a moment before the brown nose of a seal appeared. The hunters lifted their spears to strike. But at that instant came a wilder shout from the children and the brown nose of the seal disappeared.

"Oh," cried the hunter, angrily, "I wish the cliff would topple over on those noisy children!"

Hardly were the words spoken when with a great crash the cliff did topple over. As the falling stones rattled about him the hunter heard the shrieks of the children.

Neither the hunters nor the children were ever again seen in the village. But the next day some birds with pink wet feet ran about among the stones at the foot of the cliffs. As they ran they made strange cries which sounded half like children's laughter.

"Listen," say the Eskimo people, when they hear the sea-pigeons cry, "Listen to the voices of the little children who shouted so loud that they frightened away the seals!"

"Look!" cry the Eskimo children, when they see the pink feet of the sea-pigeons, "those are the cold, bare little feet of the Eskimo children who ran and shouted on the cliffs above!"

THE SANDPIPER[1]

Across the narrow beach we flit,
One little sandpiper and I;
And fast I gather, bit by bit,
The scattered driftwood bleached and dry.
The wild waves reach their hands for it,
The wild wind raves, the tide runs high,
As up and down the beach we flit,—
One little sandpiper and I.

Above our heads the sullen clouds
Scud black and swift across the sky;
Like silent ghosts in misty shrouds
Stand out the white lighthouses high.
Almost as far as eye can reach
I see the close-reefed vessels fly,
As fast we flit along the beach,—
One little sandpiper and I.

I watch him as he skims along,
Uttering his sweet and mournful cry;
He starts not at my fitful song,
Or flash of fluttering drapery;
He has no thought of any wrong;

He scans me with a fearless eye.
Stanch friends are we, well tried and strong,
The little sandpiper and I.

Comrade, where wilt thou be to-night
When the loosed storm breaks furiously?
My driftwood fire will burn so bright!
To what warm shelter canst thou fly?
I do not fear for thee, though wroth
The tempest rushes through the sky;
For are we not God's children both,
Thou, little sandpiper, and I?

—Mrs. Thaxter.

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THE CIRCLING OF CRANES

One autumn day ages and ages ago, the cranes were preparing to go south. Cranes always dreaded the cold and flew away to the summer-land at the first glitter of the frost.

The crane leader had a loud, hoarse voice, and he called and called to his flock to hurry. The cranes came from all directions at the call of their leader. The father and mother cranes came. The old cranes came and the young cranes came. Even the babies, whose feathers were scarce grown, came flying at the call of the leader.

All the cranes were happy, for they were going to the summer-land. They were glad to go, for already the frost jewels sparkled on the brown grasses and the cold winds were beginning to blow.

"Come! come!" cried the crane leader, and his voice was hoarse with shouting. "Come! It is full time we were off!"

Young and old spread their wings for flight. They waited a moment for their leader to take his place. As they waited the cranes glanced down to the cold, bare country which they were about to leave.

Thus looking down, the cranes saw a beautiful maiden standing alone at the edge of the village.

"How lovely she is!" said the crane leader. "And how lonely she seems!"

"How thin her dress is!" said another crane.

"See, she is weeping!" cried a third. Just at that moment the maiden looked up and saw the flock of cranes above her.

"Oh," she cried, "you are going to the summer-land. I wish I had wings. I would fly away with you!"

"Alas! in this cold, cheerless Northland I shall starve and freeze. I have no home. I have no friends.

"There is no oil in my stone stove! There is no meat in my kettle. What shall I do when the thick snow flies and the winter winds cut like knives?"

The crane leader looked down at the beautiful maiden in pity. The whole flock, young and old, were filled with a wish to help the girl. It was very sad, they said, that one so young and lovely should ever be cold or hungry or unhappy.

"Let us carry the maiden with us to the summer-land!" whispered a young crane.

"Yes, let us take her to the land of ever-lasting summer," begged an old crane.

"There she might gather food from the grain-fields. She might pick berries by the roadside. She might drink from the clear, cool brooks that run to the sea," said the leader.

Following their leader, the whole flock swept down to the earth. They gathered about the lovely, lonely maiden.

They lifted her on their widespread wings and bore her up into the air.

The maiden's long dark hair floated out like a cloud. She smiled happily as the cranes with one voice told her of the summer-land to which they would carry her.

With wings outspread, that she might not fall, the cranes bore the maiden away. Day and night, night and day, they carried her and never seemed to tire.

And the maiden had no fear. She laughed in sheer happiness when they told her again and again of the beautiful country to which they journeyed.

For into that land, the cranes told her, neither cold nor hunger came. They would show her the richest grain-fields. They would tell her where the sweetest berries grew. They would show her wondrous blossoms which grew for her in the distant summer-land.

The beautiful maiden was never again seen in the cold, dreary Northland, for to this day she wanders beside the sweet-voiced streams in the far-off summer-land.

But season by season the cranes, with wide-spread wings and hoarse cries, return to the Northland at nesting-time.

There they remain through the short sunny summer, but when the first snowflakes flutter through the air the cranes prepare to fly away.

And even to this day they circle about on widespread wings as though they again carried the beautiful maiden.

Even to this day the cranes, young and old, shout so loudly the praises of the summer-land that their voices are hoarse and harsh.

ALL ABOUT THE GREAT BLUE HERON OR BLUE CRANE
SUGGESTIONS FOR FIELD LESSONS

Usually resident throughout the year. Lives in marshy, swampy places.

Head and throat white, with long black crest.—Very long neck covered with light gray feathers—darker on chest—back, ashy gray—darker wings—a touch of red on bend of wings and legs.

Long legs, which are black.

Long bill, which is yellow, sharp, and strong.

Food—mostly fish, frogs, and small reptiles. Feeds near sunset.

Nest very simple—sometimes directly on ground or rocks—at other times a rickety platform of sticks.

Eggs blue-green—four in number—young helpless for at least three weeks after hatching.

ALL ABOUT THE SEA-DOVE
SUGGESTIONS FOR FIELD LESSONS

Goes far north in nesting season. Found in Illinois swamps, and as far north as Greenland.

Small bird with entire upper parts almost black—under parts white—wings tipped with white, bill black—feet pale red—toes webbed.

Food obtained from the waves—flies swiftly and dives well—walks on land better than most water-birds.

Lays but two bluish-white eggs.

THE END.

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