THE BIRDS ON CRAFTSMAN FARMS: BY T. GILBERT PEARSON

Here is a story current about Morristown, that when Gustav Stickley first established, and moved to, Craftsman Farms hard by that city, he was heard to express regret that so few birds were to be found on the estate. He had hoped to hear meadowlarks singing along the path as he walked, and catch glimpses of many brilliant warblers among the foliage. He probably wanted to be awakened by the song of the oriole, and later be soothed by the vespers of the song sparrow when the day was done.

That was three years ago. Marvelous changes have taken place on the wide stretch of forest and raw farm land since those days. The region is now one vast estate of beauty and usefulness, and with other changes have come the birds. Not simply a few shy creatures, but birds in numbers. There are large birds and small birds, and birds of bright plumage. There are birds that hoot and cluck, that caw and sing and they fill the air with their shoutings and their music. The forests and fields have given up their best and sent in the feathered tenants by scores and hundreds. In short, the place has become a bird-paradise.

It is a striking fact that this is so, for on the usual improved and beautified estate birds do not notably increase, and for this there is good reason. Few things are so distasteful to wild creatures as the strict, rigid, forbidding formality which pervades the premises of many country homes. Close-cropped lawns, limbs of trees all carefully trimmed up as high as a cow can browse, and the few shrubs all well pruned and of strange foreign variety—these are conditions which do not impart a sense of welcome and homelike atmosphere which birds so much enjoy. A brass-buttoned butler at the door is enough to shock the sensibilities of any natural-minded wild bird.

None of these conditions exist to any marked extent on the Craftsman Farms. There is, it is true, a well kept lawn immediately about the home of the owner, over which robins race and on whose green expanse a chipping sparrow now and then ventures in moments of boldness; but just outside the lawn and shouldering up close against the sunken garden the woodland stands with all its wild native growth. It is plain that the owner of this region is a naturalist at heart, which is another way of saying that he loves the forest in its natural condition, for to such a mind human attempts at beautifying a woodland dell by artificial improvements, add to its interest and charm about as much as paint would enhance the luster of the butterfly’s wing or the blue of the robin’s egg. No axe has profaned the natural growth in the glen which widens as it extends away and away
from the sunken garden. In the underbrush along the slopes, the cat bird and the brown thrasher have their haunts, and on the dead limbs the wood pewee sits and chants its plaint the livelong day. From the cool damp shade morning and evening the spiritual flute-like song of the wood thrush rings out like a call to prayer.

In the freshness of an early summer morning, with field glass in hand, I walked through this dell with Mr. Stickley. There were no trimmed-out paths to follow, and often we had to stoop to pass under limbs, and in places were forced to part the bushes with our hands. We waded knee deep in rank growths of fern and jack-in-the-pulpits until we reached the brook whose murmur had lulled us to sleep the night before. There was no stereotyped place to cross it, for bear in mind there is nothing formal in the Wood Thrush Glen. The pebbles and rocks all lay as the stream had seen fit to place them. In the tops of the trees a little bird sang with a voice so loud as to be all out of proportion to the size of the diminutive musician. It was a wary creature and defied close approach although we followed it on and on deep into the woods. But while we were unable to get a near view of the shy singer, we steeped our minds for many minutes in the clear liquid singing of the warbling vireo.

I know a place which possesses another such a glen; or did until the owner began his "improvements." Then all the underbrush disappeared and the stream was cleared of superfluous boulders and accumulated driftwood. The lower limbs of the trees were cut away so that if peradventure the owner and his friends might chance to walk therein, there would be nothing over which to trip, and no swaying branch to force them to bow their noble heads. The uneven places on the hillside were all smoothed down. The ugly weeds were cleared away, and well-groomed grassy slopes appeared. Thus a perfectly good bird sanctuary was turned into a perfectly formal grass-tree-and-brook combination, which you might perhaps enjoy should you be permitted to proceed sedately along its well kept walks.

I did not offend my host by asking whether he ever intended to thus debauch and destroy the natural beauty of his glen, for well I knew that the founder of the Craftsman Idea, whose every act and impulse has stood four-square to the natural world, would never deprive the thrashers and cat birds of their beloved thickets, or drive the water thrush from its home by the stream, or make of the glen an untenable place for the pewee, the hermit thrush and the wren. No, so long as he lives there will still be dead limbs for the pewee to use as lookout towers, and rotting logs and stumps will in winter hold
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their store of dormant beetles for the hungry crow to dig out when the snow lies deep in field and woodland.

"How about the hollows in the old trees?" I asked. "Have the tree dentists, on the plea of preventing further decay, filled these with cement?"

"Not yet," he answered and his eye twinkled knowingly. "If we close all the hollows, where will be the bluebirds’ nest, and where will my screech owl find a place for her young? I am hoping too that the big flycatchers will come to see me; but if they find no hollow they will surely pass on to some more thoughtful neighbor. No, if Nature makes a nice hollow in one of my trees, I know that sooner or later some hole-nesting bird will need it for her eggs, and if they are good enough to come to my place to look for a home I want them to find just as natural conditions awaiting them as possible."

NOW, why was it that this bird-lover had cause to lament the scarcity of bird life on his place three years ago? Of those particular species which dwell in the glen—were they not just as abundant before he built that great artistic log cottage on the hill nearby? Have they really increased in numbers, or did he simply fail to observe his feathered friends as closely as now? Possibly the latter condition is true in part, but it is also true that bird killing animals and large predatory birds have been destroyed or driven from the neighborhood by the men working on the estate, and this has had a most salient effect in permitting the songsters to increase.

The greatest single cause which has tended to increase birds on the Craftsman Farms, was the edict signed, sealed and delivered to the Superintendent, that under no circumstances should any domestic cat, regardless of age, color, or previous condition of household usefulness, be allowed at large anywhere within the boundaries. Every naturalist knows what this means for bird-protection, for there is no wild bird or animal in the United States whose destructive inroads on our bird population is in any sense comparable to the widespread devastation created by the domestic cat.

This creature captures wild birds at all seasons of the year, but it is particularly active in catching young birds immediately after they have left the nest and before they have yet gained sufficient strength of wing to escape.

It is idle for lovers of cats to contend that it is only the half-wild and unfed animals which indulge in bird killing. It is as natural for a cat to want to kill a bird as it is for a child to want candy. I have personally known cats which received the best of attention, and for whose happiness the culinary possibilities of the household were ex-
hausted, to stalk birds on the lawn with apparently as much eagerness as a starving leopard might creep upon a fawn.

Putting bells on cats would doubtless save the lives of many birds. A surer safeguard would, of course, be to keep the cats shut up, especially during the spring months when the birds are engaged in rearing their young; but the only absolute way to stop the depredations of Grimalkin is to send him to a birdless land.

Birds quickly recognize the prescribed limits of regions wherein they have absolute protection. A few weeks ago, I chanced to be in the little town of Mackintosh, Florida. Most of the day I had spent in a boat on the waters of Orange Lake nearby. Except on Bird Island, a protected Audubon Society reservation some three miles away, it was noticed that the water birds displayed their usual wild disposition. Rarely were we able to approach closely any of them. In Mackintosh, however, all shooting was prohibited. In the cool of the evening I strolled down to the little wharf that extends out into the shallow water to an open place in the lily pads a hundred yards from shore. Here I sat for a time to enjoy the wild life of the marsh and shallow lake. A hundred feet away two coots were resting with the most apparent contentment. Presently a grebe swam out of the lilies, and for twenty minutes dabbled about in the water scarcely forty feet away. Such demonstrations as shouting and waving my arms failed to produce any further evidences of alarm than merely causing it to dive for a moment; but soon the bird refused to show even this much interest in the wild noises and hat wavings on the wharf. A dozen or more beautiful gallinules actually came on shore, walking about not unlike a flock of domestic poultry. These things simply meant that the birds knew they were safe from human molestation.

On the Craftsman Farms, the birds have learned that they will not be disturbed by their human neighbors. A brilliant indigo bunting, nominally a bird of the old fields and hedge-rows, sang long and loud on the top of a little tree growing scarcely ten feet from the house. Only a little farther away a robin was building her nest against the leaning trunk of a gray birch tree. Under the eaves of the big low veranda from which the sounds of human voices are almost constantly heard throughout the day, a pair of barn swallows were feeding their young. Standing on the edge of the porch one could almost touch the nest with his cane, and yet the swallow exhibited no anxiety regarding the safety of her nestlings.

After reducing the enemies of birds to a minimum, the next im-
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Important step to attract and hold them in numbers is to provide abundant food. There are many evidences about the place to indicate that this has been done, for many seed crops and much fruit is grown. Among other dainties, sunflowers offer their store of seeds to the goldfinches, nuthatches and ever-hungry titmice.

Somewhere I have read that a wealthy American who has a castle in Scotland is aroused from his slumbers each morning by the strains of a bagpipe played beneath his window; but sweeter than any musical instrument was the song of the Baltimore oriole that awakened me one morning at the Craftsman Farms. It called, it shouted, and whistled, until sleep was impossible. From the window, I saw him springing from perch to perch, and lustily voicing his joy at the return of day. The ecstasy of his music seemed to cause the leaves of the tulip tree to quiver, and fill the air with a cadence to which the most sordid mind must respond. It was but one member, however, of the morning chorus, and among the other voices which came in at the open window were those of the song sparrow, the field sparrow, the indigo bunting, the red-eyed vireo, and the strident shouting of a far-away jay. Anew, I was impressed with the curious fact that the cumulative effect of a variety of singing birds is always harmonious, for few indeed are the discordant notes which one hears in Nature; and if such there be, one would never expect to find them among the charming surroundings of the Craftsman Farms.

PETEＲEＲSON AND FARM FOLKS

PETERSON doesn’t think much of us farm folks. He likes to spend a week in the country provided he can hire a buggy and a hammock, but he says manual toil can never be anything but degrading; he can see that truth working out all around him.

Last time I was in town, I saw Peterson in his office. He was in his shirt sleeves, with his hair rumpled up, and he was rushing about distractedly, pawing over papers on his desk, cussing everybody around him and being cussed by the boss. In the words of the late Artemus Ward, “he was indede a lothsum objeck.”

Perhaps all kinds of work are degrading. Peterson is beautiful in a hammock. From “The Philosophy of Zarathustra Sims.”

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