

T H E Z E P H Y R

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The Mockingbird

by R.A.Sell

"What e'er birus did or dreamed, this bird would say
Then down he shot, bounced airily along
The sward, twitched in a grass-hopper, made a song
Mid flight perched, prinked, and to his art again"

-- Sidney Lanier.

The pageant of fluttering wings and the symphony of bird songs and calls and trills may ebb and flow in accordance with seasonal impulses, but the flash of two white spots from a gray background and the medley of numerous bird songs all in one - the mockingbird - that is the charm of the Southland! Some birds may be regarded as guests, tourists, or visitors from afar, and entitled to special favors, but the mockingbird is "home folks", our ever-present companion and never-failing choir of inspiration and good cheer.

The mockingbird has been called "the poor man's symphony" because its concerts are more highly appreciated by people who do not pretend to have artistic tastes than are the songs of any other bird. But it is the "rich man's symphony" as well, for its ever-changing, cheerful, and inspiring song gives courage, independence and restfulness to rich and poor alike. Who cannot meet the cares and vexations and perplexities of a day's work with better grace after hearing the encouraging trill of this master vocalist of the bird world?

Because this bird has obtained immunity from persecution by man, it prefers to nest in orchards and gardens where less favored birds are not allowed. Sentiment is the real protection for birds, and no other bird is so well protected by public sentiment. Most any crowd of boys, out for strenuous life, will include one or two members who will brave the gibes and ridicule of the others in order to offer an objection to harming a mockingbird or destroying its nest. A boy who uses his influence in protecting the birds renders a very important service to humanity; he is a real sportsman.

Birds may come and go, but the mockingbird is the bird of youth and the bird of old age, the universally loved symphony of the back yard.

Armistice Day

On November 11th, throughout the United States, hundreds of trees will be planted in honor of America's heroes of the great war. Each year, as poppies bloom on Flanders fields, these fitting memorials will lift their crowns higher towards the sky, and man and bird and beast will enjoy their friendly beneficence. - sturdy oaks, graceful elms, stately firs, useful pecans, and beautiful magnolias and hollies. Even a child may plant a tree; the whisperings of the breeze amid its leaves will be more eloquent than any words of man, and the gratitude of all who share its generous shade will be as enduring as the endless glory of those whose patriotism it commemorates.

Stranger, if thou has learned a truth which needs
No school of long experience, that the world
Is full of guilt and misery, and hast seen
Enough of all its sorrows, crimes and cares
To tire thee of it, enter this wildwood
And view the haunts of Nature. The calm shade
Shall bring a kindred calm, and the sweet breeze
That makes the green leaves dance shall waft a balm
To thy sick heart.

-- Bryant.

An Important Asset

Houston's public library, with its efficient staff, has kept pace with the progress of the city, despite its cramped quarters. Outdoor enthusiasts and students of nature and science have benefitted greatly from the library's facilities and cooperation, and it is a pleasure to know that Miss Ideson and her co-workers are soon to have adequate space for every phase of their work in the fine new library, nearing completion.

The Call of the Wild

The call of the wild finds an echo in every normal human being - faint in some of us, but with a constant crescendo as we approach the throbbing heart of Nature. Perhaps this merely indicates how primitive we really are - that we are merely hearing our long-forgotten ancestors calling us back to the jungle from which we escaped not so very long ago into our present artificial existence.

Be this as it may, we do know that there are voices calling us, whether or not we are able to fully identify the source of the voices. Anyone who will listen attentively for a surprisingly short space of time may hear the dryad of the forest, the nymph of the cascading river, the deep bass of the mountain giant, and unnumbered other voices calling. Some of the voices may frighten the children of earth, others charm; but all have a capacity to arouse our awe, wonder, or curiosity.

The child may wander but a few short yards from its parents to satisfy its desire for knowledge. The youth may venture across the silver stream to the hazy, distant fields or the shadowy forest still beyond. Maturity finds us travelling farther afield, perhaps into the far reaches of the sea, the jungle, the desert, the mountains, or even the frozen polar zones; and always there are voices calling from just a little farther on, the origin of which we may never quite know. For the want of a better definition, we may designate these alluring, fascinating voices, ever laden with mystery and enchantment, as the "Call of the Wild".

- L.H. Daingerfield.

As a measure of preparation for our Christmas bird census, it might be well to mention a few books particularly useful to the bird student. Reed's pocket guide, containing colored pictures of nearly every species of bird, is very useful on field trips. Another valuable aid, with illustrations in natural colors, is the Natl. Geographic Society's "Book of Birds". There is no dearth of well written, profusely illustrated books on birds. Baylor University Bulletin "The Birds of Texas", by Jno. K. Strecker, lists all birds which winter with us, those which only pass through during migrations, and those which are residents in our midst. Several members of the club have copies of this bulletin, which may be referred to from time to time by those interested.

In line with its purpose to encourage conservation and nature study among school children, the Outdoor Nature Club will give a copy of Reed's bird guide to the hustling young resident of Houston, or Harris County, who sends in to Holland's Magazine the greatest number of pledges in its Junior Wild Life Campaign. With the right sort of cooperation from Houston's real sportsmen and lovers of the outdoors, the winner of this little prize should also win one of the generous cash prizes offered by Holland's; in fact, there is no reason why several Houston boys and girls should not lead in this good work, since it is not the habit of Houston to lag behind on any occasion when there is worthy work to be done.

Vandals destroyed the glories of Greece and Rome, because of ignorance and hate. What excuse have we for destroying the glory of our winter woods, the Holly tree?

Just a Reminder

The Objects of the Outdoor Nature Club of Houston are:

- To make stronger the bond of friendly understanding that exists among all lovers of nature.
- To study our local flora and fauna and work for the preservation of all useful and interesting forms.
- To co-operate with other societies throughout the land in the work of observation and conservation.
- To encourage nature study, tree planting, etc., among school children as well as adults.
- To make known to our citizens and to the world all the natural beauties Nature has bestowed upon our city and state.
- To encourage hiking and interest in the outdoors as a source of health and inspiration.

A Glimpse into the Future

May 1st, 1950 - Members of the Outdoor Nature Club had a most enjoyable hike along Buffalo Bayou Sunday afternoon. The hikers were much interested in a stump which one of the older members claimed to be that of a holly tree, and another said was the remains of a dogwood, both of which trees were to be found in this locality years ago, according to old books and newspapers. Some excitement was stirred up when a strange bird note was heard, but it proved to be only one of the numerous English sparrows which have entirely replaced our native birds. An interesting discovery was the legbone of a squirrel, proving beyond a doubt that these creatures once ranged into the territory about Houston. Several members of the party brought home small branches of a vine supposed by some to be one of the rare smilax vines and by others to be a yellow jessamine vine, though the latter plant has been extinct for several years. However, the vine in question proved to be a variety of the poison ivy, rather different from the usual form so abundant here. When our members have recovered from the effects of the ivy poisoning, it is planned to take up a study of the mouse, the mosquito and the roach, which are now the most important forms of wild life still in existence here.

Or This!

May 1st, 1950 - The National Geographic Magazine for this month contains a beautifully illustrated article on Houston's wonderful natural park. There are several color plates of fields of wild flowers, including one of Texas bluebonnets, the seeds of which were sown on a sandy hill by members of the Outdoor Nature Club soon after this section of Memorial Park was set aside as a nature preserve. According to celebrated naturalists and scientists who have visited the park, there are more species of wild birds in it than in any other tract of ground of similar size in America. The morning bird chorus was recently broadcast by radio, and some of our rival cities to the North have hinted that this woodland opera was "faked", so impressive was its volume and clearness. More than five million tourists have walked over the gravelled foot-paths, to see and photograph interesting birds and trees now extinct outside the park and its immediate environs. The furred and feathered inhabitants of this protected area are remarkably tame. Biology classes from the schools have had no difficulty in making long lists of wild creatures seen on their regular trips through the preserve, and a famous painter of wild life recently spent six months painting the portraits of denizens of Houston's world-famed nature paradise.

All wild flowers fade quickly, except the blooming idiots.
-- Flint Daily Journal.

After having enjoyed the interesting and instructive talks on birds and on fishes, reptiles and amphibians, given at the past two meetings, we are all rather curious about what treats the Program Committee has in store for future meetings. According to the schedule now being worked out by Mrs. Robert C. Kerr, Chairman, the topic for the December meeting will be "Trees". In January, "Winter Tramps over Prairies" will be discussed, and in February, "Tramps through Woods and across Streams". Storms, clouds, rainbows, cyclones, etc., will furnish interesting material for the March meeting. In April, Spring will have arrived for an extended stay, and our meeting will be devoted to a discussion of her numerous charms. May will be for the wild flowers, and June for the butterflies, moths, beetles, and all the beautiful, strange and noxious creatures known as bugs and insects.

The Outing Committee gives the following advance information on trips planned. Next trip: Sunday afternoon, November 9th. Mother Nature, who is a delightful entertainer, invites all her friends to come out and enjoy her Fall festival. Our annual bird census will be taken on Sunday, December 21st. The list of birds seen will be sent in to the Audubon Societies for publication, and since there is a great deal of rivalry between certain localities, especially favored by nature, to see which can send in the best list, a special effort will be made to put Houston among the leaders. Get your bird guide and field glasses ready! In January, we will observe Winter's work in the woodlands. February's outing will be staged under a bower of glorious yellow jessamines, the fragrant trumpets tumbling in golden cataracts of color. If you have never seen the landscape transformed by acre after acre of these, the South's first banners of Spring, do not miss this trip. In March, we will journey to awakening woodlands, where birds sing under canopies of dogwood, wild plum, reabud, haw and silverbell blossoms. Spring wild flowers and migratory birds will be special features of the April hike. There will be so many interesting things to see and hear in May that we will probably have two field trips. The last official trip of the season will be our annual visit to the bird village in the old orchard beyond South Houston.

Real Results

Texas' own monthly magazine, Holland's, is supplementing its great campaign for the preservation of wild birds with another junior campaign, in which young folks, both boys and girls, will receive prizes for the largest number of pledges signed. The pledge reads: "I promise on my word of honor not to kill any bird that is not declared a pest under the game laws of my state, except during the legal hunting season, when I will strictly observe the bag limits, and to do all I can to protect and encourage birds, and to keep thoughtless children from injuring them." If any young conservationist comes to you with a pledge to sign, give him all the encouragement you can. In Holland's previous junior campaign, two Houston boys received honorable mention for their splendid work. Bill Alexander, 234 Courtland Street, and Vance Turner, 2216 Fulton, were the youthful Houstonians who reflected credit upon our fair city by their activities. Such material furnishes the foundation for a flourishing city, an active state, and a prosperous nation.

"And this our life, exempt from public haunt, finds
tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, sermons in stones,
and good in everything." - Shakespeare.

Plant a Tree!

While February 22nd is the date officially designated as Arbor Day, experience has proven that it is just a little late for the purpose of tree planting in our Southern clime. Here in Houston, many trees are beginning to send forth young shoots by the middle of February, and the process of the Spring awakening has started. The best time to plant trees is when they are in the midst of their winter sleep, and for this reason it is advisable for members of the Outdoor Nature Club to prepare to do their tree planting as soon as possible. The planting of trees is a demonstration of practical civic pride, patriotism and love of nature, as well as sound business policy. When you have thrown in the last spadeful of earth and tamped it down about the roots of your tree, register it with the American Tree Association, #1214 Sixteenth St., N.W., Washington, D. C., so that your good work may be an example for other thoughtful citizens, and a record may be kept of those who are helping provide a solution for America's problem of reforestation

Outdoor Folk

In the days before Houston had an Outdoor Nature Club, there was one to whom all lovers of the outdoors could go when confronted with some problem in the pursuit of nature lore. When the call went out for an organization of all those interested in the things of the fields and the forests, the air and the water, his name was the real factor that brought us all together, and his experience and cooperation gave the club its real impetus. No need to introduce R. A. Sell - educator, naturalist, traveler, and first president of the Outdoor Nature Club of Houston, Texas. L. H. Daingerfield, our present leader, is known to almost everyone as the man who manages the weather. In addition to handling his duties as meteorologist in charge of the State of Texas, Mr. Daingerfield finds time to give his beautifully illustrated lecture on Hawaii, the peaks and volcanoes of which he explored as president of the Hawaiian Trail and Mountain Club. Like Prof. Sell, Mr. Daingerfield is an ardent follower of the great outdoors, and an earnest worker for the conservation of our forests, streams and wild life. Miss Mabel Cassell, Secretary, and champion bird observer of the club, is one of our most energetic workers, even if she does leave us every summer to pursue her studies in that nature lovers' happy hunting grounds, Colorado, with members of the Colorado Mountain Club. Bud A. Randolph, Vice-President, is our most enthusiastic disciple of Izaak Walton. He is thoroughly conversant with the havoc wrought among the denizens of the deep by the pollution of our streams and bays, and his study of the problems of sanitation has shown him other unpleasant results of the evil of pollution. The economic value of our wild birds has become more generally appreciated in Texas through the work of H. H. Schutz, who is Statistician of the U. S. Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Mr. Schutz is chairman of our Conservation Committee, and also Auditor of the club. The interesting programs at our monthly meetings are planned and arranged by Mrs. Robert C. Kerr. Although Mrs. Kerr's work is among the most beautiful and exquisite examples of the florist's art, she derives her greatest pleasure from the myriad wild flowers of Texas. In addition to being Parliamentarian and a charter member of the Outdoor Nature Club, Mrs. Kerr is also Treasurer of the Federated Women's Clubs of Houston. Miss Tillie Schmidt, Custodian, is one of several of our members whose love of the outdoors is reflected in delightful studies on canvas of trees, wild flowers and birds. J. M. Heiser, Jr., Treasurer, supplements his duties as such by seeing that the Club's bulletin is properly distributed and planning numerous outings and other Club activities, with the cooperation of his original "partner" of the outdoors, Jack Pullen, another charter member of the club.

If this paragraph does not bring down upon ye devoted editor's head a storm of disapproval from the hustling but modest officers of the club, there will be a similar paragraph later upon some other real lovers of the outdoors who take a prominent part in our field trips, nature talks, and other activities.

Real Sportsmen!

The concentration of game birds, particularly wild geese and ducks, in the few places where feed and water is still available after a long period of drought, has brought about a situation which reveals the comparative rarity, in these parts, of the typical American sportsman, in the full sense of the word. Men of the type of which Theodore Roosevelt was an outstanding example, would look with disgust upon the gunner who stands behind his blind and pours a stream of lead into the crowded flocks, regardless of all limits imposed by law and common-sense, until his greedy slaughter is brought to a finish by the exhaustion of his ammunition or the coming of darkness. Those skeptics whose knowledge of such occurrences, now regularly recorded in our newspapers, has led them to the erroneous conclusion that there is no such thing as a real sportsman, will do well to obtain a copy of "Outdoor America", official publication of the Izaak Walton League, and learn something of the activities of this splendid organization of sportsmen - men, and women - who are proud of the name, who accept the responsibilities and duties as eagerly as the rights and privileges handed down to them by ancestors who conquered the wilderness and founded a nation with a natural heritage such as no other people upon the earth's surface can boast of. It will fill you with optimism, good cheer, and renewed faith in the safety of all that Old Glory means to us to read the names, the purposes, and the achievements of those who are making this League the biggest factor in the preservation of "Outdoor America" for all Americans for all time.

Merry Christmas!

All young friends of Santa Claus, and many older acquaintances of the jolly old saint, will be glad to know that the American Tree Association has given out a statement approving the custom of having Christmas trees to celebrate the year's most joyful holiday. It is indeed a pleasure to be thus assured that we may continue to have this most delightful symbol of Yuletide happiness in our homes, without fear that its presence there is contrary to the principle of forest conservation. Proper forest management provides, in large quantities, the beautifully shaped trees which are shipped here from the North and sold on the streets. However, many people prefer to bring in their own Christmas tree from the pine or cedar groves near the city, and in doing this, it is well to pick out a tree from a large grove, thus giving the remaining trees a better chance to thrive. The cutting of trees close by the roadside is very objectionable, as it needlessly mars the beauty of the landscape. Lovers of our woodlands generally use the Northern firs offered for sale in town, as they are grown especially for the purpose, and their use discourages wasteful cutting in our adjacent woods.

As we view, on Christmas day, the shining tree we are privileged to have because of the thought and effort of foresters and tree growers, let us hope that the same wise planning and careful management will soon bring about an abundance of holly and other Christmas greens, which we may use without endangering the existence of lovely plants it is our duty to preserve in their natural home.

"Somewhere the bluebird is singing, and winging
its way to you." (from the song, The Bluebird).

Have you a little bluebird in your home? It isn't time for that question just yet, but when the fragrance of yellow jessamines is in the air and our woods are carpeted with wild violets, the sweet warble of the bluebird will announce the return of Spring, and the flash of its wings will mirror the azure of the sky. Anyone who lives near the outskirts of the city may have as guests Mr. and Mrs. Bluebird, by putting up a bird house to catch the eyes of these charming feathered friends when they are eagerly searching every nook and corner for a hollow in which to build their nest. Due to the scarcity of suitable nesting hollows, and monopoly of them by the rowdy English sparrow, the bluebird is becoming rarer each year, and unless it is given some encouragement by lovers of the outdoors it will soon be a stranger in our midst.