OPERAS AMONG THE LEAVES.

THE NORTHAMPTON BIRD LOVER LISTENS TO SPRING MUSIC.

He Notices Two Sorts of Songsters that are Ventriloquists — Trying to Determine which Bird Wakes the Nest in the Morning.

NORTHAMPTON, May 22.—All the air is tuneful, these bright days, with the singing of innumerable birds. As the imaginative auctioneer said, when selling an English nobleman's country seat, that the only drawback to the place as a residence was the fact that one couldn't sleep there at night for the singing of the nightingales, so I assert that the worst thing about certain parts of this town is that lazy persons are compelled to forego their morning snooze for the loud melody of robins, catbirds, orioles, bobolinks, wrens, and other birds, which breaks out at the first hint of dawn. One must get up early to hear the concert begin. Before the human eye can detect the faint first ray of light, the birds recognize and hail it. I have often left my bed and gone out of doors as early as 3 o'clock in the morning to try and find out which of the birds was the herald of the day, but have never been able to discover that any particular species is chosen by nature for this office. In the majority of instances I have found the chipping sparrow to be the earliest riser, and the first to send his thin, trilling song, like the hum of a tuning-fork, upon the air. Then the song sparrow takes the note from him, and then successively follow the tenor of the troupe, the robin; the wren, that plump and saucy light soprano; the oriole and catbird, and lastly the bobolink in pied garments, the buffo of the feathered company. But, in truth, it is hard to determine each one's precedence or following, for when one starts the others chime in so rapidly that the distinction of individual singers is soon lost, and one hears nothing but a large and melodious chorus.

Now the birds' operatic season is at its height. It is unfortunate it does not last longer. But in fact the birds sing only while they are courting and nest building, and the male waits for the female, patiently sitting to hatch her eggs. The hope of offspring fulfilled, the idle singer is transformed into the provider, and has little time to indulge his musical tastes while five or six hungry mouths are unappeasably gaping for food. A good many of the birds already find themselves with families upon their claws—so rapid are nature's processes in her effort to keep alive the species. Two weeks ago, of two large pine trees in my yard a pair of crow blackbirds have nested, and shrill squawkings in the thick top thereof proclaim that a lusty brood of young has lately come to bless the parent birds. The female sits over them, or roosts on a bough near by and watches them, while the male is kept scouring the country far and wide to bring them worms and grubs. I sit near by and watch him come and go, and he, seeing me, and suspecting my intentions, although he must know by this time that they are not unfriendly, resorts at each new coming to the tree which he seems to think holds within itself unfailing power to deceive, but is, in fact, of the utmost transparency. When he comes up, usually with a long worm writhing in his mouth, he makes a vastly ostentatious show of flying prominently by the tree in which his nest really is, and alighting in another. This done, he watches his opportunity, and, when he thinks no one is observing him, repairs, as quietly and secretly as possible, to his actual bower. Then I hear subdued cacking in the thick tree top, where Mr. Blackbird is evidently telling Mrs. Blackbird of his exceedingly sagacious behavior, while she commends him, as a good wife should do. This little bit of business I see enacted twenty times a day, and rejoice to observe the immense amount of satisfaction the bird seems to take in its supposed efficacy.

I detest the English sparrow as a bird wholly depraved, a robber, a brigand, a pirate, and everything that is bad, yet cannot forbear to give him credit as a most ingenious creature, and the equal of any, and the superior of most, of our native varieties in respect of intelligence. I saw one of them perform a feat the other day, which entertained me greatly. He had found in the road a long strip of cotton cloth, which his intelligence seemed to tell him was excellently adapted for purposes of nest building. Confidently, then, he seized one end of it in his beak, and flew away with it. Soon, however, the wind blew the streamer about his wings, and brought him tumbling into the dust. He picked himself up, shook himself, and, seizing the rag by the other end, made a second attempt, which resulted as disastrously as the first. Then he seized the strip by the middle, but this time he was entangled more quickly than before, and brought to earth before he had risen to the height of a yard. He then squatted down, panting, regarding the rag malevolently, yet apparently determined to overcome the difficulties which it presented. Presently his appearance changed: an idea had evidently struck him. He hopped briskly up to the cloth, and with claws and bill rolled it up into a compact ball. Then he drove his beak into it, shook his head once or twice to assure himself that the ends were secure, and flew briskly away, reaching his distant box in safety. If ever bird reasoned this sparrow did, and I have no doubt other birds do reason, and rather profoundly, too, at times.

I presume it is known to a good many naturalists that some birds have the gift of ventriloquism, although I don't remember to have seen the fact mentioned in print, and it is probably new to the most people. I have seen the scarlet tanager to possess it, and have often seen this bird singing over my head, while his note sounded twenty rods off at least. On the other hand, I have sometimes heard the song apparently quite near me, when the bird who made it was found to be in a tree some distance away. I used to think the singer could control this power, and employed it to baffle human enemies, for he does not constantly resort to it; but I have given up that idea, because I have sometimes heard a bird that I knew saw me sing so that the sound could not be thought to come from any other source than himself, while another, from whom I knew I was hidden, practised ventriloquism with signal success. So now I know nothing of the reason for the employment by the tanager of ventriloquist gifts, and only know that he is endowed with this strange faculty. I had never noticed any other bird to be thus gifted until a few days ago, when I found the wood thrush, the most beautiful of American songsters, practising the same art. I was walking along a wood road beside a deep ravine when, as the hour of sunset approached, the wood thrushes began to pipe up all about me. No one can describe their song to one who has not heard it. It abounds in notes that seem to come from flutes, and clear and delicate echoes of sound such as one might hear, if his ear were keen enough, rung by the wind out of the bluebells when they are wet with rain, one bird striking a note and moving harmoniously up and down the scale, the next the third above, the dominant, and another the fifth, until the air is full of exquisite chords and combinations such as no musician would venture upon, but which sound sweetly when coming from the birds. No two sing alike, but all harmoniously, and with an indescribable beauty of tone.

I stood and listened to the wood thrush, which seemed multitudinally beautiful when heard amid the shadows of the cool spring woods, and particularly to the nearest bird, which I located by his note in a thick bush a few rods to my right. Suddenly, looking to my left, yet standing perfectly still—for birds are not afraid of men, but only of his clumsy movements—I saw a thrush sitting on a low bough not ten feet away. That he was singing I could see from the movements of his throat and bill, and his appearance of absorbed pleasure—for birds delight in their own melody—but no sound came from him, although the unseen bird in the distant bush continued to trill and card. Presently the thrush stopped singing, and regarded me intently as if desiring my opinion on his effort, and on that moment the bird of the bush also ceased. Then the visible thrush again made the silent motions of song, and the invisible bird kept up with him, and they both stopped together. Then I knew that the thrush at my side was doing the singing, and that the supposed one in the bush was a voice and nothing besides. The thrush in this instance was a more accomplished ventriloquist than any tanager I ever saw, but I do not know whether this kind can deceive the ear as he did.

One of the most singular things I ever heard about birds was related to me by a friend who has long been an ardent student of ornithology, and of the Scriptures as well. In the course of his reading he came across the chapter in Deuteronomy which contains the laws against ritualistic cruelty, and found his attention attracted to the following verses:

> If a bird's nest chance to be before thee in any tree or on the ground, whether they be young ones or eggs, and the dam sitting upon the young or upon the eggs, thou shalt not take the dam with the young:
>
> But thou shalt in any wise let the dam go and take the young to thee, that it may be well with thee, and that thou mayest prolong thy days.

This passage puzzled him a good deal; so, with true scientific ardor, he set out to break its bewilderment, and try to find out why it was made. It being nesting time for the birds he had no particular difficulty in finding what he sought, and soon returned with a female bird and a nest with four young ones in it, put them all together in a cage, and, after supplying them with food and water, left them for the night. In the morning the dam and young were found lying dead together, though without any marks of violence upon them whatever, or anything to indicate why they had died. Evidently something was wrong here, so he went out and caught another family, put the mother in one cage and the young left another, and gave them a separate room, although not removing them so far apart but that they could hear each other in case one or the other should cry out. The next morning all the birds were found dead as before. Again the student went out, and again came back with a capture, and this time he put the young birds in the parret and the old one in the cellar, but, although neither mother nor offspring could hear each other's cries, the coming morning showed the same result. He then went out and captured a nest of birds, but let the mother go, and successfully raised the entire brood. In each case the variety of bird was the same—the rose-breasted grosbeak, which is one of the strongest and easiest to rear of all New England species. The reason of this strange occurrence does not appear, but of one thing my friend is convinced, and that is that Moses was the first agitator for a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and that he knew what he was talking about when he discussed birds.

HE WALKED 4,500 MILES.

The Two-Year Journey of Warren Johnson of Webster from California to Massachusetts—No Hairbreadth Escape, and Only Once Assaulted in the Whole Time.

From the Boston Globe.

WEBSTER, May 10.—Toward night Friday an old man leading a horse and wagon, with a cow attached, was coming into the town of Webster on foot. A man bringing a wagon into a country town is not exactly a novel sight in the outskirts of a Massachusetts settlement; but it was evident in this particular case that an event of no ordinary interest and importance was transpiring. The road on both sides was lined with people pressing forward to get a nearer view of the venerable pedestrian.

The appearance of this centre of all observation was both prepossessing and striking. His friends knew him to be 65 years old, but he stood as erect as an arrow and strode along at the head of his little caravan with the step of a man whose vigor and power of endurance was something to be feared and respected by a much younger competitor. His face was wrinkled and sunburnt. Beneath the slouch hat which he wore his iron-gray hair stuck out thin and straight. There was a smile of triumphant satisfaction on his usually stern features as his bright glance roved about among the faces which were pressing around him, the outlines of which could just be discovered in the fading light.

The cart into which the horse was hitched was a small, light, and somewhat dingy express wagon, containing nothing but a box and some blankets, on the top of which was perched a little shaggy dog, who, not at all discouraged by the inspection of the curious townsfolks, blinked his small eyes sleepily as the team jogged along. A pitchfork hung by the side of the cart, and at its tailboard a rope was hitched, which dangled out over the head of the placid cow that brought up the rear of the procession. In this manner the little inner group went on, and the nearer it came to the settle l part of the town the larger grew the cheering and excited crowd that surrounded it.

"Can anybody tell me what all this fuss is about?" was the astonished inquiry of a person who overtook the procession in a carriage.

"This? Why, it's Webster. Warren Johnson come home. He's walked all the way from California, just as you see him now."

This was, in truth, the explanation of the phenomenon. Two men who drove over from Oxford in the afternoon had brought the news that the old man was on his way home, and all the citizens, young and old, men and women and children, poured forth to meet him.

The old man having entered the town by the main street, proceeded to the hotel, in front of which he found himself the centre of an almost impenetrable circle of humanity.

The crowd cheered, and Mr. Johnson took off his hat, bowing and smiling, he said, "there's lots of ye, but I don't seem to know you." He then, not without a great deal of difficulty, proceeded to put up his horse and cow at the hotel stables, after which he disappeared from the sight of the thousand to receive the greetings and congratulations of his friends and acquaintances, in the hotel parlors. His entry into town will pass into history as one of the most momentous and triumphant events in the annals of Webster. He has come back to his native village after an absence of two years, and is to-day the most noted man in the town. As mariner and traveller he has no equal, and has secured celebrity for himself, and will hereafter be pointed out to strangers as the man who walked from San Francisco to Massachusetts.

Mr. Johnson is a remarkably well read and intelligent citizen of Webster. He is a veteran of the late war, having been drum major of the Twenty-third Massachusetts Regiment and afterward in the Fifty-sixth Massachusetts Regiment, and accompanying Sherman in his famous march to the sea. For many years previous he was employed as sole leather cutter for H. E. Bugbee of this town, and is a well-known and respected townsman.

"I am at your service," he said to a *Globe* representative to-day, "and ready to answer any questions you may care to ask me. My walk, my great walk as you call it, was accomplished in 165 travelling days. I started from Humboldt Bay, California, June 1, 1882, and reached Ogden, Utah, on the 23d of September. I passed the winter of 1883 among the Mormons. On the 10th of May I set out again, and arrived in Keene, New Hampshire, on the 7th of last November. I left that city for Webster last Monday, and got home at 7:15 last night. During the time I have been on the road I left Humboldt Bay I have travelled over 4,500 miles of road, walking some days twenty miles, others forty, and making an average the whole distance of thirty miles a day. That is my record. I went out to California in 1880, and after living at Humboldt Bay, which is some 313 miles north of San Francisco, you know, for two years I thought I'd like to come home. I had a horse which I wanted to fetch along, and besides that I wanted to see the country. So I took the dog and the cow, and the cart and the horse and set out. I set out with a railroad map of the country, and depended on the inhabitants for further information. After I got into the States I bought State maps as I came along. I first went to San Francisco, and from there to San José, some forty-seven miles further south. Then I turned back, crossing the San Joaquin River, through the San Joaquin valley, and so on through Stockton to Sacramento. I halted in Sacramento for eight days, and then took the Central Pacific road direct up through Auburn and Colfax to Emigrant Gap."

"You don't mean you went by rail?"

"Certainly not. But the road, or the trail as you please to call it, runs right along by the railroad, and so it goes under the name of the C. P. road. Well, as I was saying, I struck a snag at Emigrant Gap. I was trying to get through the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and it wasn't easy. The folks told me they didn't believe I was going to get through, and after trying it I came to the conclusion that I weren't. So I had to turn about and go back to Colfax and take the other road around through Grass Valley to Nevada City. By this way I got through by the Henness pass, thus getting round the mountains which I could not cross. I followed on through Jackson's range and struck Verdi, the first depot station in Nevada. If you look on the map you'll find that I had been obliged to leave the Central Pacific road and go around, and now I had struck the road again. From this point I was able to follow the road. I remember very well when I struck Reno, the next important point, for that was where I got my overcoat, for the first time. After leaving Wadsworth I entered the desert."

"Hard, dry travelling there, I suppose?"

"Not a bit of it. I found the desert road in the country—the very best. It runs right along by the railroad, and I tramped forty miles the first day before I realized it. Little sharp pebbles make a good, level, hard surface to go over. Well, I kept on along the line of the railroad until I struck Ogden, where, as I told you, I wintered among the Mormons. I had gone a distance since leaving Eureka of 1,400 miles, and I had taken 115 days to do it in."

"And the hairbreadth escapes and perilous adventures along the way?"

"Bless you, I never had anything of that kind. I saw plenty of Indians and cowboys, but nobody offered to molest me. I found the young Indians, especially, first-rate fellows. I suppose I could have got into trouble with the cowboys if I had tried very hard, but I know too much about human nature to be caught that way. No, sir: I travelled from ocean to ocean, as you may say, and I never got insulted till I got into my own State, near Auburn, when a drunken fellow one night wanted to get into a row with me; but even that didn't work."

"What was your method of travelling?"

"Well, I walked most of the time, as you may have gathered, for the simple reason that I would rather walk than ride. I had a box of provisions in the cart which I replenished whenever I came to a settlement. I carried a bag of grain for the horse. I couldn't always depend on finding feed ready at hand, you know. While I was within the limits of civilization I put up at the hotels and rested in the different towns as many days as I pleased. When I was out of the houses I laid down on the bare ground at night and went to sleep. I couldn't make much of a camp because I didn't have any materials. If there was anything to build a fire with, I built one, and if there wasn't—and there often wasn't—I went without it. The ground was dry, and there wasn't much dew at night. I got along all right. The only thing that troubled me was the wolves. They did scare me a little once or twice; but it never amounted to anything more than a scare. I got sight once in a while of other wild beasts, but they never sought to molest me.

"The only trouble I had was with the sporters. I didn't want to have anything to say to them, but they followed me sometimes for miles in the vain hope of getting something out of me. I wasn't going to talk them. I don't care now it is all over. I got to my journey's end safe and sound, in Keene, N. H., on Nov. 7, and stayed there till Monday, and I believe I told you."

"And how do you feel after your journey?"

"Splendid. I never felt better in my life."

"And you think you walked most of this 4,500 miles across the continent?"

"Oh, yes; I didn't ride but mighty little. I like walking, you see, and the old horse had enough to do without carrying me. No; it was a good, long jaunt, but I enjoyed it. You see, I wanted to bring the horse home, and the easiest and cheapest way to do it and see the country at the same time was to walk him. So I came with the cow and the team and the dog. I've got the notes for a good book out of it, too, as you will see by and by."

DRIVING A BROADWAY 'BUS.

THE HARD WORK AND POOR PAY OF THE MEN ON THE BOXES.

The Stage Men Themselves Predict the Near End of their Business—Too Much Competition in Prices, Speed, and Comfort.

A big, burly man, bundled in an old, patched ulster, with a weather-beaten sou'easter pulled down to protect his bronzed face from the pelting rain, shuffled wearily into the dark interior of a big stable in East Forty-first street, near the tunnel, one stormy night last April. A single bright ray of light shot out into the darkness from a little cubby hole in a wooden partition near the entrance, and away back in the depths of the stable two blinking lanterns, hung on hooks, brought out in faint outline the heavy white wheels and lumbersome hulks of some half dozen omnibuses, and glinted here and there on the metal trappings of a lot of venerable harness that was strung along the beams. Slinging the rain from his sou'easter with a twitch of the brim, the newcomer slammed it back on his head, and, plunging a horny palm through the hole in the wall, observed:

"By Jehoshaphat what er night. Give us Shakespeare's boodle, boss, quick, will you?"

There was a clinking of coin behind the wall, and then a plate was thrust out through the small aperture, heaped with coppers and nickels. The tired man counted up the heap, found that it made $1.75 all told, and, dumping them into his trousers pocket, shifted his quid in a gratified way, and sallied forth into the storm. At regular intervals other rough-clad, weather-beaten, horny-handed men rumbled up to the same entrance on stages, slid down from the box seats with the nimbleness of acrobats, and loaded down their trousers with small change. They were stage drivers, getting paid off for a rainy day's work.

Stage drivers, like the stages they drive, are interesting subjects to study. Only those who have time to study, though, bother their heads much about them. Stage drivers can tell you more about old New York and things that were noteworthy, odd, and entertaining in the days when the present generation was in pinafores than anybody you can meet in a day's walk. There are three hundred stage lines in the city. It takes 300 drivers to jolt the stages of these lines through the intricate jam of vehicles on Broadway. New drivers are being taken on every day to replace those who get sick of the business and drop off. There are about fifty of the real old timers who have stuck to the business through all its vicissitudes. They have handled the reins and jolted New Yorkers ever since omnibuses first came into vogue. The best known of them all is the grizzled old veteran who has been dubbed "Shakespeare." He drives for the Madison avenue line. He was nicknamed after the great dramatist because he spouts Shakespeare to every passenger who climbs up the box to ride beside him. He won't talk about anything else.

The clouds had rolled by and given the sun a chance to light up the rugged interior of the big stable, when "Shakespeare" came back bright and early next morning to resume his job of driving. He was surrounded by a motley diverse, who had lugged home their small load of coin, and laid out most of it to buy the day's meals for wife and little ones, came in groups of twos and threes, clambered up on their high perches again, drew up their reins, took from quids of tobacco, and then, as the big omnibuses went rumbling and lumbering away on another long, monotonous series of tours to the ferries and back again, while the big town woke up, got itself in a fearful state of commercial excitement, and went to sleep again.

A stout superintendent, whose inherent good nature could not be entirely disguised by the gruff dictatorial air he tried, with only partial success, to assume, came out from behind the board partition, with its cubby hole, as the first stage rolled away from one of the three stables at 6 o'clock A. M. exactly, and, hoisting his raw-hide boots in the air, put them down on the desk in front of the door, passed up tin boxes of money envelopes to each driver, and fiercely tugged at the rough ends of his shaggy black moustache as he jotted down a memorandum of each box and the name of the driver who got it. In the mean time a string of about thirty men stood in silence against the outer wall of the stable, and whistled, sang hoarsely, rattled jigs with their heels, or chewed tobacco vigorously to kill time while they waited in anxious suspense for a summons from the stout, ruddy-faced, and secretly jolly superintendent. They were all recent applicants for situations, hoping for the chance to take the extras on trial trips given to new drivers taken on probation, to show what they can do at handling the reins. Sometimes a dozen are hired at a time. Sometimes the men have to wait days for a chance.

"What requisites are necessary to become a driver?" I asked the jolly, inoffensive superintendent as he was ramming home some fine cut into the odorous bowl of a venerable brier wood pipe.

"Nuthin' but a five-dollar note an' plenty er muscle, as I know of," he grunted, good humoredly, agitating a match on a sliver on his boot. "Leastways, I wouldn't require the five-dollar note neither, only we must get some security for the $6 worth of small change I give to a driver when he starts out. Commercial precautions, you know, dang my buttons!"

"Doesn't it require some previous knowledge of driving to enable a man to hold up a stage horse and make him go?"

"No, it don't do anything of the kind. We have all sorts of people come here to get the job. There's more ex-policemen, as has been club swingers, than ex-express drivers apply for situations. Leastways, the former do, too, because one of 'em has to go through any training beforehand. A man who is foolish enough to want to become a driver generally knows enough to cut off his rival in the right of way and make things lively for the people who don't know better than try to cross the street when they see a stage a block away, dang my buttons!

"But is it unwise to become a stage driver?"

"Yes, it is danged foolish. I've been twenty years in the business, and ought to know, dang my buttons. It's the toughest life a man can lead. Bein' an orderly in a lunatic asylum is nuthin' to it. In addition to getting paid off in pennies and nickels, dang my buttons, and wearin' out your pockets carryin' it, a driver has to work twelve or fourteen hours a day for it, dang it. And if he gets sick, so much the wus for him. Then he don't get nuthin' at all. I calculate there is three hundred men in the business as will never know what happiness is till they get out of it into something else. Queer thing for a boss to say, but, dang my buttons, I mean it, every word."

Saying which, the superintendent vigorously knocked the ashes out of his pipe, danged his buttons some more, as if he really would swear if he got the chance, and then started in afresh.

"The fact is, the whole danged business will go to smash in another two years. It's losing money right straight along since the fare was cut down to five cents, and I'll give stages just another two years to last as a metropolitan institution. In the mean time it's absolutely ridiculous to keep 'em agoing. Why, dang my buttons, I remember many a stormy night last winter that a stage has gone down from here to the ferry and back again without so much as a nickel being collected for fare. Scarcely anybody wants a stage now. They're the third rail. With the street cars and the elevated roads and the black-and-tan cabs the stage is too danged slow for the age. It's a relic of the past, that's what it is, and rapidly getting N. G. You can make a note of it that the superintendent told you so."

"What is the cost to run a stage a day?"

"Seven dollars is the figure, and experience shows that it can't be done for a cent less. About seven trips a day is an average driver's work. During that time there are three or four hundred dollars in his fare box, and, if he can make a note of that the past, that's what it is, and rapidly getting N. G. You can make a note of it that the superintendent told you so."

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