



MOTHER PHOEBE: Among animal homemakers, she's a standout



WHO SAID "DUMB ANIMALS?"

by Hilda Cole Espy

"I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd."
— WALT WHITMAN

APHOEBE came to our house this spring, built a nest under the eaves, and raised her young. She raised them so quietly that though they were under my roof, I never knew how many she had.

I must say that she did more to deflate my ego than any neighbor I have ever known. Her springtime competence depressed me. While I was reading "House and Garden" to try to figure out how to make my kitchen more functional, she was building herself an abode that was completely functional before Frank Lloyd Wright was a toddler playing with blocks.

What made her achievement even more spectacular was that she was probably an egg herself this time last year. Still, without any previous experience, without consulting Contractors, Architects, Close Friends or How To Do It books, she made herself a house as much like any respectable Phoebe's nest as if she had been carefully studying Audubon.

OCCASIONALLY, when I was out in the front yard shouting at my four little girls, I'd see her beak and bright eyes protruding from the hatch of her nest under the eaves. It made me feel as if I might do better if I just gave up all my attempts at reasoning and instructing and just took to calling "Phoebe, Phoebe."

That's all *she* ever said, and she was

obviously managing her brood more sagely than I.

Of course, she had never been confused by child-care experts. When I had my first children, the twins, pediatricians were sternly recommending Routine. (Four hours between bottles; if the babies cry, let them; don't pick them up oftener than necessary.) By the time I had my fourth daughter, all this was earnestly reversed: feed her when she's hungry, pick her up often, love that child.

TRUE, I occasionally used my common sense and/or instinct, but I was never as lucky as Phoebe, who needed no advice at all.

Maybe she had never seen an egg, but she knew how to hatch one, what to feed it and when it was ready to take wing on its own.

When Phoebe's babies flew away, she seemed to feel no need to cultivate Outside Interests, get a part-time job, or join the Women's Club. In fact, I doubt if it occurred to her that she had ever had a husband or family, or would ever have again.

Spring had come and gone; it was now another season and she was up to it. She hadn't gotten a little too fat, nor did she require a term in Success School to cope with the future. She did not look over her shoulder or beyond her beak. She was a bachelor being, and she simply flew off to do all the things a single Phoebe had to do and enjoy.

I'm not too sorry she's gone, though; I have discovered it's far, far easier to keep up with the Joneses.



Hilda Espy

Sidelines

BIRD NOTE: By coincidence Charles Martin submitted This Week's cover drawing at almost the same moment that Hilda Cole Espy submitted "Who Said Dumb Animals?" We felt the two items made a happy combination and so we have printed them back-to-back. However, we hasten to point out that the birds on our cover are not the phoebes of the story. To readers who feel inclined to ask what kind of birds they are: as far as we know they are strictly Charles Martin birds.

YOU CAN SEE HOW IT WOULD BE: In Guatemala, we learn from some recent visitors there, the "mozo," or peasant farmer, is accustomed to walking many dusty miles under a hot sun while carrying as much as 100 pounds of produce to market on his back. Then, if he has nothing to carry home, he fills his pack basket with 100 pounds of stones.



Because he needs stones? No, because — you'll have to take our word for it — he fears he'll spoil himself for toting heavy loads if he ever makes the trip empty-handed!

ASK YOUR DADDY, DEAR: A lady writes that the visit to her home of a resplendent gentleman wearing spats prompted her youngest to ask: "Mommy, why does the man have slip covers on his shoes?"

This Week

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Cover by Charles E. Martin

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