Grinnell, E. and J.

The damn-bird.

(1900)

A-G[rinnell,
E.+J.]
Damn-Bird
1900

HARVARD UNIVERSITY.

LIBRARY

OF THE

MUSEUM OF COMPARATIVE ZOÖLOGY

62,710

BEQUEST OF

WALTER FAXON

December 7. 1923.

DEC 7 1923

62,710

IN WESTERN LETTERS.

89

a-g

now at work on a very striking frieze, on a \$3000 contract, for a private library in Pittsburg.

: *

Charlotte Perkins Stetson was married at Detroit, June 11, to Geo. Houghton Gilman, her cousin, a lawyer and another Beecher — which is almost a religion by itself. *Si non é vero é ben trovato* that his own brother, once "filling the pulpit" for "the great Congregational preacher," prefaced the services with the remark: "Those who have come to worship Henry Ward Beecher may now retire. We

C. M. Davis Eng. Co.

Copyright by C. F. Lummis, 1900.

CHARLOTTE PERKINS STETSON-GILMAN.

will proceed to the worship of God." The marriage of two Beechers should satisfy all the demands of piety and love.

That Mrs. Stetson is a philosopher has come to be admitted by the most unwilling minds. That she is human, no doubt need now persist. At any rate, the loose-reading and unraveled who have held her a Foe to Home because she is hostile only to inversions of home, should now be estopped. That Mrs. Gilman will not be a Submerged Half, goes safely unsaid; that she may find in love and comradeship a surer foothold and inspiration for her broad work, here's hoping. In any event, she has promptly and satisfactorily answered one query as to "what she would do with her brains."

C. F. L.

The Human-Bird.

Edg. & Geo. S. Russell.

THE DAMN-BIRD.

BY ELIZABETH AND JOSEPH GRINNELL

NEIGHBOR of ours has a young son interested in birds. He believes, with a child's faith, what is told him. One day his father asked, "What bird is that, Kenyon?" pointing to a little grey fellow with red head and throat. "That's a Damn-bird, father," was the reply.

Being a strict church-member, the father was shocked, and repeated the question, with a serious mental attitude facially expressed toward the supposed profanity. "But it *is* the Damn-bird, father! The gardener told me so!" the child persisted, innocently giving to the little creature a title which, if he has not earned it, is universally accepted.

By general consent and common anathema the linnet is the Damn-bird of California. He is stoned, shot, poisoned, cursed, hated—and still by a kind heaven and his own gentle wits the bird remains to do his questionable mission. It is not the object of this paper to discuss the demerits of the culprit. The newspapers have done this to more than perfection. Like other people of any race he has his faults. But his virtues are

many. The California rancher continues to go through his peach orchards "thinning out the fruit" in early summer, with his shotgun or saucer of poison at his elbow wherewith to exterminate feathered workmen who would fain do the work of thinning for him regardless of wages. The time may come, as it has come to many a Massachusetts farmer guilty of a similar hatred toward certain other birds, when he will wish by his seven senses that the linnets were back, cursing meanwhile the little scale-folk which aforetime the linnet swallowed along with the rest of his dinner, intentionally or no.

C. M. Davis Eng. Co.

THE LINNET NEST.

And so it comes to pass that the linnet will never wear a halo until he is a ghost. But he isn't a ghost yet, and so his halo is not in evidence. A recent writer condemns the bird without mercy and says, "There seems no way of ridding the country of him save by poisoned water, and this probably destroys as many song birds as linnets. Perhaps in this case the small boy and his air-gun is the surest remedy." Well, perhaps it is not commonly known that the air-gun in the hands of a small boy points directly to the reform school or the penitentiary, for by the time he has pulled the trigger fifty times or less, he has shot his own heart out. But we are not discussing the small boy of California, though his case deserves men-

tion ; we will leave him and the damn-bird and take up our dear delightful linnet.

It is scarcely necessary to photograph this bird, for everybody knows him ; but pictures of our friends—and possibly of our enemies— appeal to the emotions, and someone may come to give a kind thought to the bird in consequence. July is the month of jubilee for the linnet. Parent birds are heard blessing their stars that the dangers of the brooding season are nearly over, while juveniles coax and whimper for more victuals, and brush the last remaining tuft of baby down from their heads against the berry bushes.

Our home is a city ranch of about two acres set to many varieties of fruit, making of course a veritable paradise for the linnets. No cats are allowed, no dogs, no small boys with air-guns. Since we have made a study of the linnet for fifteen years under these favorable conditions, we claim some acquaintance with the bird. Of this fact we are sure, if linnets are allowed to live in peace in a certain locality all the other birds will frequent that place. Since we make a study of birds in general we have endured the linnet and are even accused of harboring a love for the "little pest." We plead guilty. Early damage done by them to the peach and apricots is not set down against them, since more fruit sets anyway than the tree can grow to perfection. When the fruit ripens we tell the linnets to "fall to." And they do it, of course. They bite as many peaches as they please on the topmost bough, increasing the area bitten as the individual ripens, and we respect a peach that has a bite in it. We never touch one the linnets have marked as theirs. So they confine their testing to these few on the highest bough and it is surprising how few are eaten. There is much more singing and twittering and talking about the matter than the quantity eaten justifies, exactly as at any banquet. The less really eaten the more fuss about it, as any one can see by close watch at a peach tree. We truly believe that if the linnets could be persuaded to "keep still" their wrong doing would be overlooked. It is their perpetual chatter that is against them.

We sowed a patch of alfalfa for the Jersey, and our neighbors told us we would never see it an inch high. "The Damn-bird will get it." We laughed ! It was in winter when seeds were scarce and no weeds had pushed their two hands above the cover. But we knew how to head off the linnets ; that was why we laughed. Under the orange trees were plenty of windfalls. We cut these waste oranges into halves and laid an "orange belt" about the edge of our alfalfa patch. Not a blade of the clover was touched. One could illustrate the stupidity of California ranchers who lie awake o' nights thinking up bad words to sling at the linnets. The birds pre-

fer oranges to any other fruit, provided only they can get at the heart of them. There are culls enough dumped into the places where "No dump" is observed written on a board and nailed to a lot post, to supply all the linnets in the country, could the fruit be cut in halves. Let the small boy be taught to lean his air-gun up against his resolution to kill nothing he can by any possibility "get any fun out of," and set him at halving the cull oranges. In a day's time he, and the linnets, and the arroyo banks, would be in high glee, and the rancher would have the satisfaction of being left alone with his peach crop.

There were the loquats! Even to these, oranges were pre-

C. M. Davis Eng. Co

A PAIR OF LINNETS.

ferred, laid on shakes about as high as the fruit, and at a respectable distance.

As for the logan berries, hanging in individual beauty from not overlaid stems, there is no trouble. What a few widths of damaged mosquito netting costs is trivial. Besides, we expect to divide everything we raise with the birds. They were here before we came, and welcomed us to Southern California as heartily as ever a party of tourists was welcomed by unfeathered residents with their hands full of waste geranium cuttings thrown in at car windows. In fact the linnets were the only birds about the place when we came and took up our initiative residence in the newly-built stable, after the fashion of senators and editors of fifteen years ago, biding their time "for the house to be built." Now, there are at least fifteen varieties of birds

nesting in the grounds, some of which are rare and beautiful. Would we have the latter, we must love the linnets. And these linnets nest just where they are told and use any material designated. Sometimes they nest where they are not told. Last year a phoebe built her mud nest in a cigar box tacked under the low barn eaves. One brood was raised and she returned this spring, repaired the old structure and was ready to begin business when some woodchoppers scared her away with their flying chips. After her temporary desertion, as it proved, a linnet took the old stand and reared her brood in the mud nest, beginning the second incubation without incident. Back came the phoebes one morning last week and they were very wroth. We watched the battle. Two birds against one was more than fair and our silent sympathies were with the mother linnet. She laid low in the nest above her eggs and fought like a Boer. The phoebes took hold of her wing feathers and pulled at them one on either side, imploring and commanding her to vacate their property. "Possession is nine points," called out the linnet, and she stood, or rather sat them off. They then turned their attention to an adjoining cigar box, now and then looking across at the linnet reproachfully as if she were a tenant who did not pay her rent. Two pairs of linnets have just been nesting in cigar boxes on our upper balcony where they have grown familiar with certain details of housekeeping, such as rug shaking, blanket airing and so forth.

It occurred to us that certain arctic material which we valued might appeal to the sense of these birds, and we placed it near by. They selected it at once and built a couple of nests as unique as are often seen. There was Timothy grass from the Kowak river, moss from the tundras of Cape Nome, feathers from an Emperor goose, lichens from the banks of Kotzebue Sound. These were woven well in and around, and lined with strips of a wedding gown of 25 years ago, as white as Swiss muslin of that age can well be. When the nests were completed we exchanged them for last year's discarded sparrow's nests brought from the tufts of pampas grass. The linnets adopted these black substitutes for their own nests of lighter color and rarer beauty, never once objecting seriously, and have brought off two broods. We have proved that the linnet is capable of domestication, and some day may see it corraled behind woven wire, hatching broilers, and producing eggs at 15 cents a dozen. They do not mind the taking of their eggs, providing a nest egg is left, and a linnet hen will take the young of her neighbor just hatched in exchange for her own full fledged darlings, and bring them up to the best of her ability. Indeed we have kept a pair of linnets engaged in the occupation of wet-nursing for a prolonged period by thus "swapping" the young. In the matter of domestic felicity no human couple could be so

devoted. Never more than a few feet apart at housekeeping time, the male and female evince an affection for each other beyond comparison. Their attitude toward birds not of their own species is kind and generous. We have seen a hummer attack a linnet for the cotton which she was carrying away to her nest. The linnet alighted on a bough, looked fondly at the tiny hummer, laid the cotton on a twig as much as to say "You're welcome," and waited leisurely while the hummer filled her dainty beak and went off with it. Is there trouble anywhere in the grounds, a stray cat, an owl, or a young oriole hanging by one foot caught in the hairs of its nest lining, linnet tells the story and calls to the rescue. During incubation she sings almost constantly, in a low note, her faithful gray head just above the nest the picture of content, the thought evidently not occurring to her that she has already raised eight or ten children who may be waiting to coax her for patent baby food the moment she leaves the nest. Linnets are nurslings, being fed solely on regurgitated food. All through the nesting period, beginning before an egg is laid, the male so feeds his mate, the two sitting on tree twigs twittering together about the cares of parenthood. Altogether the linnet is a dear creature worthy of admiration by all who know him.

Pasadena, Cal.

DYING SAN NICOLÁS.

BY BLANCHE TRASK.

It is but an isle, nine miles long, about seventy-five miles out from Port Los Angeles; the tops, it would seem, of submerged peaks. Narrow and lean, it yet stands firmly in the sea; reef-bound and without a harbor.

Day after day and week after week the battle endures. The snows of the sea chill yet deeper the heart of the black lava reefs; a hopeless battle witnessed only by the shags, the gulls, the otters and the seals.

Briny are the waters which steal silently through the sand-carved and wind-swept and sand-filled arroyos; now and then the little stream sinks quite away, and great cañons hundreds of feet deep are really "snowed in" by the sand.

All day long and all night long the wind and the sand are working away, building great castles, while gnomes and giants and dragons start up on every side. Even on the comparatively "level-top" of the island one must pass through gorge after gorge fantastically wind-and-sand carved. It is not unusual to be stopped by an erosion from 10 to 100 feet in depth, when following the main ridge, and to have to go far out of your way to reach its head.

Three miles from and extending to the west end, the "Indian mounds" are found—vast numbers, covered by thousands of red abalone shells, besides small shells innumerable; snails, key-hole limpets, owl limpets, sea-urchins, frog-shells, spiral shells, sea cradles, the bones of the whale, otter, seal, and probably those of a dog and various other small animals and sea birds, besides human bones.

How thickly inhabited the place must have been! Human skulls are everywhere about, and at camp we used the upper parts as baskets oftentimes, when we were short of tin cans.

After a day of blinding storm—not of rain or of snow, but one of fog and sand and small pebbles and wind—a storm so fierce (although so strange) that one cannot face it, but gladly stays in his tent and “fixes” his “finds”—after such a day, how good to see sunshine in the early morning, even a touch, through the grey fog which is in truth the mantle chosen by San Nicolás, and which he rarely allows the wild wind to blow from over his shoulder.

This morning new (old) bones are found exposed and delicate relics which the wind has uncovered. Everywhere the sand is piled fresh and the wind has given to the banks the exquisite markings which in colder lands he gives to the snow-drifts.

At the west end, only the long, long stretches of endless mounds and the black rim of the reefs below, with the great sea rushing in, so sure of its victory. Seven breakers, twenty feet high, one after another, with the wind bearing away more and more and yet more new particles to the spit; the spit which stretches lazily to eastward with its stolen life; out of the fog and into the arms of the spray which the sunlight turns into rainbows. In all this somber isle this one spot alone is joyous, this spit where the great rainbows play hour after hour, though there are none to see them.

In March, after the rains, here and there about the central summit are gay sparkles of little flowers. About one hundred species were collected by the writer: several before unknown to botanists. San Nicolás is indeed a dying land. In all his length was found but one shrub seven feet high, and in three or four localities *Leptosynes* grow from four to six feet high, their gold stars beaming gladly in this solemn land. One tiny lake, too, was found begemmed with bullrush.

In the weird and briny streams you walk with cautious step, in the shifting sand-bed of these narrow arroyos, hastening onward, lest your feet sink deeper, gazing up at the trembling crags—crags which often shut out the blue of the sky. Sad places, enlivened only by the green of the iceplants which grow on the drifted sands. No whirr of wing, no sound of bird, no trickle from those briny waters which glide but do not flow, and gliding sink!

Rarely a raven, like those of Santa Catalina, flies past, and two or three foxes are seen; these too, like those on Santa Catalina, a species which is said to be found only on the coast islands. One of these foxes (lame) afterward identified as one the mate had shot a year previous.

Nearly all the mounds are, as has been said, to westward. They lessen suddenly as you go towards the east. The cause is apparent upon thought. At the west end fresh water drips from the rocks just above the reefs; it diminishes suddenly as you go toward the east, until none is found.

The east end, though it has not fresh water, has that for which the west end can never hope, for beyond the long sand-spit, beyond the billow-lulled and rainbow-encircled spit, rise the ridges and rest the cañons in which wind and sand have spent the greater part of their strength and time. There you may walk through defiles hung with stone lacework, and climb stairways strangely carved. You may rest in old ruins and lean against a Corinthian column which holds within it still the heart of a Greek; and the dragon which starts out here and there—do not forget that he too is but stone!

You may wander from terrace to terrace and hear no sound save the far-off murmur of the sea which breaks a thousand feet below; and below, just above the sea, in a riven flat, you behold that which is too strange to fathom: for leagues away is the city, yet the park seems to be before you. There are dashes of scarlet amongst emerald green; there are

Photomount
Pamphlet
Binder
Gaylord Bros.
Makers
Syracuse, N. Y.
PAT. JAN 21, 1908

MCZERNST MAYR LIBRARY

3 2044 148 058 88