GENE STRATTON-PORTER

HOMING WITH THE BIRDS

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Homing with the birds, G. Stratton-Porter
Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck
86450 Altenmünster, Loschberg 9
Deutschland

ISBN: 9783849648688

www.jazzybee-verlag.de
admin@jazzybee-verlag.de

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INTRODUCTION

IN THE fall of 1916, while visiting at the home of Mr. F. N. Doubleday, a member of the house which publishes most of my books, in conversation with my very dear friend Mrs. Neltje De Graff Doubleday, the author of a number of invaluable books on birds and flowers, she began to question me about unusual experiences I encountered afield. I told her some of the things here recorded, the queerest and most peculiar things that I had seen during a lifetime of personal contact with the birds. In the course of that intimate conversation, Mrs. Doubleday conceived and planned this book, feeling – I hope not mistakenly – that these intimate personal experiences with birds, which so intensely interested her, would not fail to be of equal interest to other bird lovers and protectors. She felt that these records faithfully and simply set down would add very largely to the sum of human achievement in a scientific estimate of the habits and characteristics of birds. So, I have written for any one who is interested, these sketches of personal experience, as I outlined them to such a devoted lover and champion of the birds as Neltje Blanchan.

CHAPTER I - EARNING A TITLE

ALMOST my first distinct memory is connected with a bird. I found a woodpecker lying on the grass beneath a cherry tree. I could not understand why he did not fly with the birds flocking over the fruit; I spread his wings and tossed him through the air, but he only fell to the ground. Then I noticed that his kind were all flying from the tree tops and high places, so I carried him upstairs and launched him from a window. He fell as before. Then I thought perhaps he was hungry; I took him to the garden, pried open his beak, and stuffed him with green gooseberries, but still he would not fly. In complete discouragement, I sat on the front steps with the bird in my lap, wondering what I could do to help him. My father passed, so I began asking questions. That morning I learned a new word; I had not known "dead" before. Father very carefully explained that he never permitted robins, orioles, or any song bird to be killed, but that woodpeckers made no music, while they carried away distressingly large quantities of fruit. It was then that I made my first business proposition: "If you will make the boys stop shooting woodpeckers, I will not eat another cherry. The birds may have all of mine."

My father said that was a bargain. I never before noticed that cherries were so big, so red, so tempting, while it seemed that all of our family, helpers, and friends spent most of their time offering them to me. Our cook almost broke my heart by baking a little cherry pie in a scalloped tartpan for me. I could not say a word, but I put my hands behind me and backed away from that awful temptation with tears in my eyes. At that point my mother intervened. She said she had decided that we had cherries enough for

all of our needs and for the birds as well, so she gave me the pie.

It is probable that this small sacrifice on my part set me to watching and thinking about the birds, which every day flashed their bright colors and sang their unceasing songs all over and around us. For years one pair of wrens homed over the kitchen door, the entrance to their dwelling being a knot hole in the upper casing. While the mother bird brooded the father frequently spent an hour at a time, often in the rain, on a wooden acorn ornamenting the top of the pump on our back porch, becoming so tame that he frequently brushed us with his wings in going back and forth to his door, sometimes alighting on our heads. In his behalf I spent much time sweeping up the debris dropped by the pair on the back porch while building their nest, because my mother threatened to nail shut the opening; but as she never did, I strongly suspect that she had no real intention of so doing.

She was a great friend of a pair of hummingbirds that almost always nested in a honeysuckle over her bedroom window. One day, the front door having been left open, the male bird flew into the room and did not seem able to find his way out again. When he had circled the ceiling, striking his head until the feathers were worn away and tiny touches of red began to show on the paper, my mother could endure no more; so she summoned help and finally succeeded in capturing the bird, which she allowed me to hold in my hands while she showed me how small its body was, how tiny its feet, how fine its bill.

She had much trouble with the swifts that built in the chimney to a huge fireplace in our living room. A number of these birds would build their nests near the top of this chimney every season, beginning a raucous chatter very early in the morning, constantly dropping twigs and clay over the andirons and into the fireplace; while, either from imperfect construction or through heavy rains loosening

the fastenings, there never was a season that one or more nests did not fall into the fireplace, frequently carrying young birds almost ready for flight with them. They were very seldom killed in the fall, but they swept down soot, and flopped around in the ashes to the vexation of Mother's housewifely soul. The old birds often fell with the nests or followed down the chimney and escaped into the room; so they, too, decorated the ceiling with their blood, if they fell when we chanced to be away from home and they were not released immediately. Often, if the nest were not completely shattered, I gathered up the pieces, wired them back into shape to the best of my ability, climbed from an upstairs window to the roof of the back part of the house, which was only one story, and from there to the roof of the second story. By using pieces of shingle and bits of wire, I replaced the nests inside the chimney, then put the little birds back into them. It was a frequent prophecy with the family that I should break my neck in this undertaking.

My experience with birds began as soon as I could walk, at my home, Hopewell Farm, in Wabash County, Indiana. As I recall our farm at that time, it was of unusual beauty, a perfect inland location for birds. The public highway ran north and south through the middle of the land. On the west of the road were a number of cultivated fields and one large tract of native timber. On the east of the road lay the residence, surrounded by a large, tree-filled dooryard, south of which was a garden, bright with flowers and shrubs. Behind the dooryard spread a very large orchard filled with apple trees and bordered with peach trees on three sides, with rare peach, plum, and pear trees on the fourth. A lane ran from the barnyard to a woods pasture where much of the heavy timber had been cut away leaving only a few large trees interspersed with berry bushes and thickets of wild-rose and elder. Three streams of running water crossed the place, one flowing through the woods and rounding the foot of a steep hill south of the residence.

A smaller one flowed in a parallel direction on the north, both emptying into a larger stream coming from the north through our meadow and joining the Wabash River several miles south of us.

The land was new, a large part of it having been cleared and put into cultivation by my father. All of the wild growth was much ranker and more luxuriant than at the present time, while this was true also of everything we cultivated. My mother used the natural fertilizer from the poultry house and stable in her garden; the cleanings from the barn were scattered over the fields; but no other fertilizer ever was talked of at that time.

The flowers and all growth were more luxuriant than now because the soil was young, the temperature more equable. Summer always brought heavy rains every few days; long periods of heat and drought and cyclones or high, raging winds were unknown. As I recall, there were small flocks of birds for every one that is seen at the present time. We were taught to love the song birds for their beauty, their music, and the likeness of their life processes to ours. We were told that we must not harm a bird's nest because it would break the little mother bird's heart; but no one ever particularly impressed it upon us to protect them because the berry and fruit crops would fail if we did not. My father was the only person I ever heard mention the subject in my childhood. The birds' work as insect exterminators was not generally realized or taught at that time, while the spraying of fruit trees was unknown. When the trees had been pruned and the trunks given a thorough coat of whitewash, everything that was known to do for their care had been done; and so bounteous and fine were the fruit crops in my father's orchard that the whitewash was not used there, but I did see it in neighboring orchards and dooryards.

I distinctly remember the swarms of birds that flocked over the cherry trees when the fruit was ripe, and the Babel of song that went up from the orchard, while the field

birds were so numerous that we were always allowed to take the eggs from any quail nest we found, provided we first used the precaution of raking one egg from the nest with a long stick to see to what stage of incubation it had progressed. If the quail had not finished laying or had brooded only a few hours, we carried the eggs to the house, put them in cold water, boiled them for twelve minutes, let them cool in the water, and divided them among the children, as one of the greatest treats possible. No other egg I ever have tasted was so fine in grain and delicate in flavor. Despite the destruction we must have wrought in a season, the quail were so numerous that it was the custom to build traps of long, fine pieces of wood, covered with leaves, and set with a trigger, baited with grain. A trail of grain led to these traps, where from half a dozen up to twelve and more of the birds frequently imprisoned themselves at one time. The advantage over shooting was that the birds were in perfect condition when taken. Now, this seems a dreadful thing to have done, but at that time quail were so plentiful we never could distinguish any diminution in their numbers, while rabbits and squirrels were pests, which we had to fight to protect our fruit trees and for our comfort. After the cold weather set in at Thanksgiving time, we always had a large supply of frozen quail and rabbits hanging in the smokehouse for a treat upon the arrival of unexpected guests.

The only game bird, the protection of which I ever heard mentioned in my childhood, was the wild pigeon. My father never would allow our boys to go to the pigeon roosts, baffle the birds with the light of lanterns, club them, and carry them away by bagfuls, as some of our neighbours did. He said that such proceedings would eventually end in the extermination of the birds; that God gave us these creatures to enjoy but not to destroy; so he always cautioned all of us, either in hunting or fishing, to be content with a "moderate share." The prophecy he then

made concerning the wild pigeons has found its fulfillment in my day, for a heavy reward has been offered for a number of years past for even one specimen of this beautiful bird, the metallic luster of whose plumage made a gleam of light when on wing, and whose whistling flight was familiar music in my childhood. These birds now seem to have joined the extinct starlings of Ile de la Reunion.

All of the trees and most of the bushes surrounding the house were filled with bird nests. A privet bush in one corner of the garden always had at least one nest, while the grape arbor and berry bushes sheltered many. There were little cups of hair even among the currant and gooseberry bushes. Every bird that ever homed in an orchard in the Central States was to be found in the apple trees, in a big heap of trimmings at the back of the orchard, in the hollow rails of the fence, or in the grassy corners of our orchard. I think too that every bird of the fields was to be found in our meadow, our clover fields, and in the fence corners, while the big trees of the woods pasture and of the deep woods had their share of crows, hawks, owls; while twenty years after we moved away, a pair of golden eagles nested in the woods pasture, and were shot because they were carrying off small pigs and lambs. The female of this pair is my only mounted bird.

From my earliest recollection I was the friend and devoted champion of every bird that nested in the garden, on the fences, on the ground, in the bushes, in the dooryard, or in the orchard trees. From breakfast until dinner and from dinner until supper, almost my entire day was spent in making the rounds of these nests, watching the birds while they built, brooded, or fed their young, championing their cause against other children, cats, snakes, red squirrels, or larger animals such as skunks and foxes, which were so numerous that we held organized fox-chases for their extermination.

I was always on terms of the greatest intimacy with a pewee that built on a rafter supporting the roof of a log pig-pen. It was very easy to climb from a rail fence to the roof, then by working loose a clapboard near the nest I could watch the birds' daily life and make friends with them.

I do not recall one instance during my childhood when I ever intruded myself into the affairs of any bird in such a manner as to cause it to desert its nest location. I always approached by slow degrees, remained motionless a long time, and did the birds no harm whatever; so they very soon accepted me as a part of their daily life.

One of the heartbreaks of my childhood occurred when one of our hired men forgot his instructions and put up the third bar of an opening in one of the west field fences, which I had asked Father to have him leave down, because in the opening chiseled out to hold the bar was the nest of a chippy having four exquisite, speckled eggs. When I found this bar in place and could not remove it, I hurried to my father in a tumult of grief and anger which very nearly resulted in the dismissal of the man; but it was too late to save the bird and her nest.

I can not recall how many robin nests I located in a season, but there were two locations in which the robins built where access to them was especially convenient. One was a catalpa tree in the northwest corner of our dooryard, to the branches of which I could easily step from the front picket fence. In my morning rounds I always climbed to visit this robin, sitting on a branch talking to the brooding mother bird, almost always carrying her a worm or a berry in my apron pocket as a friendship offering. The other location was the early harvest apple tree of our orchard. This tree was especially designed by nature for the convenience of children in climbing. In the first place the tree grew at an angle, and in the second it had a growth as large as a good-sized butter bowl on the top side which was in the proper position to make a first step in the ascent of

the tree. We used to start a few rods away on the run, take this first step, which brought us in reach of the nearest branch, and from there we went up the tree almost as swiftly as we ran along the path. I can not recall one spring of my childhood in which the robins did not have at least one nest in this tree.

Coming from it early one summer morning I heard the crack of my father's rifle in the dooryard, then I saw a big bird whirling to earth in the milk yard, which adjoined the garden on one side, the orchard on the other. I saw my father start toward the bird, so as fast as possible I sped after him, my bare feet making no sound on the hard, worn path. A large chicken hawk was sitting back on his tail, one wing stiffly extended, the tip hanging broken and bleeding, while in the bird's eyes there was a look of commingled pain, fear, and regal defiance that drove me out of my senses. My father grasped his rifle by the barrel. As the butt came whirling around, I sprang before him and sheltered the hawk with my body, the gun whizzing past my head so close that the rush of air fanned my face. My father dragged me away.

"Are you mad?" he cried. "I barely missed braining you!"

"I'd rather you did hit me," I answered, "than to have you strike a bird when its eyes are like that! Oh, Father, please don't kill him! He never can fly again. Give him to me! Do please give him to me!"

"Keep back!" cried my father. "He will tear your face!"

Father was an ordained minister, better versed in Biblical history than any other man I ever have known intimately. To him, "hawk" meant "Ayit." This old Hebrew word, literally translated, means "to tear and scratch the face." That is exactly what a hawk meant to my father; the word and bird were synonymous. To me, it meant something very different, because I had watched this pair of kingly birds carry heavy sticks and limbs, with which they had built a nest in a big oak tree overhanging a bank of the brook that

ran through our meadow. The structure was bigger than a bushel basket, but no one else of our family knew about it, because it was well screened by the leaves of the tree. It was part of my self-imposed, daily task to gather up from the bank skeletons of any wild bird, rabbit, or domestic fowl, which the hawks had dropped there, and consign them to the current so that the telltale evidence of their location was quickly carried down stream. I envied these birds their power to soar in the face of the wind, to ride with the stiff gale of a beating storm, or to hang motionless as if frozen in air, according to their will, as I envied nothing else on earth. I had haunted the region of this nest so long that I knew it contained a mother bird and a pair of young big enough to look down at me over the edge of the nest, while I was quite sure that the birds were as well acquainted with me as I was with them.

So, for the first time in my life, I contradicted my father.

"He won't!" I cried. "This bird knows me. He knows I would not hurt him. Oh, do please give him to me!"

To prove my assertion, I twisted from my father's grasp and laid my hands on the bird. The hawk huddled against me for protection. In a choice between a towering man who threatened with a rifle and the familiar figure of a child who offered protection, is it any wonder that the bird preferred the child? My father gazed at us in amazement.

"God knows I do not understand you," he said in all reverence. "Keep the bird, if you think you can!"

After my father had gone, the hawk began to revive from the shock. He was not so friendly as I had hoped he would be. In fact, he showed decided signs of wanting to scratch and bite. I did not know how to begin caring for him. My first thought was that he should be in a shady place, where he could have something to perch upon. I hunted a long stick and by patient maneuvering drove him to the woodhouse, where he climbed to the highest part of the corded wood. There he sat in sullen suffering for the

remainder of the day. The next morning I went to him very early. I thought that after a day and a night with a broken wing and without food or drink he would surely allow me to care for him. I cautiously approached him with a basin of water. He drew back as far as he could crowd into a corner. I had always heard that wounded soldiers were frantic for water, so I patiently held the basin before the bird, dabbling and splashing to show him that it contained water. Suddenly, he thrust in his beak and drank like a famished creature. Then I offered him some scraped meat, which he finally took from the end of a stick. The flies began to cluster over the broken wing, and I knew that that must be stopped; so with one clip of the sheep shears I cut through the skin and muscle that held the dangling tip. The bird uttered a shrill scream, but he did not attack me. Then I poured cold water over the hurt wing, which was kept stiffly extended, until it was washed clean. From the time I put the cold water on, the bird ceased even to threaten me. He seemed to realize that his pain was relieved. Then I went into the house to ask my mother if there was not something in her medicine chest that would help heal the wound and keep away the flies. She thought that there was, and as she measured out a white powder for me, she smiled and said: "What a little bird woman you are!"

In two weeks, the hawk was as well as he ever could be. By that time he would take food from my fingers and allow me to do anything I chose for him. Inside of a month he followed me through the dooryard, woodyard, and garden much like a dog, although he was a very awkward walker, probably having had less use for his feet in walking than in carrying and holding prey. There were times when birds of his kind, often his mate without doubt, swept low above us. Then he would beat his wings and try frantically to fly. Sometimes he followed them with his despairing eyes as they sailed from sight, and sent after them a scream that never failed to set my heart aching. At such times I could

scarcely forgive my father for having deprived such a royal bird of his high estate. Although he never said so, I believe from after events that my father had the same feeling.

By this time I had become known in the family as the unfailing friend of the birds. Every unfortunate bird caught in a reaper, wounded by having been stepped on by stock, or that had escaped from the attack of a cat, a red squirrel, or a snake, was brought to me for treatment. No one told me how to care for them. I was so intimate with each different kind that when a member of any bird family was brought to me I tried to do for it what seemed to be the right thing for a bird of its species. I think that in doctoring them I copied very closely the methods of my mother in treating our hurts.

CHAPTER II - A GIFT OF THE BIRDS

THE following year, one morning in early spring, my father called me to him to ask whether I should like to have as a gift the most beautiful thing ever made by man. Of course I eagerly assured him that I should like it very much indeed. Then he told me that he had something for me even finer and more precious than anything man ever had made or ever could make: a gift straight from the hands of the Creator. He then proceeded formally to present me with the personal and indisputable ownership of each bird of every description that made its home on his land. Undoubtedly the completeness of this gift was influenced by his experience with the hawk. Before that time if he had been making such a gift I think he undoubtedly would have reserved the right to exterminate the hawks that preyed on the fields and poultry, the owls that infested the barns and chicken houses, and very probably, too, the woodpeckers, which seemed to take even more of the cherries than did the robins, orioles, or tanagers. That he made the gift complete, with no reservations, proved that he had learned to regard my regard for the laws of nature, which, even when very young, I seemed dimly to realize and stoutly to maintain; for the worst hawk or owl was quite as dear to me and fully as interesting as the most exquisitely colored and ecstatic singer. He must have realized that the gift would not be perfect to me if there were exemptions, so he gave me for my very own not only the birds of free, wild flight with flaming color and thrilling song, with nests of wonder, jewels of eggs, and queer little babies, but also the high flying, wide winged denizens of the big woods, which homed in hollow trees and on large branches, far removed

from any personal contact I might ever hope to have with them.

Such is the natural greed of human nature that even while he was talking to me I was making a flashing mental inventory of my property, for now I owned the hummingbirds, dressed in green satin with ruby jewels on their throats; the plucky little brown wren that sang by the hour to his mate from the top of the pump, even in a hard rain; the green warbler, nesting in a magnificent specimen of wild sweetbriar beside the back porch; and the song sparrow in the ground cedar beside the fence. The bluebirds, with their breasts of earth's brown and their backs of Heaven's deepest blue; the robin, the rain song of which my father loved more than the notes of any other bird, belonged to me. The flaming cardinal and his Quaker mate, keeping house on a flat limb within ten feet of our front door, were mine; and every bird of the black silk throng that lived in the top branches of four big evergreens in front of our home was mine. The oriole, spilling notes of molten sweetness, as it shot like a ray of detached sunshine to its nest in the chestnut tree across the road was mine; while down beside the north creek, on a top branch of a willow sheltering an immense bed of blue calamus, nested a blood-red tanager, with black velvet wings. Every person visiting our family was taken to see him. With what pride I contemplated my next personally conducted trip to that tree to show the bird of blood-red! Now I owned the pewees in their marvelous little nest under the pig-pen roof, the song sparrow and the indigo finches of the privet bush at the foot of the garden, the swifts of our living room chimney, the swallows on the barn rafters, and the martins under the eaves. When it came to the orchard with its fruit trees and its shrub-filled snake fence corners of bloom and berries, I could not even begin to enumerate the vireos and bluebirds, the catbirds, robins, jays, and thrushes. Mine, too, was the friendly, delicately colored cuckoo, slipping

through the shrub-filled fence corners and bushes of the woods pasture, with his never failing prediction of rain. I remember that in the first moment of tumultuous joy, one thought was to hope that a storm would come soon so that I might remark in careless, proprietary tones: "Hear my cuckoo calling for rain!"

In my enumeration, I included the queer little stilt-legged killdeer that had a nest on the creek bank of the meadow. I was on terms of such intimacy with her during the last few days of her brooding that she would take food from my fingers and even allow me to stroke her wing. There was another pair of hawks nesting in the big oak overhanging the brook a short distance farther in its course to the south; while I was as proud to possess the owls, from every little brown screecher in a hollow apple tree of the orchard to the great horned hooter of the big woods, as I was the finest song and game birds. In the greed of my small soul I saw myself ordering my brothers and sisters never again to take the eggs from any quail nest of the fence corners. I do not recall that I made a virtuous resolve at that minute not to take any more myself, but I do remember that the next time I found a nest of eggs it occurred to me that if I left them to hatch I should have that many more birds, so I never robbed another nest. In that hour I was almost dazed with the wonder and the marvel of my gift, and to-day, after a lifetime of experience among the birds, this gift seems even more wonderful than it did then.

That same day the search began for new treasures. No queen on her throne, I am sure, ever felt so rich or so proud as the little girl who owned every bird on her father's land. Ever since I could remember I had loved, to the best of my ability, protected, and doctored the birds, but I never before had realized that they were quite so wonderful. From that hour in which they became my personal property every bird of them took on new beauty of coloring, new grace in flight, and previously unnoted sweetness of song.

So with the natural acquisitiveness of human nature I began a systematic search to increase my possessions. I climbed every tree in the dooryard and looked over the branches carefully. Not a sweet scented shrub, a honeysuckle, a lilac, a syringe, a rose bush, or a savin escaped my exploring eyes. Then I proceeded to the garden, and one by one I searched the currant, gooseberry, blackberry, and raspberry bushes, the grape arbor, the vines clambering over the fence, and the trees and shrubs of its corners. Then I went over each vine-covered section of the fence enclosing the dooryard, hunting for nests set flat on the crosspieces. I almost tore the hair from my head, while I did tear my apron to pieces and scratched my face, hands, and feet to bleeding in my minute exploration of the big berry patch east of the dooryard, where the Lawton blackberries grew high above my head. Then I extended my search to every corner of the fence enclosing the orchard and took its dozens of trees one at a time, climbing those that I could and standing motionless under those that I could not, intently watching until I am sure that few, if any, nests were overlooked. After that I gave the buggy-shed, the corn cribs, the pigpens, and the barn a careful examination and then followed the lane fences to the woods pasture in one direction and to the woods in the other. Lastly, I went with my brothers to the fields, and while they cultivated the crops, I searched the enclosing snake fences, with their corner triangles of green, filled with bushes and trees. It is my firm conviction that at that time there were, at the most conservative estimate, fifteen birds to every one that can be located in an equally propitious place and the same amount of territory to-day. Before I had finished my inventory I had so many nests that it was manifestly impossible for me to visit all of them in a day; so I selected sixty of those, which were most conveniently located and belonged to the rarest and most beautiful birds, giving

them undivided attention and contenting myself with being able to point out, describe, and boast about the remainder.

As always ownership brought its cares. At once an unusual sense of watchfulness developed. No landholder was ever more eager to add to his acres than I was to increase my flock of birds. My first act was to beg my mother for an old teaspoon that I might have to keep. A green warbler in the gooseberry bushes, when stepping into her nest, had pierced the shell of an egg with the sharp nail of one of her toes. If the broken egg began to leak, it would stick to and soil the others and the nest. I was afraid to put my fingers into the small hair-lined cup, so I secured the spoon for this purpose and afterward always carried it in my apron pocket.

Life became one round of battles with cats, snakes, and red squirrels, while crows and jays were not to be trusted near the nests and the young of other birds. It was a long, tedious task to make friends with the builders of each of the chosen nests, for I was forced to approach very slowly and with extreme caution, imitating the call note of the bird the best I could; and when I had gone so near a nest that the brooding mother began to plaster her feathers flat to her body, to draw up her wings, the light of fear began to shine in her beady eyes, and she started to rise to her feet, it was time for me to pause until she regained her confidence and again settled to brooding. Almost always at this point a few more steps could be taken. I usually contented myself with leaving a little of the food that the bird being approached liked best to eat. On going back the following day, it would be possible to advance with confidence as far as I had gone the day before; from there on I would be forced again to work my way slowly and cautiously toward the nest. In this manner gradually the confidence of the mothers could be won so completely that it was permissible to touch them while they brooded. Some of the friendliest would look at me steadily for a long time

and then, with a dart so quick that I had to watch myself lest I shrink back and frighten them, they would snatch the worm or berry held before them.

At that time I sincerely thought that it was my work to help those birds feed their young. Half of my breakfast slipped into my apron pockets, while I worked like the proverbial beaver searching the bushes for bugs, hunting worms on the cabbages in the garden, digging them from the earth, and gathering berries and soft fruits. I carried with me grain from the bins in the barns, pounded fine with the hammer and soaked until it was soft for the young of the grain and seed eaters. Few mothers were so careful about the food they fed their children. I gave those nestlings only one bite at a time, and never a morsel of anything until I had watched what it was that the old birds were giving them. Before the nesting season was over they allowed me to take the most wonderful liberties with them. Warblers, Phoebes, sparrows, and finches swarmed all over me, perching indiscriminately on my head, shoulders, and hands, while I stood beside their nests, feeding their young.

When it was decided that I had reached a suitable age to attend a city school, I stoutly rebelled, capitulating only when Father said the most precious of my birds might go with me. These, of course, were unfortunates that had fallen from their nests in high trees, where I could not replace them, those orphaned by an accident or some prowling creature, while sometimes a nest of young birds was brought me by a neighbour who thought he was doing me a kindness; so I left the country in company with nine birds, none smaller than a grosbeak, that had been raised by hand. I had to arrange my school day so that there was a morning hour in which to clean the cages, change sand, scrape perches, scour bath-tubs, and cook food.

My especial favorite among my pets was a brown thrasher named Peter, because he had constantly called: "Pe-ter, Pe-ter" in the distressful days when he was missing

his mother and growing accustomed to my longer intervals between feedings. One of my brothers had found him helpless and dying beside a country road and had picked him up and put him in his pocket for me. When he was given into my care, he was half-starved. After a few minutes, he opened his bill for food, and in a short time spent in getting acquainted we became the greatest friends. He grew to be a strong, fine, male bird, and in the spring of his second year developed a remarkably sweet voice, with which he imitated the song of every bird that could be heard around our house. He also made excursions into improvisations, which I could not recognize as familiar bird notes. One warm night of summer my father suggested that Peter would be more comfortable if left on the veranda. That was a mistake. Either a screech owl or a rat attacked him in the night and broke the tip of one wing. In the morning Peter hopped from his open door and showed me his wing. We did all we could to comfort each other. I doctored him as in childhood I had doctored the hawk. I never shall forget the fortitude with which he bore the amputation, not struggling nor making the slightest effort to get away from me, although he cried pitifully. The wing soon healed, but Peter had lost his equilibrium. He never again could fly. Always before, he had had the freedom of the premises. Now he was forced to ride on my shoulder when I went out into the yard, or to hop after me. There was one particular apple tree of our dooryard in which there was a perch where I could learn a lesson much more easily than in school. While I studied, Peter hopped from branch to branch through the tree. One day under pressure of an especially difficult Latin translation I forgot to take Peter with me to the apple tree. A maid in the house saw that he was fretting to be with me, so she put him outside the door. I heard his call, realized he was coming, and climbed down as speedily as possible, but before I could reach him a prowling cat darted from under a shed and