

if you see any difference between it and his former poems. Has he suddenly turned fool, or has he always been one? The latter, to my way of thinking." Writing from England, he says, "People here are so different from us that it is hard to understand how, at ten hours' distance, unfeathered bipeds can resemble Parisian ones so little. Mr. Gladstone I did not find entertaining, but interesting. There is in him the child, the statesman, and the enthusiast." In 1865 he writes from Paris, "Another person, M. de Bismarck, pleased me very much. He is a big German, very courteous, and not *naiif*. He has an air of being entirely without *gemüth*, but full of brains. He has made a conquest of me." The later letters are full of discontent with the course of political affairs, and, since things do not go as to his mind they should, Mérimée expresses unmeasured contempt for the stupidity of mankind. The last letter, dated from Cannes, September 23, 1870, was written two hours before his death, which he knew was impending, though ignorant of how suddenly it was to come. He begs his friend to take from among his books *Madame de Sévigné's Letters* and a *Shakespeare* as a memento of him. "Dear friend, I am very ill; so ill that it is a hard matter to write. Yet I am a trifle better. I hope soon to write to you more at length. Adieu. Je vous embrasse."

Taine sums up his account of Mérimée's career in the words, "For fear of being duped, he was distrustful of life, of love, in science, in art, and he was the dupe of his distrust." That is an extremely pointed and expressive phrasing of the truth. The biographer ends, however, with the saying, "We are always the dupes of something, and perhaps it is best to resign ourselves in the beginning." That, too, is cleverly put, but we object to it that it is not true. We almost suspect Taine of adding it as much by way of a rounded period to his sketch as from sincere conviction. It is so much the vogue among clever Frenchmen to dispense with a superfluity of convictions that we are sometimes tempted to judge hastily that they have none at all.

It often happens that the moral of the lives of estimable, and even in some respects admirable, men is as well worth finding as the more patent one of lives openly vicious, which has become a commonplace to our ears. We judge of Mérimée from the record of his own hand, bearing in mind at the same time that it is but a partial record. Taking him as he appears in the *Letters to an Unknown*, it is difficult not to regard him as *une vie manquée*; it seems to us that he was miscalled Prosper, if the name were taken as significant of a success very well worth having, or one that satisfied himself.

Maria Louise Henry.

CHARACTER IN FEATHERS.

In this economically governed world the same thing serves many uses. Who will take upon himself to enumerate the offices of sunlight, or water, or indeed of any object whatever? Because we know that a thing is good for this or that, it by no means follows that we have dis-

covered what it was made for. What we have found out is perhaps only something by the way; as if a man should think the sun were created for his own private convenience. In some moods it seems doubtful whether we are yet acquainted with the real value of anything.

But, be that as it may, we need not scruple to admire so much as our ignorance permits us to see of the workings of this divine frugality. The piece of woodland, for instance, which skirts the village,—how various are its ministries to the inhabitants, each of whom, without forethought, takes the benefit which is proper to himself! The poet saunters there as in a true Holy Land, to have his heart cooled and stilled. Mr. A. and Mr. B., who hold the deeds of the “property,” walk through it to look at the timber, with an eye to dollars and cents. The botanist has his errand there, the zoölogist his, and the child his. Oftenest of all, perhaps (for barbarism dies hard, and even yet the ministers of Christ find it a capital sport to murder small fishes),—oftenest of all comes the man, poor soul, who thinks of the forest as of a place to which he may go when he wishes to amuse himself by killing something. Meanwhile, the rabbits and the squirrels, the hawks and the owls, look upon all such persons as no better than intruders (do not the woods belong to those who live in them?); while nobody remembers the meteorologist, who nevertheless smiles in his sleeve at all these one-sided notions, and says to himself that he knows the truth of the matter.

So is it with everything; and with all the rest, so is it with the birds. The interest they excite is of all grades, from that which looks upon them as items of millinery, up to that of the makers of ornithological systems, who ransack the world for specimens, and who have no doubt that the chief end of a bird is to be named and catalogued,—the more synonyms the better. Somewhere between these two extremes comes the person whose interest in birds is friendly rather than scientific; who has little taste for shooting, and an aversion from dissecting; who delights in the living creatures themselves, and counts a bird in the bush worth two in the hand.

Such a person, if he is intelligent, makes good use of the best works on ornithology; he would not know how to get along without them; but he studies most the birds themselves, and after a while he begins to associate them on a plan of his own. Not that he distrusts the correctness of the received classification, or ceases to find it of daily service; but though it were as true as the multiplication table, it is based (and rightly, no doubt) on anatomical structure alone; it treats birds as bodies, and nothing else: while to the person of whom we are speaking birds are, first of all, souls; his interest in them is, as we say, personal; and we are none of us in the habit of grouping our friends according to height, or complexion, or any other physical peculiarity.

But it is not proposed in this paper to attempt a new classification of any sort. I am by no means qualified to make even a beginning in that direction. All I am to do now is to set down a few studies in such a method as I have indicated; in short, a few studies in the temperaments of birds.

Let our first example be the common black-capped titmouse, or chickadee. He is, *par excellence*, the bird of the merry heart. There is a notion current, to be sure, that all birds are merry; but that is one of those second-hand opinions which a man who begins to observe for himself soon finds it necessary to give up. With many birds life is a hard struggle. Enemies are numerous, and the food supply is too often scanty. Of some species it is probable that very few die in their beds. But the chickadee seems to be exempt from all forebodings. His coat is thick, his heart is brave, and, whatever may happen, something will be found to eat. “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” is his creed, which he accepts, not “for substance of doctrine,” but literally. No matter how bitter the wind or how deep the snow, you will never find the chicka-

dee, as we say, under the weather. It is this perennial good humor, I suppose, which makes other birds so fond of his companionship; and their example might well be heeded by persons who suffer from moods of depression. Such unfortunates could hardly do better than to court the society of the joyous tit. His whistle and chirps, his graceful feats of climbing and hanging, and withal his engaging familiarity (for, of course, such good-nature as his could not consist with suspiciousness) would most likely send them home in a more Christian frame. The time will come, we may hope, when doctors will prescribe bird-gazing instead of blue-pill. To illustrate the chickadee's trustfulness, I may mention that a friend of mine captured one in a butterfly-net, and, carrying him into the house, let him loose in the sitting-room. The little stranger was at home immediately, and seeing the window full of plants, proceeded to go over them carefully, picking off the lice with which such window-gardens are always more or less infested. A little later he was taken into my friend's lap, and soon he climbed up to his shoulder; and after hopping about for a few minutes on his coat-collar, he selected a comfortable roosting-place, tucked his head under his wing, and went to sleep, and slept on undisturbed while carried from one room to another. Probably the chickadee's nature is not of the deepest. I have never seen him when his joy rose to ecstasy. Still his feelings are not shallow, and the faithfulness of the pair to each other and to their offspring is of the highest order. The female has sometimes to be taken off the nest, and even to be held in the hand, before the eggs can be examined.

Our American goldfinch is one of the loveliest of birds. With his elegant plumage, his rhythmical, undulatory flight, his beautiful song, and his more beautiful soul, he ought to be one of the most famous; but he has never yet had half

his deserts. He is like the chickadee, and yet different. He is not so extremely confiding, nor should I call him merry. But he is always cheerful in spite of his so-called plaintive note, from which he gets one of his names, and always amiable. So far as I know, he never utters a harsh sound; even the young ones, calling for food, use only smooth, musical tones. During the pairing season his delight often becomes rapturous. To see him then, hovering and singing, — or, better still, to see the devoted pair hovering together, billing and singing, — is enough to do even a cynic good. The happy lovers! They have never read it in a book, but it is written on their hearts, —

“The gentle law, that each should be
The other's heaven and harmony.”

The goldfinch has the advantage of the titmouse in several respects, but lacks that sprightliness, that exceeding light-heartedness, which is the chickadee's most endearing characteristic.

For the sake of a strong contrast, we may mention next the brown thrush, known to farmers as the planting-bird and to ornithologists as *Harporhynchus rufus*; a staid and solemn Puritan, whose creed is the Preacher's “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” No frivolity and merry-making for him! After his brief annual period of intensely passionate song, he does penance for the remainder of the year, — skulking about, on the ground or near it, silent and gloomy. He seems always to be on the watch against an enemy, and, unfortunately for his comfort, he has nothing of the reckless, bandit spirit such as the jay possesses, which goes to make a moderate degree of danger almost a pastime. Not that he is without courage; when his nest is in question he will take great risks; but in general his manner is dispirited, “sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.” Evidently he feels

“The heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world:”

and it would not be surprising if he sometimes raised the question, "Is life worth living?" It is the worst feature of his case that his melancholy is not of the sort which softens and refines the nature. There is no suggestion of saintliness about it. In fact I am convinced that this long-tailed thrush has a constitutional taint of vulgarity. His stealthy, underhand manner is one mark of this, and the same thing comes out also in his music. Full of passion as his singing is (and we have hardly anything to compare with it in this regard), yet the listener cannot help smiling now and then; the very finest passage is followed so suddenly by some uncouth guttural note, or by some whimsical drop from the top to the bottom of the scale.

In neighborly association with the brown thrush is the towhee bunting, or chewink. The two choose the same places for their summer homes, and, unless I am deceived, they often migrate in company. But though they are so much together, and in many of their ways much alike, their habits of mind are very dissimilar. The towhee is of a peculiarly even disposition. I have never heard him scold, or use any note less good-natured and musical than his pleasant *cherawink*.¹ I have never detected him in a quarrel such as nearly all birds are once in a while guilty of, Dr. Watts to the contrary notwithstanding; nor have I ever seen him hopping nervously about and twitching his tail, as is the manner of most birds, when, for instance, their nests are approached. Nothing seems to annoy him. At the same time, he is not full of continual merriment like the chickadee, nor occasionally in a rapture like the goldfinch. Life with him is pitched in a low key; comfortable rather than cheerful, and never jubilant. And yet, for all the towhee's careless demeanor, you soon

begin to suspect him of being deep. He appears not to mind you; he keeps on scratching among the dry leaves as though he had no thought of being driven away by your presence; but in a minute or two you look that way again, and he is not there. If you pass near his nest, he makes not a tenth part of the ado which a brown thrush would make in the same circumstances, but you will find half a dozen nests of the thrush sooner than one of his. With all his simplicity and frankness, which puts him in happy contrast with the thrush, he knows as well as anybody how to keep his own counsel. I have seen him with his mate for two or three days together about the flower-beds in the Boston Public Garden, and so far as appeared they were feeding as unconcernedly as though they had been on their own native heath, amid the scrub-oaks and huckleberry bushes; but after their departure it was remembered that they had not once been heard to utter a sound. If self-possession be four fifths of good manners, our red-eyed *Pipilo* may certainly pass for a gentleman.

We have now named four birds, the chickadee, the goldfinch, the brown thrush, and the towhee, — birds so diverse in plumage that no eye could fail to discriminate them at a glance. But the four differ no more truly in bodily shape and dress than they do in that inscrutable something which we call temperament, disposition. If the soul of each were separated from the body and made to stand out in sight, those of us who have really known the birds in the flesh would have no difficulty in saying, This is the titmouse, and this the towhee. It would be with them as we hope it will be with our friends in the next world, whom we shall recognize there because we knew them here; that is, we knew *them*, and not merely the bodies they lived

¹ The goldfinch is the only other bird of whom I could say so much. A year ago I should have put the bluebird into the same category, but since

then I have heard from him a note which expressed displeasure, or at least anxiety.

in. This kind of familiarity with birds has no necessary connection with ornithology. Personal intimacy and a knowledge of anatomy are still two different things. As we have all heard, this is an age of science; but, thank fortune, matters have not yet gone so far that a man must take a course in anthropology before he can love his neighbor.

It is a truth which is only too patent that taste and conscience are sometimes at odds. One man wears his faults so gracefully that we can hardly help falling in love with them, while another, alas, makes even virtue itself repulsive. I am moved to this commonplace reflection by thinking of the bluejay, a bird of doubtful character, but one for whom, nevertheless, it is impossible not to feel a sort of affection and even of respect. He is quite as suspicious as the brown thrush, and his instinct for an invisible perch is perhaps as unerring as the cuckoo's; and yet, even when he takes to hiding, his manner is not without a dash of boldness. He has a most irascible temper, also, but, unlike the thrasher, he does not allow his ill-humor to degenerate into chronic sulkiness. Instead, he flies into a furious passion, and is done with it. Some say that on such occasions he swears, and I have myself seen him when it was plain that nothing except a natural impossibility kept him from tearing his hair. His larynx would make him a singer, and his mental capacity is far above the average; but he has perverted his gifts, till his music is nothing but noise and his talent nothing but smartness. A like process of depuration the world has before now witnessed in political life, when a man of brilliant natural endowments has yielded to low ambitions and stooped to unworthy means, till what was meant to be a statesman turns out to be a demagogue. But perhaps we wrong our handsome friend, fallen angel though he be, to speak thus of him. Most likely he would resent the comparison, and I

do not press it. We must admit that juvenile sportsmen have persecuted him unduly; and when a creature cannot show himself without being shot at, he may be pardoned for a little misanthropy. Christians as we are, how many of us could stand such a test? In these circumstances, it is a point in the jay's favor that he still has, what is rare with birds, a sense of humor, albeit it is humor of a rather grim sort, — the sort which expends itself in practical jokes and uncivil epithets. He has discovered the school-boy's secret: that for the expression of unadulterated derision there is nothing like the short sound of *a*, prolonged into a drawl. *Yäh, yäh*, he cries; and sometimes, as you enter the woods, you may hear him shouting so as to be heard for half a mile, "Here comes a fool with a gun; look out for him!"

It is natural to mention the shrike in connection with the jay, but the two have points of unlikeness as well as of resemblance. The shrike is a taciturn bird. If he were a politician, he would rely mostly on what is known as the "still hunt," although he too can scream loudly enough on occasion. His most salient trait is his impudence, but even that is of a negative type. "Who are you," he says, "that I should be at the trouble to insult you?" He has made a study of the value of silence as an indication of contempt, and is almost human in his ability to stare straight by a person whose presence it suits him to ignore. His imperturbability is wonderful. Watch him as closely as you please, you will never discover what he is thinking about. Undertake, for instance, now that the fellow is singing from the top of a small tree only a few rods from where you are standing, — undertake to settle the long dispute whether his notes are designed to decoy small birds within his reach. Those whistles and twitters, — hear them! So miscellaneous! so different from anything which would be expected from a bird of his size and

general disposition! so very like the notes of sparrows! They must be imitative. You begin to feel quite sure of it. But just at this point the sounds cease, and you look up to discover that *Collurio* has fallen to preening his feathers in the most listless manner imaginable. "Look at me," he says; "do I act like one on the watch for his prey? Indeed, sir, I wish the innocent sparrows no harm; and besides, if you must know it, I ate an excellent game-breakfast two hours ago, while laggards like you were still abed." In the winter, which is the only season when I have been able to observe him, the shrike is to the last degree unsocial, and I have known him to stay for a month in one spot all by himself, spending a good part of every day perched upon a telegraph wire. He ought not to be very happy, with such a disposition, one would think; but he seems to be well contented, and sometimes his spirits are fairly exuberant. Perhaps, as the saying is, he enjoys *himself*, in which case he certainly has the advantage of most of us, — unless, indeed, we are easily pleased. At any rate, he is philosopher enough to appreciate the value of having few wants; and I am not sure but that he anticipated the vaunted discovery of Teufelsdröckh, that the fraction of life may be increased by lessening the denominator. But even the stoical shrike is not without his epicurean weakness. When he has killed a sparrow, he eats the brains first; after that, if he is still hungry, he devours the coarser and less savory parts. In this, however, he only shares the well-nigh universal inconsistency. There are never many thorough-going stoics in the world. Epictetus declared with an oath that he should be glad to see *one*. To take everything as equally good, to know no difference between bitter and sweet, penury and plenty, slander and praise, — this is a great attainment, a Nirvana to which few can hope to arrive. Some wise man

has said (and the remark has more meaning than may at once appear) that dying is usually one of the last things which men do in this world.

Against the foil of the butcher-bird's stolidity we may set the inquisitive, garrulous temperament of the white-eyed vireo and the yellow-breasted chat. The vireo is hardly larger than the goldfinch, but let him be in one of his conversational moods, and he will fill a smilax thicket with noise enough for two or three cat-birds. Meanwhile he keeps his eye upon you, and seems to be inviting your attention to his loquacious abilities. The chat is perhaps even more voluble. *Staccato* whistles and snarls follow each other at most extraordinary intervals of pitch, and the attempt at showing off is sometimes unmistakable. Occasionally he takes to the air, and flies from one tree to another; teetering his body and jerking his tail in an indescribable fashion, and chattering all the while. His "inner consciousness" at such a moment would be worth perusing. Possibly he has some feeling for the grotesque. But I suspect not; probably what we laugh at as the antics of a clown is all sober earnest to him.

At best, it is very little we can know about what is passing in a bird's mind. We label him with two or three *sesquipedalia verba*, give his territorial range, describe his notes and his habits of nidification, and think we have rendered an account of the bird. But how should we like to be inventoried in such a style? "His name was John Smith; he lived in Boston, in a three-story brick house; he had a baritone voice, but was not a good singer." All true enough; but do you call that a man's biography?

The four birds last spoken of are all wanting in refinement. The jay and the shrike are wild and rough, not to say barbarous, while the white-eyed vireo and the chat have the character which commonly goes by the name of oddity. All four are interesting for their strong

individuality and their picturesqueness, but it is a pleasure to turn from them to creatures like our four common New England *Hylocichla*, or small thrushes. These are the real patricians. With their modest but rich dress, and their dignified, quiet demeanor, they stand for the true aristocratic spirit. Like all genuine aristocrats, they carry with them an air of distinction, of which no one who approaches them can long remain unconscious. When you go into their haunts they do not seem so much frightened as offended. "Why do you intrude?" they seem to say; "these are our woods;" and they bow you out with all ceremony. Their songs are in keeping with this character; leisurely, unambitious, and brief, but in beauty of voice and in high musical quality, excelling all other music of the woods. However, I would not exaggerate, and I have not found even these thrushes perfect. The hermit, who is my favorite of the four, has a habit of slowly raising and depressing his tail when his mind is disturbed — a trick of which it is likely he is unconscious, but which, to say the least, is not a mark of good breeding; and the Wilson, while every note of his song breathes of spirituality, has nevertheless a most vulgar alarm call, a petulant, nasal *yeork*. I do not know anything so grave against the wood thrush or the Swainson; although when I have fooled the former with decoy whistles, I have found him more inquisitive than seemed altogether becoming to a bird of his quality. But character without flaw can hardly be insisted on by sons of Adam, and, after all deductions are made, the claim of the *Hylocichla* to noble blood can never be seriously disputed. I have spoken of the four together, but each is clearly distinguished from all the others; and this, I believe, is as true of mental traits as it is of details of plumage and song. No doubt, in general, they are much alike; we may say that they have the same qualities;

but a close acquaintance will reveal that the qualities have been mixed in different proportions, so that the total result in each case is a personality strictly unique.

And what is true of the *Hylocichla* is true of every bird that flies. Anatomy and dress and even voice aside, who does not feel the dissimilarity between the cat-bird and the robin, and still more the difference, amounting to contrast, between the cat-bird and the bluebird? Distinctions of color and form are what first strike the eye, but on better acquaintance these are felt to be superficial and comparatively unimportant; the difference is not one of outside appearance. It is his gentle, high-bred manner and not his azure coat, which makes the bluebird; and the cat-bird would be a cat-bird in no matter what garb, so long as he retained his obtrusive self-consciousness and his prying, busy-body spirit; all of which, being interpreted, comes, it may be, to no more than this, "Fine feathers don't make fine birds."

Even in families containing many closely allied species, I believe that every species has its own proper character, which sufficient intercourse would enable us to make a due report of. Nobody ever saw a song-sparrow manifesting the spirit of a chipper, and I trust it will not be in my day that any of our American sparrows are found emulating the virtues of their obstreperous immigrant cousin. Of course it is true of birds, as of men, that some have much more individuality than others. But know any bird or any man well enough, and he will prove to be himself, and nobody else. To know all the birds well enough to see how, in bodily structure and mental characteristics, every one is different from every other is the long and delightful task which is set before the ornithologist.

But this is not all. The ornithology of the future must be ready to give an answer to the further question how these divergences of anatomy and tem-

perament originated. How came the chickadee by his endless fund of happy spirits? Whence did the towhee derive his equanimity, and the brown thrush his saturnine temper? The waxwing and the vireo have the same vocal organs; why should the first do nothing but whisper, while the second is so loud and voluble? Why is one bird belligerent and another peaceable; one barbarous and another civilized; one grave and another gay? Who can tell? We can make here and there a plausible conjecture. We know that the behavior of the bluejay varies greatly in different parts of the country, owing to the different treatment which he receives.

We judge that the chickadee, from the peculiarity of his feeding habits, is more certain than most birds are of finding a meal when he is hungry; and that, we are assured from experience, goes a long way towards making one contented. We think it likely that the brown thrush is at some special disadvantage in this respect, or has some peculiar enemies warring upon him; in which case it is no more than we might expect that he should be a pessimist. And, with all our ignorance, we are yet sure that everything has a cause, and we would fain hold by the brave word of Emerson, "Undoubtedly we have no questions to ask which are unanswerable."

Bradford Torrey.

LILY OF STRATH-FARRAR.

My lady comes of knightly race;
Her forbears oft on many a field,
Ere arms to merchandise gave place,
With life's best drops their honour sealed.
She beareth lilies on her shield;
The flower-de-luce is her device;
And on the roll of her degree
Crosses are blazoned twice and thrice.

Some served their king on foreign strands;
One yeoman fell to make us free;
One, at his country's high commands,
Helped build the country that you see:
What wonder that his child to me
Seems of that life a precious part,
Or that I render her in rhyme
The constant service of my heart?

I know mine age forbids to me
More than a distant lover's doom;
To worship still and dream that she
Some day may wander to my tomb
And haply hang a clover-bloom
Upon my marble cross, in sign
That she remembers me with love,
Though always cold and never mine.

Thomas William Parsons.