

"The best thing you can do is to take every opportunity of going into society. When you are among strangers be your own honest self and act naturally. Be sure that if you are not loved for what you are, you never will be for what you pretend to be. Think of others, too, and not of yourself; never mind what people will say of you, and whether they will understand what a superior person you are. Make yourself agreeable to them, try to interest your neighbour, and do what you can to make the time pass pleasantly, and you will get on ever so much better than you would do otherwise, and make friends too."

"But supposing people are disagreeable?" asked Maud.

"My dear Maud, take my word for it, the people who are really and truly disagreeable are very few and far between. Out of every ten persons who are said to be haughty and scornful, nine are only shy or sensitive as it is called. Go half-way to meet strangers, and they will come the other half to meet you. Be friendly and they will respond. But stand on your dignity, and they will stand on theirs, and neither of you will know what a very pleasant individual the other is."

"And if they really are unpleasant, auntie?"

"Don't be ready to fancy them so, first of all. If they will not be friendly whatever you do, give them up, they are not worth troubling about. Friends must be of the right sort or they are worse than none. I would have you pleasant to all in the hope of making friends, most careful in the choice of a friend, but most patient and forbearing when once a friend is chosen. Do you remember those lines in *Hamlet*?—

'The friends thou hast, and their adoption tried,
Grapple them to thy soul with hooks of steel.'

That seems to me to express the sum of wisdom with regard to friendship."

"For my part, I must say that I expect to find the people who are worth knowing will be difficult to know," said Dorothea; "I never care for girls whom I know all about in two minutes."

"Generally it is so," said I; "all the more reason why you should not put foolish obstacles in the way. But we must not forget that there is another point to be considered—making friends is one thing, keeping them is another."

"I knew you would come to my case," said Blanche; "you mean we are not to quarrel with them."

"Quarrel! that is a strong word. We must avoid all occasion for dispute, we must be considerate,

thoughtful, constant, tender, and true. We must not be exacting, but we must give freely. And, more than all, we must try to make our friendship a help to something higher. If I were a girl and had a friend, what do you think I would try to do?"

"Tell us, auntie."

"I would resolve to talk with my friend as seldom as possible about persons—mutual acquaintance I mean."

"Oh, what a dull time you would have!" said Blanche.

"I do not think so. At any rate, our conversation would not consist of gossip or degenerate into scandal. I dare say we should be silent sometimes, but that would not matter. I remember hearing some one say that to sit with a person an hour or two without speaking was a sign of friendship. Oh! the number of girl friendships which have been broken up through tittle-tattle, somebody saying to somebody else that somebody had said so-and-so."

"What would you talk of then?" said Blanche.

"Of books, which may be regarded as the best of friends; or work. But there is no fear that you would want subjects of conversation with a friend whom you loved. Even if you did, silence is to be preferred to chatter, and it is more likely to cement real friendship."

"Are we not talking too seriously of our friends?" said Dorothea; "we shall only know them for a little time. In a few years we shall lose sight of them, and very likely never see them any more."

"Ah! my dears, when you have lived as long as I have, you will know that friends go away and seem to be lost, but their influence remains. And they, if they live, are constantly turning up at unexpected corners and being found again. When in after-life we come upon the friends we made when we were young, we have a far more tender feeling for them than for the friends of yesterday."

"I can easily believe that," said Dorothea.

"So can I," said Maud, "and if I were you, Blanche, I would try to keep my friends, and not quarrel with them as you have done."

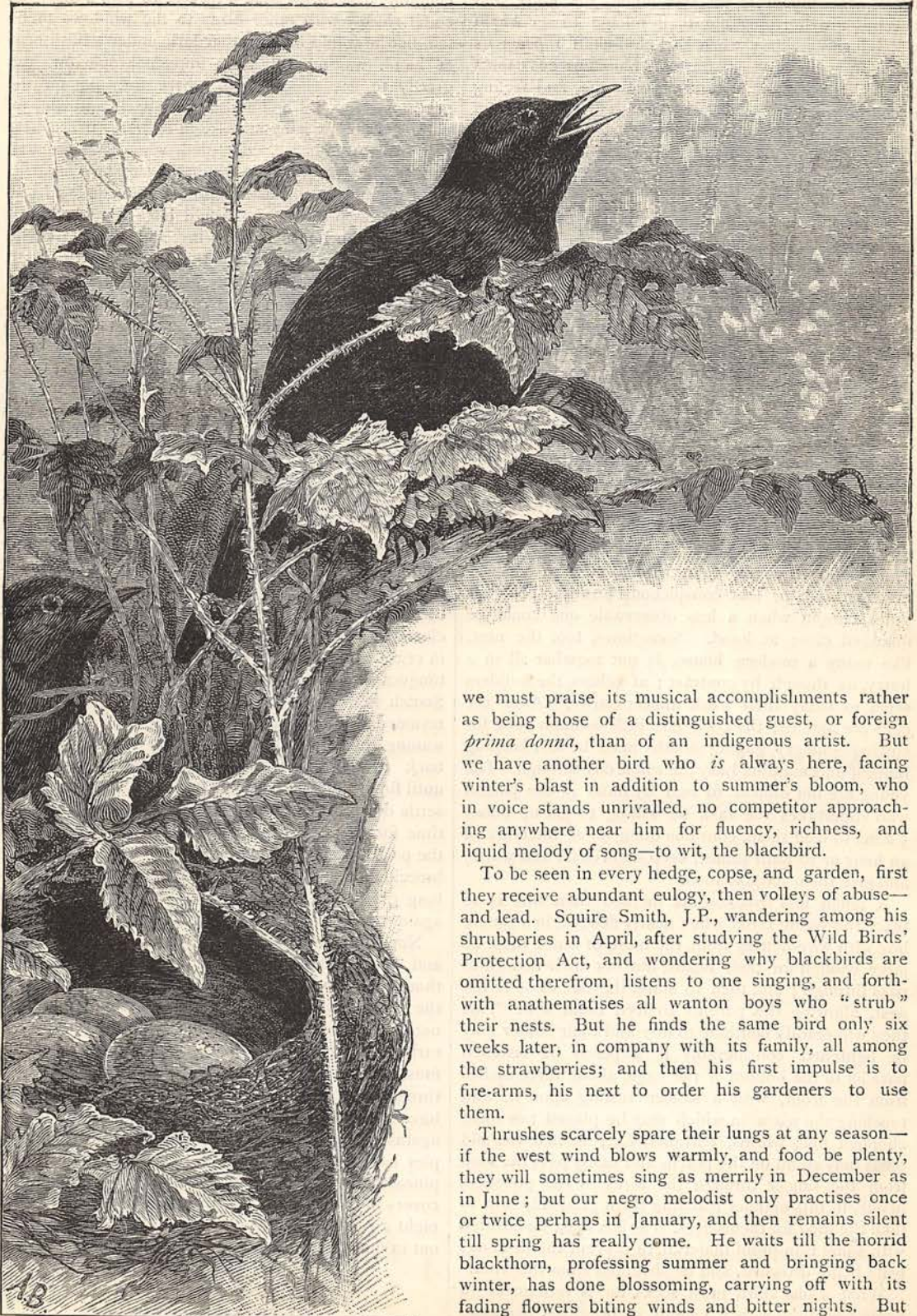
"I have no doubt Blanche will try," said I. "And all of you remember what Young says in his 'Night Thoughts'—

'Hope not to find
A friend, but one who's found a friend in thee.
All like the purchase, few the price will pay,
And this makes friends such miracles below.'

A NEGRO MELODIST.

IT has often been remarked that in the bird-world the rule is for the males to have the brilliant plumage, and for the ladies to be the dowdy ones—a rule which would entail a revolution in fashions startling and ludicrous, if it were to be introduced for variety among our own kind: also, that gaily-dressed birds have the least

pleasing song—the screaming jay bearing an unfavourable comparison with the thrush, and the modestly-attired nightingale having furnished, in all ages, a brilliant example of virtue unadorned. The nightingale, however, only remains in England while the London season lasts, leaving us again before the British climate has become objectionable; so that



we must praise its musical accomplishments rather as being those of a distinguished guest, or foreign *prima donna*, than of an indigenous artist. But we have another bird who *is* always here, facing winter's blast in addition to summer's bloom, who in voice stands unrivalled, no competitor approaching anywhere near him for fluency, richness, and liquid melody of song—to wit, the blackbird.

To be seen in every hedge, copse, and garden, first they receive abundant eulogy, then volleys of abuse—and lead. Squire Smith, J.P., wandering among his shrubberies in April, after studying the Wild Birds' Protection Act, and wondering why blackbirds are omitted therefrom, listens to one singing, and forthwith anathematizes all wanton boys who "strub" their nests. But he finds the same bird only six weeks later, in company with its family, all among the strawberries; and then his first impulse is to fire-arms, his next to order his gardeners to use them.

Thrushes scarcely spare their lungs at any season—if the west wind blows warmly, and food be plenty, they will sometimes sing as merrily in December as in June; but our negro melodist only practises once or twice perhaps in January, and then remains silent till spring has really come. He waits till the horrid blackthorn, professing summer and bringing back winter, has done blossoming, carrying off with its fading flowers biting winds and bitter nights. But

one month later, when chestnut-buds have burst their bonds, the bloom is on the apple, the elms and beeches are hurrying out their foliage to see which will be green first; when the chiff-chaff repeats its name in willows whose fragrant blossoms coax forth the bees; when all is teeming with life, and feeling encouragement from the warm breath of the fairest of the year's months—*then* it is our friends, the blackbirds, gladden every dell and corner of the country with their music.

Take a look at one of them in the copse on a fine April morning, as he sits on the bough of the silver birch, the "lady of the forest," already sprinkled with a shower of delicate leafage. First he pipes a few notes, to see if his voice has lost compass since last season; then, satisfied upon this point, away he goes to the field where the lambs are romping, hopping and running along till, spying what he is looking for, he gives a jump and a pull, and out comes a great long worm, extracted only to disappear down his throat. Again, with startled cry, back he hurries to the bramble-thicket, to be sure Mrs. B. is carrying on her incubatory arrangements satisfactorily—then up to the big oak scarcely yet tempted to verdure, there to begin his song afresh.

As often as not these birds, like their cousins the thrushes, appear to fix on a spot for their nest rather as a "happy thought" than with a view to concealment, a more or less conspicuous position being at times chosen when a less observable one could be obtained close at hand. Sometimes, too, the nest, like many a modern house, is put together all in a hurry, as though by contract; at others, the builders seem to delay their work unnecessarily. After the eggs are hatched the cock has little enough time for singing—hungry, gaping mouths must be fed, keeping himself and mamma busy the whole day through. The young are not difficult to rear by hand *if* the person who undertakes the task be willing to get up about 5 a.m. to feed them, continue doing so at intervals of an hour or so until sunset, keep them clean and warm, and give them suitable food.

A much less troublesome method than this is to place the young birds, when nearly fledged, in a square box with wire-netting front, the mesh of which must be large enough for their heads, but not their bodies, to pass through; and then to stand the box close to the nest, allowing the parents to feed them still. This they will readily continue to do; and their labour may be lightened considerably if a perch be fastened parallel to the bottom of the cage, about three inches from the front, with a saucer resting upon it, and touching the wires, in which may be placed raw meat chopped fine, worms, currants, &c.; so that the old birds may stand on the perch, and easily pass the food from the saucer through the wires to the prisoners inside, in this manner teaching them gradually how to take the food for themselves. The box must be covered with some rain-proof material, to prevent the nestlings from being drowned, and be sheltered from the wind.

What a blackbird most seeks for is retirement—a neglected ditch with a canopy of brambles overhead

being a safe place in which to find him. Of less confiding disposition than a thrush, he will, if starving, come readily with other birds to the windows to be fed, but he would much rather lurk under a bush near at hand, waiting till some impudent sparrow, too greedy to eat the crumbs where they lie on the gravel, seizes a bit half as large as itself and flies off with it, dropping it by mistake in its hurry near where the dusky watcher is concealed, who darts out and appropriates the welcome windfall to his own use.

"In summer, remember winter,"* says the local proverb. Conversely, if we would have the blackbirds nest near the house next spring, and charm us with their songs, we must study their wants in the short days, throwing rotten apples, few at a time but often, in under the evergreen shrubs all through the winter; and place here and there near the apples a nice sharp stone of quartz or flint, so that the birds may bring their snails there, and break the shells against them. Our labour will probably not be in vain.

In spring they are all full of song, but at other seasons birds in general do not seem to talk much, beyond a passing remark now and then, except towards roosting-time, when they have a deal to say to each other. When the shadows are growing long of an afternoon in winter, and the cattle wend their way back from field to milking—when the geese in straggling procession waddle home from the pond on the common, and the fowls disappear from the farm-yard—first come the starlings in their hundreds, assembling in black clusters on the tallest elms, stuttering and whistling in ceaseless clatter, till in a moment the confusion of tongues is hushed, and all unanimously fly off to the Scotch firs or other rendezvous, where the chatter is resumed. Then, hardly satisfied that daylight is waning, off they start again, whiz round the trees, back to the same spot, whiz round once more, until finally, after a tussle or two for best perches, they settle down in silence till the moon is high, and it is time for them to begin whistling again. Meantime, the partridges, separated during the day by murderous breechloaders, have been calling one another in the long grass on the downs, gradually getting together again to talk things over and reckon up their slain.

Now it is, too, the blackbirds, at all times tetchy and quarrelsome, keep uttering their "tit-tit-tit," as though for friendly conference, then fly noiselessly to the thick laurels, deluding the drowsy finches into the notion that they mean to go quietly to bed with no disturbance. Not so. Before *they* retire, many a grievance must be settled, many a noisy chase and flight gone through, not to be finished till long after the sparrows have squabbled over the snuggest quarters in the ivy against the leeward side of the house, after the magpies have stopped their discordant screeching in the pineasters, the woodcocks have sallied forth from the covers in the twilight, and the only sound left on the night air is the "hoo-too-too" of the owls wandering out in quest of food and adventure.

A. H. MALAN.