

“QUOTH THE RAVEN——”

W. C. C. 1862

SKETCHING AND PAINTING BIRDS FROM LIFE.

THE introduction of birds into a decorative composition adds so much to the interest and value of the work that a few hints as to the best way to obtain original material may be helpful.

Stuffed specimens when good, as are many of the more recent cases of birds at the Natural History Museum, South Kensington, are most helpful to the student, but there is a tendency for one's work to become wooden unless one supplements one's studies by direct reference to nature, and those living within reach of the Zoological Gardens have all that is required in that wonderful collection. I have done a great deal of work there during the last twenty years, having been granted a student's ticket from time to time. The Society is very good in this matter, a letter of introduction or written request from a Fellow being usually sufficient to obtain for the worker a student's ticket for six months or less, generally renewable later on. These tickets admit from nine till three every day save Saturday and Sunday.

After many experiments as to the best way of making rapid sketches, I incline to the use of grey or brown paper, using soft Conté crayon or vine charcoal and white chalk. An effect is obtained far quicker in this way than pencil on white paper, and as rapidity of

execution is essential in noting down moving objects, the student cannot afford to be hampered by his method of work.

Don't work on too small a scale, for this again stands in the way of rapid execution. Go for broad simple effects, noting down, with as few strokes as possible, the general shape of the creature. By this I mean, take in the object as a shape and not as a mass of intricate detail. Movement is what you want to catch, and therefore characteristic attitudes are what you seek to record. The beginner will find it very difficult in her earlier attempts to note down anything of value, so bewildering is it to retain in the mind what one has seen, but the tyro should not be discouraged, for with practice will come the trick of taking in the whole shape of the creature in any particular action. The disposition is to think of detail instead of the whole, and until this tendency is overcome, the sketching of moving objects will not be attended with much success.

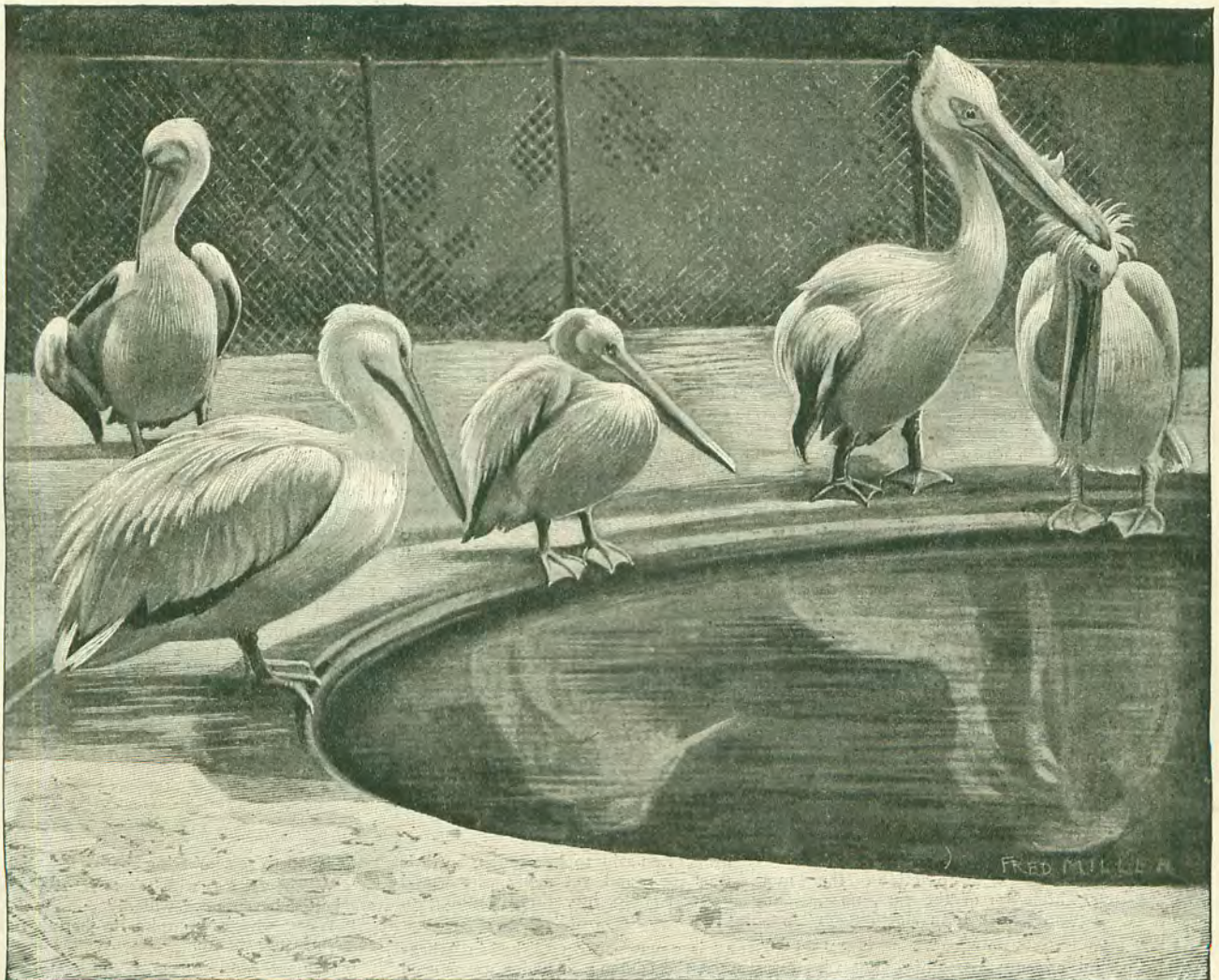
You may remember, however, that details can be obtained from stuffed specimens, whereas action cannot, or at all events can only be studied in a very limited sense, for museum specimens are too often poor in attitude. Some of my most useful sketches have been notes done with a few strokes, and when you feel that you have "hit" a characteristic

attitude, leave it rather than elaborate it and so possibly lose what is of value.

Drawing is largely a question of angles, *i.e.*, noting the angles made by the main lines of the object delineated. In a bird these briefly are, (A) the angle the beak makes with the neck, for the beak being part of the skull, the latter will follow the former; (B) the angle the neck makes with the back, especially in birds with long necks; (in the case of the swan or pelican it appears a curved line, but if analysed it will be found to be made up of two or more angles;) (C) the angle the tail makes with the back; and (D) the angles the legs make with each other and with the breast and underneath part of the body.

If these can be noted down, the filling out of this rudimentary plan, or as we might say "map" of the bird, can be made from a stuffed specimen. These are a few of the points it seems to me that the student should keep before him if he is going to avoid dismal failure and heart-breaking waste of time, as was my record in my earliest efforts.

After some little certainty of method has been acquired by practice—and constant exercise of one's faculties can alone give certainty of execution—colour may be added to one's monochromatic studies. Pastels will be very useful here—not a large assortment which



MORNING TOILETTE. (A STUDY OF PELICANS IN THE ZOO.)



"THE SEA IN LONDON." (THE GULL ENCLOSURE AT THE ZOO.)

would only bewilder the worker, but a dozen or so of the most generally useful colours; and here again only go for the general tone of the object, especially as the colours are influenced by the light and shade under which the bird is seen, for colour wholly depends upon this. The plumage of a bird with the light upon it is quite a different thing from the same colour seen in a subdued light, such as that of a museum. Think of the object as a shape seen in light, half tone and shadow, plus colour. Indicate the colour by direct crisp touches. Don't try to blend them or get very subtle gradations. Put in the darks and then the half tones, and upon these dash on the bright passages of colour, hinting at them rather than painting them as you might do from a dead specimen in a museum, where you have plenty of time to do it.

Always see your object with half-closed eyes, so that all detail is lost sight of and only the main features are observable. This is a golden rule in all art work, looking with half-closed eyes, for in this way one learns what to leave out, and *ergo* what to fix down, for art is as much leaving out as putting in. The beginner always sees too much and hence is bewildered; it is the accomplished craftsman who gets simplicity—the much-to-be-desired effect where all fits in just as it should without crowding or confusion.

Photography is a help to artists especially when they take the negatives themselves. The drawing of pelicans is based on a photograph I took in the Zoo. Taking snap-shots seems such an easy way of doing the work that it is apt to take the place of sketching. Now this is bad, for by sketching from life the student lays up a store of knowledge and acquires increasing skill in proportion as he so works. He can learn, in fact, all that is characteristic about the animal, a thing that photography never teaches one. Some years ago I, in company with many other artists, thought photography was going to be such a great aid to art and would save one such a lot of time and trouble. I proved, at considerable outlay of time and money, that this was a dream, the stern reality being that snap-shots have very limited possibilities. The perspective and the light and shade are both very arbitrary in photography, and a few touches of one's own, especially in colour, are more valuable than many photographs. Working much from photographs is apt to show itself in one's work and for this reason: a photo gives everything with the same distinctness and will even exaggerate certain features which observation shows to be faulty. In working from a photo in which there is such a bewilderment of detail, it is difficult to know what to leave out, for half closing your eyes to a photo is

not at all the same thing as doing so to nature. Snap-shots, too, can only be taken where the light is good; in the houses it is never successful, nor in any place where the light is at all dull. It is astonishing, too, how much time is lost in this way, and while you are dodging about with a camera and getting films or negatives developed and then printed, you can make several maybe most useful studies, which are infinitely more interesting and useful than the work of a camera. The study of gulls shows, I think, what excellent material there is in the Zoo. Quite a picture could be painted of the gull enclosure, so well does it come.

Pelicans are quaint birds, and at the same time beautiful as to colour, and would be useful subjects for a screen.

The other illustration is, as will be seen, a composition. Most of the individual studies were made in the Zoo. Combining a number of birds in one scheme is not the easiest thing to essay, as care must be taken to get them to arrange themselves in pleasing lines. The reader will notice the composition is based on a circular plan. Then, again, you must have some leading idea to give the whole a sense of unity. The raven is supposed to be addressing the crowd around him, some of whom resent his rhetoric.

FRED MILLER.

ODDS AND ENDS.

IT is always best to sleep on the right side as this gives no impediment to action of the heart or liver. Maladies of the ears, nose, and throat frequently arise from sleeping on the back.

"WE cannot conquer necessities, but we can yield to them in such a way as to be greater than if we could."—*Hannah More*.

"TIME is often said to be money, but it is more—it is life; and yet many who would cling desperately to life, think nothing of wasting time."—*Sir John Lubbock*.

THERE is a newspaper published in Athens every week the contents of which are written entirely in verse, including the advertisements.

IT is worth remembering that—

"Whenever we will what is good, we are better because we willed."

"What we truly aspire to be, that in some measure we are."

"THE generality of men spend the early part of their lives in contributing to render the latter part miserable."