

## THE TOUCAN.

The toucan, so called from his peculiar cry, which is somewhat like the word *Tu cano*, is a native of America, and is handsome, so far as bright coloring is concerned, though he is clumsy in form.

Often all the hues of the rainbow are to be seen in the plumage of a single bird; and even the huge beak shares in these lovely tints, though here they are liable to change, and frequently grow dull and even fade quite away.

The toucans live in the woods, sitting on the branches of the trees sometimes in large numbers, amusing themselves by fencing with their great beaks, which clatter loudly in the mimic fight; while the forest resounds with the hoarse shouts of the excited birds.

Their food is varied according to the season. They are very fond of oranges and guavas, and often do so much harm among the orchards that they are shot, and in their turn eaten by the owner.

At another time of the year when the rain has softened the great nests of the white ants, these birds break them up, and, like hungry creditors, send in a long bill, swallowing thousands of ants with a keen relish, which, perhaps, the stings of the creatures only serves to stimulate.

But the toucans, not content with fruit and ants, will also eat mice and small birds, killing them in an instant with one or two squeezes of the enormous beak. When tamed, these curious birds will eat bread, boiled vegetables, eggs and meat, but they are specially flattered and gratified with the friendly offering of a mouse or a little bird.

When retiring to rest, the toucans show, by the care they take of their beaks, how great is the value which they set upon them; for they rest them upon their backs, hiding them in a perfect nest of bright-colored feathers, which is made yet thicker and softer by the tail being doubled over it, till the birds look like a mere bundle of gorgeous plumage.

The toucan is not difficult to tame, but he is hardly a pleasant pet, in spite of his gay dress, for he is greedy and rapacious; very noisy, too, with his clattering beak and harsh cries. Then, also, the creature has the habit of bringing up his food half-digested, and going through the process of eating it over again; which, however delightful from a toucan point of view, makes him a somewhat undesirable companion.

On one occasion a greedy toucan belonging to a naval officer, killed himself by eating too many ball-cartridges on board a man-of-war.

Odd as is their appearance, they have a great hatred of birds which they think are uglier than themselves, and will "mob" any unfortunate one that they fall in with. —*Child's Companion*.

## HESTER'S DILEMMA.

BY CHARLOTTE M. PACKARD.

"It is all wrong," said Hester, leaning heavily on the ironing-board, "all wrong now, and things have never been just right with me."

She looked wistfully at the sunshiny blue beyond which we are accustomed to think lies unclouded light. Heaven seemed far away from the clean, shady kitchen and the work her deft fingers turned off so rapidly, yet heaven had stooped very near to her soul in that identical spot but a year or two since.

"I'm a church member, and so there is no one to help me a grain. Father is deacon, and the ministers put up at this house. That makes certainty sure," she added rather bitterly. "Who would suppose that I am in suffering need?"

Hester resumed her task, and the thud of the iron betrayed mental disquiet, though the Sunday lincloth like a tranquil spirit. "I have it now!" exclaimed she, after an interval of silence only broken by the noisy clock in the corner. "Mother wants some herbs and roots for her cordial; they grow in Mr. Elder's woods, and I shall find him there."

Settling this point satisfactorily, she moved quickly on her preparations for dinner, when a feeble step on the stair arrested

her attention, and turning she saw first a head bound in a yellow handkerchief, then the tall, gaunt form of Mrs. Deacon Rice.

"Why, mother!"

"Yes, it's me, Hetty. My feet are as cold as stones, and I want to try sitting by the stove a few minutes."

The speaker's voice was fretful with chronic pain. Her face, sallow and sharp, had been puffy and pink like the apple blossoms at the door; but those springs which renew the bud and flower in nature steal them from human life, and Mrs. Rice had almost forgotten her May-time. The daughter attended to such little offices as were expected of her, always cheerfully yielded when "mother's headache" made its weekly visit. She made fresh tea, bathed the throbbing temples with hot water, and said with an accent of real thankfulness, "I never had a bad ache in my life," passing over the mental struggle, into which Mrs. Rice would not enter.

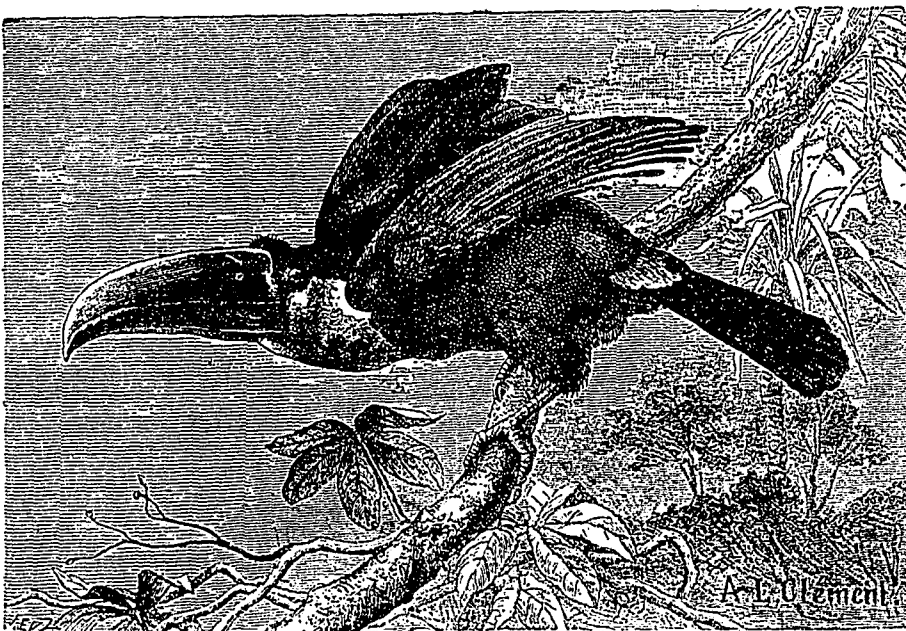
The elder woman sighed. "If you live to have a family of eight children and then to bury half of them, you'll tell a different story. I was young and smart, and, you

who will not be coaxed or chidden into good-nature.

A fragrant day in April, sweet with the sound of mountain brooks fed by late rains, its soft sky swept by fleecy clouds that a wandering breeze trails before the face of the sun. Hester Rice is not slow to accept any message, the All-Father dictates, and her spirits rise as she drops the weight of home care. The precious herbs whose use is time-honored among country folk are easily procured, and with a basket laden she reaches the "west lot" as Mr. Elder, who recognizes her far away, comes to greet her.

Shrewd, kindly, spiritual, a man to whom confidence flows unasked, save as his ready sympathy invites, wise in the things of the life to come, but never overlooking the affairs of this world, Heman Elder is an unordained minister, an unconscious leader to whom many souls turn for strength. Hester Rice is his Sunday-school scholar, his little friend who stands in place of the child he never had. A daughter might treat him with less spontaneous frankness indeed.

"What now, Hester?" inquired, after



might say, feather-headed, when your father brought me to Edgetown. I'm only a walking headache now."

The old rocking-chair creaks softly; it has stirred so many troubles it could not soothe, and the present occupant always sways as she talks. Hester urges the boiling kettles, draws out the table, and at a quarter past twelve the substantial meal is ready for the eager children whose voices announce their near approach. But Mrs. Rice has vanished as quietly as she came, warned by the occult law of headaches that the sleep from which one awakes relieved is overtaking her.

Noisily enter the trio of younger brothers and sister, flinging down the books from which this half-holiday frees them for a few hours.

"Oh, Hester, I'm as hungry as a bear. Have you made any gingerbread?"

"I have torn my dress across the front breadth. Can you mend it to-day, Hester?"

"Hester, where did you find Speckle's new nest in the barn?"

"Hush, hush!" warns the sister. "Mother is sick and you must not make a disturbance. Lily, just help me a moment." Lily is twisting her shining yellow curls at the small glass and does not move. At thirteen the growing beauty has a due appreciation of her charms and examines her white forehead with an eye to possible freckles.

"Are you in a hurry, Hester? You have filled the pitcher yourself. That is just as well."

Deacon Rice, a pleasant-looking and absent-minded man, takes his seat, the silent apprentice follows, and a chorus of voices discourse on the subjects of present interest.

John and Dick and Lily have each a plan for the afternoon's amusement, but Hester is decided as to her duty, and explaining quietly that she must walk through the woods to Mr. Elder's, and Lily keep the house and look after mother, receives her father's consent, coupled with a word of authority to the pretty and pouting child

shaking hands, glancing at the contents of her basket. "A dose for mother's headache?"

"Partly. I want medicine myself!"

The whole physique of the girl declared her to be a stranger to sickness, but the cloud had returned to her clear eyes and her voice trembled. "Sit down a moment; this sunshine seems like July, and the south side of a wall is safe."

So the two seat themselves on a smooth boulder that has served its turn as a familiar halting-place.

"Now, Hester?"

"I am afraid I made a mistake two years ago, that I never was a Christian; I grow worse every day instead of better!" Tears fall hot and suddenly; the doubt and fear of weeks melt into the flood and Hester's frame shakes convulsively. At last she raises her head with a gasp of relief. "I have not had a good cry since this began to worry me," she explains, while the man beside her whispers cheerily,

"April showers bring forth May flowers; you and the season are only preparing the way for flowers."

"If I could believe that! Well, my story isn't much to trouble any one else with. I work hard, do nothing but work. Most days I have scarcely any time for reading or amusement, and I am not complaining of what cannot be helped, but—I am so irritable and stirred up by trifles; even when I manage to say nothing, I chafe and fight against my lot. It is unchristian, and here is the real core of the trouble. I read my Bible and pray to be helped, then I go back to my sweeping or baking or darning, and they are tiresome and I—cross!"

"Mother is poorly and doesn't cheer you much, I suppose. Sure enough, how can she? And Lily slips off when you ask her to wipe dishes to see if her hair is frizzed. And the boys are small elephants for eating and tearing about the house. And Hester is simply tired out and needs a month's vacation, sure!"

"Do you think I can be that, Mr. Elder? Mother always says such a great, hearty girl ought not to think of nerves or talk about overdoing. She is afraid Lily has her constitution and will break down early, but she laughs if father hints at my wearing out. She is afraid I may take notions."

"Selfish as ever!" ejaculated Mr. Elder inwardly. "And Lily is as like her as blanc-mange is like the mould. Who wants blanc-mange for daily bread? Bah!"

"There is one remark, Hester," he said aloud, "that always holds true though it seems commonplace. God is very good to us when he forbids us the thing we ask of him, sometimes. When I was a young fellow—lots of years ago—I wanted to marry the prettiest girl in church, and for a short season I felt that the world turned dark when she preferred another man. Scarcely a week of my life goes by that I am not thanking God anew for that loss and the gain I found it to be. Perhaps you have set your heart on some treasure out of reach which would turn to dust in your hands, and the dear Lord knows it. You work nobly and you pray and strive, yet you are sore with carrying a burden you dare not trust him with." Mr. Elder did not glance at the flushed and disturbed face beside him; the random shot had reached its mark—as he inferred from Hester's silence and the nervous working of her hands, knotting up and smoothing down her shawl-fringe as if that were a serious duty.

"So," resumed this wise friend whom a young girl could safely rely upon, "the work and the worry together are too much for your faith, and the devil wants you to doubt God and yourself."

"How do you know things?" The very tone of Hester's voice spoke relief, and the sunshiny glance of her brown eyes showed that already her healthful nature was asserting itself.

"I have watched you grow up, my girl, and one does not live fifty years without learning a bit of human nature. Young creatures are a good deal alike and all need to be stroked the right way once a year at least. Have you seen my pretty colt? Here she comes for a lump of sugar."

After a little frolic with Brownie Hester lifted her basket to return home.

"What is the last word you have for me?" she asked rather shyly, yet with perfect confidence, as if the message were inspired.

"Keep good heart; and when you carry a matter to your Heavenly Father give it up, don't bear it away again."

"Perhaps you will have a call from me soon," added Mr. Elder, as she hurried across the field and turned to nod good-bye once more. —*Illustrated Christian Weekly*.

## TEN CENTS AND A MORAL.

Here is a silver dime, my son!  
Looks like lead, it is blackened so;  
Not a bit like the shining one  
I dropped in my pocket a week ago.  
Dingy? Yes. Don't you think it strange  
It should lose its sheen in so short a time?  
Would you like to know how came this change  
For the worse to a brand new silver dime!

The cause is simple and easily told,  
But lay it to heart, O son of mine!  
See if it does not a moral hold  
For a bright brave boy with a wish to shine.  
I draw from my pocket a copper cent—  
See, there is the secret; the silver dime,  
Dropped in this pocket by accident,  
Has rubbed against copper all this time.

And the cent is never a whit more white  
Nor improved at all by its company,  
While the silver dime comes out less bright,  
And its value is questioned, as you see.  
Now the moral for boys is very clear.  
You see it, my son? Well, lay it to heart;  
And see, I drop the silver here,  
And the copper there; let them be apart.  
—*Treasure Trove*.

THE YOUNG Chinese Emperor, Kuang Hsu, who is only sixteen years old, formally assumed the reins of government on February 7th. The same day that saw him installed in power also witnessed his marriage. From this time he is almost a prisoner of state, as etiquette forbids that he should venture outside his palace or be looked upon by vulgar eyes.