



EGG-SHELLS AND YOUNG BIRDS.

In May two boys in town wrote to me to explain to them the meaning of the egg-shells, mostly those of robins, that were to be seen lying about on the ground here and there. I supposed every boy knew where most of these egg-shells came from. As soon as the young birds are out, the mother bird removes the fragments of shells from the nest, carrying them in her beak some distance and dropping them here and there. All our song birds, so far as I know, do this.

Sometimes, however, these shells are dropped by blue-jays after their contents have been swallowed. The jay will seize a robin's egg by thrusting his beak into it, and hurry off lest he be caught in the act by the owner. At a safe distance he will devour the contents at his leisure, and drop the shell.

The robins, however, have more than once caught the jay in the act. He has the reputation among them of being a sneak thief. Many and many a time during the nesting season you may see a lot of robins mob a jay. The jay comes slyly prowling through the trees; looking for his favorite morsel, when he is discovered by a vigilant robin, who instantly rushes at him crying, "Thief! thief!" at the top of his voice. All the robins that have nests within hearing gather to the spot and join in the pursuit of the jay, screaming and scolding.

The jay is hustled out of the tree in a hurry, and goes sneaking away with the robins at his heels. He is usually silent, like other thieves, but sometimes the birds make it so hot for him that he screams in anger and disgust.

Of the smaller birds, like the vireos and warblers, the jay will devour the young.

My little boy one day saw a jay sitting beside a nest in a tree, probably that of the red-eyed vireo, and coolly swallowing the just-hatched young, while the parent birds were powerless to prevent him. They flew at him and snapped their beaks in his face, but he heeded them not. A robin would have knocked him off his feet at her first dive.

The belief prevails more or less, that when the eggs of a bird are ready to hatch, the shell is broken by the mother bird. Even Bryant puts this notion into one of his poems.

The mother bird hath broken for her brood
Their prison shell, or shovels them from the nest
Plumed for their earliest flight.

But the notion is erroneous. The young bird breaks its own prison shell, which becomes very brittle at the last. It would be a very risky procedure to aid the young bird in this matter. The struggle to free itself from the shell seems all important.

I once met a gentleman on the train who told me about a brood of quails that had hatched out under his observation. He

was convinced that the mother-quail had broken the shells for the young birds. He sent me one of the shells to convince me that it had been broken from the outside.

At first glance it did appear so. It had been cut around near the large end, with the exception of a small space, as if the regular thrusts or taps from a bird's beak, so that this end opened like the lid of a box on a hinge, and let the imprisoned bird escape. What convinced the gentleman that the force had been applied from the outside was that the edges of the cut or break were bent in.

If we wish rightly to interpret nature, to get at the exact truth of her ways and doings, we must cultivate what is called the critical habit of mind; that is, the habit of mind that does not rest with mere appearances. One must sift the evidence, must cross-question the facts. This gentleman was a lawyer, but he laid aside the cunning of his craft in dealing with this question of these egg-shells.

The bending in, or the indented appearance of the edge of the shells was owing to the fact that the thin paper-like skin that lines the interior of the shell had dried and shrunken, and had thus drawn the edges of the shell inward. The cut was made by the beak of the young bird, probably by turning its head from right to left; one little point it could not reach, and this formed the hinge of the lid I have spoken of.

Is it at all probable that if the mother bird had done this work she would have left this hinge, and left it upon every egg, since the hinge was of no use? The complete removal of the cap would have been just as well.

Neither is it true that the parent bird shoves its young from the nest when they are ready to fly, unless it be in the case of doves and pigeons. Our small birds certainly do not do this. The young birds will launch out of their own notion as soon as their wings will sustain them, and sometimes before.

There is usually one of the brood a little more forward than its mates, and this one is the first to venture forth. In the case of the bluebird, chickadee, highhole, nut-hatch and others, the young are usually a day or two in leaving the nest.

The past season I was much interested in seeing a brood of chickadees, reared on my premises, venture upon their first flight. Their heads had been seen at the door of their dwelling—a cavity in the limb of a pear tree—at intervals for two or three days.

Evidently they liked the looks of the great outside world; and one evening, just before sundown, one of them came forth. His first flight was of several yards to a locust tree, where he alighted upon an inner branch, and after some chirping and calling proceeded to arrange his plumage, and compose himself for the night.

I watched him till it was nearly dark.

He did not appear at all afraid there alone in the tree, but put his head under his wing and settled down for the night as if it was just what he had always been doing. There was a heavy snow a few hours later, but in the morning he was there upon his perch in good spirits.

I happened to be passing in the morning when another one came out. He hopped out upon a limb, shook himself, and chirped and called loudly. After some moments an idea seemed to strike him. His attitude changed, his form straightened up, and a thrill of excitement seemed to run through him. I knew what it all meant; something had whispered to the bird, "Fly!" With a spring and a cry he was in the air, and made good headway to a near hemlock.

Others left in a similar manner during that day and the next, till all were out.

Some birds seem to scatter as soon as they are out of the nest. With others the family keeps together the greater part of the season. Among birds that have this trait may be named the chickadee, the bluebird, the nut-hatch, the king-bird, the phoebe-bird, and others of the true fly-catchers.

One frequently sees the young of the phoebe sitting in a row upon a limb, while the parents feed them in regular order. Twice I have come upon a brood of young but fully fledged screech-owls in a dense hemlock wood, sitting close together upon a low branch. They stood there like a row of mummies, the yellow curtains of their eyes drawn together to a mere crack, till they saw themselves discovered.

Then they all changed their attitudes as if an electric current had passed through the branch upon which they sat. Leaning this way and that, they stared at me like frightened cats till the mother took flight, when the young followed.

This family of chickadees kept in the trees about my place for two or three weeks. They hunted the same feeding-ground over and over, and always seemed to find an abundance. The parent birds did the hunting, the young did the calling and the eating. At any hour in the day you could find the troop slowly making their way over some part of their territory.

Later in the season one of the parent birds seemed smitten with some fatal malady. If birds have leprosy, this must have been leprosy. The poor thing dropped down through a maple tree close by the house, barely able to flit a few feet at a time. Its plumage appeared greasy and filthy, and its strength was about gone. I placed it in the branches of a spruce tree, and never saw it afterward.—*John Burroughs, in Youth's Companion.*

A NEWSPAPER PARTY.

A rainy summer evening at a mountain resort was passed very entertainingly in impromptu newspaper-making. As late in the afternoon as four o'clock an invitation in rhyme was posted in the hall with the request that each guest should drop an original letter or poem or conundrum or essay into the mail box before eight o'clock, and at that hour repair to the parlor, where all the contributions would be read aloud.

There was considerable curiosity as to the meaning and end of this unusual announcement, but most of the guests accepted the invitation. The mail-box received more than its usual rainy-day contributions, and these were looked over and then read aloud in the parlor by a committee of four. Although no high-water mark of excellence was reached in any particular one, they were all worth listening to. The personal tone of many (always good-natured) gave the most delight to the storm-bound audience.

There was a weather report promising a change of wind and clear skies before morning; a flattering description in verse of the different guests; a European adventure from an old traveller; a sonnet about the mountains; a letter asking for rooms for the Prince of Wales; an acrostic on the proprietor's name; several local conundrums, and an essay on dress reform supposed to be written by Mrs. Cleveland.

Now, this idea could be adapted in more than one way to an evening gathering of bright people. But to be successful the preparations should be condensed into a short space of time. Therefore, it is

really more appropriate for a house party, or where the participants could be got together upon a few hours' notice.

A few suggestions in planning a party of this kind are necessary.

1. It might be well to draw up a list of subjects for contributions to be based upon; or, portion off certain ones to special topics; or, to include selections from those who felt too timid to expose their own compositions.

2. One rule should be made, and that is in reading a contribution not to announce the writer's name.

3. Those who are to do the reading aloud should look over their material before the time, and intersperse the grave with the gay, the matter-of-fact with the imaginative.—*Alice M. Kellogg, in Home-Maker.*

NEW CLUB RATES.

The following are the NEW CLUB RATES for the MESSENGER, which are considerably reduced:

1 copy	.....	\$ 0 30
10 copies to one address	.....	2 25
20 " " "	.....	4 40
50 " " "	.....	10 50
100 " " "	.....	20 00

Sample package supplied free on application.

JOHN DOUGALL & SON,
Publishers, Montreal.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

BREAKFAST-SUPPER.

EPPS'S
GRATEFUL-COMFORTING.
COCOA
BOILING WATER OR MILK.

*To Fortify
Infants*

Against the weakening effects of the heat use NESTLÉ'S Food before the hot weather begins its devastating work. Children fed on this food are remarkably exempt from diarrhoea and all intestinal disorders, the composition of the food being such that it can be digested by the most delicate stomach. Consult your own family Doctor.

Sample ample for trial and our book "The Baby" mailed free on application. Mention this paper.

Thos. Leeming & Co., Montreal.

THIS Rolled Gold Plated Ring (worth \$1), your name on 20 new and pretty Cards, silk fringed, gold edge, hidden name, etc. Agent's Sample Case and a 25c present, all for 10c. Samples, etc., 3c. Address STAR CARD CO., Knowlton, P. Q. IF YOU WANT to get cheap Jewellery, Novelties, or a Watch, at about one-half regular price, write for Catalogue and private terms. Address HALL BROS. & CO., Knowlton, P. Q.

USE **BABY'S OWN SOAP**

PLEASE MENTION THE "NORTHERN MESSENGER" WHEN REPLYING TO ANY ADVERTISEMENT THEREIN. THIS WILL ALWAYS BE ESTEEMED A FAVOR BY BOTH ADVERTISERS AND PUBLISHERS.

THE NORTHERN MESSENGER is printed and published every fortnight at No. 142 St Peter street and from 672 to 682 Craig street, "Witness" Building, in the city of Montreal, by John Redpath Dougall, of Montreal.

All business communications should be addressed "John Dougall & Son," and all letters to the Editor should be addressed "Editor of the 'Northern Messenger.'"