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BIRDS OF THE MERRY FOREST

By LILIAN LEVERIDGE

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CHAPTER XVII.

Gypsying with the Birds.

"What is so rare as a day in June?
 Then, if ever, come perfect days.
 Then heaven tries the earth if it be
 in tune,
 And over it softly her warm ear
 lays."

JIMMIE closed his lesson book with a sigh and flung it with a nice aim into one of the veranda chairs. He rose from his seat on the top step, where he had been studying his school work for Monday, and stretched himself with a yawn. "It's true, all right," he thought, "but if only a fellow might get a chance to prove it for himself!"

Jimmie was a good student and fond of books, but in June-time he began to grow impatient for the lagging vacation days when he might

"Read what is still unread
 In the manuscripts of God."

"Cows are up, Jimmie. Bring out the pails," called his father from the pasture, where he was putting up the bars after letting in the herd.

"All right, Dad," called Jimmie, and soon, with a shining tin pail slung over each arm he joined his father.

The milking was done outside, for the cows were all quiet and had no need to be tied. For a few minutes nothing could be heard but the steady streaming of milk into the empty pails, but when they began to fill up, the softer sound of the foaming flow permitted of a little conversation.

"Dad," Jimmie began, "will you be wanting me very much to-morrow?"

"I guess that means, being interpreted," answered his father, sagely, "that you want very much to go fishing."

Jimmie laughed. "You needn't guess again. Of course, I know there's always enough to do on Saturday, but I do want a day in the woods. The Marlowe kids have planned to spend a whole day in the woods and fields to-morrow, and count up how many different kinds of birds they can see in one day, and they are crazy for me to go with them. They'd like to go to Lonely Lake, but their mother won't let them take such a long trip alone. She wouldn't mind if I was with them."

"That's the idea, is it? I think you youngsters are bird-crazy. But I don't blame you. I'm beginning to be very much interested in them myself, and if I could be a boy again I'd make friends with them more than I have done."

"As far as I'm concerned, I guess you can have a day off. All the crops are in and there's nothing pressing. But mind you, if you don't bring home a good string of fish I'll send you straight back to Lonely Lake. I'm fairly famished for a good mess of fresh fish."

"Thanks, Dad," replied Jimmie, with a bright face. "I'll promise you the fish all right. I'll take an extra hook and line for Boy Blue. He never caught a fish in his life, and he's anxious to try. Dimple, I expect, is too soft-hearted to care for the sport. I'll hurry over as soon as the milking is done and tell them; they'll be so glad."

Jimmie was awake before daylight next morning. He lay a few minutes, listening to the bird songs piping up, one by one. Then he sprang out of bed and looked anxiously at the sky. Not a cloud was visible, and the east was softly tinted with a pale primrose light, brightening every moment. It was going to be just such a day as that the June-day poet had in mind.

He dressed quickly, stole softly down the stairs, and, taking a pail from the milk-room, passed out into the delicious morning freshness. He roused the sleepy cows and did his share of the milking, then washed and went into the kitchen. No one was up yet, but on the table he found some breakfast set out for himself, also a well-packed box of lunch. Mother always thought of everything.

"I wonder how many birds I'll see to-day," thought Jimmie as he took out his little pocket note book. "I mustn't forget to mark down those I have seen already. Let me see—Robin, Blackbird, Crow, Sparrow—and it's likely I'll see some more going through the woods."

He did see some more, but none that he could name. The wakening woods were full of songs, but in only a few cases was his bird lore sufficient to enable him to name the unseen minstrel.

The twins were just finishing their breakfast, and were delighted at Jimmie's early appearance. They had planned to set out as soon as the dew had dried off a little, for the birds are always at their best in the early morning.

Mrs. Marlowe had just finished packing a lunch basket, which Boy Blue took proudly in charge. A smaller basket, containing the field-glasses, "Bird Guide," note books and pencils, was allotted to Dimple. Dimple had adorned the rim of her basket with dewy June roses, and she looked like a half-blown rose herself in a deep, rose-coloured muslin dress—an old one, but still a favourite, for Dimple was fond of colour.

"Now, first thing," advised Mr. Marlowe, "it would be a good idea to take a turn around the garden and jot down what birds are here."

To this they all agreed. Jimmie produced his book and read his list.

"Sparrow," said Boy Blue. "What kind of a Sparrow?"

"Oh, one of those we used to call Greybirds. You said they were Sparrows, didn't you?"

"Yes, but Jimmie, there's about fifty different kinds of Sparrows in Canada, Dad says, or at least that may be seen in Canada at times; and it won't do to put it down that way. You've got to say the kind. We don't know very many. Some of them are easy enough to tell, but some kinds are nearly alike, and you have to watch them closely to be sure."

"I don't know the kind," said Jimmie, "but listen! It was singing just like that one on the lilac bush."

"That's a Song Sparrow," answered Boy Blue. "You can tell it by that song and the dark spot in the middle of its speckled breast."

"Yes," put in Daddy, "and one of our poets, Edward William Thomson, describes his first spring song very beautifully in verse:—

"A joyful flourish, lilted clear—
 Four notes—then falls the frolic
 song,

And memories of a vanished year
 The wistful cadences prolong.

"A vanished year—O heart too
 sore—

I cannot sing; thus ends the lay.
 Long silence, then, awakes once more
 His song, ecstatic of the May!"

"I like that," said Jimmie.

"Look! Isn't that an English Sparrow out there in the middle of the road?" asked Dimple. "That brown bird with a black throat."

"Yes, it is," said Daddy. "We don't often see them around here, and I'm glad of it. The English Sparrow seems to have few friends in this country, but he has no one to blame