

"Hear him!" cried Lizzie.

"It will not rain. I am a weather prophet, you know," said Dawson. "I promise you we shall have a charming day."

J. H. BROWN.

### NEST BUILDING AND BIRD-SONG.

Probably of all nests builded by birds in this locality, the most unique is that of the humming-bird. It is about five inches in circumference and just one and a half deep on the outside, and is fashioned of the softest of white stuff apparently the floss of the poplar, while over it all is ingeniously laid fine bits of fawn and pale green lichen so that it is a marvellous imitation of the bark of the branch whereon it rests, and for this reason it is difficult to distinguish it from a knot of the tree, fastened too as it is close on the limb with not a small branch on any side for support. Over the lichen is spun an invisible veil, fine like a very fine cobweb, and there is about it a warm odor like old wool or dry moss. In this nest just two pale tiny eggs are laid, and indeed there would scarce be room for another, so small is the soft hollow.

Another interesting nest is that of the wild canary. A snug one has been built yearly during the last five years in the heart of a blossoming bush here on the hillside; each time in the same cluster of twigs, the old one having been removed every season directly after the young birds had flown. This nest is composed of bits of wool, floss, white cotton thread and grey grasses, and before or about the time the first egg has been laid, along comes a lazy cuckoo, sliding noiselessly, thief-like, from bough to bough, and depositing in this nest a brown-speckled egg twice the size of the canary. Then when hatching-time arrives and the young birds appear and grow a little, the young cuckoo, ingrate that it is, flops about and with its strong wings turns out of their home to perish the offspring of the sweet yellow bird. Every year I have watched this nest and taken from it the objectionable egg, and one year I found a second one, after the canaries had deserted the nest, imbedded in the grasses and wool, it having been laid of course before the completion of the nest, and thus covered over, it had remained unharmed during the rearing of the yellow brood.

This year, just as the canary had fashioned a fine nest in the old place, a wild wind came out of the south and tore it away, so I doubt if the bird will ever build there again. How wonderful! this building of nests year after year in the same spot, this memory of birds, inasmuch as there is such a vast tract of country wherein to go astray and so countless a number of trees to mislead. A few years ago, along the bay shore a phoebe built its nest in a robin's nest of the preceding summer. The following year the robins arrived first and placed their nest on the two old ones, and again the next year the phoebes were lords of the tower, and so they builded alternately until six or seven nests were piled one on the other, when the spot was forsaken for a new site.

Doubtless the most comfortable of nests is the swirring nest of the oriole. Narrow and deep, and woven of soft, light colored material, it is fastened to the drooping boughs of some tall elm, out of the reach of the small boy, and in it the mother birds sits and swings

through the hot summer days, the winds singing to her in fair weather, no harm molesting when storm is abroad, for the nest is builded and hung so deftly, that the entrance is protected against the sky out of which the summer storms come.

For us the oriole has sung his last song this year, because the autumn has no food for him and he has gone south again, not so much, it is believed, to avoid the cold as to find good feeding fields for the winter. What songs he sang when the apple-trees were in flower! His brilliant orange and black plumage all aglow against the pink and white blossoms. Then were the orchards merry with his music, for he hunted them the day long for food. We used to whistle sometimes, at best a poor imitation of his singing, yet he answered us. It is interesting, the study of bird-song and of birds' perception of musical sounds. Many times in the summer when there is music in the house, mocking-birds come about the open windows and struggle on through broken song in a mad endeavour to follow the notes of the instrument. Go out into any large garden after sunset when the mocking-birds and other singers are silent. Whistle some light air, and presently the shadows will be full of song, and it is good to feel you thus have power to make birds sing. Then, too, on a grey morning even a loon will answer you out of the mist if you imitate its note, though not, I fancy, because of any inspiration of music like that which whistling possesses for other birds—rather in all probability, it takes you for its mate and gives call for call.

HELEN M. MERRILL.

### THE CRITIC.

Professor Goldwin Smith's "political outline" of the United States from their discovery in 1492 to the Geneva Award in 1871, published the other day, is a work which deserves and demands no little notice. Within the compass of some three hundred octavo pages, the author has succeeded in compressing what no other historian of the United States has yet attempted to do—perhaps it might with safety be said, what no other historian of the United States has yet been capable of doing. Perhaps no other historian has been so singularly fitted to do it. For, to say nothing of the intellectual endowments of the sometime Professor of modern history at Oxford, of his remarkable grasp of large masses of facts, and his keen historic sense, no one has seen and known so much at once of the political England of the last half century, from whose teeming womb the United States issued, and of the child, now full-grown, to which that England gave birth. He was present with observant eye and active pen during the tremendous crisis when the question of Secession was being debated both by tongue and sword, and from that date to this, has, as many published articles show, made a study of the political and social growth of our neighbours. The results of such study are apparent in "the United States: an outline of political history," and for once and for the first time we have before us, in bird's eye view, an unprejudiced account of the political growth of a nation whose historians hitherto have seemed incapable of writing without bias. Professor Smith's friendship for the United States is well-known: he has everywhere there, both as speaker and writer, been received with

acclamation, he holds a chair in one of their Universities, his views regarding the common future of the States and Canada—all prove him their well-wisher and admirer. Naturally, therefore, though in the preface he is careful to tell us that his book is "for English rather than American readers," there will be found in it no anti-American sentiments. Nor on the other hand, and equally naturally, will there be found any anti-British sentiments. To no other writer, perhaps, was a calm and judicial middle-way so possible. Certainly we get it here, and nowhere more distinctly than in the account of the woful separation of 1776, and the deplorable events that led up to it. He does not spare Grenville, he does not spare Townshend, he does not spare North, he does not spare Parliament, he does not spare the King. But, on the other hand, neither does he spare "the agitators at Boston, who . . . did their utmost to push the quarrel to extremity and to quench the hope of reconciliation," nor "the preachers of Boston who . . . made themselves the trumpeters of discord," nor "the mentors of the quarrel"—Samuel Adams and Patrick Henry. We get a calm and judicial account also of that other critical period in the history of the States, in the chapter devoted to Civil War. It is a pity, perhaps, that this account has been limited to a single chapter, for but few writers besides Professor Goldwin Smith are better fitted to undertake a full and careful recountal of the various and complicated opinions and events of that crisis. The data of such recountal are abundant—perhaps superabundant. Its true and concise history has yet to be written. A tremendous conflict, indeed it was, but its narrators seem to have vied with each other in making it more tremendous still. The wave of bitter feeling ran so high as to cross the Atlantic and deluge even England. France and Russia felt the tide. Little wonder then, that even now unruffled narrative is rare. Yet nothing could be fairer than the chapter entitled "Rupture and Reconstruction." In it certainly concinnity is stretched to breaking point; but with so great a master of language, with one too who has devoted a lifetime to the exposition of political historical facts and their causes, the history loses little by this concinnity.

The amount of reading, thought, and observation which such a book necessitated must have been immense. Indeed we have a hint to this effect when the writer tells us in the preface that a full list of authorities would be disproportionate to the book itself. Yet no many modern writers, we fear, could truthfully give utterance to such an assertion. When we consider the extreme paucity and insignificance of the errata which critics have discovered we see how carefully that reading, thought, and observation have been exercised.

The work, in short, is a model of what a political history in outline should be: growth, events of peace and war, together with the connecting details; the characters of the leaders of these; the varying temper of popular bodies; the ebb and flow of popular opinion; glimpses of social life; growth of sentiment, of power, of material wealth; trends of statutory legislation; conflict of parties; antagonism of various theories of finance and government; electoral campaigns with their multifarious issues and curiosities; international and inter-racial diplomacies; these and a multitude of other matters are handled in a manner which, while it commands