

The Bird Charmer

AS I wandered about through the Tuileries gardens in Paris one morning my attention was drawn to a curious crowd that was closely watching the movements of a man. There he stood, the center of admiring spectators, with pigeons and sparrows thronging around him. The birds perched fearlessly on his head, arms, and shoulders, pecked at his feet and looked up at him with their bright bead-like

eyes filled with absolute confidence and trust. I realized that this must be the celebrated M. Pol, the bird charmer, whom I had so often heard of but never seen, simply because I had never chanced to cross the Tuileries gardens when he happened to be feeding his feathered pets.

I drew near, attracted by the pretty and wonderful sight. It was not long before an opportunity presented itself, and I was able to enter into conversation with the famous bird charmer,

whom I found only too pleased to give me all the particulars of his charming. M. Pol revels in expatiating on the intelligence and many qualities of his little favorites. He himself is a curious character, clever and quick-witted, brimming over with the bright and amusing repartees of his countrymen. M. Pol for many years worked in one of the Paris ministerial offices, and it was in passing to and from his work through the Tuileries gardens that he first noticed the birds, nearly fifteen years ago.

One morning he brought a small roll and threw the crumbs on the ground. The Parisian sparrow, like his prototype the French "gamin" or street boy, is not shy, and M. Pol was interested and amused to see the little things flutter at his feet and peck vigorously at the bread he had given them. He gradually got into the way of stopping morning and evening to distribute crumbs to the birds, very soon they became his one absorbing interest. He began to study their ways and life. Not content with being their friend and benefactor in a general way, he soon grew to know many of them individually, giving them special names that accorded with some trait in their character or some peculiar mark in their plumage. He mentioned to me as one of the most striking features of their intelligence that these birds remember a name given to them one day and answer to it the next.

This extraordinary man is now in such perfect sympathy with his birds that they obey his slightest wish when given by word of mouth or by a mere sign or wave of the hand.

"In fact," M. Pol confidently asserts, "I find these birds are no longer mere sparrows, but accomplished and talented people. To tell you the truth," and a merry twinkle lights up his eyes, "I consider my feathered friends are far better acquainted with the forms of outward politeness and courtesy than many of their supposed betters who bear the name of men and women!"

"Would you like to be personally introduced to some of my little friends?" he asks, delighted to note the growing interest I show in his pets.

"Most certainly! I should be charmed," I answer, and I draw nearer the magic circle very carefully, fearing to frighten the feathered throng.

He notes my hesitation and exclaims: "I shall tell my little friends you are all right and that you will not harm them. They put absolute faith in what I tell them, so that, if you wish it, they will at my bidding feed out of your own hands."

Delighted with the novel experience, I stand quite close to the bird-charmer and extend him my hands, holding in each a tiny morsel of bread rolled out in a spiral shape.

"Come on, my children, fear nothing," the charmer shouts, and docile to the word of command the sparrows fly towards me and boldly peck at the morsels of bread I am holding.

"See, 'tis quite easy for anyone to be a bird charmer, if they only try," he laughs. "Now let me show you some of the talents of my pupils, for many of them are clever and wonderfully gifted."

"This is 'Cafe au Lait,' so named from the particular gloss of his coat, and called after a celebrated race-horse belonging to M. Bremont, well known on the English turf. 'Cafe au Lait, come here!'"

The bird so-named flies from the ground, soars above M. Pol's head and swoops down on the piece of bread held aloft.

"This is Mr. 'Joli-Coeur,' (Gay Young Spark), whose specialty it is to take a piece of bread from off the tip of my nose.

"Here comes 'Tape-a-l'oeil' (One in the Eye); he is an old friend of twelve years' standing; you see, as they grow older the birds' plumage turns blacker, contrary to the human species which grows gray with age.

"This little maid here is only three months old; her name is 'La Souris' (the Mouse); she was exceedingly shy when first her mother introduced her to me, but see, now I can rain down cuffs to within an inch of her head, and she does not budge."

He suits the action to the words and "La Souris" seems to smile up at him placidly.

"This gentleman I am rather proud of: 'Le Boer' is really the first French sparrow on record who has learnt English. Mark well, I make no sign to him, it is only what I say which he understands and responds to."

In fairly fluent English M. Pol calls out:

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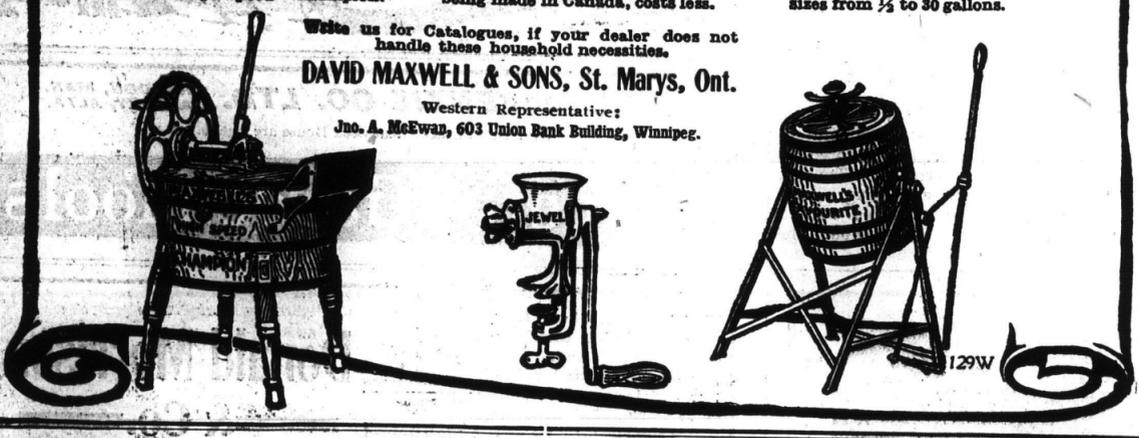
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