

A PAIR OF COUSINS.

I know of no other two birds so near akin that are so opposite in character and disposition as the Robin and the ~~Russet-backed~~ Thrush. As scientists distinguish birds, there is not much difference because both are thrushes, except that the robin is attired with much more show, while the thrush has a modest, brown dress. But this is the smallest difference. In other ways, they are distinctive types. For spunk and audacity the robin has it over most birds. The thrush has none of this boldness. He flits around in the shade trees and on the ground as if he were trying to keep hid. He sings from a thick clump, the robin from a tree-top. The life of the thrush is pitched in a low key. His best song is a vesper hymn with a strain of sadness through it all. The robin has a gayer disposition; he is at his best in the rollicking song of the morning.

Both birds nest about my home, the robin in the orchard, the thrush in the fir thicket beyond. When I looked into the nest of the robin, it made the owners tearing mad. They dashed at me. "Help! Murder! Get out of here or we'll knock your head off!" they yelled. When I crawled into the thicket where the thrush had her home, she was more offended than frightened. She held her dignity and looked at me with an air that said, "This is my home: you are intruding."

Of the eight hundred species of the North American

birds, the robin is the most widely known. No matter how limited a boy or girl's knowledge is about birds, he knows the robin when it arrives in the Spring and begins to hunt worms on the lawn.

Perhaps no bird is so closely associated with our every-day life as the robin. He takes his chances with the cats about the door-yard. He is a rural-life bird but he doesn't like the primitive forest. He can get better nest-building material and better food wherever man is and he stays nearby some house. He likes a lawn in the springtime, for it always holds a good supply of worms. Give a robin plenty of lawn in the Spring and a good cherry orchard in the Summer and he ^{asks} ~~asks~~ for nothing else, and you can't get rid of him. And he makes a picture in the field. How his ruddy breast shows against the green! He hops along for a few steps and suddenly stands erect and still as if ^{Thinking} ~~brooding~~. Then his head turns to one side in a pert way as he examines the ground and listens. Down into the ground goes his bill and he sits back and jerks a long worm from its hole.

As the robin is widely known because of his distinctive size, dress and habits, so the thrush is known for his singing. "If we take the quality of melody as a test," says John Burroughs, "the Wood Thrush, the Hermit Thrush and the Veery Thrush stand at the head of our list of songsters."

P Every bird lover has his favorite songster, and it is often difficult to say whether the song of one bird surpasses that of another, because bird songs are largely matters of association and suggestion. At specific times and places or under certain mental feelings or emotions, I have felt bird music sink into my memory to remain a lasting pleasure. I can never forget the song of a Winter Wren I heard in the very heart of the forest. I had tramped the whole day along the lonely trail and the heavy woods seemed so deserted of birds, ~~that~~ I had heard the call notes of only two or three rare species. I dropped down to rest a few moments and was greeted by a sprightly but plaintive little song, that seemed almost lost in the primeval solitude of the woods. It was the winter wren.

Few songs have thrilled me more than the carolling of the robin at sun^{rise} ~~rise~~ on a ^{crisp} ~~spring~~ Spring morning as I have set out for a walk in the woods. Yet this is not my favorite song. The russet-backed thrush has a richer, fuller melody. His song is one that "ranges the whole scale of pure emotion." And it comes best about dusk from the shaded canons or the dark, tree-covered lawns.

The nest in the fir thicket beyond the orchard was a typical thrush home. When I crawled in under the thick, low-hanging branches of the fir saplings, I almost put my hand ^{on} ~~in~~ the nest. The mother did not flush till I shook the limb, and then

then she slipped through the branches and gave a low whistle that brought her mate. The nest was made of moss and lined with leaves. I have never found a thrush's nest that was not built largely of moss. Moss is as essential to the russet-backed thrush as mud to the robin and lichens to the hummingbird.

Whenever I visited the thrush's nest, I met both the father and the mother. They flitted about the trees, watching me in silence. They were always shy, and to me the shyness was the truest indication of the fine natures they possessed. They did not relieve their feelings by a great show and fuss as the robins did. The robins were always unnecessarily fussy and noisy; They are of plebeian stock; the thrushes are real patricians. Each time the thrush mother came with food for her young, I saw her linger at the nest edge. Many bird mothers are away as soon as they have fed their young, but the thrush never failed to examine her nestlings, and I often saw her sit for several minutes at a time looking at her babies and caressing them with a real mother's love.

There are many tragedies in bird and animal life, but we rarely come upon them. How often do we see a bird sick or dying? The end is generally tragic and not from natural causes. The weak fall as prey to the strong, the sick bird dies from a cat or some other animal. One day I was watching a pair of

~~Yellow~~ Warblers in the orchard that were flitting about the vine-covered fence. I think they were building a nest or just about to build in the vicinity. The first thing I noticed, the male paused on the fence, fluttering his wings. His mate flew down beside him. He tried to fly to a limb of a tree nearby, but fell short and wavered to the ground. The wife was right beside him and chirping all the time. I went nearer for a closer view. He lay flat on his back, writhing in pain. I stooped to pick him up for he was dying. His wife was on the fence scarcely a yard from my hand, fidgeting and calling to him. He died in my hand. I laid him back on the ground; his mate was by his side in an instant and now as speechless as I. She didn't cry; they say birds can't cry, but it was sadder for all that. It was dumb grief. She stayed about all day, waiting for her mate. I buried him by the fence where he fell, stricken by I know not what.

Birds sometimes meet with accidental death. I once saw a swallow fly against a telephone wire with such force that the bird was killed instantly. Later in the season after the thrushes were grown, I found the body of a thrush hanging to the barb of a wire fence down below the orchard. The wire ran straight across the top of a zigzag fence and the bird, in full flight, had just skimmed the top of the rail to go full force into the wire before it was seen. The barb had caught in the

neck and the force had swung the bird's body over the wire from below, locking it in a death grip.

Last summer when I went out through the orchard to examine the trees and see how many bird homes I could find, I found many of the same tenants back, but for some reason not as many robin families as usual. I found only seven robin nests, while these cherry trees generally feed about a dozen broods as well as furnishing a stamping-ground for all the neighboring robins half a mile around.

Two years ago, an old robin built in an apple tree two rows over from the cherries. This year he planted his nest right in the main crotch of the best Royal Ann tree. The minute I swung up into the branches to get some fruit, I was pounced upon by two angry robins. In two minutes they raised such a cry of "Thief! Thief!" that all the birds in the orchard were scolding me. It looked as if I were about to lose my head for taking my own cherries.

In a plum tree a short distance away, I found a nest that had been vacated a few days before by a brood of four young robins. Out of this I picked twenty-seven seeds. On the ground below the nest were a whole handful of pits. But no one can begrudge a few cherries in payment for the horde of insects and worms destroyed by the birds.

I was standing in the back yard watching a robin that came for string to build her nest. I had wrapped a piece sev-

eral times about a limb to see whether the bird would use any intelligence in unwinding it. I have always been skeptical of some of the stories that have been told of birds reasoning. For example, one writer tells of an oriole that took a piece of cloth and hung it on a thorn so the thread could be pulled out. When the cloth came loose, he said the bird refastened it. Again, he has the bird tying knots in the string to keep the ends from fraying in the wind or tying the sticks together to make support for the nest. But these are not bird actions: they were evolved out of the fertile brain of the writer.

As soon as the robin spied the string, she thought it good for her nest. She lit on the branch and took it in her bill, and finding it caught, she gave it a hard tug. Twice she started to fly away with it, but she pulled up with a sharp jerk. She could see and reason no further than the end of the twine. Had she unfolded one or two wraps about the limb, the whole would have come loose. Again and again she took a try at that string with the same success, until she got it tangled about some of the leaves. Then I loosened it and she carried it away. Birds do not know how to use string for it is new to them. We often see cases where they get tangled and hang themselves.

Robins often show very great difference in the matter of selecting a site for a nest. I saw one nest built on an old

rail fence a foot from the ground, another in the side of an old stump, another under a porch, while the great majority of robins will select a tree near a house and place the nest in a strong crotch. The nest is generally built with coarse sticks and strings on the outside and a good cup of mud with an inner lining of finer grasses. Yet I have sometimes found robin nests with hardly a bit of mud.

OUT

Each species of bird has a peculiar way of building a nest that differs from every other species. Among many of the common birds one can generally tell what bird built the nest by a glance at the exterior and the position in which it is placed. The vireos and the orioles build a hanging nest, robins and jays and crows a bulky nest; the warblers build a neat deeply-cupped structure, the grosbeak has a thin framework that you can see through, and the cuckoo and the dove make only a rough platform for a home.

Birds have a good deal of intelligence when it comes to knowing their friends and enemies. One of our neighbors had a robin nesting in the orchard and it became very fearless. Whenever the cat went near the nest, the robin darted at it and clipped it on the back of the head and ears. And the animal would beat a hasty retreat, for it had been taught not to catch birds.

In another yard where the blackbirds nested in the

cypress trees, they grew so bold as to be almost vicious, for they had nested there so long they thought they owned the place and thought they could exclude all intruders. If a strange person went near the ^{nest} while they contained young, the old blackbirds began to scold and swoop from the upper limbs, giving the intruder a sharp rap on the head. It furnished us lots of fun to see a strange dog begin to nose around. In an instant he got a clip on the ear and then another. The birds struck and were away before he could retaliate. He would retreat and the minute he turned his back, the birds were after him, nipping his ears. The faster he ran, the better the chance for them to strike, till they hustled him out of the yard and down the street in a hurry.

In the Spring and Fall the robins often assemble in a large grove every evening and roost together. I discovered one of these robin roosts at Berkeley, California. The robins assembled each evening in a large eucalyptus grove and spread out over the country to forage during the day. This was the last of February and the first of March. Then the birds began to go north. Later in the Spring I have seen them do the same thing when they reach their breeding grounds in Oregon. They like a community life.

One evening I went down to the eucalyptus grove to count the robins. I went at five thirty, but was not early

enough for the grove was then well populated with robins. They were coming in singly and in small flocks. In ten minutes, I counted over three hundred coming from the West. Then I counted from the South and ~~there were~~ over six hundred arrived in ten minutes. They kept coming continually from all directions until a quarter after six, when most of the birds were back. The grove was alive with them just before six o'clock. They kept up a continual clatter, flying from tree to tree, as if talking with their neighbors over the events of the day. In the center of the grove, the chirping and fluttering was so loud as to shut off all sounds from the outside.

Many of the robins came from a long distance for they flew high. Sometimes as I watched, I saw them drop out of the sky. They often were right above the grove before they seemed to see it. I saw the tiniest speck in the blue and it would grow rapidly larger until the robin dropped into the grove. Sometimes I saw the birds fly clear past the grove before they seemed to recognize the place, then they ^{would} turn, fold their wings and drop headlong. One day when it was very windy, they flew very low, just over the house-tops. Many would come in, beating their wings and ^{making slow headway} ~~going very slowly~~ against the wind, as if all tired out.

For several evenings I tried to count the number of robins that came into the grove. I estimated there were over

six thousand sleeping there every night.

I thought there would be a grand chorus in the morning when all these birds awoke, so I went over before daybreak one morning. The robins began to wake at the first indication of dawn, and they began leaving the trees immediately. There were no songs, only a few robin calls as the birds departed in singles and in small flocks, as they had come the evening before. And by five thirty the grove was vacant again.

