

CHAPTER V

The Birds and Their Families



NOW that the nest in the horse chestnut tree was completed Mr Thrush sat near by waiting to hear the glad news that one egg had come. So the next time Mrs Thrush went away from the nest for her bath the children peeped into the nest and there saw one peckled egg! The next day another was there and the next day still another.

Mr Thrush was a most interesting father for the children to observe for he fought off any bird who ventured too near Mrs Thrush's nest. For birds there are who are too lazy to build their own nests and boldly take possession of any nest they can. Father Thrush knowing this was ever on the defensive and ready to fight to protect his wife and little ones. He watched when she went for food—and when at sundown she went to the stream to bathe he also watched.

The Thrushes seemed to do most of their love making at sundown in song. The song consists of four notes which the children interpreted as saying 'Do you love me?' And the answer came in three notes 'I love you

If singing meant happiness Father Thrush was certainly very happy these days. For he seemed to sing more than any of the other birds except perhaps Father Song Sparrow who too was overjoyed at the arrival of four youngsters.

Mother Thrush never answered Father Thrush's musical song while she was waiting for the eggs to hatch—she was very still then always—but he must have taken her love for granted for he sang on just the same.

One day some time later when the children took their usual place under the tree the air was rent with shrieks and cries from both birds who flew at them and scolded so shrilly that the children decided it was best to go away but on watching from a distance they saw Mrs Thrush bring food in her mouth and three tiny heads with open bills stretch themselves above the nest. They knew now why Mr and Mrs Thrush objected to their going so near the nest that day. The children were so excited that it was difficult to keep them from going to the nest to see. But when they were reminded of the great care Mr and Mrs Thrush had given the eggs so that they might hatch into little birds and were told that it would trouble them greatly and excite them to have any one touch the nest they decided to wait for a better opportunity.

It did not come for several days for Mr

Thrush was a most watchful father. But these Thrush youngsters were developing so fast and had such husky appetites it took both Mr and Mrs Thrush busy to keep them fed. So when the parents were off on their hunt for food the children carefully looked into the nest. There they were three featherless fearless funny things with only knowledge enough to stretch their necks for food.

The day that Mrs Thrush first hurriedly told Mr Thrush that one scrawny imp had come out of its shell he seemed overjoyed for he sang all day long—even into the night. This was perhaps the most vivid example of a father's joy the children saw. But another case came to their notice of a father bird's devotion—and that was when Mrs Sparrow deserted her little ones.

There was an old apple tree at the back of the house and in the trunk of this tree Mr and Mrs Sparrow had made a home for their children.

One morning there was a call of distress from Mr Sparrow. The children watched him as he flew from tree to tree and limb to limb calling—calling in the most plaintive tones. All day he called until the sun went down behind the Palisades but no mother returned to her children. It was quite decided that Mrs Sparrow was hurt or even killed and great

the excitement over this terrible possibility After two days of calling and calling Mrs Sparrow returned—but not alone The guilty partner of her flight came along too and Father Sparrow promptly chased him away but every time Father Sparrow flew at him and chased him off Mrs Sparrow would fly away with him Then poor Father Sparrow would call and coax and tease and plead with her to return, and she would return just long enough to see the little fledglings and off she would go with the other sparrow Each day she returned to see the little ones and trouble the poor father who was trying so hard to provide for the motherless family

The other birds seemed most sympathetic and on one occasion Mr Robin watched the sparrow house while Mr Sparrow chased the wooer of his wife This was the last time for Mrs Sparrow never again returned to her family

No other birds ever went near that tree wherein the lone widower dwelled He seemed greatly respected by the other birds He taught his little ones to fly and where to find the choicest food in Bobby's garden The children insisted on caging the cats for a few weeks so that Father Sparrow would not have this extra burden on him They were of one decided opinion that father love and devotion saved that

family and all agreed that it was a most important factor in bringing up a family

This was a most unusual case and the boys were made to realize its unusualness for it is *very seldom* that a mother ever deserts her young

It was funny to watch the sentiments of these small tots As soon as Mrs Sparrow returned for her short intervals the children got bread and worms and all kinds of tempting food in hopes that she would remain with her family They were willing like Father Sparrow to forgive her but as soon as she made her preparations to go away instinctively they picked up stones to throw at her so intense was their interest and it is feared that had not a grown up been with them something would have happened for the air was full of whispers and words like bean shooters air rifles etc were heard occasionally

However their attention was diverted to Miss Oriole who had two young Oriole attendants Each asked for her love—and she would not decide How she teased them both and how desperately she flirted Of course the lovers despised each other but how wonderfully they told her in song of their great love for her each trying to outdo the other

When no one was about she must have made up her mind to accept one and it was

noticed it was he with the sweetest voice rather than the one with beautiful plumage who won her. He was a most daring and fearless lover and took beautiful care of her while they were waiting for the eggs to hatch.

The summer was one lovely long day watching the birds. As the cold weather came on the birds became fewer—few and strange birds on their way to the South came for food and flew away again.

There was no more interesting and charming lesson of paternal love to be learned than among the birds and it was noticed that no longer was the mother of sole interest but the father's habits and life became of interest. The children received their lesson of father love through the birds.

Where the father flowers, fish and frogs gave themselves no concern over the young here was a higher creature whose love of offspring was not purely physical but represented something higher in his makeup. This was not only the desire to procreate but to protect and care for his offspring after their creation.

This is perhaps one of the best times to begin to talk to the child of its own body if one has not done so before.

The study of the birds gives the boy particularly a beautiful impression of the father's

part in life so that it is quite natural for him to think of himself in this relation too

Teach the child that there is no shame in nature Mothers should never say shame on you when a child exposes any part of its body

Always allow perfect freedom in his acts and affections Teach him that love and affection are beautiful and let him follow his impulses in these Never make children kiss people for form's sake either aunts or uncles or any others let them alone in this for their instincts are keener often than ours

It was not until all the familiar birds had gone that their thoughts turned to the higher stage the mammals