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A Fable of the Birds to Mrs. Muir [Louie Strentzel Muir]

Unidentified

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A F A B L E O F T H E B I R D S .

In the days of great wonders - no matter when -
 But when language was common to beasts, birds and men,
 The birds of the air held a mammoth convention,
 The cause and the outcome are worthy of mention.

It happened in this wise: One bright summer day,
 When all of the world was uncommonly gay,
 Some blackbirds, while happily flitting around,
 A nest of strange shape and construction had found.
 It was hung on two limbs of a low-growing tree
 And was cosy and snug as a nest well could be.
 It had an arched cover, constructed no doubt
 To keep the birds in and to keep the rain out.

Now blackbirds are chatterers, every one knows,
 And on seeing this nest, as you may suppose
 They raised a great hue-and-cry, calling together
 Wild birds of all sizes, conditions and feather.
 The nest was examined from low and from high
 And the beautiful arch attracted each eye;
 It seemed to be useful, in every way fitting
 To shelter the mother-bird while she was sitting.

Then they cried in one voice, with infinite zest,
 "We must learn how to build for our young such a nest."
 A Committee was raised to seek out the bird
 Whose nest such a hullabaloo had bestirred.
 A committee instructed to beg and to pray
 That the builder would come and teach them the way
 To build an arched-nest, like that on the bough;
 Every bird in the meeting was crazed to know how.

Now while the committee was gone on its quest
 An informal meeting was held by the rest:
 In this, as is usual, contentions arose,
 For each had a plan of his own to propose.
 A majority there were fully agreed
 That an arch on a nest was a very great need
 And protect the young birdlings from wind and from storm,
 And, besides, such a nest *must of course, be "good form".*

Per contra: - There came from the Burrowing Owl,
Whose forehead towers over his eyes like a cowl,
These words, in a voice discordant and rough,
"I think that hole in the ground is enough."
When any one starts there are plenty to follow,
And the same sage remark came from the Bank Swallow.

The Woodpecker said, "The trunk of a tree
With a hole I can dig, will answer for me."
The Barn Owl and Swallow cried, "Rafters and eaves
Make far better shelter than arches and leaves."

Said the Cuckoo, "O, pshaw! that may do for the rest
But the fact is I don't have to build any nest:
I watch for some bird that is willing to make it,
And when it is ready, I quietly take it!
So stupid the bird - so wondrously civil
That she hatches my young, giving back good for evil.

The Night Hawk created a visible shock
By saying, "I hatch my young out on a rock."

Thus the chatter went on, but suddenly ended
When from out the blue sky there quickly descended
The seeking-committee, and with them a guest -
The Oriole, he who had helped build that nest.
What a flutter of wings! The very air trembled!
In a jiffy the whole feathered tribe had assembled;
While at once the committee, the happy possessor
Of the bright Oriole, introduced the Professor.

His appearance created a striking sensation
Which brought to his heart no end of elation.
His dress was a dream, bright orange and black,
And he flirited his head with a queer little knack
As if he would say, "I am IT, don't you see,
If you wish to learn wisdom, come listen to me."
He made a low bow, adjusted his collar,
And his voice had the ring of a new-minted dollar.

"My friends," he exclaimed, "I am glad of this meeting
 And extend to you all a brotherly greeting.
 I am told that you all want to learn how to build
 A nest like the one that is used by our Guild.
 But before I begin on the great work of teaching
 This motto I give, it is very far reaching;
~~It is simple and plain, every bird can see through it.~~
 It is simple and plain, every bird can see through it-
 'To learn how to do a thing well - you must do it.'"

And here it is fitting to make a remark
 Throwing light on some things heretofore in the dark.
 The records have all been examined with care
 And from them it seems very safe to declare
 That the first great Industrial School was held there
 While the Oriole sat in the President's chair!
 The truth he proclaimed is as vital to-day
 As it was in those years so far, far away,
 For knowing and doing should walk hand in hand,
 And those who can do shall inherit the land.

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 But now to resume - ~~the~~ learned Professor
 Proceeded, as still does his worthy successor,
 To give illustrations. He started ~~the~~ work
 In a way that was sure to detect any shirk.
 He claimed but one thing, in that was persistent,
 That little Tom Titmouse should be his assistant,-
 A bright little chap with a shrill, piping voice,
 Who builds an arched-nest, this accounts for the choice.

He said to the Pigeons, "Some twigs, if you please,
 You will find them abundant beneath the dry trees."
 To the Blue Jays and Blackbirds, "Some lichens and moss
 To work into the twigs as we lay them criss-cross."

To the Robins and Waxwings, "Some very soft clay
 With any fine rootlets you find in the way;"
 To the Thrushes and Catbirds, "Some strips of soft grass
 And any thing ~~is~~ fibrous you happen to pass."

To the Bluebirds and Goldfinches, "Fine thistle down
With the long strings of cotton you see floating down
From the Cottenwood trees; it's abundant, you know,
You can gather easily, not far to go."
To the Sparrows and wrens, "Some hairs, long and fine
To weave through the nest, as though they were twine."

Thus he ~~as~~ set them to work in a masterful way.
And most of the birds seemed to think it but play.
He had other workers constructing the nest
And all were quite ready to heed his behest.
Sir Oriole stood there as Cock of the Walk,
But soon they observed he did nothing but talk.

Now this method of his attracted attention
Sowing deeply the seeds of future dissension.
As the birds came and went, fulfilling their task
Each one of the other was ready to ask,
"Why don't he do something, not stand there and gabble
As though he considered us only the rabble?"

The mutterings deepened, defying restraint,
Every worker was anxious to enter complaint.
The Pigeons said, "Coo, we'll stand none of his rigs!
We have known all our lives how to gather up twigs;
We will work here no longer," then flitted away,
And their nests are made up of mere twigs to this day.

But the nest grew apace, it was natty and trim
And soon was completed well up to the brim.
Then a "Delegate" came and sowed more dissension,
The usual result, I venture to mention.
At last the storm burst! The birds came together,
All shapes and all sizes, of every feather,
And surrounding Sir Oriole, each felt inclined
To give with much vigor "a piece of his mind."

The Blue Jays complained that their toe-nails were sore
The robins declared, "We knew all this before,"
And all cried with one voice, "We will labor no more."
It is now quite in place that I should declare
That the first Striker's Meeting was held then and there.

Sir Oriole bowed his imperial head
And unto the strikers he quietly said,
"Knew all this before! Then why send for me?
But since with my methods you do not agree
Let us "call the thing off", I bid you good day."
Then he turned on his heel and fluttered away.

Then the birds, one and all, started off on a hike:
You will recognize this as a genuine strike.
And so the thing ended: and since that sad day
Birds have builded their nests in the old-fashioned way.
They struck, and so doing fell out of the march;
But the Titmouse and Oriole know how to arch.

Old Aesop, the father of fables, I'm sure
From a story like this would a lesson secure.
So now for a moral: Be never a shirk,-
No thing worth the doing is learned without work;
No skill will be gained by idly stand viewing,
To learn how to do you must join in the doing.

Fine feathers don't make a fine bird, it is true.
But a bird with fine feathers may know more than you.
Despise not instruction from great nor from small,
Remember you never will quite know it all.
And last, though your part in the work you don't like,
You'll not learn a new trade by joining a Strike.