

MEETING SPRING HALF WAY

By FLORENCE MERRIAM BAILEY

II. (*Continued from page 155*)

DRIVE DOWN across the southernmost prairies of Texas in April if you would meet the last of the migrating hordes of birds and see one of Nature's most remarkable exhibits of 'social plants'. Daisies that whiten occasional meadows in the east and the so-called poppies that gild strips of uncultivated land in California partially explain the term, but on the prairies most of the species are social plants and acres or miles of one species are followed by acres or miles of another species. Blue-bonnets dominated all the other flowers at Austin and were among the dominant flowers at Corpus Christi. Beyond them there was one flower bed about a mile wide and three miles long, solid *Coreopsis*, so brilliantly yellow it fairly mirrored the sun. That many of the social plants like *Coreopsis*, verbena, spiderwort, and phlox are the familiar garden flowers of the east makes their riotous growth seem peculiarly remarkable. Fresh from an eastern garden, even rods of verbena are enlarging to the mind!

The richest flora and fauna between Corpus Christi and Brownsville was found on the bands of clay soil adjoining the two towns and separated by a wide stretch of sandy soil. The most conspicuous flowers of the clay were yellow tar weed, yellow and pink primrose, purple verbena, magenta *Callirhoe*, and yellow *Coreopsis*. Cactus, thorny chaparral, and mesquite also occurred on the clay soil, while on the sandy tracts here and there among the sand dunes stood live oak groves.

We began our three hundred and sixty mile drive from Corpus Christi to the Mexican boundary and return, on April 24, 1900, and that day made twenty-two miles to Petranilla Creek, enjoying the alternation of green mesquite orchards and gay flower prairie. One section of prairie had miles of pink evening primroses stretching as far as the eye could see. In the mesquite orchards the beautiful trees suggested the pepper trees of California with their finely cut waving foliage branched to the ground, and toward sunset the slanting light made the lacy foliage an intense yellow green. Though not yet decorated with their delicate tasselled yellow blooms, two trees that we saw bore brilliant blossoms—scarlet-breasted Vermilion Flycatchers! One of these was in a mesquite on the Oso, how musically the Spanish names run, the other in a tree at Mott Aura, Mott being the local name for a small grove on the open prairie (this one having a mixture of huisache, hackberry, and mesquite), Aura commemorating the Turkey Vultures which formerly frequented the grove. Having the unusual addition of a pond, Mott Aura had attracted not only the scarlet *Pyrocephalus*, green Vireos, and black Jackdaws, but also a Solitary Sandpiper and a number of Yellow-legs.

On the prairie the characteristic birds seen during our journey were Meadowlarks, Mourning Doves, Dickcissels, Sennett Thrashers, Nighthawks and Upland Plover. Knowing Dickcissels previously only as individual songsters well met on their breeding grounds in the wheat fields of the north, it was a pleasant surprise to meet the spring flocks on their way north. We began meeting them on our first day out. Long rows, rows sometimes reaching hundreds, were lined up on the fences like Swallows on telegraph wires. Their flat heads

and hanging tails marked them when too far away to see their chestnut backs or yellow chest patches. Their familiar song with its mouthed furry burr suggested the wheat fields of Illinois, for which some of them may have been bound. When not in exclusive rows of their own kind, the Dickeissels were often sitting alongside the large Mourning Doves, making the groups suggest old and young. A droll picture was seen one day, May 9, on our return trip, four Hummingbirds sitting on a fence, mere darning needles against the big prairie.

On the fence posts or low bushes from our first day out we occasionally saw one of the large Hawks, *swainsoni* and *sennetti*, among the rare pleasures of our journey. *Swainsoni* was a familiar westerner but the southern *sennetti* was new to me. When opportunity afforded I noted eagerly its immaculate breast, white rump, and white tail with black subterminal band; but the impression of the bird is what is recalled to-day when a level prairie comes to mind. At a distance one sees a large statue of a Hawk on the prairie floor; on nearer approach, a King of Hawks looking up with calm enquiring gaze, both gaze and pose bespeaking the silent power of the race. The white of the Hawk, by Mr. Thayer's view of protective coloration, has been worked out to the undoing of its prey, the small mammals that look up at it against the light of the sky into which its whiteness enables it to fade; while on the other hand the small mammals have become colored like the prairie to protect them from furred and feathered hunters that look earthward.

Some Jack rabbits that we saw on our first day's drive trusted to their protective coloration as if they knew what Nature had done for them. While one ran off fleetly, its long black-marked ears held high, several crouched motionless, and one fairly skulked along, its ears flat on its back concealing the conspicuous black nape, as it ran with body close to the ground. One of the crouching ones trusted to its disguise, but with anxiety in its big eyes, while we drove near enough to have touched it with a whip. In another place a Jack was jumped up from the horses' feet and apparently half asleep broke all the rules of protective conduct, stopping only a few yards from us and sitting down on its haunches with ears up full length and black neck conspicuous, a rare exception to our common experiences.

Jack rabbits were the only animals seen on the open prairie but on the clay banks of Petranilla Creek when we made camp, tracks of coon, wild cat, and coyote, besides the excitingly strange tracks of armadillo—curious round, stumpy nail prints—suggested many stories of north and south. Big armadillo burrows were also found on our trip, slanting under cactus roots, and under tufts of marsh grass. How ardently I wished for a sight of the ancient armored beasts!

The rich band of vegetation bordering the creek demonstrated what water will do on the prairie. The flora showed the same northern and southern admixtures that made the fauna especially interesting. Elms and ashes stood side by side with hackberry, moss-hung live oaks, blooming cactus, palmettos that were all leaves, and the curious all-thorns that instead of leaves have green bark covering branches and thorns. Our camp floor encircled by these interesting trees and bushes was carpeted by pink primroses that, at nine in the morning, were still facing west where they had turned to follow the sun the night before.

Both migrant and resident birds enlivened the camp with their bright col-

ors and songs. An Indigo Bird back from its winter in Mexico or Central America, and our first Cuckoo, back from South America, were found here, and after listening to the voice of a Chat we caught sight of its brilliant yellow breast in the mesquite. A Wren, having probably wintered near home, was already beginning to build, being seen carrying a stick up through a streamer of moss. Hearing a bright pleasing song that resembled the Indigo Bunting's, I followed it up till, on a bare tree top in the sun I discovered—a Nonpareil, the familiar many colored cage bird! A Red-bellied Woodpecker came flying in to the bridge over the creek, but seeing us withdrew to watch us from around a corner. Besides these, there were Mockingbirds and a family of Harris Hawks, the handsome southerners. Their nest, a heavy platform of sticks in the top of a moss-draped hackberry, was littered with fur and bones, a dozen wood rat skulls among the number. The large well feathered nestlings had the same handsome rufous patches that distinguish the parents. The guardian of the nest, perhaps made unduly anxious by our presence, stood for a long time on the bare top of a tree that commanded the situation, and like a preoccupied philosopher ignored the hysterical attacks of a Mocker, doubtless another parent merely expressing his responsibility in terms of his own nervous temperament.

After Petranilla Creek, our next objective point was King's Ranch, fifty miles west of Corpus Christi, across broad stretches of flat blooming prairie, with successive bands of pink and white primroses. Where there were no fences the migrating Doves and white-winged Lark Buntings perched on the cactus pads, edging gingerly along as if fully mindful of the sharp spines. Once in passing we caught a delightful wave of song from the white wings. Fences were so rare that they were taken advantage of, and one corral that we passed was occupied by hundreds of Mourning Doves as close as beads on a string.

At San Fernando Creek a herd of range cattle reminded our Texas camp man that in a dry time thousands of cattle had been saved by having the spines burned off the cactus so that it could be fed to them. The old man warned us when looking for birds to 'watch out' for rattlesnakes, for he said in such hot weather the snakes stayed in the shade in the day time. As they were the large diamond backs of Texas and Florida whose long fangs put a dangerous amount of poison into the circulation, his warning had some point. At San Fernando Creek new flowers came in, a magenta Mexican poppy, a small mesquite with fragrant blossoms, and a bright red flowered cactus, followed later by blue-bonnets. The heat that made the cactus bloom also produced our first mirage. The spring migrants had need to hurry, but besides the white wings we noted a tardy Ovenbird, a Black-throated Green Warbler, and a Clay-colored Sparrow, on this, the twenty-fifth day of April.

Our second night's camp was on King's Ranch, one of the largest cattle ranches of Texas, where we met the Brownsville and Alice stage road and turned south across the rich stock range. The cattle king was at that time a cattle queen who spent her winters in New York, leaving her superintendent in charge. At his advice we camped at Santa Gertrude, as two windmills and their water tanks were called. A vivid green circle enclosed by mesquites branching to the ground with abundant water made indeed a camping place to commemorate a saint. Quail, a pair of Cardinals, and a pair of Thrashers carrying food showed their appreciation of the tanks, which were evidently well known in the region. As we had been warned regarding fellow travelers

near the Mexican border, when a party of dusky faced men rode in and proceeded to camp on the opposite side of our enclosure, I made sure that our fire-arms were fully in evidence and valorously determined to protect the camp from midnight Mexican daggers! Terrors of the night! The first Mexican to cross our camp ground, well after sunrise, was a mild mannered lad with a piece of drawn work to exchange for coffee and sugar for his breakfast! Nevertheless, on leaving the windmills we had to abandon the Alice and Brownsville stage road we had been enjoying, as, beyond that point, the stage drivers locked the gates behind them to prevent horse thieves crossing private pastures.

Another day passed in a world of flowers, a day of moving pictures, of beautiful and interesting forms of vegetation and bird life. More circles of pink evening primroses were surrounded by green mesquites, and a grove of low huisache more filmy and delicate even than the mesquite, was carpeted with *Coreopsis* as yellow as buttercups. Then, in striking contrast, came a thicket of thorn brush with cactus coming into bloom, and beyond a carpet of the curious Indian wheat, a whitish plantain that grows extensively in the arid region, and whose miniature grain the pocket mice carry home in their pouches. Big bare circles around peaked ant hills with bare trails leading to them through the vegetation were characteristic and numerous.

At a turn of the road there appeared a lake set in a cool dark green tule frame. A gleaming white spot on its edge, through the glass proved a red-breasted Shoveller, and on a tongue of the lake stood a Solitary Sandpiper and a Plover with her young, while a Greater Yellow-legs, followed by its miniature a Lesser Yellow-legs, walked along the shore, mirrored in the water. One shallow strip of pond that we passed was covered with little shore birds running about and scolding at each other in double.

After passing acres of white mint we came to one solitary scarlet painted-cup, so gratefully brilliant after the white that its single flower caught the eye and held it charmed. Beyond, the pink *Erythraea* began increasing and swelled in numbers till it reached its height. Following the *Erythraea* came an unusual field of blended colors. In the vivid green grass was a stand of pink phlox and a level higher, thinly but uniformly scattered through it, a stand of some bright yellow flower. While the color combination seems crude and in-harmonious, curiously enough the effect of the yellow was merely to lighten the pink, to illuminate the field in a rare and surprising manner. After this, as if Nature would do nothing to weaken such an effect, there followed miles of white daisies.

Before sundown we passed our next landmark, Santa Rosa Ranch—the names marking the road between Corpus Christi and Brownsville are those of ranches, windmills, or motts—and after driving up to the hubs through freshet lakes we camped for the night between two runs, much to the dissatisfaction of the old Texas camp man who said that he had been caught that way in winter, camping beside a dry wash and having to stand up to his knees in water half the night! The only excitements of the night, however, proved to be the passing of birds in the darkness, the fine chip of small migrants, the squawk of Black-crowned Night Herons, and low over us the thrilling swishing of heavy wings, probably those of Wild Turkeys. As the night had been dry, Mr. Bailey found pocket mice and kangaroo rats in his traps, for we had now entered the sand belt that supplies homes for these small burrowing animals

and the badgers that prey on them, all of which are unknown in the clay belts adjoining Corpus Christi and Brownsville.

After visiting the traps we went in search of the birds that were holding jubilee on the other side of the woods, and in spite of the warning of the old Texan, "Look out, there's varmints in that bresh," pushed through the dense cactus and thorn armored thicket, bending low to escape the thorny branches or shoving rigidly through with minds hardened to the pricks of needles, though with eyes out for coiled rattlesnakes. After a strenuous passage we reached the edge of a lake of flood water, in the middle of which mesquite trees stood up to their heads, black-spotted with Jackdaws, squawking and squealing almost loud enough to drown even the cackling of Coots and barking of Grebes that were adding to the merry medley on that April morning.

In one corner of the pond a small flock of Cormorants perched on the mesquites, their long snaky necks and bills raised expectantly. When they descended to the water they looked droller than ever, for they still sat with long bills pointed skyward. A party of gray, white-billed Coots feeding quietly in a dark green tule cove or standing on the beach as if at home, and scattered groups of Coots swimming about in leisurely homelike fashion offered amusing contrasts to the strained alert manner of the Cormorants. Some Eared Grebes with light ear patches were swimming about as complacently as were the Dabchicks, between dives, though their spring journey was not yet completed. Through the bushes we caught sight of two Gallinules disappearing so fast we merely saw their small hen-like heads and bright red bills in passing.

Along shore the sand was filled with holes and pellet-made chimneys of fiddler crabs, and I spied one little fellow with its arms around a victim backing down its hole. Coon tracks on the sand told the other side of the crab story.

Taking up our journey again our prairie road disappeared in another flood pond, in which we went up to the hubs. Beyond, on the dry prairie we drove through bands of color, miles of low pink phlox and pink primroses, yellow Coreopsis, Senecio, or Oenothera, orange brown Thelesperma, scarlet painted-cup and white daisies. During the day we noted the Blue Grosbeak, Red-winged Blackbird, and Maryland Yellow-throat. In an oak mott that we crossed there was an interesting old stage station, a Mexican pole house with thatched roof, its pole walls chinked with mud, a brush corral adding to the foreign picture.

Under the oaks of the mott we found three fellow travelers, an old Mexican with a pointed hat, a boy with a three-story water jug in his hand, and a solemn little burro with a peccary skin spread on his back. Our mules shied at the group but we stopped to talk to the wayfarers and persuaded them to sell us the handsome white-collared peccary skin. Where it had been secured, our Spanish was inadequate to discover, but a few of the wary wild pigs are still left in the region though they escape the hunter by taking to caves and cactus and thorn brush. If a mounted cowboy ropes one, he does it with great risk to his horse, for the pigs when brought to bay gash the horse's legs with their sharp tusks.

After leaving the mott, instead of prairies glowing with flowers, we had equally beautiful green salt marshes alive with light that glinted from the stems of the marsh grass. The green level stretching away to the horizon was dotted with ponds, some bordered with tules, some merely flood water ponds

with submerged tufts of marsh grass, but all covered with water fowl, some of which were resting and feeding on their way from Argentina to Alaska. Among those seen were the Solitary, the Western, and Buff-breasted Sandpipers, Dowitchers, Black-necked Stilts, Killdeer, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, feeding in flocks together, besides quakerish Willets, and comfortable looking Shovellers. How interesting to meet the travelers half way!

But while our morning, with its lakes full of water fowl, was the most exciting of our journey, our afternoon dragged slowly along for we had reached the sixty or eighty mile stretch of light sand that in distinction from the hard bottomed sand of the mesquite land makes such hard pulling that we had been warned about it before starting. Coarse poor grass and low oak brush replaced the flowers we had come to consider our portion, and sand dunes were the most interesting landscape features. The country was as bare of bird as plant life with two notable exceptions. Upland Plover were passed along the road so tame that they walked close to us with gentle fearlessness, their heads raised, their mild eyes resting upon us; and farther on we saw a flock of perhaps a hundred Long-billed Curlew flying toward the ocean in a long shifting line, now a broad V, now a saw-tooth W, now a straight line, a stirring sight. When the birds had gone, the hours dragged out and we helped them pass as best we could analyzing stray flowers, collecting an occasional specimen, or photographing some new type of vegetation, studying up constellations for our nights in the open, and dipping into the miniature pocket poets I had brought for such hours of need. After Wordsworth we were well attuned to the quiet prairie sunset, a warm, serene sunset, the round pink ball going down on the level horizon broadening the outlook till we found ourselves quoting Lanier's *Marshes of Glynn* with their range and their sweep.

At last the low line of trees we had been wearily traveling toward for hours was reached and proved a veritable oasis in the sand belt. An oak mott, San Ignatia by name, raised only a few feet above the general level but made up of large old live oaks that dispensed cool shade through the hot hours and offered shelter to birds from all the region round about. The trees, filled with nests, were noisy with squawking Jackdaws, clamoring Scissor-tails, and loquacious Mockingbirds, the heated medley being cooled down by the quiet cooing of Doves. When the aviary had settled down for the night a rattlesnake, discovered too near our tent, had to be shot, and at the report of the gun an amazingly large flock of Scissor-tails burst out of the tree, proving what the oak mott meant on the treeless prairie. The oaks had been trimmed up for wood by previous travelers, but after making camp it did not take the old Texan long to discover some dead branches he could lasso, and we were soon sitting before the camp fire enjoying our supper after our long day's drive.

The stars came out so temptingly that we carried our sleeping bags out under them on the open prairie. To sleep under the stars on the open, level prairie—the dream of years was to be realized at last! As if from a raft on the ocean the entire circle of your horizon is star-filled sky! As night closes in around you, you seem to be alone with the stars. Mortal no longer, you become a point in the universe. All human cares, all the littleness of human life drop from you, the great universe lies close around you.

But one cannot always stay on the illuminated, soul expanding mountain tops. The return to earth in this case did not bring the looked for second rattlesnake, but a scorpion fell from a shaken sleeve the next morning. The day

was spent in trapping, skinning, and writing up notes among the bird colony of the oak mott. Its rarest member, *Pyrocephalus*, the exquisite little scarlet-breasted Flycatcher sang a rapturous flight song suggestive of that of the Cassin Sparrow. When in midair he would puff out the feathers of his breast till he might have been a full blown red rose, and then float down through the air to the flowery fields below. The Jackdaws, prominent members of the mott colony, amused us by their buffoonry, their attitudinizing, their crackling, brush-breaking noises and their falsetto squeals while their mates calmly gathered nesting material. Golden-fronted and Texas Woodpeckers called as they passed back and forth through the trees, the Golden-fronted with a loud penetrating rattle. Vireos hunted about, and passing Warblers, among them the Black and White Creeper, chipped in the tree tops. A belated Chestnut-sided was seen in another oak mott later in the day. A Mockingbird was building in an oak and we found a Lark Sparrow's nest sunk in the ground at the foot of a bush containing four eggs. On the live oaks were found clumps of a stout air plant related to the Spanish moss with beautiful purple fuchsia-like flowers that proved to be a new species, and it was carefully photographed, as was also a solid acre of pink phlox, though, alas, we could not reproduce the colors!

When we again took to the road and Barn Swallows with their dark backs and deep chestnut breasts circled around us, by contrast we realized anew how keen and bright were the tones of the prairie flowers. As we drove on a Caracara with its proud, erect bearing, waited in a low tree ahead of us till we could distinguish its black crest, and as it flew off its white wing tips were conspicuous. A partly eaten snake and the Mexican emblem seemed well correlated. Very few birds were seen along the road on these last days of April, and those mostly summer residents, a few Mourning Doves and Horned Larks, a flock of Cowbirds around a herd of cattle, and once a Nighthawk sitting with furled sails on a 'chip' on the prairie. Resident bird life centered in the motts, where Wood Pewees, Lark Sparrows, Quail, Clay-colored Sparrows, Blue Grosbeaks, Curve-billed Thrashers, and Mockingbirds were seen, a Mocker in one place feeding half grown young. Mockingbirds were so abundant that the old Texan remarked comprehensively, "Wherever you find a bush you'll find a Mocker, without an accident, from Corpus here."

The largest mott, which was seen on the twenty-ninth, offered such generous shade that cattle had bared the ground under its oak roof. Jackdaws were making a great commotion here and Orioles and Black and White Creepers increased our wish that we might camp and investigate.

A north wind gave us a beautiful sight, a flock of perhaps forty White Pelicans maneuvering in the sky, flying in a wedge or a straight line, for, as we were told, a north wind makes them fly north because it piles the water so high down the gulf that they cannot get their fish. The events of the hour were a number of large Hawks, the Harris, Sennett, and Swainson, some of them perching on telegraph poles, as if appreciating the rare possibility, beautiful, smooth sand dunes, and our old friends the mesquite and cactus, together with ponds enlivened by Redwings and waders, and encircled by brilliant yellow *Coreopsis* rings. These yellow rings around pools were so numerous that they demonstrated the aquatic taste of the flowers.

Sauz Ranch, the next spot on the map, proved not only a white man's ranch and stage station but a Mexican village of picturesque hackells made of branches and thatched with grass, inhabited by Mexicans who rode around

with tall peaked hats. In passing a goat pen we persuaded the white-bearded goatherd to take a dime for a cup of goat's milk though he urged that it was worth only *un centavo*. A jolly party of Mexicans traveling in a prairie schooner camped by our water tanks.

Here we saw our first tropical and sub-tropical White-winged Dove, a bird which afterwards grew rapidly common. In hooting it sat on a branch and puffed out its throat emitting its curious hollow, cavernous *whoo-hoo'-hoo-hoo'*. A nest that we discovered was in a huisache over flood water about six feet from the ground.

Beyond Sauz Ranch a new effect was given to the woods by the butterfly tree (*Parkinsonia aculeata*). It had been only in bud at Petranilla Creek a week before, but we were going south and it was here in full bloom, its jessamine-like yellow flowers having a delicate fragrance. A *Salvia* also added a bright touch to the woods, and outside the magenta poppies increased in numbers.

(To be continued)

A HOSPITAL FOR WILD BIRDS

By DR. W. W. ARNOLD

WITH TWO PHOTOS BY THE AUTHOR

ONE OF the most delightful sequelae to my efforts to interest school children in bird-life and its protection, was the establishment of a hospital for the care and treatment of wild birds suffering from what might be termed the normal catastrophes which happen to vast numbers of our feathered brothers as they journey from their embryonic egg-shell home to the grave. For a number of years I had been devoting much time and attention to arousing general interest in the welfare and protection of bird-life, through talks on birds, illustrated by lantern slides and mounted specimens; but it seemed impossible to arouse a permanent interest and abiding enthusiasm in the children until I adopted the plan of taking the live birds that had been restored from some accident, and showing them to the children, at the same time reciting the life-histories of the feathered patients, the character of their injuries, and the method of treatment carried out for their relief. This plan met with an immediate response, and the children deluged me with such numbers of crippled birds that I was compelled to erect a commodious aviary (fig. 50), and to call into use a large number of small cages for the accomodation of the seriously injured.

Within twelve months the size of the hospital had to be doubled to accomodate the feathered patients; and following the heavy hail storm occurring July 18, 1915, I was completely swamped and had to resort to all kinds of devices to furnish shelter for the flocks of battered and broken creatures brought to me by the children. Forty-five robins suffering from broken wings, broken legs, eyes knocked out, and bodies battered and bruised, refrigerated by ten or twelve hours spent in windrows of hail stones, were brought to the hospital for treatment; and fifteen miscellaneous victims—bluebirds, finches, black-headed grosbeaks, yellow warblers, red-shafted flickers, meadowlarks, tana-