

## VIII. A VOICE FROM THE HEIGHTS

Above the chorus of the Humid Coast belt three soloists stood apart, not from any brilliancy of execution or charm of vocal accomplishment, but from their deep human appeal, their rare moving quality. The clarion *pu-pu-peo*, or the keener *pu-pee-peo*, of the Olive-sided Flycatcher from the hills aroused rich mountain memories, as did also the fresh uplifted song of the Nuttall Sparrow, whether heard from a fern field, a tree top overlooking the fishing village and the quiet inland waters of the blue Bay, or from a cliff overlooking the wide sandy beach and the long white lines of surf coming in from the ocean.

But there was one voice that was new to me, whose appeal was reinforced by no rare memories, though given glamour by Alaskan song and story—the voice of the Varied Thrush. Its single note with its mysterious vibrant trill had been heard from the mountain tops in the chorus of morning and evening; and on one red letter day, from the wood road one of the rare birds had actually been seen near enough to distinguish its golden brown, dark-collared breast.

But not until one Sunday morning when I was sitting quietly in the fern field, did I really hear the wonderful song. Then through the clear air, each single, long-swelling note came down from the ridge above like the peal of a golden bell. It was indeed a Voice from the Heights! The best songs from the lower levels and even those of the Olive-sided and the Nuttall Sparrow but lead up to it, for the song of the Sparrow is full of plaintive yearning, and the call of the Flycatcher, pure and clarion toned though it be, has a note of striving in its exaltation; but the voice of the Varied Thrush seems the voice of one who has attained. And as it comes from the Heights with their far view over the ocean, it seems to voice the serene philosophic spirit by which life, death, and the veiled hereafter seem but links in the chain of the ordered Universe, upon which, with bared head, one may gaze, content to bear his part.

*Washington, D. C.*

## FROM FIELD AND STUDY

**Peculiar Nesting Habits of the Avocet.**—While collecting on the south shore of Big Quill Lake, Saskatchewan, on June 22, 1915, on a low, sandy island I found three nests of the Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*). Nest number one contained four eggs on the point of hatching. Number two, six eggs, three of which were fresh and three on point of hatching! Number three, eight eggs, all fresh. During the time I was on this island, nearly two hours, I counted ten birds. On June 8, at Buffalo Lake, on a small low island, I found only one nest containing seven fresh eggs, though I counted there eight birds.

Mr. W. E. Lake, of Edam, Saskatchewan, a reliable observer, told me he had noted Avocets breeding in his district for some years, and of having found nests containing from three to eight eggs.—H. H. MITCHELL, *Regina, Saskatchewan.*

**The Surf Bird at San Francisco.**—On November 5, 1916, a very exceptional opportunity was afforded the writer for observing a flock of Surf-birds (*Aphriza virgata*), on the boulder-strewn beach below San Francisco's famous Cliff House. I had been looking seaward through the powerful binoculars that may be rented on the piazza, when my attention was attracted by nine of these birds on the ledges almost directly beneath. Upon adjusting the glass to proper focus, the birds were revealed in startling proximity, appearing scarcely an arm's length distant and permitting of the most minute inspection.

They were busily engaged in exploring the mossy buttresses, and apparently were not at all alarmed by the numerous visitors on the terrace above, though acknowledging their presence by pausing from time to time to look upward. They worked industriously