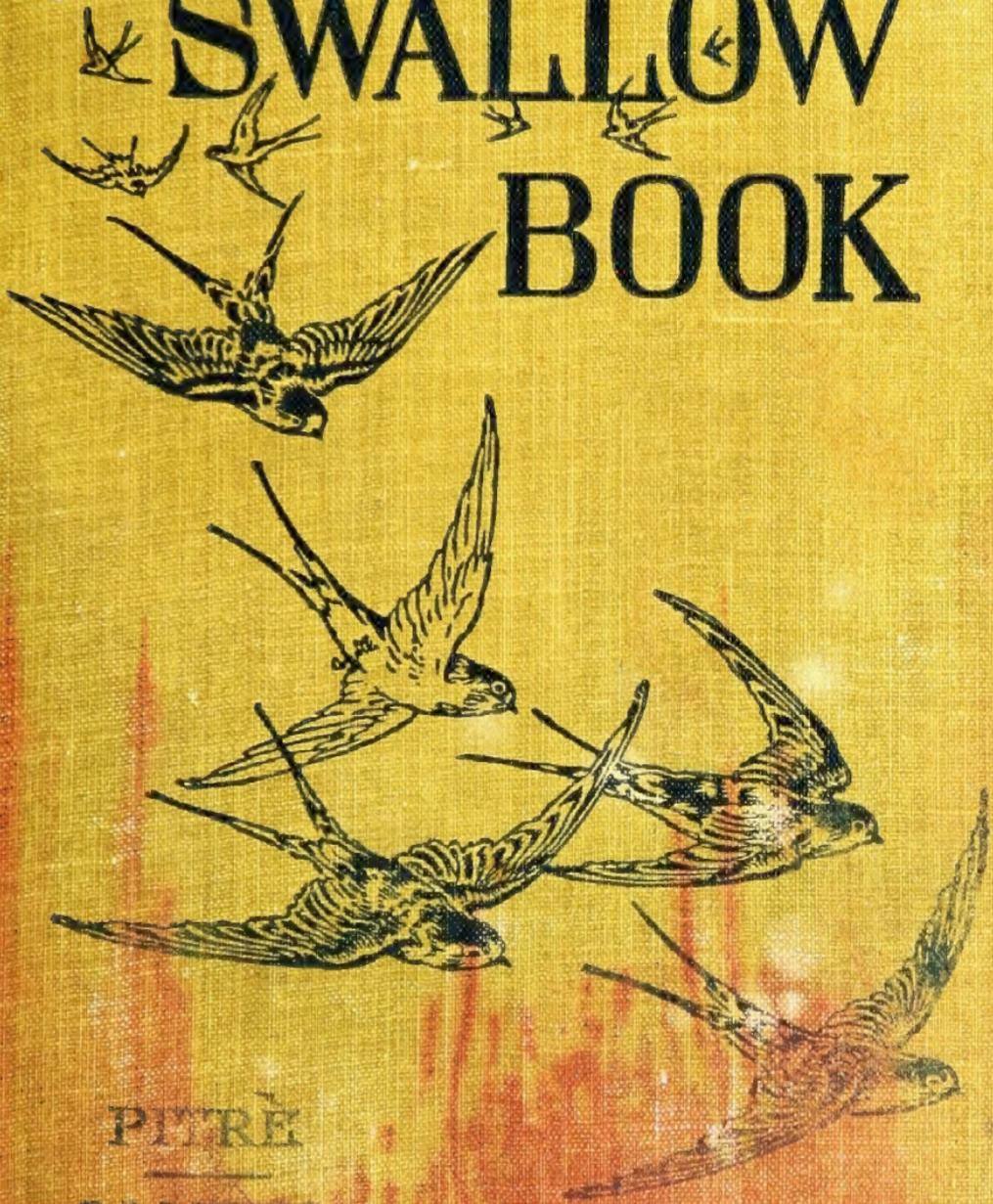


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THE



SWALLOW  
BOOK



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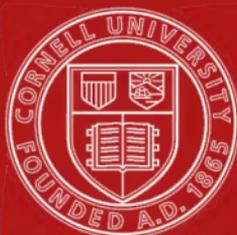
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# THE SWALLOW BOOK

THE STORY OF THE SWALLOW  
TOLD IN LEGENDS, FABLES  
FOLK SONGS, PROVERBS, OMENS  
AND RIDDLES OF MANY LANDS

GATHERED BY  
DR. GIUSEPPE PITRÈ  
UNIVERSITY OF PALERMO

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH AND  
ARRANGED FOR THE USE OF OUR  
BOYS AND GIRLS

BY  
ADA WALKER CAMEHL

NEW YORK ·· CINCINNATI ·· CHICAGO  
AMERICAN BOOK COMPANY

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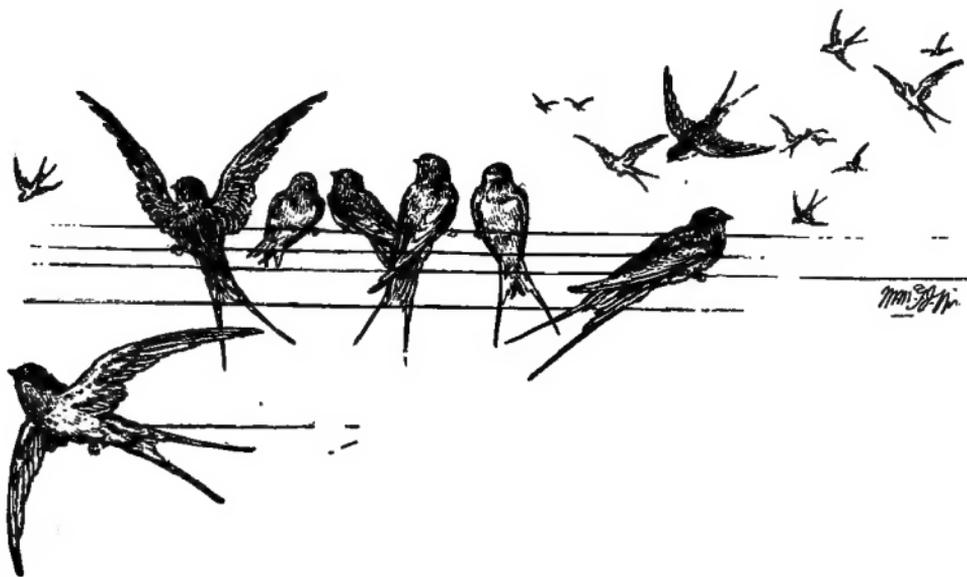
TO  
GIUSEPPINA D'ALIA PITRÈ

This little book, dear, was to have been dedicated to your mother, when she, alas, was snatched from us in the terrible disaster of Messina, while she was transcribing for me notes and material concerning the Swallow.

Now that your dear mother and father live in you, I offer this book in your name, sweet Giuseppina, as an augury of bright days for you — our happiness and our care.

May the good-omened little bird of gladness and of joy be to you a messenger of perennial spring, and may your life be always strewn with the roses, gladdened with the golden dreams, crowned with the happiness invoked for it by

YOUR GRANDFATHER.





## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

BECAUSE of her sociable habits and her friendly disposition, the swallow from earliest times has been observed and beloved by all the peoples of the world. Her springtime comings and her autumn goings, they have celebrated in proverb and in song; her physical features, they have made the subject of legend and of fable; and for each of her peculiar habits, they have found an explanation in their own lively fancies and imaginations.

The Folk Literature of nearly every country in the world—from icy Lapland in the north to torrid Africa in the south, from eastern Siberia to the prairie lands of our own West—contributes a share, sometimes large, sometimes small, to these swallow traditions. They are replete with the artlessness, with the spiritual faith of the various peoples—and at times they are fraught with wisdom.

This swallow literature has been gathered by the eminent Folklore scholar, Dr. Giuseppe Pitrè. As reward of his many years of painstaking and loving research in this field (resulting in twenty-five published volumes), the Italian Government

established for Dr. Pitrè a Folklore Chair in the University of Palermo, his native city.

These tales, many of which tell of the love of the children of strange lands for the swallow, I have rendered into English and arranged for the children of America, with the hope that the knowledge of them may serve to create in our growing generation a tender and cherishing interest, not only in this friendly little bird, but also in every other creature of our feathered kingdom.

With the exception of the Folk Songs, I have translated this work from the Italian. The songs I have taken from the different languages in which they had their origin, and in the rhyming of them I have endeavored to preserve, so far as possible, the form as well as the meaning of the original verse. For two of the songs, from the Greek, I have used the English version of the charming writer upon Folklore, the Countess Evelyn Martinengo-Cesaresco. For the Roumanian song I have taken the translation by Henry Phillips, Jr.

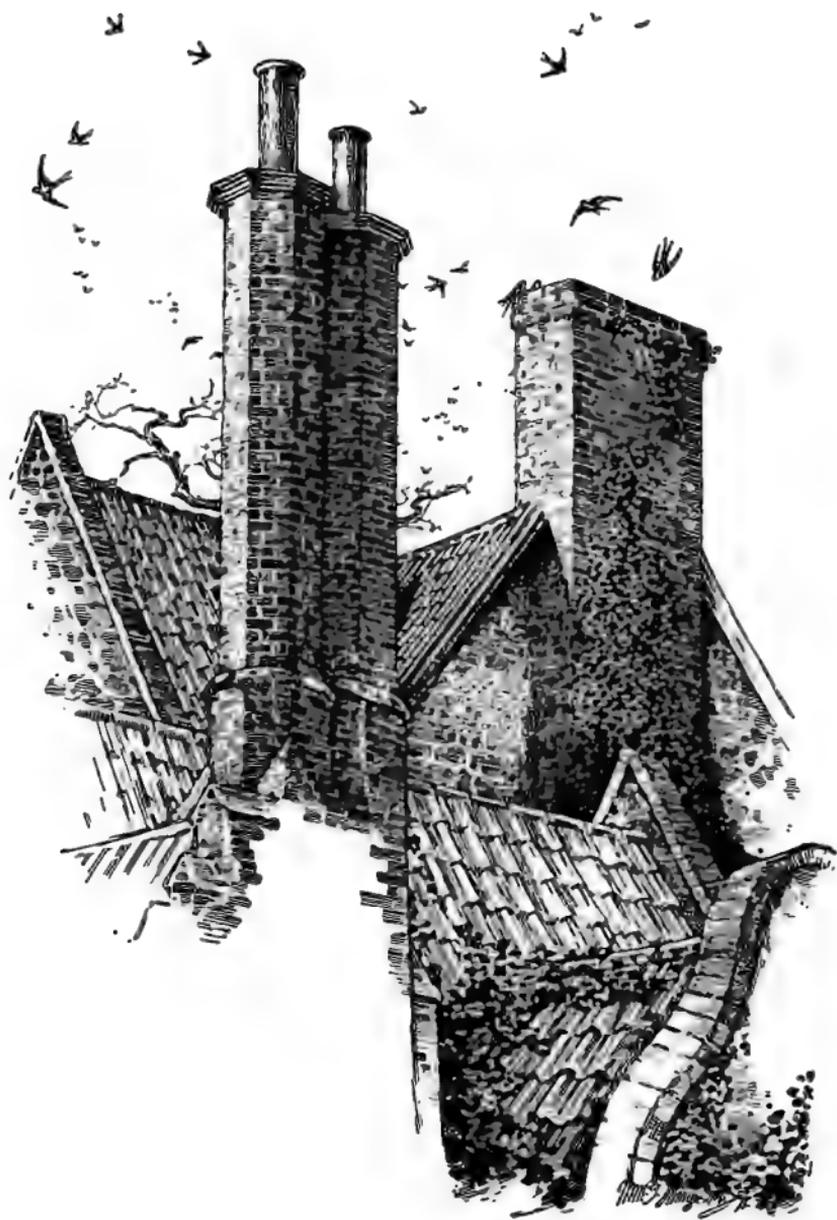
For assistance in arranging the material of this book I am deeply indebted to my sister, Miss Florence Mercy Walker, and to Mr. Brayton L. Nichols.

ADA WALKER CAMEHL.

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE SWALLOW . . . . .	9
II. THE SWALLOW IN LEGEND AND FABLE . . . . .	25
III. THE SWALLOW IN LEGEND AND HISTORY . . . . .	63
IV. THE SWALLOW IN BELIEFS AND OMENS . . . . .	92
V. THE SWALLOW IN PROVERBS AND RIDDLES . . . . .	105
VI. THE SWALLOW IN FOLK SONGS . . . . .	117
VII. THE SWALLOW IN MEDICINE . . . . .	139
VIII. OUR DEBT TO THE SWALLOWS . . . . .	151





# THE SWALLOW BOOK

## CHAPTER I

### THE SWALLOW

Who does not know and love the friendly little swallow? Each year after her long absence in the warm lands of the south she comes to us with the sunshine and the flowers, and she tells us with her merry chatter that spring is on the way.

There are about seventy species of swallows scattered over the entire world, but only five of these are to be found in the United States, and six in Europe. The swallow whose story we tell in these pages is our common barn swallow, whose summer home is under the eaves of our barns and outbuildings. In Europe she is called the house or chimney swallow, and there

she builds her nest not only in barns and ruined buildings, but also in the chimneys, and sometimes even inside the rude stone houses of the peasants, or farm people of the country districts.

This swallow has a graceful and pretty body. Her back is black and shiny, with



deep violet reflections; and her throat and breast are tinged with dull red. Her wings are long and pointed, tail forked, claws very short and weak, and eyes tiny, brilliant black, and keen to spy an insect a long way off. She is almost always on the wing and darts about very swiftly and

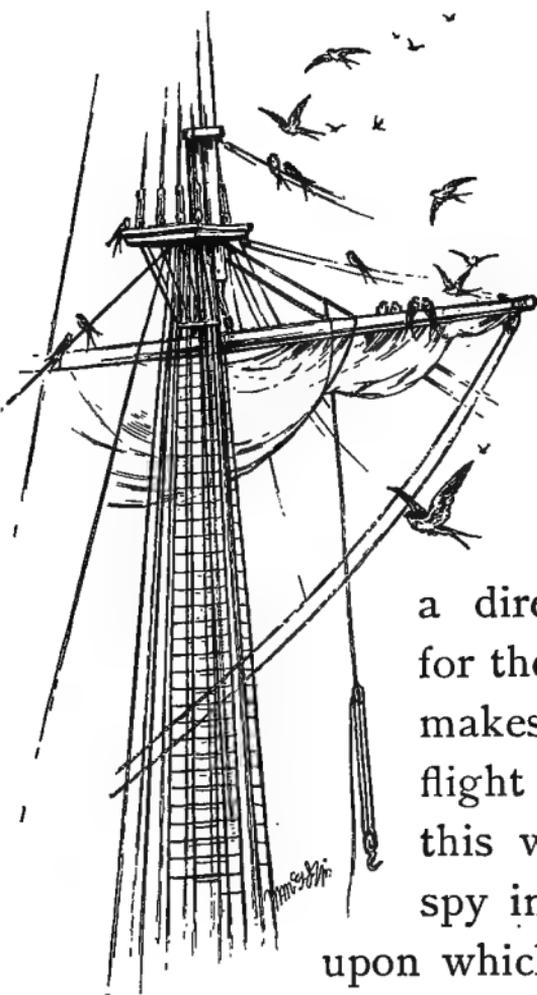
gracefully, feeding upon the insects which she catches in the air.

When drowsy nature awakes in the spring, then come the swallows to the places they left long months before. How do they cover the great distances from their winter homes? What guides lead them? What signs point the way in their long journeys? No one knows. No one has ever been able to discover with certainty.

So much is sure, however—they go and they come. Where have they been? They have been under other skies, in far distant lands, where sunny days have changed into starry nights, and rosy dawns into golden sunsets. Nature has showered upon them smiles of sunshine, abundant food, kindly welcome—blessings they have had to renounce when called away by the longing for the old nests and the joys of rearing their young.

It was once thought that swallows were

able to cover great distances of sea without stopping to rest. But rest is necessary for them, and they stop now and then upon light-



houses or upon the sails and rigging of ships, when they are obliged to pass over long stretches of sea.

Though their course might be in

a direct line, it never is, for the need of getting food makes them break their flight of a sudden and turn this way and that, as they spy insects a long way off

upon which to feed. They dart off to right and to left in pursuit of them, and so greatly lengthen their journey.

By no means all of them are able to endure the terrible fatigues of the flight. Many

become exhausted and perish in the sea, or else fall to the deck of some passing vessel, where they arouse the tender pity of those



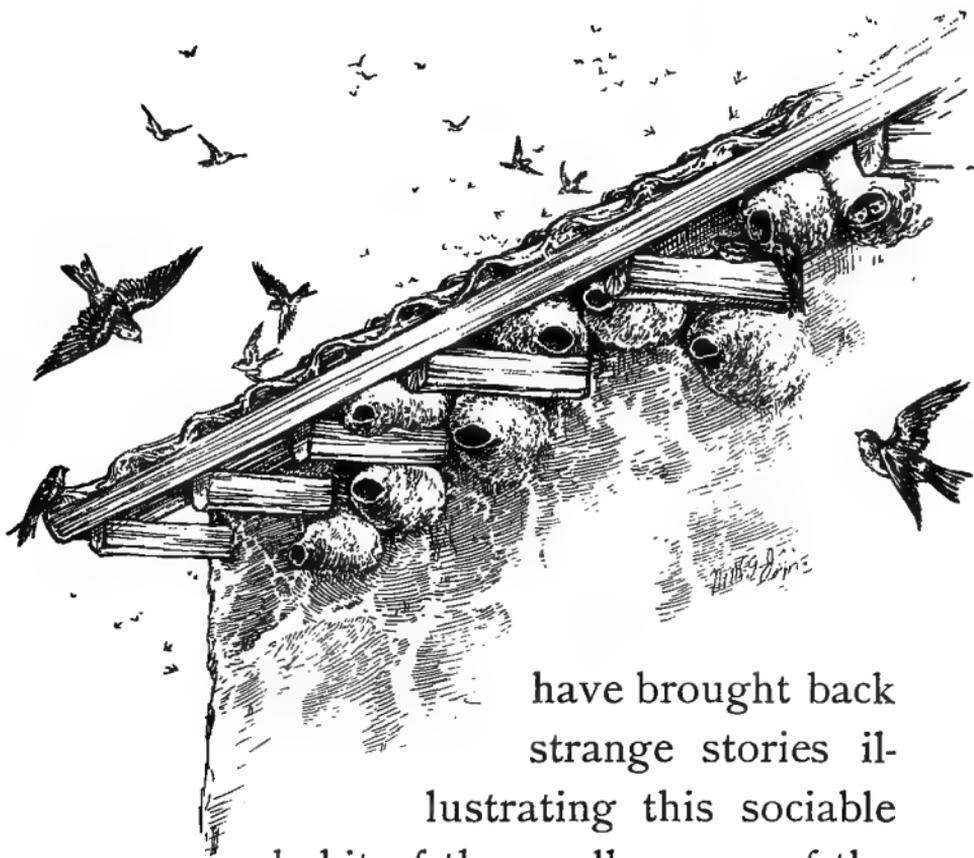
on board. Only the youngest and the strongest succeed in reaching the goal of the old familiar nesting places.

The returning swallows often find that the winter's storms have wrought havoc in their homes; but if any of their nests have been injured or destroyed they are quick to repair or to build anew. Then, after the wearisome journey and the home building, follow the courtships of the birds and the sweet idylls of the baby brood. And soon the warm air of spring is perfumed with

flowers, alive with the busy little pilgrims, gladdened with their merry chatter and their fleeting song.

The nests which these swallows build are curious works of art. The outside they make of mud, which they fetch from some pond or river bank, and with the mud they mix hairs and bits of straw to hold it together. The inside they line with soft leaves and feathers. There are two settings of eggs each year, the first of five or six eggs, the second of three. The eggs are white, speckled with dull red spots. Their nests they place, not apart by themselves on some lonely tree top like many other birds, but side by side with the nests of their companions in a little colony under the eaves of our barns, or along the beams just under the roof. In certain lands of southern Europe this sociable little bird is allowed to build her nest in the windows of the houses, and in the crevices of the tiles of the roof. In the Orient she sometimes even puts it in-

side the door, and by so doing she brings, as the people believe, good fortune to the dwellers within. Travelers in that eastern land



have brought back strange stories illustrating this sociable habit of the swallow, one of the strangest being that of a noted Frenchman, who visited Asia in 1844. This is what he wrote : —

“The swallow has so much love for man

and so great confidence in him that she dwells not only in the eaves and porticoes of his palaces and in the porches of his houses, but she penetrates even to his bedchamber and establishes herself upon his bed. This I saw, myself, many times, in the city and in the country, but more often in the country. I saw those good people, visited by this chosen creature of the good God, surrounding the bird families with every care, opening the windows in the morning to let the parent birds go out and gather food, tolerating the filth they made in the room, upon the furniture and the bedclothing, and spending hours together in observing and showing to others the doings of the old birds, the number of the young and the progress of their education. And what I saw took place everywhere here.”

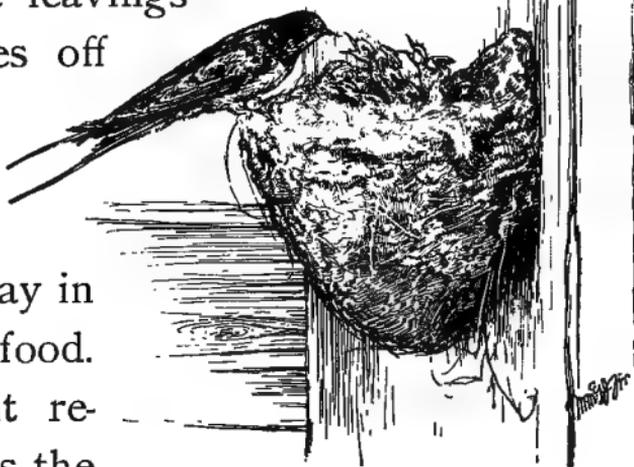
Let us now look at the baby swallows. Four or five little heads are peeping over the edge of the nest, while a lively chirping from all the little throats in concert announces the

arrival of either the father or the mother bird. Cautiously the parent approaches, chirping contentedly the while and bringing the food in its bill. It flutters to the edge of the nest, alights there, and drops the morsel into the open mouth of the first youngster, who, after receiving his portion, turns his back, while the fond parent carefully picks up all the leavings in the nest, flies off a little distance and drops them to the ground.

Then it goes away in search of more food.

After a while it returns and repeats the

scene with the second, with the third, and so on to the last one. Then it begins anew with the first and continues until all are satisfied. So it does every day from morning until night, till at last the fledglings are able to feed themselves.



Then begins another training — the nestlings are taught to fly. Let us look on here also. We see both of the old birds

giving this lesson to their young.

Notice how they cheer on their

pupils with their

voices; how they offer them

food a little way off, then slowly

move it farther back as the youngsters approach to take it; how

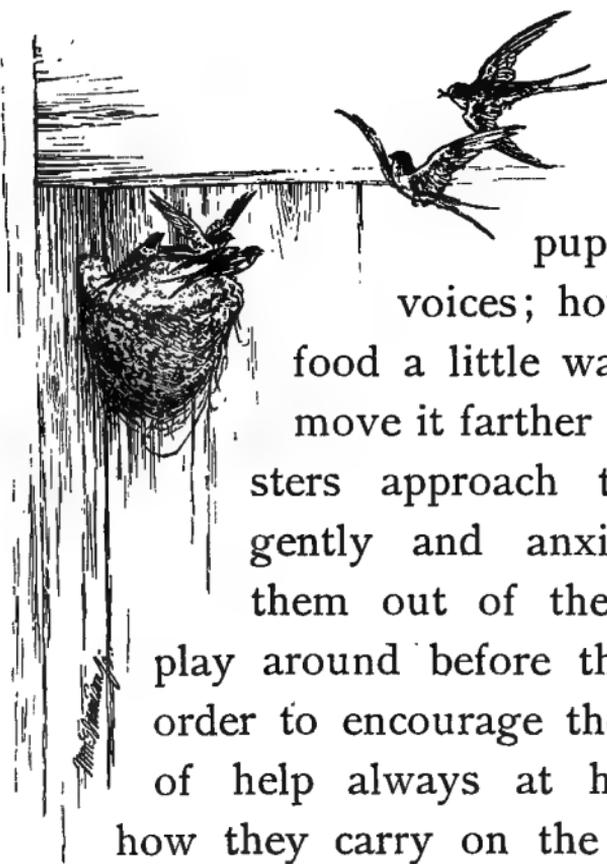
gently and anxiously they push them out of the nest; how they

play around before them in the air in order to encourage them with the sight

of help always at hand; and finally,

how they carry on the lesson with such expressive chatter which sounds like caresses, exhortation, reproof, and applause all in one.

As the summer grows warm, our little guests, who dislike intense heat as well as severe cold, break out into their first gay



notes at early dawn when every other feathered songster is silent. They leave their warm nests and ascend aloft to the infinite spaces of heaven; they descend with dizzy haste; they whirl; they soar; they skim the low grasses and the shining surfaces of lake or stream; and with noisy cries they



meet, they separate, they dart away—and then they turn to meet again, ten, twenty, a hundred times—now appearing, now disappearing like flashes of lightning. They send out shrill cries as they whirl and soar, and if they stop for a moment, impatient of rest, their trills and quavers sound like questions and answers in a brisk conversation.

Swallows, besides being on good terms

with man, are kindly in their dealings with one another. If one of them is injured, it is no reason for leaving her alone to suffer. Many incidents might be told which would illustrate this good trait. We will relate but one, the story of an injured swallow in the streets of Paris. This is what an eyewitness tells :—

“A swallow, through some accident, I don't know what, was one day caught by the foot in a slipknot of a rope which had been stretched to the eaves of one of the public buildings. She had tried to free herself and then, becoming exhausted, was hanging from the rope, crying aloud and now and then making fluttering and vain attempts to get away. All the swallows round about, to the number of several thousands, had gathered around her. They made a dense cloud, and all the time they cried aloud in alarm and pity. After a while they seemed to hold a noisy consultation and one of them evidently hit upon a plan to free their com-



panion and to make it known to the others. For all at once they set to work. One after another flew swiftly to the knot and gave it a blow with her bill in the same spot. In about half an hour the string was broken and the prisoner set at liberty. The swallows remained about the place until evening, flying about and chattering as if congratulating themselves upon the success of their maneuver."



The summer passes, and at last the gentle little birds, whom we have learned to love,

make ready for their departure. Upon the house tops, along the eaves, on the walls and the fences, among the cane fields, along the edges of streams, and upon the telegraph wires, they gather in large flocks, all the time chattering and chirping. What are they saying? No doubt they are talking about the coming journey, and the older ones are instructing the younger about it. If we could understand the language of birds we might at this time be able to learn where they go, the dangers which beset them, and the hardships they must endure.

After much noisy chatter at last they are ready to start. The signal is given — first one, then another, ten, a hundred, an army, rise into the air and circle around as if to take their bearings. Then they set out in a compact mass and are soon lost to sight in a black cloud.

All summer long these gay little guests have been with us, enlivening the cool shadows about our houses, our barns, our public

monuments, our country places — and now they go away to regions “where never falls the snow, where the land is never hardened by frost.” Our swallows go to the northern countries of South America and to the islands about our tropical seas. The swallows of Europe fly south to the monuments of Egypt and to the minarets of the mosques of Asia.





## CHAPTER II

### THE SWALLOW IN LEGEND AND FABLE

THE swallow is connected with so many legends that from them might be formed a true cycle, all of "Why." Why is the swallow's note sad? Why does she wear a black mantle? Why has she a forked tail? Why has she a reddish breast? Why does she twitter, and not sing? Why does she live in warm climates? Why does she build her nest in windows? Why does the swallow go about unmolested? Why is she blessed? Why does she dwell with man? Why did the northern princesses seek the swallows? Why is the swallow superior to other birds and animals?

Let us see if we can answer all these Whys.

But first, we must take note of three

legends, from countries far remote from one another, which tell us how the swallow came upon the earth. The oldest of these legends, the one most important in the history of the swallow, comes to us from the ancient land of Greece, and has its origin in those times when gods and goddesses peopled the green slopes of Hellas, and when fables were recounted to interpret the mysteries of the natural world. This is the Greek legend.

## THE ORIGIN OF THE SWALLOW

### A LEGEND OF GREECE

Once upon a time Pandion, King of Athens, had two daughters named Procne and Philomela, whom he dearly loved. One daughter, Procne, he gave in marriage to Tereus, King of Thrace, who took her away to make her home in his own country. Many years of happy married life went by for Procne, but ever she kept the memory of her dear sister Philomela in her heart, and

the hope one day to see her again. At last, overcome by her longing, Procne asked her husband to go to Athens and bring back her sister for a visit. Tereus at once set out, and upon reaching Athens he begged the old King Pandion to allow Philomela to accompany him to his home in the north country.

After much persuasion Pandion consented, and Tereus set out upon the sea with the young girl. While on the voyage he fell very much in love with his pretty sister-in-law, but in return she only scorned his affection. Then, instead of taking her to her sister, Tereus led Philomela into a remote part of his kingdom and there he kept her a prisoner for many months. At last, he went alone to his wife with the tale that her father had refused to allow her sister to return with him.

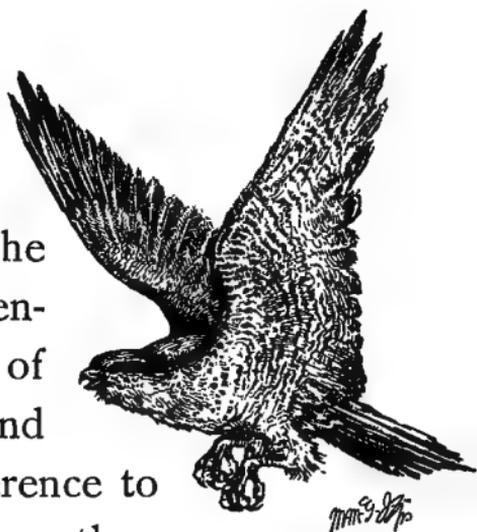
The unhappy Philomela passed a wretched life in the place where Tereus had confined her, and in vain she sought to free herself

from her prison. At length she found a way to send word to her sister. She embroidered upon a peplos, or linen robe, the story of her misfortune, and sent the robe to Procne. Upon receiving the garment Procne read the tale, and, taking advantage of a public feast in honor of the god Bacchus, she pretended that she was mad, made her way outside the city walls and hastened to her sister. She found Philomela in her prison, set her free, and took her at once to her home in the royal palace of Tereus.

From that day the two sisters thought only of vengeance for the cruel deed, and they found a revenge so terrible as almost to surpass belief. Procne had a little son by the name of Itys. The sisters resolved to kill the boy. As soon as Tereus discovered the plot he seized an ax and pursued the two sisters to kill them. As he was almost upon them, they prayed to the gods to change them into birds. Procne

at once became a nightingale and Philomela a swallow. Tereus was also changed into a hawk, which chases other birds.

In this manner the Greeks related the origin of the swallow and of the nightingale. In later centuries, the Latin poets of Rome (Horace, Vergil, and the rest) often made reference to this legend. Sometimes they sang of Procne as a nightingale, as in the original Greek version, but more often they reversed the ending of the legend and referred to her as a swallow, and



to Philomela as a nightingale. Thus Horace, in an Ode to Vergil in which he invites the poet to pay him a visit at his Sabine

farm, assures Vergil that pleasant weather has come by saying that the "Thracian

winds, the companions of spring" are blowing, and "the unhappy bird, mourning for Itys" is building her nest.

The poets of England and of America follow the Latin version of the legend in their frequent mention of these two favorite birds, and when they sing of "sad Philomel" or of "Santa Filomela" they mean the nightingale.

Why is the swallow's note sad? If you will listen to the twitter of the swallow as she sits alone upon a beam, you will hear her say over and over to herself: "Itys, Itys, Itys." Is it not poor Procne calling and grieving for her little boy? And the nightingale, sad Philomela, as she warbles at evening in the tree tops of southern Europe, does she not put into her song real sobs of mourning?

These sad bird notes have many times been interpreted as expressions of grief by our greatest writers. If we look into the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, we find that

he likened his cry to the voice of the swallow: "Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter." Dante caught in the swallow's note the echo of far-off mourning, and he has passed it on to us in the exquisite lines with which he prefaced the description of his awakening in the Flowery Valley on the Mountain of Purgatory:—

✠  
Just at the hour when her sad lay begins  
The little swallow, near unto the morning,  
Perchance in memory of her former woes, —

But this old tale of pagan Greece does not suffice for the people of later times, when they wish to relate the origin of their favorite bird. The devout folk of Spain tell the following pretty legend, in which the Boy Jesus is said to have fashioned the first swallows with his own hands:—

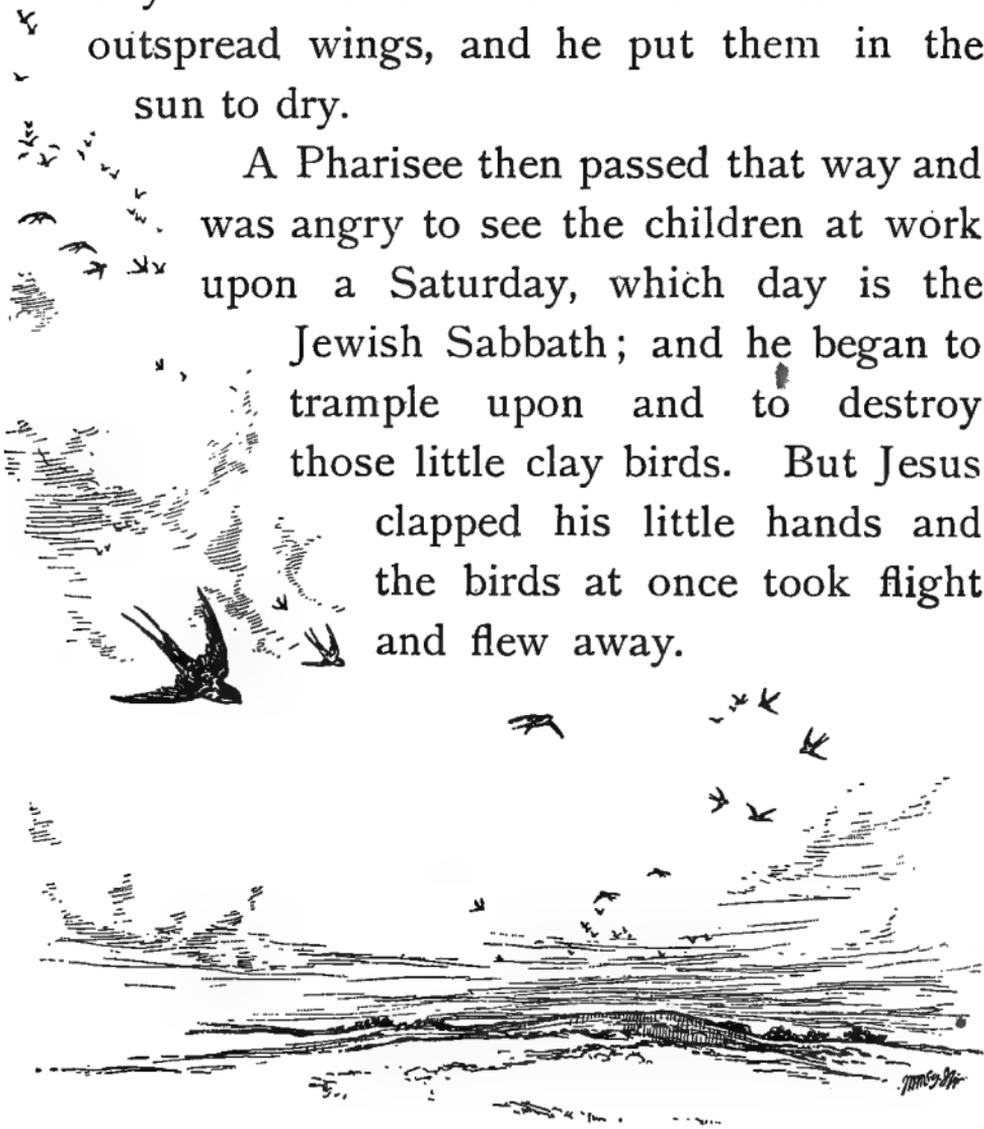
## THE CREATION OF THE SWALLOW

### A SPANISH LEGEND

It was on a Saturday, and Jesus, then a little boy, went out to play with his compan-

ions, little like himself. He took some white clay and with it he made little birds with outspread wings, and he put them in the sun to dry.

A Pharisee then passed that way and was angry to see the children at work upon a Saturday, which day is the Jewish Sabbath; and he began to trample upon and to destroy those little clay birds. But Jesus clapped his little hands and the birds at once took flight and flew away.



Then, upon the house of the Child Jesus, with some of the same clay from which they

had been made, the swallows began to build their nests in the eaves of the roof of tiles. And from that day to this they have continued to make their homes upon the humble little houses of the poor and to bring to them peace and good fortune.

When Jesus was on his way to be crucified upon Calvary, the disconsolate little swallows followed him with the holy women, and when he hung upon the cross they pulled the thorns from out the crown which had been placed upon his brow and which pierced his sacred head.

When he died the swallows at once put on mourning, covering themselves with a black mantle, which they wear to this day. And in Spain there is sung a little couplet in memory of this pious service, which runs:—

On the mount of Calvary,  
The swallows, pitying,  
Drew out ten thousand thorns  
From the poor Christ, suffering.

Our third legend which has to do with the

origin of the swallow comes from the Navaho Indian tribes of our own western country. In it we find the swallows, before coming to earth, occupying one of those heavens which so often figure in Indian traditions.

## NAVAHO ORIGIN LEGEND

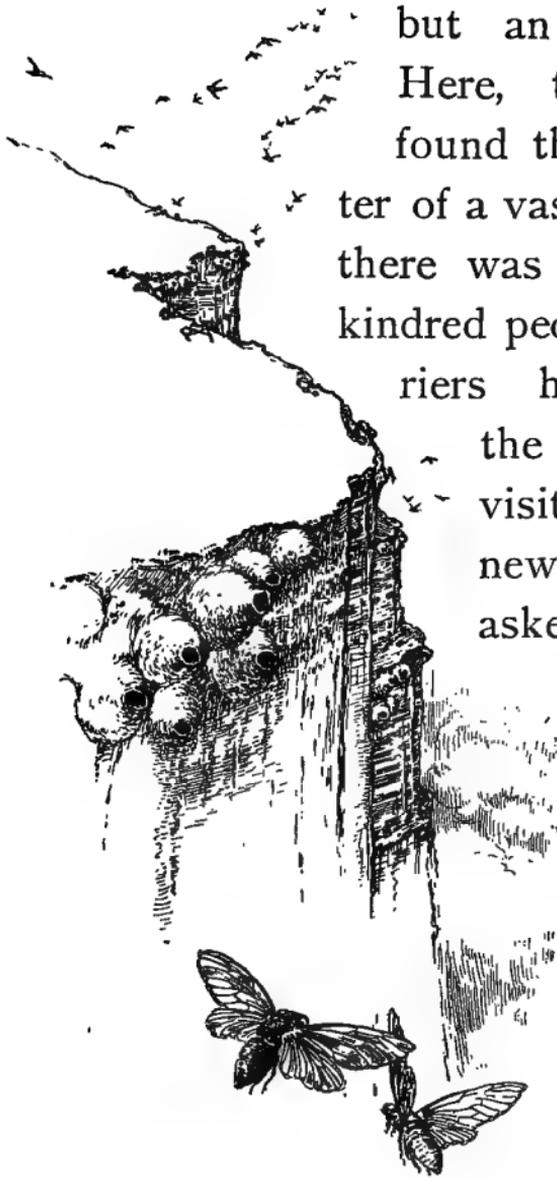
### THE STORY OF THE EMERGENCE

They went in circles upward till they reached the sky. It was smooth. They looked down; but there the water had risen, and there was nothing else but water there. While they were flying around, one having a blue head thrust out his head from the sky and called to them, saying, "In there, to the eastward, there is a hole." They entered the hole and went through it up to the surface of the second world.

The blue one belonged to the Swallow People. The Swallow People lived there. A great many of their houses, rough and lumpy, lay scattered all about. Each tapered toward the top, and at that part there

was a hole for entrance. A great many people approached and gathered around the strangers, but they said nothing.

The first world was red in color; the second world, into which the people had now entered, was blue. They sent out two couriers, a Locust and a White Locust, to the east, to explore the land and see if there were in it any people like themselves. At the end of two days the couriers returned, and said that in one day's travel they had reached the edge of the world — the top of a great cliff which arose from an abyss whose bottom they could not see; but that they found in all their journey no people, no animals of any kind, no trees, no grass, no sagebrush, no mountains, nothing but bare level ground. The same couriers were then dispatched in turn to the south, to the west, and to the north. They were gone on each journey two days, and when they returned related, as before, that they had reached the edge of the world, and discovered nothing



but an uninhabited waste. Here, then, the strangers found themselves in the center of a vast barren plain where there was neither food nor a kindred people. When the couriers had returned from the north, the swallows visited the camp of the newly arrived people, and asked them why they had sent out the couriers to the east.

“We sent them out,” was the reply, “to see what was in the land, and to see if there were any people like ourselves here.”

“And what did your couriers tell you?” asked the swallows.

“They told us that they came to the edge

of the world, yet found no plant and no living thing in all the land.”

(The same questions were asked and the same answers given for the other points of the compass.)

“They spoke the truth,” said the Swallow People. “Had you asked us in the beginning what the land contained, we would have told you and saved you all your trouble. Until you came, no one has ever dwelt in all this land except ourselves.”

The people then said to the swallows: “You understand our language and are much like us. You have legs, feet, bodies, heads, and wings as we have. Why cannot your people and our people become friends?”

“Let it be as you wish,” said the swallows, and both parties began at once to treat each other as members of one tribe. They mingled one among the other, and addressed one another by the terms of relationship, as my brother, my sister, my father, my son, etc.

They all lived happily and pleasantly together for twenty-three days, but on the twenty-fourth, one of the strangers was rude to the wife of the Swallow Chief, and the next day when it became known, the Chief said to the strangers: "We have treated you as friends, and thus you return our kindness. We doubt not that for such crimes you were driven from the lower world, and now you must leave this. This is our land, and we will have you here no longer. Besides, this is a bad land. People are dying here every day, and, even if we spare you, you cannot live here long."

The Locusts took the lead on hearing this. They soared upwards. The others followed, and all soared and circled till they reached the sky.

Let us now see if we can solve the Whys concerning the swallow. First, why has she a forked tail? We find the answer to this Why in several curious legends, the first of

\*\*\*

which comes to us from the land of Siberia in Asia. There the folk tell why the swallow's tail is forked.

## WHY THE SWALLOW'S TAIL IS FORKED

### A LEGEND OF EASTERN SIBERIA

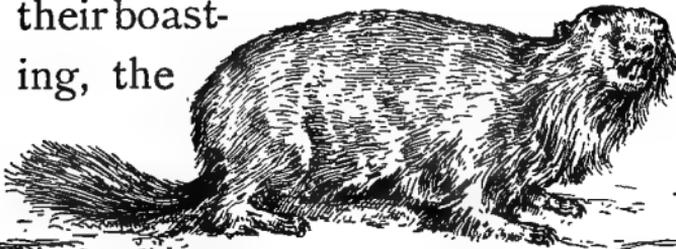
A species of marmot is native in Poland and in near-by Galicia, as well as in the lands to the east as far as central Asia. It is also very common in Eastern Siberia. There, as elsewhere, the little animal is called Bobac.

Under the shoulder of the Bobac, in the flesh, may be found a whitish piece which must not be eaten, for it is the remains of the man who was transformed into Bobac by the wrath of the Evil Spirit. For you must know, O stranger from a far land, that all the Bobacs were once upon a time men, who lived by hunting. And they were the most skillful of all hunters. But with the passing of time they became such braggarts

as to boast that they could kill on the wing, with the first shot, any bird whatsoever. These boasts aroused the wrath of the Evil Spirit, and he at once went among them, and ordered the best marksman to kill a swallow in flight. The hunter fired and hit the bird, but instead of killing it he shot away only the middle of the bird's tail.



Then, as a punishment for their boasting, the



Evil Spirit changed all those hunters into Bobacs. And from that day to this, swallows' tails have been forked.

Also from eastern Europe comes another ancient legend, giving another reason for the forked tail of the swallow.

## WHY THE SWALLOW'S TAIL IS FORKED

## A CIRCASSIAN LEGEND

In the good old times, Solomon, son of David, ruled over all things. He understood the language of animals and of plants, and to each animal he assigned a given food—to the serpent he assigned the blood of man. But man, knowing not how to resign himself to the assaults of the serpent, cried out against the allotment.

King Solomon, impressed with the just complaints of man, one day gathered together in a large field all living creatures, and he began to question man. The animals all began to talk in a loud voice, but Solomon listened only to man. After hearing him, Solomon decreed that the tiniest of the animals, the mosquito, should go about and find out which was the sweetest and most delicate blood of creation, and that this should be assigned as food to the serpent.

On New Year's Day another reunion was



ordered by Solomon,  
and the mosquito was  
on his way thither,  
when on the street he  
met a swallow, and,—  
“Where are you  
going?” the swallow  
asked.

“To the reunion of Solomon, as you know.”

“I had forgotten it. And what did you find to be the sweetest blood?”

“That of man,” answered the mosquito.

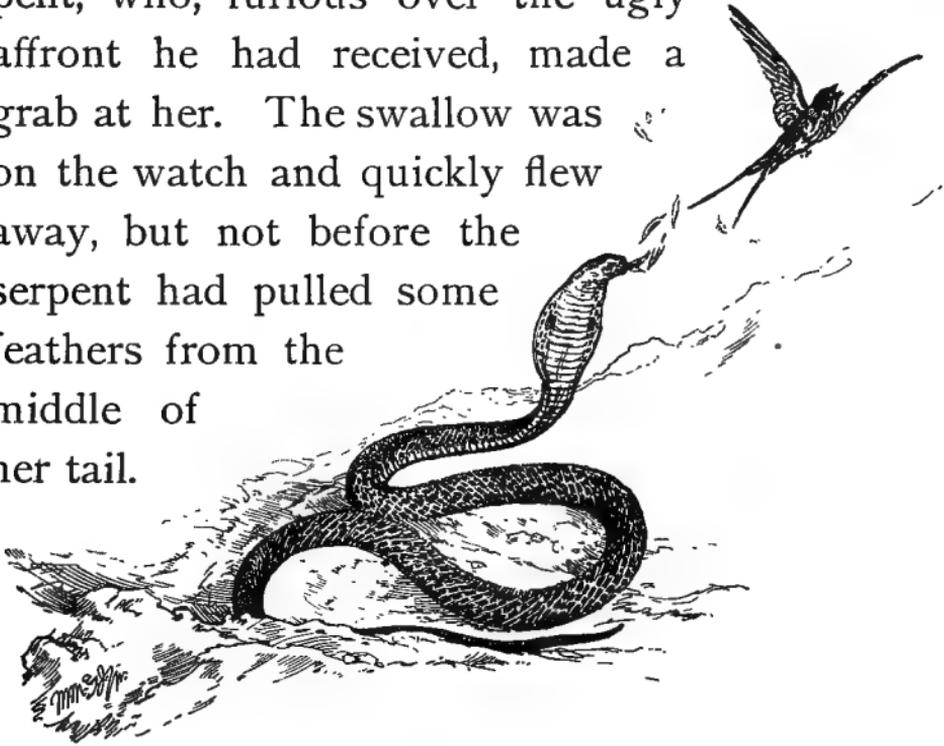
“That of—?” asked the swallow, feigning not to have understood.

“Of man,” replied the mosquito, and as he opened his mouth, the swallow with one peck pulled out his tongue.

In the reunion, the mosquito, upon being questioned, could express himself only by making the sound Xssss. The swallow stepped up and interpreted it thus, “The blood of the frog,” at the same time observing that she had heard this answer from the mouth

of the mosquito before he became dumb. Thereupon Solomon decreed that the serpent should feed upon the frog.

As the animals were separating after the meeting, the swallow passed near to the serpent, who, furious over the ugly affront he had received, made a grab at her. The swallow was on the watch and quickly flew away, but not before the serpent had pulled some feathers from the middle of her tail.



From that day the swallow's tail has been forked.

A similar reason for the forked tail we find in the following legend from eastern France.

## WHY THE SWALLOW HAS A FORKED TAIL

A LEGEND OF FRANCE

After the Deluge the animals, as they left the Ark, bethought themselves to look about in the world for a food which would please them, each according to his taste. The wily serpent sent out the mosquito with instructions to find out, by tasting,

*Wm. B. Wood*

which one of all living creatures had the sweetest blood. When the mosquito, who found the blood of man better than that of the animals, came back to render account of his mission, the swallow with one peck plucked out his tongue. The serpent was furious at the affront and seized the poor swallow by the tail to devour her. But only

the feathers of the center of the bird's tail remained in his mouth. Those feathers never grew again in the swallow's tail, and the mosquito is dumb to this day, able only to make his *zum, zzzz, zzz*.

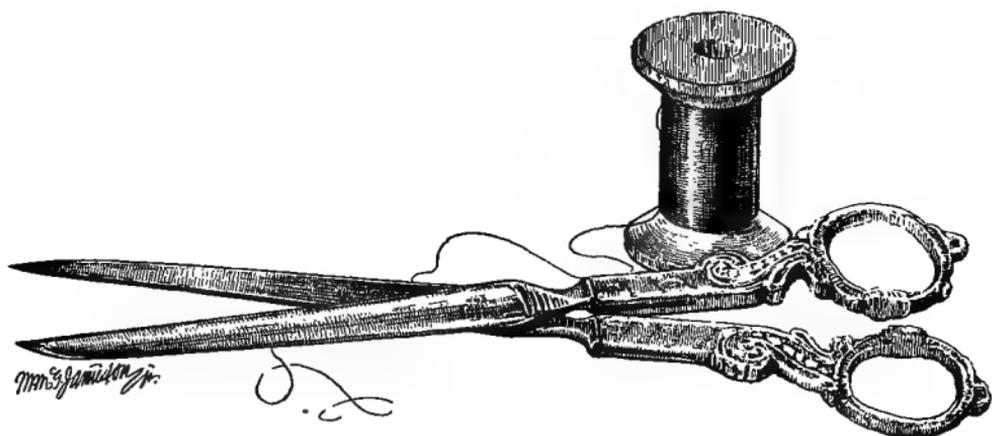
The following legend tells us not only why the swallow's tail is forked, but also why her breast is red. It shows our bird in rather an unfavorable light.

### WHY THE SWALLOW HAS A FORKED TAIL AND A RED BREAST

#### A SWEDISH AND NORWEGIAN LEGEND

Once upon a time there was a young girl in the service of a Fairy. One day the girl stole from her mistress a spool of red thread and a pair of scissors. For this theft she was changed into the bird called the swallow; and also, as a further punishment, she was condemned to carry about with her forever the signs of the objects she had stolen—the spool of red thread upon her throat, and the scissors in her tail.

And ever since then, in the summer time, when the swallow is sitting upon a beam, alone and pensive, if you listen carefully, you will hear her repeat sadly and slowly, over and



over: "My mistress—has lost—my mistress—has lost—her spool—of red thread—her spool—of red thread—and—her—scissors!"

The swallow has no song like other birds. Upon the wing she gives a shrill cry, in repose she chatters and chirps, but scarcely ever does she utter a sound which might be called a song.

To account for this peculiar trait the German folk tell the following three pretty legends.

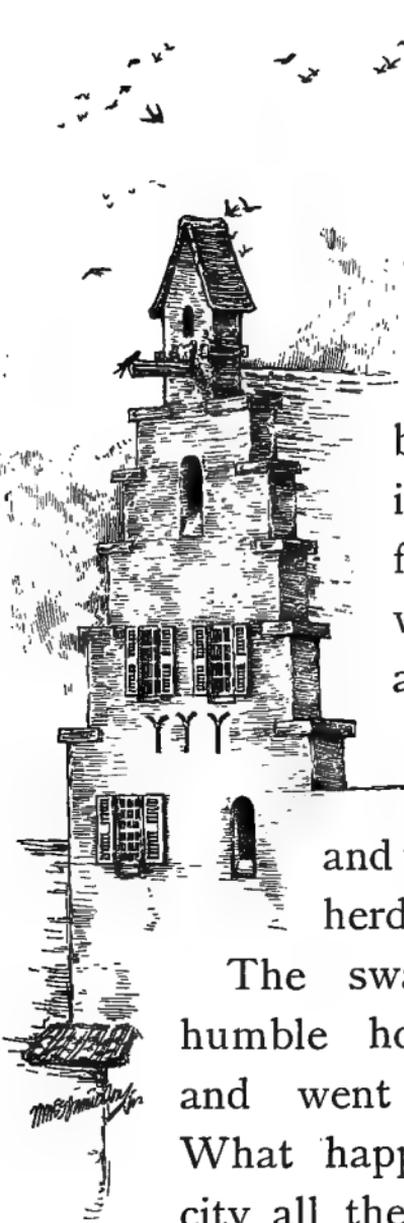
## WHY THE SWALLOW DOES NOT SING

A GERMAN LEGEND

Once upon a time the swallow was a singing bird, and sang a song as melodious as the nightingale's.

But after a time she became weary of dwelling in the lonely forests where there was no one to hear and admire her beautiful voice, except the busy peasant boy and the innocent little shepherdess tending her flock.

The swallow then left her humble home in the country and went into the big city. What happened there? In the city all the people were so busy



that no one had time to listen to the bird's divine voice, so little by little she forgot her song, and she learned instead to be an architect and to build her wonderful mud nests.

## WHY THE SWALLOWS DO NOT SING

A LEGEND OF FLANDERS AND OF THE GERMAN TYROL

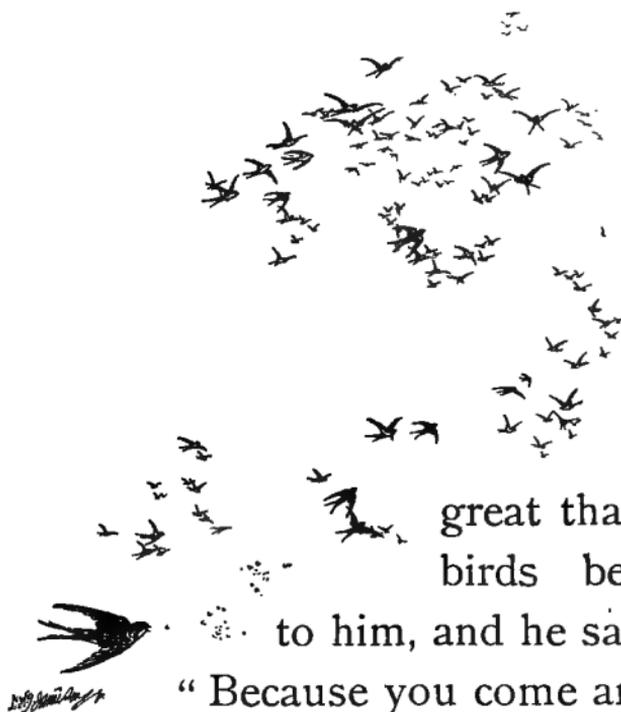
Once upon a time the swallows knew well how to sing and to find their food upon the surface of the earth, instead of on the wing as now. When Jesus was suffering upon the

cross, many swallows came and rested upon the arms of the cross and they set up a loud singing. The agony of Jesus was so

great that the songs of the birds became unbearable

to him, and he said to them, —

“Because you come and annoy me with



your song, from this time on you shall only chatter and the land shall contain no more food for you."

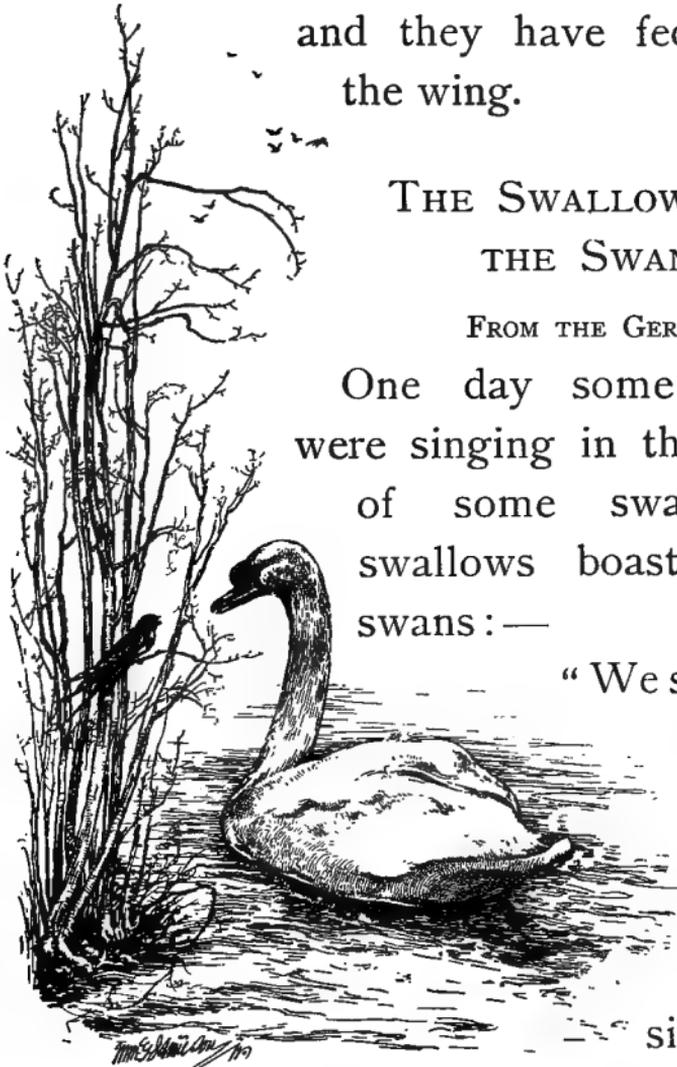
And from that day to this the swallows have not known how to sing, and they have fed only on the wing.

## THE SWALLOWS AND THE SWANS

FROM THE GERMAN

One day some swallows were singing in the presence of some swans. The swallows boasted to the swans:—

"We sing, as you see, for the pleasure of all people, while you sing for your



own pleasure alone, and that rarely and in lonely places.”

“But it is better,” replied the swans, “to sing little and well for a few choice souls than, like you, to sing much and poorly for all.”

Why do the swallows choose warm climates in which to live? We know that at the approach of the cold season they migrate each year to the south. To explain this habit we have a fanciful legend of the Roumanian folk.

## WHY THE SWALLOW LIVES IN WARM CLIMATES

A LEGEND OF ROUMANIA

Saint Domenica had a maid-servant, and one day before going out she told the girl to prepare her dinner and to be very careful to get it neither too hot nor too cold.



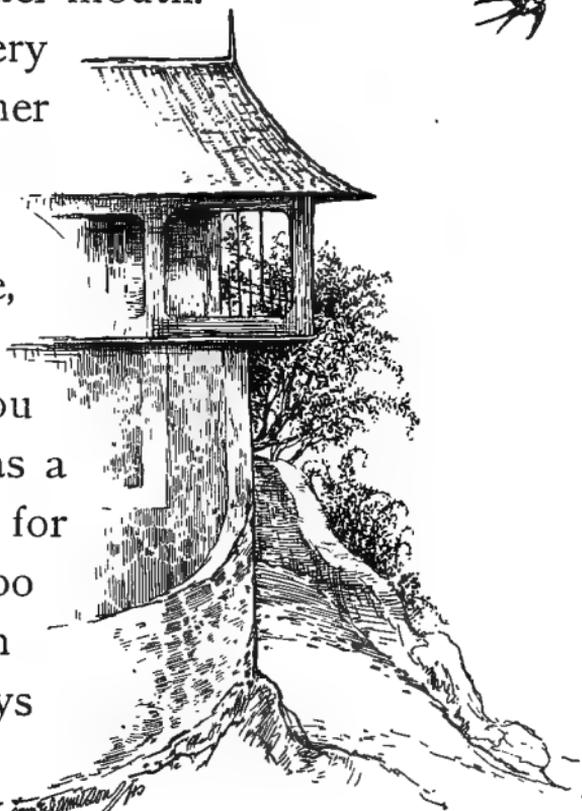
The maid forgot the instruction, and when her mistress sat down at table the dinner was so hot that it burned her mouth.

The mistress was very angry, and said to her servant:—

“Because you have disobeyed me, I, for your negligence, change you into a bird. And as a further punishment for getting my food too warm, I condemn you to live always in warm climates.”

And the servant was changed into the swallow, and forever after she has lived in lands where the climate is mild.

From the peasant folk of northern France comes the answer to our next question: “Why do swallows build their nests in windows?”



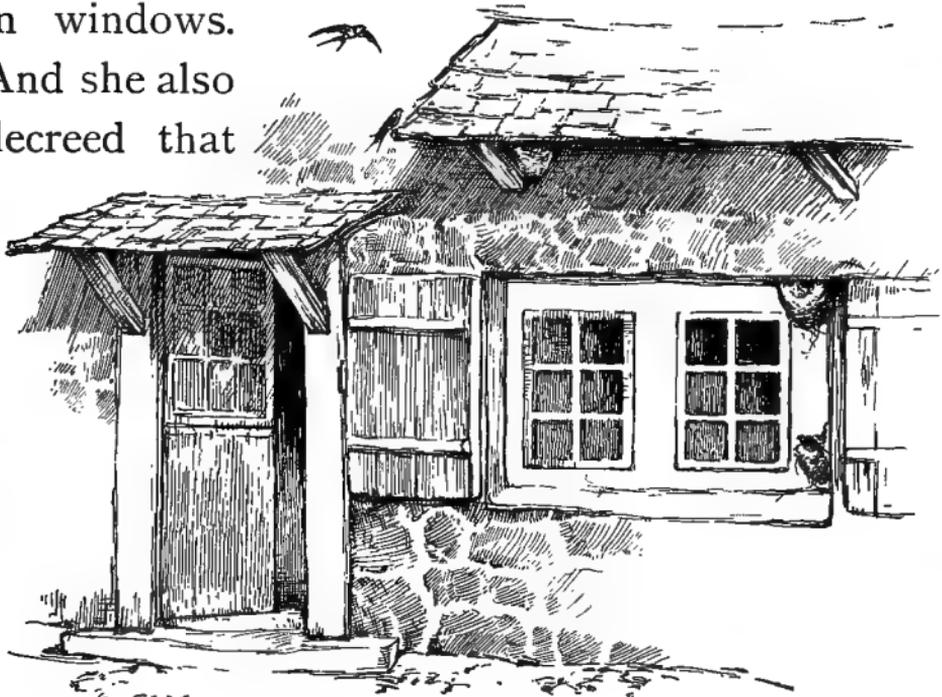
## WHY SWALLOWS BUILD THEIR NESTS IN WINDOWS

### A LEGEND OF BRITTANY

A mother swallow who was recovering from a long illness, and who had been abandoned by her husband, went for three days without food, so as not to cool the eggs upon which she was sitting. Along came a little mouse and asked if he might stay all night. The swallow told him that he might stay in the nest if he would promise to keep the eggs warm. The little mouse then sat on the eggs, but behold, when they were hatched, out came some little bats! When the poor mother bird saw the ugly little creatures she felt so badly that she died of grief. Then all the swallows in the neighborhood gathered around the little dead body. They greatly mourned the loss of their companion, and after they had buried her they took charge of the little orphans. Then the Queen of the swallows decreed that because

the poor dead mother had built her unfortunate nest in a chimney, from that time on swallows should be allowed to put their nests in windows.

And she also decreed that



bats, the little monstrosities which hatched out in the nest, should never again be able to see by daylight. This explains why bats are blind by day, and why swallows build their nests in windows.

Our next legend gives another reason for the daytime blindness of bats. I will tell

you this legend in the words of the little old woman who told it to me, in her home on the slopes of Mount Amiata in Tuscany. You will learn from this why the swallow has the right, according to the good people in that part of Italy, not to be molested, and why she must not, like other birds, be caged or killed. And you will also learn why she is called blessed, and why the people love to have her in the eaves of their houses — a morning awakener and a true prophet of the springtime. This is what she said.

## WHY THE SWALLOWS ARE NOT MOLESTED

### A LEGEND OF TUSCANY

The good Jesus was suffering on the cross in the terrible hour of his agony. A thorn of the crown which was fixed upon his brow was piercing his eye, and was penetrating more deeply with every movement of his weary head. A bat was flying about the cross, and at that time the bat was a bird like any other. Jesus called to him:—

Little bat, little bat, come to me, I pray,  
And from out my eye, take this thorn away."

But the bat flew off, pretending that he did not understand. Then a swallow flew about the cross. Jesus called to her:—

"Little swallow, little swallow, come to me, I pray,  
And from out my eye, take this thorn away."

And the swallow hurried to the cross, searched and searched with her bill for the head of the thorn, found it, and pulled it out.

One drop of blood spattered



the breast  
of the dear  
little bird, as

Jesus with a sigh of relief looked  
upon her as she gently moved away.



Then Jesus said to her: "May you be blessed, little swallow! From this time on, no one shall do you harm. You shall build your nest secure under the roof of man. To him you shall be of good omen. You shall announce with your song the hour for him

to arise and go to labor. Go. May you be blessed!"

The bat, who was not far away, and who heard these words, then set up a screech of scorn.

"Naughty little bat!" then said Jesus; "Never more shall you sing, but you shall henceforth shriek as you have just now done. From this time on you shall be a bird loathsome and wild. You shall rise but a few cubits from the earth, and only at night time, in the dark, shall you flutter about in abandoned houses or in melancholy graveyards. Go, naughty little bat!"

And so it has been. From the pretty bird it was at first the bat became what you all know. And the swallows became known as "The birds of God."

One thing I nearly forgot. The swallow has on her breast a little red spot, like blood long dried. May it not be a sign of this merciful act performed for the good Jesus upon the cross?

We will close this Chapter with a pretty legend of the northland. It is partly fairy tale and partly myth, and in it we shall learn how the swallows bring the summer to the frozen countries of the far north.

## THE SCOTCH PRINCESSES AND THE SWALLOWS

### A LEGEND OF LAPLAND

A certain king of Scotland was in the habit of having his wives strangled as soon as a son came. He had already sent five wives into the other world, when he sought and obtained as his sixth companion Tuigga, the lovely daughter of the king of Ireland. After a few months had passed, her husband had her shut up in a tower under the guard of an old woman named Odaffa and an old man Ulfeld, the same who had performed the five services of which you know. But one or the other of them took pity on the poor queen, and when two little daughters came to her they concealed the fact from the

king, and fled away with them in a ship towards the north.

During the voyage Odaffa died. The queen landed on "The Island of the Whale," where the old sailor built a hut out of the sails and wood of the vessel. And there they all dwelt. Six years they lived there and the little



princesses had no other amusement than playing in the snow. So long as the queen had

money, the little party did not want for food nor fuel from the inhabitants of the island, but as soon as her money was gone they left her alone, and then she began to cry. The little girls asked her: "Why doesn't the summer, which, they say, makes the grass grow and the roses bloom in Ireland, also come here?"

"It is said," replied the queen, "that the little swallows who bring the summer do not want to come so far north as this. They stop on the other side of the Gulf."

"Very well; don't cry. We will go and beg the swallows to come here."

The queen smiled sadly at their innocence. The next day the princesses began to run, hand in hand, over the frozen Gulf so as to reach the other side and talk with the swallows. But soon they were caught in a dense fog and knew not whether they were going forward or backward. They began to call for their mother and to shed tears so warm that they melted the ice they fell upon. Then from out a cave near by came a Fairy

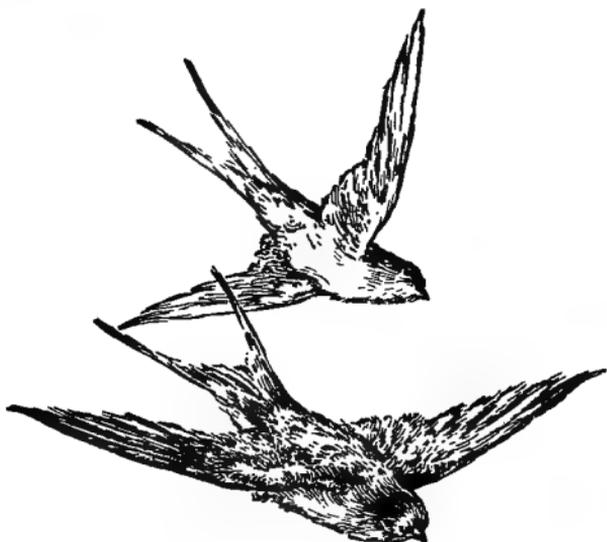
who asked them what they were seeking. They told her they were going to call the swallows. The fairy then said to them:—

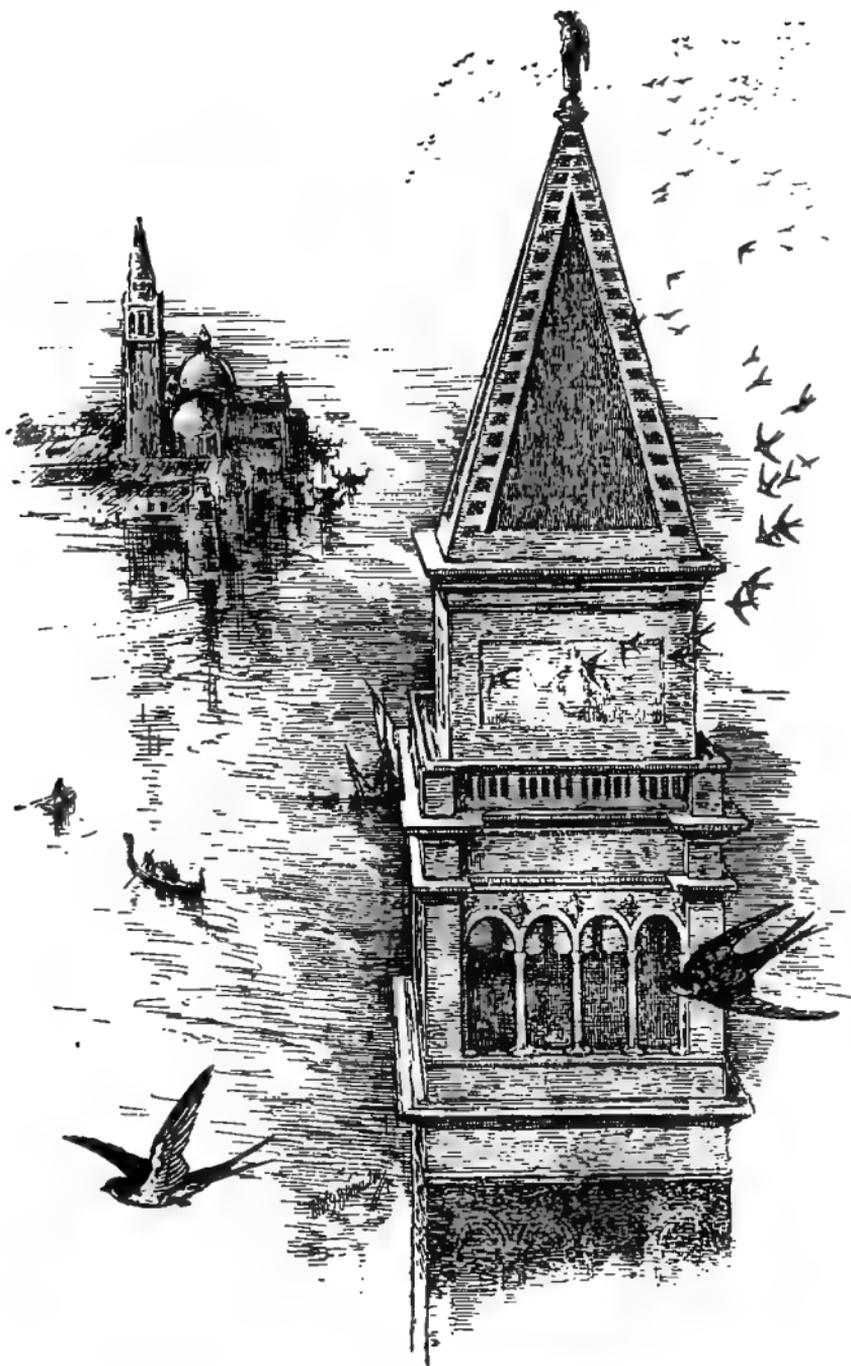
“The land of the swallows is a long way from here, and to get there one must travel over many countries, where there are bad men and wolves. Come with me and I will put you to sleep. When you shall awake the swallows will be here.”

The princesses hugged the Fairy, and she led them into her underground palace, where she warmed them and put them to sleep by rocking them gently, and she kept them in bed for a hundred nights and a hundred days. At the end of that time the ice walls of the Fairy's palace were melted away, and the eternal snows which had covered everything around had disappeared, and the earth began to grow grasses and flowers. . . .

The gay song of a bird awakened the little ladies from their slumber, and they ran away to their mother to tell her that the swallows had come. But the queen had died of sor-

row, grieving for her lost children. And the good Fairy of the ice, not being able to endure the heat brought by the swallows, or the sight of any green thing, suddenly melted away and her body mingled with the ocean. But the god Odin, to repay her for her kindness to the little princesses, raised her on the breast of a wave and gave her in marriage to a god of the sea.





## CHAPTER III

### THE SWALLOW IN LEGEND AND HISTORY

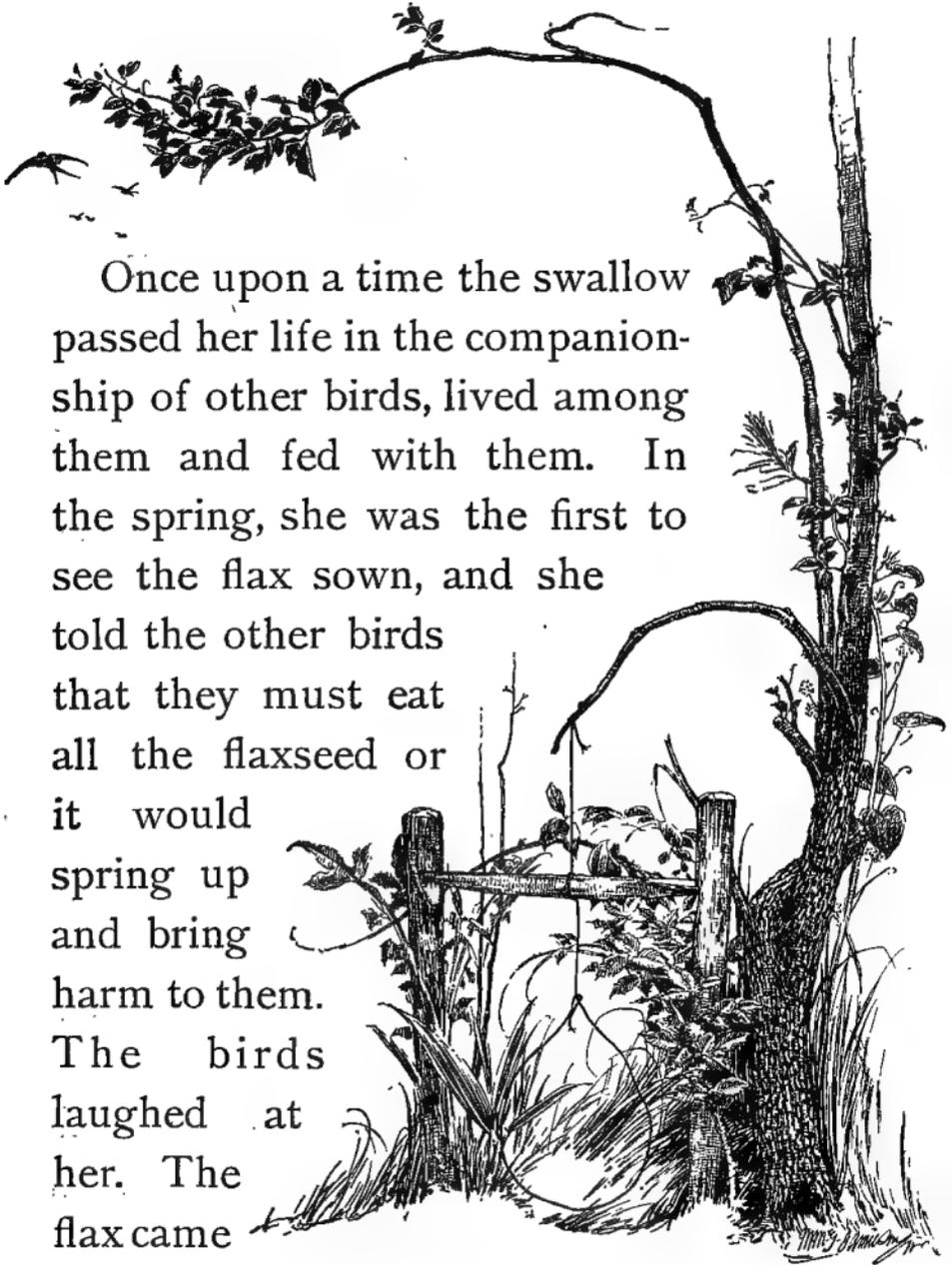
IN addition to her peculiar physical traits, accounted for in the legends of the preceding Chapter, the swallow's moral qualities, as shown in her relations with other birds and with various animals, have been made the subject of legend. The blackbird, the monkey, the raven, the cock, the cuckoo, and the sparrow — each, in contrast with the swallow, falls short of her in wisdom and sagacity. The swallow's association with man, sometimes bringing him good and sometimes evil fortune, forms a curious chapter of legendary history.

The first two legends make plain the swallow's superior foresight in her dealings with other birds.

## THE SWALLOWS AND THE FLAX

A LEGEND OF VENETIA

Once upon a time the swallow passed her life in the companionship of other birds, lived among them and fed with them. In the spring, she was the first to see the flax sown, and she told the other birds that they must eat all the flaxseed or it would spring up and bring harm to them. The birds laughed at her. The flax came



up, and the swallow warned the birds that they should pull it all out of the ground — and again they laughed. The flax matured, and once more the swallow advised them to carry it away. At last, seeing that the birds paid no heed to her counsels, she withdrew from their companionship and attached herself to man. With him she still lives and sings, secure in his protection.

The birds, out of scorn, dubbed her “false prophet,” but they were blind to one thing which she saw clearly — that out of flax men weave cords and snares to capture birds.

## THE BLACKBIRD AND THE SWALLOWS

### A LITTLE FABLE OF ITALY

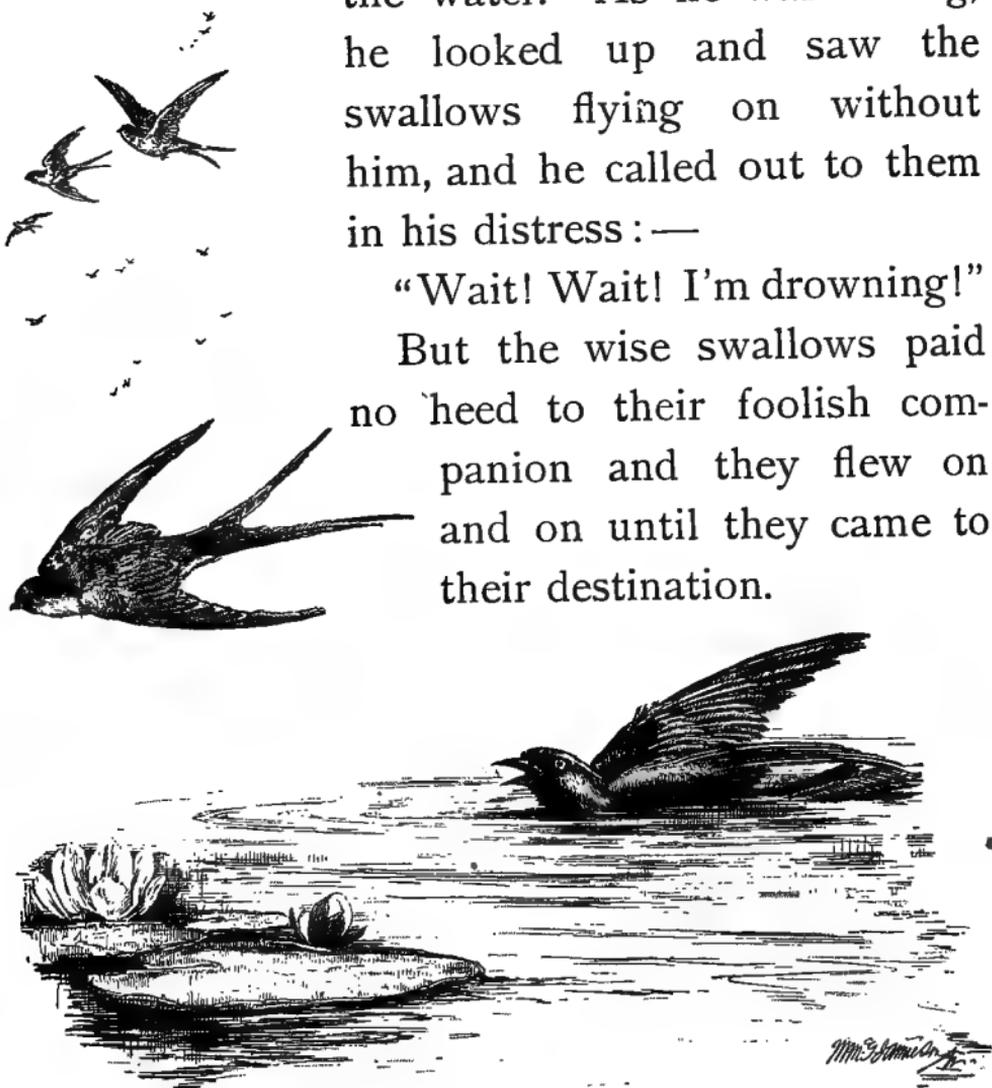
Some swallows were flying away to the south one day when a blackbird begged them to take him along with them as one of their flock. They consented, and together all flew away. After a time they came to a lake with a surface smooth and shiny like a mirror. The vain blackbird saw the lake,

and, wishing to admire his own beautiful image which was reflected on the water, he stopped his flight and stretched out his feet.

Suddenly he fell headlong into the water. As he was falling, he looked up and saw the swallows flying on without him, and he called out to them in his distress:—

“Wait! Wait! I’m drowning!”

But the wise swallows paid no heed to their foolish companion and they flew on and on until they came to their destination.



The next tale is one which is told by the natives of a small island far away on the southern coast of Africa. They too believe in the good sense and foresight of the little bird.

## THE SWALLOW AND THE MONKEY

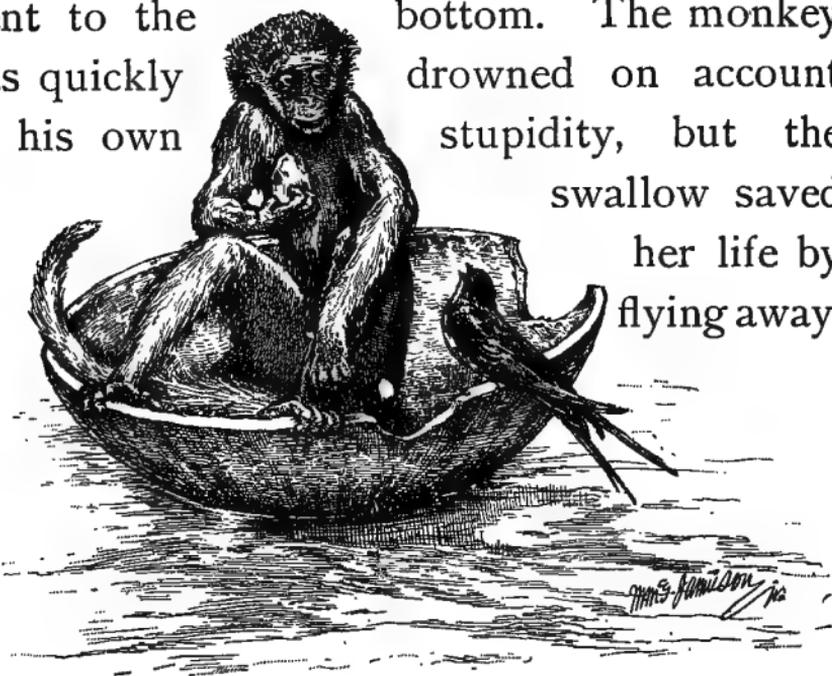
A FABLE OF THE ISLAND OF MAURITIUS

Once upon a time a swallow formed a friendship with a monkey and together they opened a drug store. One day the swallow bought a citron and sat down and ate half of it with a neighbor. The other half she hollowed out so it would float like a canoe. Then the swallow and the monkey got into the citron and began to sail. By and by the monkey became hungry and took a bite out of the side of the boat. The prudent swallow warned him of the danger they both would be in should the rind of the citron become too thin. After sailing a little farther, there was more hunger on the monkey's part, more eating of the boat,

and more anger and reproof from the swallow.

Finally, at the third bite which the monkey took, the little boat sprang a leak and went to the bottom. The monkey was quickly drowned on account of his own stupidity, but the

swallow saved her life by flying away.



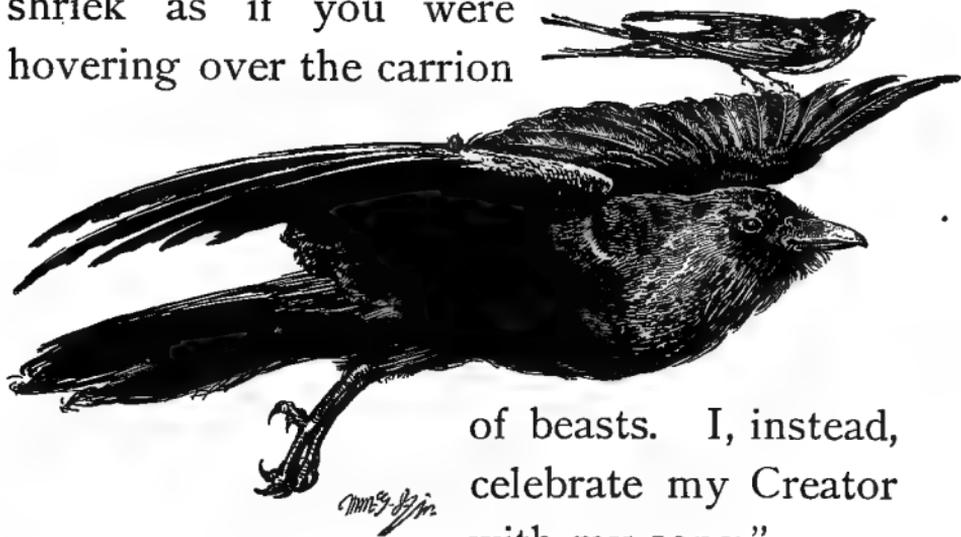
The swallow's shrewdness reaches even to cunning in the two following fables, one of which comes from the far north and the other from the far south. In these tales our clever little bird outwits two feathered creatures much larger than herself, a raven and a cock.

## THE SWALLOW AND THE RAVEN

A FABLE OF FINLAND

The swallow and the raven were singing one day. The raven was making ugly croaks, and the swallow reproved him thus:—

“You do not know how to sing. You shriek as if you were hovering over the carrion



of beasts. I, instead, celebrate my Creator with my song.”

The raven replied: “You may know how to sing, but you cannot rival me in flying. Though you may be very swift at the start, you will tire in a long flight.”

Then they both began to fly.

After a while the swallow became tired and she settled herself upon the wings of the raven, and in this way she was able to keep pace with him. When they came to their destination the swallow quickly leaped down from the raven's back, looked up at him and said:—

“ Well, here I am, too ! ”

## THE SWALLOW AND THE COCK

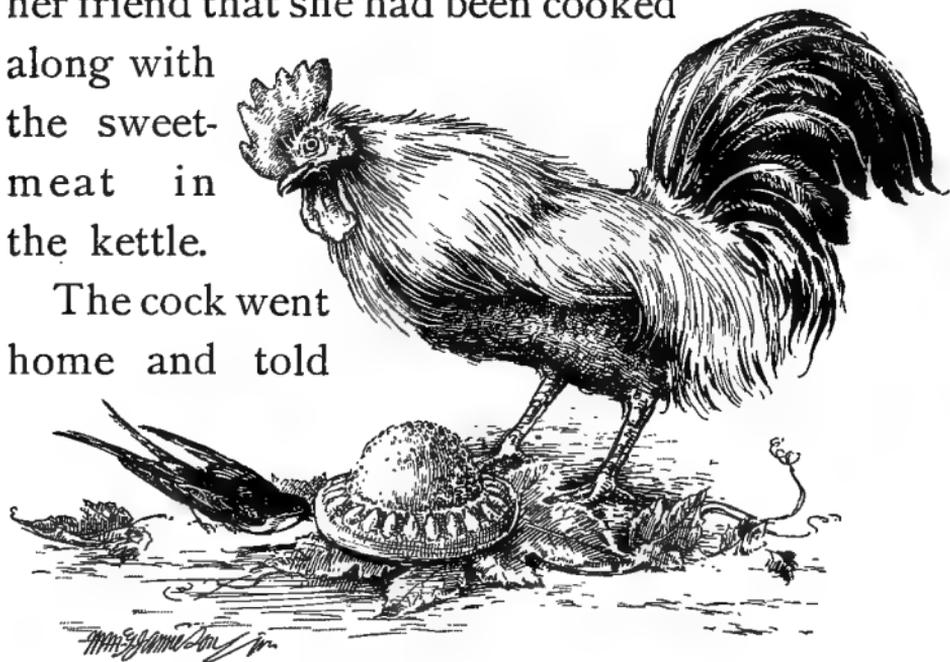
### FABLE OF MOZAMBIQUE

A swallow one day went to pay a visit to her friend the cock. The cock offered her a sweetmeat made of almonds. While eating it, the swallow observed that at her house in preparing this delicacy she always cooked herself in the kettle with the almonds. The cock could scarcely believe such a tale, whereupon the swallow invited him to come, to her home and see for himself.

The next day he came, and there was the sweetmeat boiling on the stove. Soon he saw the swallow flying high above the boil-

ing kettle, and almost concealed in the steam which issued from it. In a little while she reappeared covered with steam and assured her friend that she had been cooked along with the sweetmeat in the kettle.

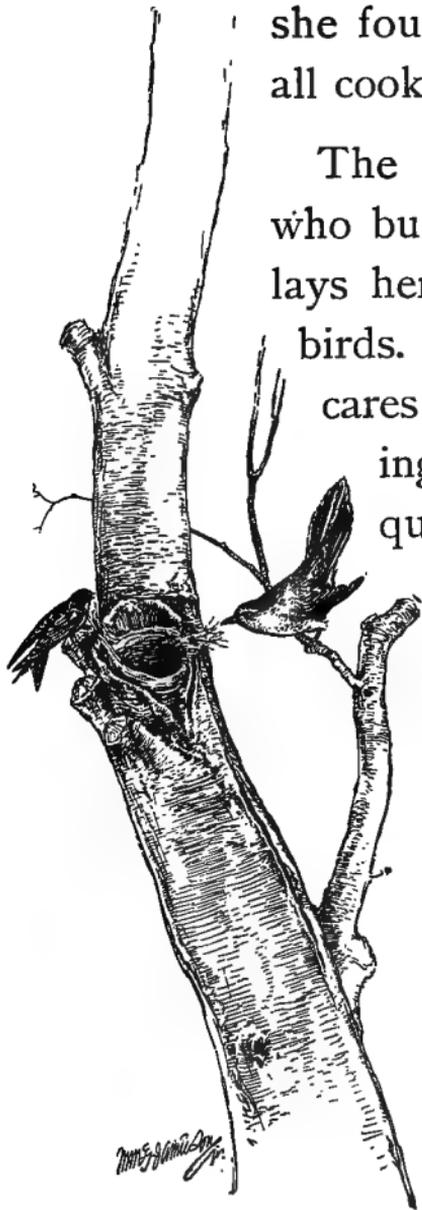
The cock went home and told



his wife about the delicious morsel and how he had seen it made, and he said that he wanted to be boiled in the kettle with some almonds so as to improve the flavor of the delicacy. His wife then put him in the kettle and covered him up and he boiled and boiled. Along came the swallow then and ordered the kettle uncovered, and there

she found her too credulous friend all cooked and ready to be eaten.

The European cuckoo is a bird who builds no nest of her own, but lays her eggs in the nests of other birds. By so doing she shirks the cares and responsibilities of raising her own family. What quality in the swallow does the next legend show?



## THE SWALLOW AND THE CUCKOO.

A FABLE OF FINLAND

A cuckoo asked a swallow if, for the sake of economy, they might share a nest in common. The swallow at once demanded of him:—

“What can you do to earn a living?”

“I bring the cry of summer at a given

time each year," the cuckoo answered. "All men listen for the cuckoo's cry."

"And I bring the warmth of summer, together with the springtime," replied the swallow, "and so in this cold land where the summer is so late in coming we cannot possibly have a nest in common. The climate will not permit."

We are all familiar with the enmity between the sparrow and many other birds—how the naughty sparrows drive away the rightful owners from their nests. Hatred of the sparrow is the motive of the next two tales.

## THE SPARROW IN THE SWALLOW'S NEST

### A TALE OF FINLAND

When the swallow comes here (to the land of Finland) in the beginning of the summer, the sparrow chirps to her from the edge of the roof:—

"I have been here long. I have shivered with the cold. I was always cold. I have

kept your nest closed and warm, and now you come back to work all done."

The swallow replies: "Tins! Tins! I will pay, I will pay! I bring scissors, wax, and needle from abroad."

"The sparrow cries: "I don't care for your needles and your scissors. I had my own tools for the work."

The swallow begs: "Never mind! Never mind! Let me into the nest!"

The sparrow replies: "How can I let you in?"

I brought the feathers. I brought all that is within it."

The swallow begs and begs: "Let me stay! Let me stay! I will stay only three months in the home."



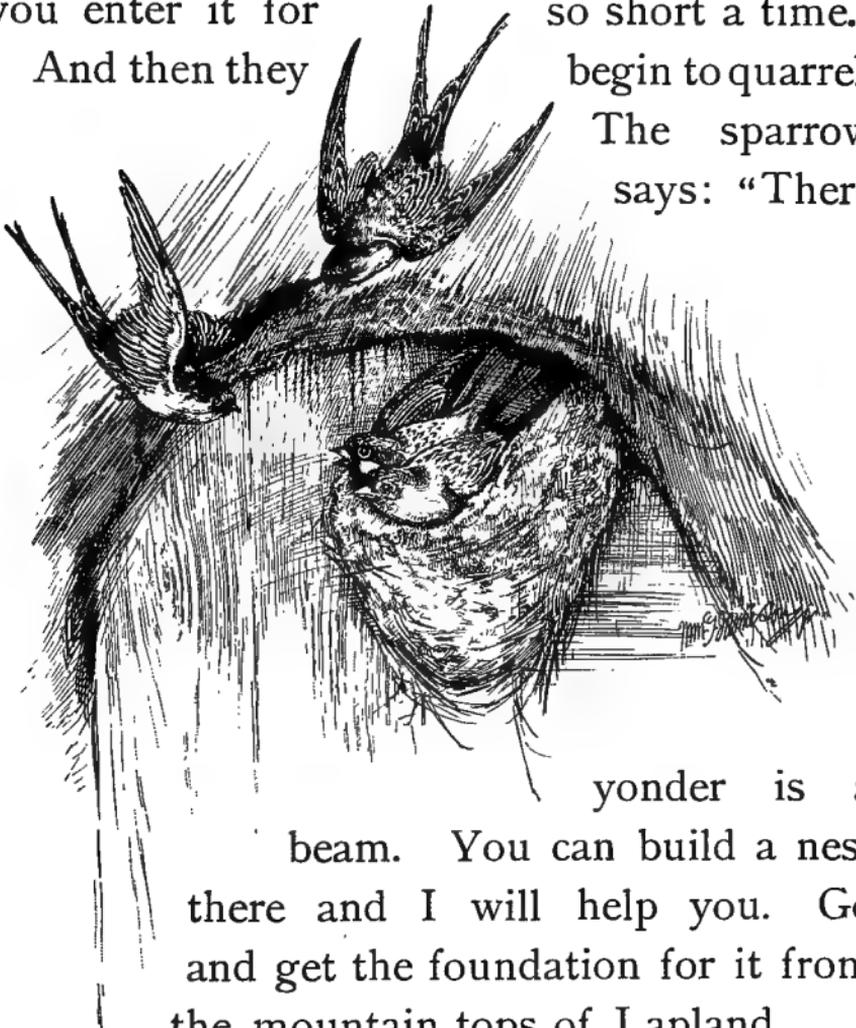
The sparrow observes: "Having cared for your nest for nine months, I will not let you enter it for so short a time."

And then they

begin to quarrel.

The sparrow

says: "There



yonder is a beam. You can build a nest there and I will help you. Go and get the foundation for it from the mountain tops of Lapland.

The swallow leaps up and the sparrow comes down from the roof. The swallow says, "I am a master mason."

“And I,” says the sparrow, “am a fine architect.”

“Must the clay for the pots and kettles be brought from afar?”

“You,” says the sparrow, “have many brothers to help you.”

“But perhaps they have all died in the long journey oversea and through violent winds.”

“Perhaps I will help you,” relents the sparrow, “if you will give me good things to eat—rye, barley, and seeds of hemp.”

“But I have none of these.”

The sparrow then becomes angry. “Very well, I will tear down your nest, and you can build another. You are a nuisance to man. You live in his courtyards.”

“That,” says the swallow, “is my own affair. I am a friend to man. I do not steal. The sparrows steal. I am allowed to live on friendly terms in the courtyards of man.”

## HOW THE SPARROW WAS PUNISHED

A FABLE OF HUNGARY

A swallow returns to her nest in the spring and finds it occupied by a sparrow. She cries and shrieks to attract the attention of her companions, who soon come hurrying from all directions. They at once pitch upon the usurper to make him leave the stolen nest. But the sparrow refuses to move. The swallows then hold a brief consultation and decide to punish the sparrow for unjustly keeping the nest. With one accord they all fly away and get some moist earth, and, quick as a wink, they put a layer of mud over the opening of the nest, thus hermetically sealing it. The sparrow and his wife, deprived of food and air, both quickly die.

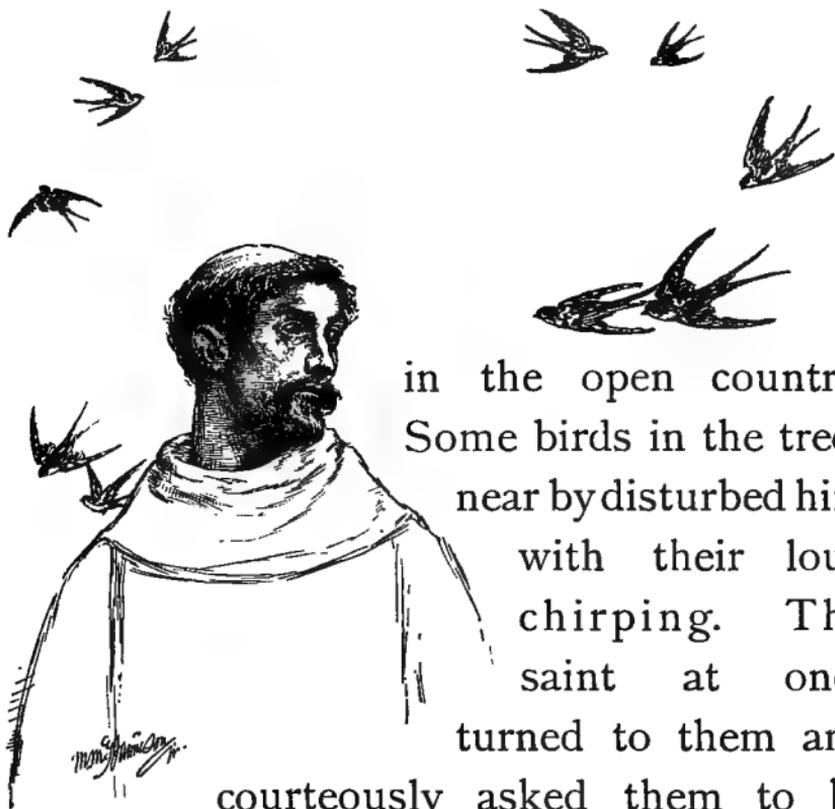
The folk of the country of Hungary have this little song, which records this punishment by the little mud plasterers:—

Quick the swallows hither fly,  
And wall the foolish sparrows in ;  
So the stupid creatures die, —  
A warning sad to all their kin.

Three charming legends record the swallow's association with saintly men of olden time. The first is the familiar story of

### SAINT FRANCIS AND THE BIRDS

Francis, the gentle saint of Assisi, was preaching one day to a company of people



in the open country. Some birds in the trees near by disturbed him with their loud chirping. The saint at once turned to them and courteously asked them to be silent — and they reverently obeyed him.

At another time Saint Francis, who loved

all creatures of the earth and air, and who called them his "little brothers" and "little sisters," addressed a sermon to a multitude of swallows and other birds in a field, by the roadside. The birds flew down from the trees and pressed close about the saint and listened devoutly as he spoke. He told them of their Creator and of the many blessings he had bestowed upon them, in giving them the air in which they lived, the raiment which they wore, the food and shelter which they enjoyed. And he told them always to be grateful for these benefits. The birds listened devoutly and made visible signs of understanding the words of the saint, opening their beaks and spreading their wings. Then, after the saint had blessed them, they flew away, filling the air with a wonderful song in which they sought "to praise and to thank the good Jesus."

In the second legend we find the swallows visiting one of the old convents of Italy. It was situated in the midst of dense woods, and far from cities.

## SAINT GUTHLAC AND THE SWALLOWS

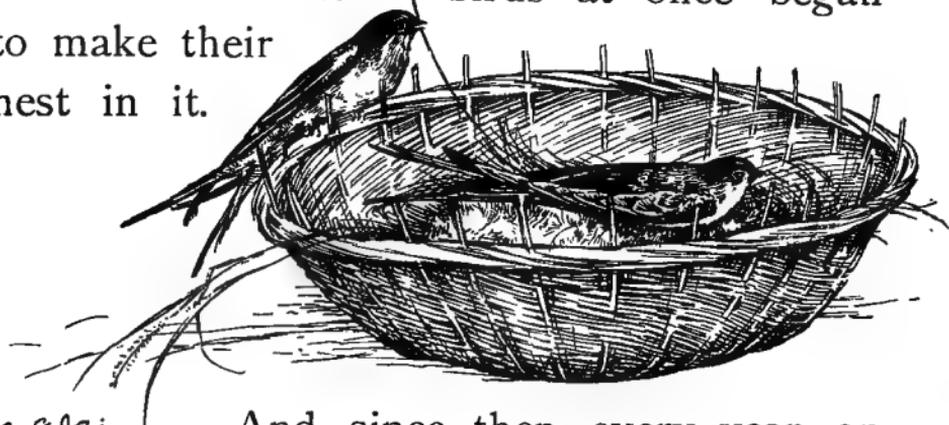
One day Saint Guthlac was receiving a visit in his cell from his friend Wilfred, when two swallows flew in and made the little place resound with their merry chatter. They lit upon the shoulders and upon the head of the saint, and they caressed him with their black wings. Wilfred marveled at the actions of the birds, and said to Guthlac:—

“Oh, my brother, how is it that you have inspired such confidence in these little winged creatures of solitude?”

“Do you not know,” replied the saint, “that he who is united to God in pureness of heart sees, in his turn, all created beings joined to him? The birds of heaven recognize those who are of this brotherhood of man.”

At these words the swallows fluttered their wings the livelier and set up loud, plaintive cries, as if they wished to speak and to ask

some question. The saint, who understood their language, fetched a little basket made of rushes and bits of straw and put it on the floor. And the birds at once began to make their nest in it.



And since then, every year, on the very same day and at the very same hour the swallows come and ask for the little rush basket for their nest, and for a refuge under the roof of the cell.

Our next legend takes us to a famous shrine of the Middle Ages, the reputed resting place of the bones of Saint James, he "who was buried more distant from his country than any other of the Apostles." This shrine, which for centuries was the most favored gathering place for pious pil-

grims from all Europe, is in Galicia, in the northwestern corner of Spain.

## SAINT JAMES OF GALICIA AND THE SWALLOWS

A LEGEND OF SPAIN

Saint James was grieving one day because no one came to his Festival. But Galicia is so very far away that only Saint Alexis dared to make the long journey.

Then, to console Saint James, Jesus said to him : —

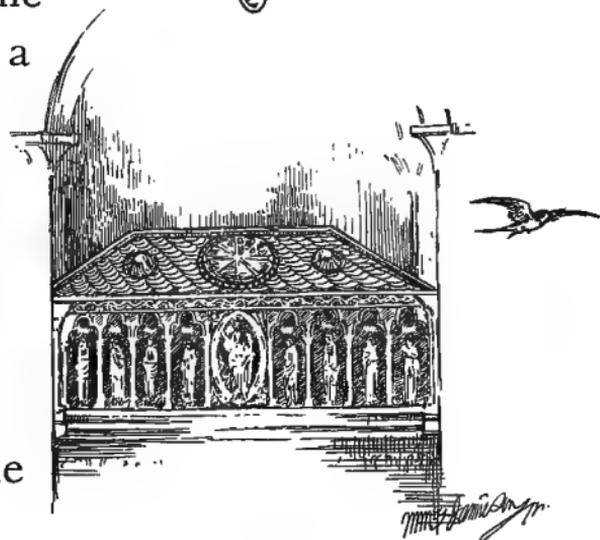
“ Be of good cheer, James. All those who cannot visit you while they live will come to see you after death.”

And from that time there has been a constant knocking at the little door of the shrine — and no person touches it! It is the procession of the dead, who continually come and go on their visits to the saint.

And through that same little door come also all the swallows in the world, and each one bears in her mouth an olive. From

these olives oil is made for the many lamps which adorn the shrine and which burn there day and night.

We should scarcely expect to find the swallow playing a part in the serious annals of the world. But in that ancient borderland of history, midway between the true and the fabled, where confused with fact, there we discover our bird flitting about from country to country. Here, she is saving the life of a famous general — there, sending another to tardy justice, and more than once, by her timely warning, deciding the fate of nations.



Even so great a historian as the Greek Xenophon tells us that just before King Cyrus set out to fight the Scythians, some swal-

lows appeared to him and warned him of defeat. And he also writes in his account of his times that both the kings, Darius and Antiochus, were forewarned by swallows not to engage in battle.

Some swallows, by building their nests in the sails of the Egyptian Queen Cleopatra's barge, foretold the death of her lover, Mark Antony. It is to this same ancient swallow superstition that Shakespeare alludes in his *Antony and Cleopatra*, when he makes Scarus say (IV, 10):—

Swallows have built

In Cleopatra's sails their nests ; the augurers  
Say they know not, — they cannot tell, — look grimly,  
And dare not speak their knowledge.

A famous Roman consul named Hostilius Mancinus was also warned of defeat by a swallow resting among the sails of his galley.

We read in an old history, and in a pretty Italian poem, a tale of how Olaf the Great, a king of Denmark, destroyed the city of

Duna by tying fire to the tails of a vast number of swallows and then setting them free. The birds flew over the city and kindled the buildings into flames.

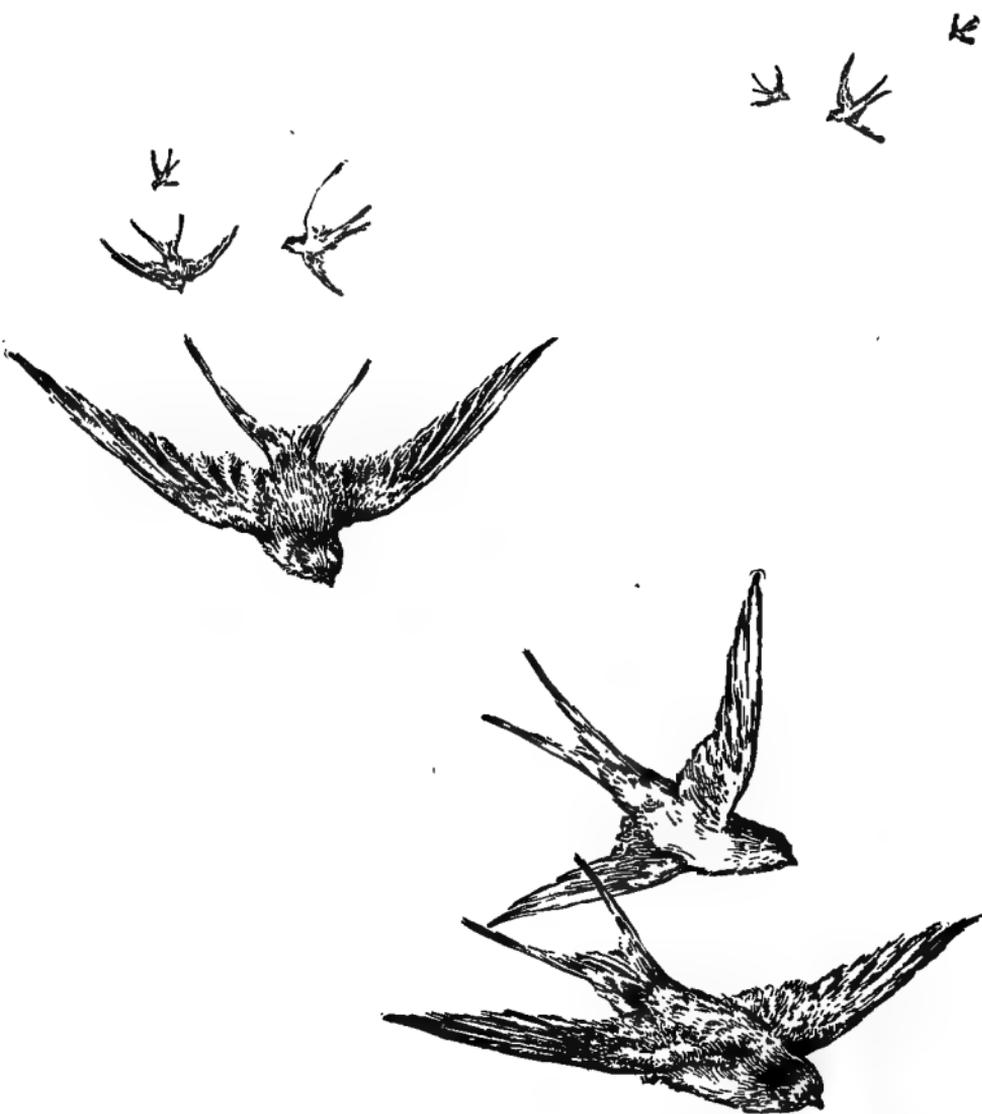


This seems almost like fable, but we must remember that in those very early times

roofs were made of thatched straw, and not as now, of fireproof materials.

As we have learned in the tales just told, the appearance of a swallow upon land foretold disaster. Upon the sea, on the other hand, the sight of her was taken as a good omen. Alexander the Great once owed his life to a swallow,





if we may credit the following popular story:—

While besieging the city of Halicarnassus, one day Alexander was so worn out that he

slept until midday. While he was asleep a swallow lit upon his head and gave a loud cry, then flew round and round over the bed, all the time keeping up a very strange noise. Alexander was so exhausted by fatigue that it was some time before he awoke, but finally aroused by the noise, he struck the swallow with his hand. The bird instead of flying away insisted upon lighting upon his head, nor would she leave until the king was fully awakened. Alexander then



called to mind the omen of the swallow, and at once sent for Aristander, his diviner, who told him that the swallow's actions signified the treachery of one of his friends, and also that this treachery would be brought to light. He explained that the swallow is a bird which is reared among men, is a friend to man, and is more talkative than any other bird. It was shortly discovered that a certain Alexander, son of a trusted captain, was plotting the king's death. And perhaps he would have succeeded in his wickedness had it not been for the clever little swallow.

Another swallow who had her nest in the chapel of Alexander, son of Pyrrhus, foretold to him a coming disaster. And still another, building her nest in his tent while on the march against the Medes, told Antiochus that evil was about to befall him,— and so he hurled himself down from a steep precipice.

Because of her free flight in the air, the swallow has long been looked upon as a

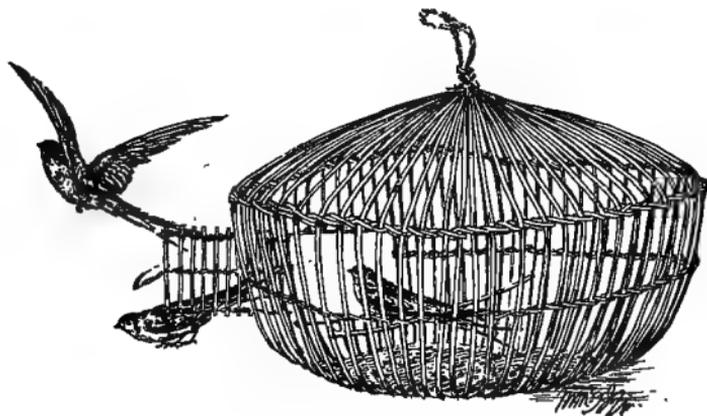
symbol of liberty. Several historical tales are based on this fancy: Pliny tells us that swallows never entered the houses of the Greek city of Thebes, because it had been many times besieged. Nor would they approach the country of the Bizyæ, because there lived the wicked Tereus who we learned in the Greek legend made the pretty Philomela prisoner—as a result of which act swallows came into the world.

Swallows have sometimes been made to carry messages<sup>s</sup> between men. Pliny recounts that at the time of the celebrated chariot races in Rome, a citizen of Volterra (a city about fifty miles north of Rome, which may be visited to-day) by the name of Cæcina was the owner of several chariots or “dominus quadrigarum” as you will read in your Latin. He was in the habit of having swallows caught and carried with him to Rome when he went to compete in the Circus. Upon gaining a victory he would send the news home to his friends by the birds.

He did this by staining them with his colors and then setting them free; and they at once made their way to their old nests.



Fabius Pictor, the ancient historian, relates in his Annals how one day a Roman garrison was being besieged, when a swallow, who had been taken away from her young in the nest outside the walls, was brought to him inside. He tied a string to her foot, making as many knots in it as the number



of days the garrison could hold out. Then he set her free and she flew to friends outside the walls. They understood the meaning of the knots and at once came to their relief.

Plutarch tells this story: A certain Bessus had killed his father, and for many years he had kept the murder a secret. One evening he went to sup in the house of one of his friends, and while there he angrily struck to the ground a nest of swallows which was in the house. Then in great wrath he trampled upon and killed the little birds in the nest. When asked why he did such a cruel thing he replied: "Didn't you hear those birds saying over and over that I had killed my father? It is a lie."

His friends wondered greatly at his words, and they went at once to the king and told him what had taken place. The king then made diligent inquiries through his ministers, and after finding certain proof that this same Bessus had really murdered his father, he ordered the culprit put to death.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE SWALLOW IN BELIEFS AND OMENS

As we have learned from the stories of natural history and legend, the swallow is a very sociable bird. She lives not only in large communities of her own kind, but she loves and seeks the companionship of man, building in the eaves and windows of his barns and houses, and rearing her young family in his very dooryard. It is natural, therefore, that the folk of all countries have come to be familiar with her daily habits. They observed her busily fetching mud and fashioning it into her curious nest. They saw her fighting her old enemy, the sparrow, in his attempts to rob the pretty new home. They watched her, when the heavens were clear, soaring almost out of sight in the blue above; and again, when dark clouds hung

low, skimming the shining surfaces of ponds and the waving fields of grain. Then, when the first cool winds of autumn chilled the air, they saw her . . . gather her family together and fly . . . away to some unknown land.

As a result of this companionship, curious beliefs and omens have sprung up and flourished in many lands. The gypsies of Hungary, perhaps because of the bird's ceaseless chatter, relate that the first two swallows in the world were once upon a time a quarrelsome man and his wife, who passed all their days in bitter disputes over their children. For this sin they were at last changed into chattering swallows.

Other beliefs are more pleasing. The Chinese claim that the birth of one of their myth-



ical heroes named Hesie was thus ordered by heaven. One day the Princess Shung was bathing in a stream, when a swallow flying above let fall an egg upon her mouth, — and from this egg the Prince was born.

The Arabs call the swallow the “Bird of Jesus,” and the Algerians consider her sacred like their priests, and not to be touched by human hands. In certain tales of the Middle Ages we read that one important duty of the town guards of German villages was to announce with trumpets the springtime arrival of the swallows, for the old Germans held the bird in high esteem, even fabling her an assistant of the Lord in the making of heaven. According to a Belgian fable, swallows were the bringers of water to earth. The children of Portugal will tell you that every day the swallows fly up into the sky and wash the feet of God, and if one of them is harmed it “makes the Mother of Jesus weep.”

About her mud nest cluster charming say-

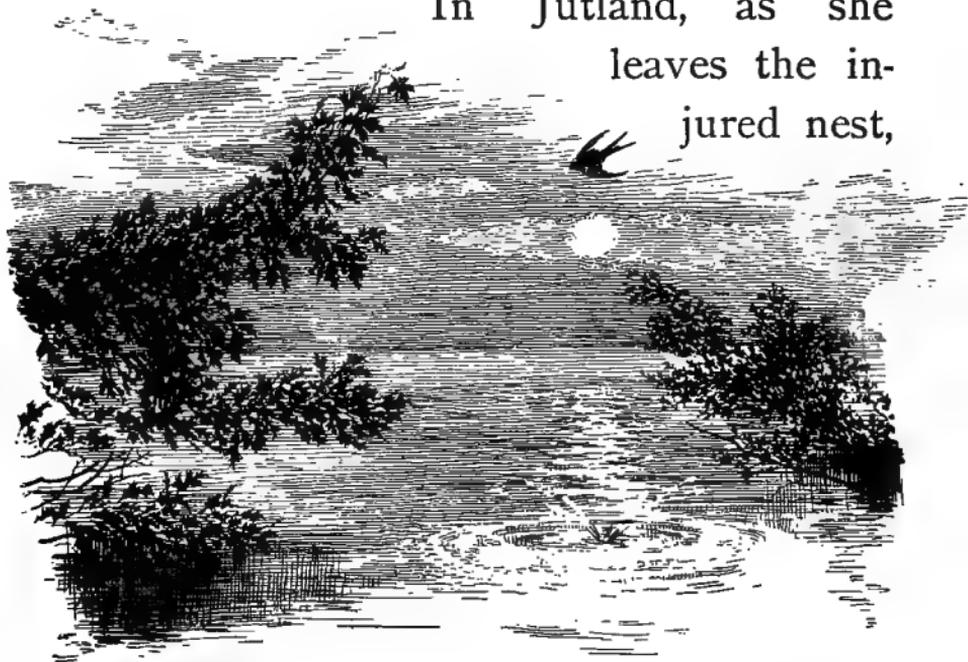
ings and beliefs. "Swallow, come and build your nest in my little window!" cry the boys and girls of Brittany in the early springtime, for, unlike the raven, swallows bring good fortune to the homes that harbor them. But the homes they favor with their presence must be the abodes of love and peace, for, according to the Germans, the slightest quarrel in a family makes the swallows abandon their nests in the eaves and fly away, taking the good fortune with them.

The ancient Romans gladly allowed swallows to build in the eaves and roofs of their houses, for one of their legends taught that the spirits of the little dead babies of their household came back from heaven to visit them in the form of swallows.

But beware of harming the nest! Terrible are the misfortunes which will fall upon your head for the offense! Sicilian boys are taught not to harm the nest for fear of being stricken dumb, and Norwegian mothers warn their children that they will become

blind or crippled if they disturb a nest. In other countries the retribution is less severe — the cow's milk is soured, the flock of the wicked one is scattered, his house falls down or sudden death visits his household.

In Jutland, as she leaves the injured nest,



the swallow touches the arm of the rash youth and leaves it paralyzed. Sometimes the poor mother bird in her great grief curses the offender even to the third generation. She picks up a little stone and drops it into a pond for an evil omen, the act signifying

that one day a member of that family will drown. That is why they say of a boy whom evil luck has befallen, "He was cursed by a swallow."

Worse punishments are reserved for him who wantonly kills the bird. His prettiest cow will die, all his sheep will perish, a stroke of lightning will destroy his house or else he will lose his parents during the year. The French peasants have the strange belief that a swallow passing under the belly of a cow leaves the animal bewitched, and turns her milk into blood. But the milk may be turned back again simply by scalding it at a four corners!

The German folk watched with interest the struggle between the swallow and her eternal enemy, the sparrow. In consequence we have these omens: When a swallow alights in an open window and twitters, it is a sign that a happy event will come to pass in that house. But if a sparrow alights there and chirps, something unlucky will

happen. If a sparrow throws a swallow out of the nest, a son will be born and a daughter die. But if the swallow pushes the sparrow out, then a daughter will be born and a son die. A sparrow flying towards a house is a sign of the birth of a son, while an approaching swallow foretells a daughter.

The folk have noted the swallow's small, weak feet, and the fact that, unlike other birds, she is almost always on the wing. So they have styled her a bird of heaven, and added that when she alights upon a tree or barn she cannot again fly away, but perishes there, as the earth is not her element. They account for her swift, tortuous, and apparently capricious flight by the fanciful notion that some invisible monster, a dragon or hobgoblin, furiously pursues her.

As the swallow flies so swiftly and easily, why not ask her to bear messages to distant loved ones, even to friends in heaven? A learned man of Venice writes:—

“It is believed here that swallows have

a mystical correspondence with certain men and women, who get from them mysterious messages from the skies. I could tell you of an old woman, held to be a saint, who is said to talk with the swallows.”

By carefully noting her actions at the approach of a storm and when the skies were clear, the people have discovered in the swallow one of our surest prophets of the weather. To this office we owe our most familiar swallow omens, common to many languages and countries. Swallows announce the approach of rain by flying low over the fields and the ponds, so

When swallows fly low,  
A storm will blow,

say the Italians. The French have it:—

Swallows skimming o'er the plain  
Are sure messengers of rain.

When sunny days are at hand, swallows mount high into the heavens and lose themselves from sight in the blue sky — and the English poet sings:—

When swallows fleet soar high and sport in air,  
They tell us that the welkin will be clear.

Perhaps because of her ability to foretell the weather, the folk appeal to her to decide other and more important matters. The French peasant who wishes to marry and knows not which maid to choose, awaits the coming of the first swallow in the spring. As soon as he spies her, he looks down at his feet, and there upon the ground he finds a hair, which is the color of the tresses of the lass he must marry.

The Polish youth who needs a new horse, and knows not which to choose, also consults the swallows. He goes out into the fields, and when he sees a swallow he whirls around three times on his heel, saying as he does so, "Tell me, O swallow, what color my horse shall be." Then he steps to one side and examines the mark made by his heel, and there he finds a hair the color of which tells him the color of the horse to buy. But he must quickly say, "I've found

it!" in order to ward off the evil spell of witches.

The Italian peasant who sees the first swallow in the spring at once stops where he is and with his knife digs a hole in the ground near his left foot, and there he finds a little piece of coal, which has the wonderful power to cure fever. This magic piece of swallow coal, the youth of Denmark, when he finds it in the same way, ties to his spade handle as a talisman against disease. In Chapter Seven we shall learn of many other strange practices of healing.

Where do the swallows spend the cold months of winter? The answer to this question, so simple to us to-day, was until quite recent years the subject of astonishing beliefs. Among the many curious things which Pliny taught in his Natural History... was the belief that swallows go to the bottoms of lakes and cling there close together in bunches like grapes, until spring comes. This solution of the mystery sufficed for

many generations of men, and even yet a similar notion may be found among the ignorant peoples of northern Europe. As every fall they see the swallows gather in large flocks upon the margins of lakes and ponds, and then in the dead of night they disappear, they say the birds have gone down to the bottom of the water to remain there under the ice until the end of bad weather. This absurd belief has not been confined to the ignorant, for listen to the learned Izaak Walton, in his immortal discourse upon the gentle art of angling:—

“It is well known that swallows and bats and wagtails, which are called half-year birds, are not seen to fly in England for six months in the year, but about Michaelmas leave us for a better climate; yet some of them that have been left behind their fellows, have been found many thousands at a time in hollow trees, or clay caves, where they have been observed to live and sleep out the whole winter without meat.”



## CHAPTER V

### THE SWALLOW IN PROVERBS AND RIDDLES

JUST as little by little the peculiar habits and traits of the swallow were translated into beliefs and omens, so gradually these beliefs and omens crystallized into proverbs and riddles, and as such they became a part of the common speech of many peoples. The bird's springtime coming and autumn departure, her hatred of the sparrow, her curious nest, her incessant chatter and continuous flight—each serves as a means for the fanciful expression of some simple fact. The proverbs have often a deeper meaning, and under many a plain statement we may find concealed a wise and homely truth.

The coming of the swallow depends upon the state of the weather; therefore the precise date varies from country to country. In Italy

she appears about the 21st of March, which is Saint Benedict's day, and the people greet one another with this proverb:—

By Saint Benedict the Blest,  
The little swallow's on her nest.

She is first seen in France on March 25, or sometimes as late as the 10th of April, and the folk, happy to be out in the spring sunshine, repeat:—

When their nests the swallows make,  
We no longer shelter take.

Then, as they see the fresh young green of their grain fields, they add:—

The swallows to the wheat fields bring  
All the joys of fruitful spring.

Berlin sees the swallow about the 18th of April, but she does not reach Copenhagen, Denmark, until May 5th. In England, April 15th is called "Swallow Day," but if a bird chances to be seen sooner, then may be heard the familiar

One swallow does not make a summer.

This proverb is old, going back to Greek times when its form was:—

One swallow does not make a spring.

A quaint combination of the two proverbs is current in the Balearic Isles, near the coast of Spain:—

One swallow makes neither a summer, nor two springs.

As the swallow leaves Italy about the middle of August, the devout folk naturally associate the event with the feast days of their August saints, Saint Roch (August 16) and Saint Bartholomew (August 24), and we hear:—

On Blessed Saint Roch's day,  
The swallows fly away,

and

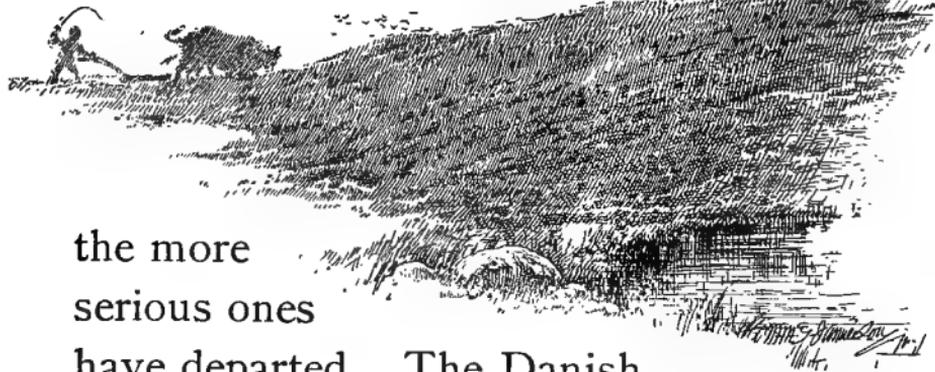
O Saint Bartholomew,  
With God the swallows flew.

Instead of suggesting a saint, the bird's departure from Gascony calls to mind the work to be done in the fields:—

When the swallows go away,  
Get the plow and work all day.

A homely German proverb says : —

When the swallows go away, the flies stay,  
 which means that the birds are a benefit by  
 ridding the land of  
 flies, and also, in an-  
 other sense, that some-  
 times bothersome  
 people remain  
 around after



the more  
 serious ones  
 have departed. The Danish  
 people have a proverb which attributes a  
 selfish reason to the summer visits of our  
 bird, but we are well aware of its untruth ; —

The hypocrite is like the swallow — with us in the sum-  
 mer, and away at the approach of bad weather.

Some proverbs combine both the coming

and the going of the swallows. From France we have:—

The swallows in March arriving,  
Not always make the spring ;  
And in September, departing,  
The clouds of autumn bring.

The Austrians say that the swallows come on the day of the Annunciation (March 25), and go away on the birthday of Mary, the Mother of Jesus (September 8) and they join the events thus:—

On the day of Mary's birth,  
The swallows fly away —  
And they come again to us,  
Annunciation Day.

In the proverbs which voice the quarrel between the swallow and the sparrow, the inner meaning meant to be conveyed is that one should attend carefully to his own household lest harm come unawares. "When the swallow allows the sparrow to enter her nest, she must make another for herself," and "While the swallow is away after food, the sparrow robs the nest" say

the Germans. The Dutch put it this way: "When the swallows go, the sparrows remain."

The swallow loves her pretty nest and the Germans love their comfortable homes, so naturally we have a group of German proverbs which express this



common sentiment: "An old mother swallow knows her own nest," "The swallow gladly returns to her nest," "When the swallows go

away, the nest remains empty." When they wish to say in metaphor that a successful home is one for which both husband and wife labor, they have this: "When both swallows fetch mud, the nest is soon made," and when they warn a friend not to expect the impossible, they say to him: "Never look for eagles in a swallow's nest." Affection for the bird and their own proverbial hospitality the people of the Fatherland make plain in this proverb: "One swallow and a guest bring good luck into the house."

The ceaseless chatter of swallows is suggestive of the endless tattle of gossips, and is the inspiration of a group of proverbs aimed against this idle and harmful habit. "Do not receive swallows into your house," said old Aristotle, and so say the modern Italians, meaning that you should not make friends of persons who cannot bridle their tongue. The Germans remark of one who talks too much: "He went to school to the swallows." "Swallows come chattering to

their nests, and go away silent" is an old Latin proverb.

When a little German boy salutes a friend by raising his hat in nervous haste, the people joke: "He has some swallows under his hat," and when he plays truant, they say of him: "He has been to school to the swallows." By these they mean that, like the swallows, he is restless and would rather roam about at his own free will than spend his time in one place.

"A swallow without a louse" is a man without a cent, or a beggar, in a homely and common proverb of Holland. In a certain city in the north of Italy, they name a "swallow" the black silk ribbon with which the engaged girls tie their braids, which ribbon distinguishes them from the girls who are not yet betrothed. We all know what a "swallow-tailed coat" is.

The beauty and grace of young girls is sometimes compared to the beauty and grace of swallows, as in Tuscany:—

Little flower of myrtle bright —  
I like my sweetheart lythe and light,  
Like a swallow in her flight.

Many years ago in a little village in the western part of the island of Sicily, there lived a very old man who, it was rumored, made tails for swallows. He was very poor and very small and very pious, and so they gave him the name of Saint Miserino, which means all those things. To-day the people who live in that village recall him in a saying addressed to a person who attempts to do the impossible:—

For Saint Miserino you I'd mistake,  
Who tails for swallows thought he could make.

In Italy, the beatings of a pretty girl's heart are called "swallows' wings," and when a child is exceptionally bright in his studies, they say of him: "He must have eaten a swallow's heart." In the Chapter on Medicine we shall learn the meaning of this saying.

The answer to each of the following rid-

dles is "The Swallow." In two of them her forked tail, you will notice, is compared to a pair of scissors — perhaps an echo of some of the legends.

A Greek riddle runs : —

Needle in front,  
Scissors behind,  
Black as a monk on top,  
White as cotton beneath —  
What is it ?

From Roumania come the next two : —

What is that which has a head like a woman, and a tail like a fork ?

Now on high,  
Now down low,  
It is black,  
And not a cat.

The Portuguese children ask one another : —

What is that,  
Which does not belong here,  
Eats and drinks here,  
Sleeps here,  
Yet doesn't live here ?

Another Portuguese riddle describes the little bird thus : —

A spinner who spins not  
And cures not in March ;  
Comes from the sea, flies to the sea,  
Builds her home without hearth,  
Without spade, without mattock,  
And without help of male.  
Chirrichiz !

In the island of Sardinia there runs a pretty riddle, which has for answer, " The Swallow's Nest " : —

I know a palace  
All made of lace,  
All made of lace ;  
No stone, nor plaster —  
Guess what it is,  
Guess what it is —  
No plaster, nor stone.





## CHAPTER VI

### THE SWALLOW IN FOLK SONGS

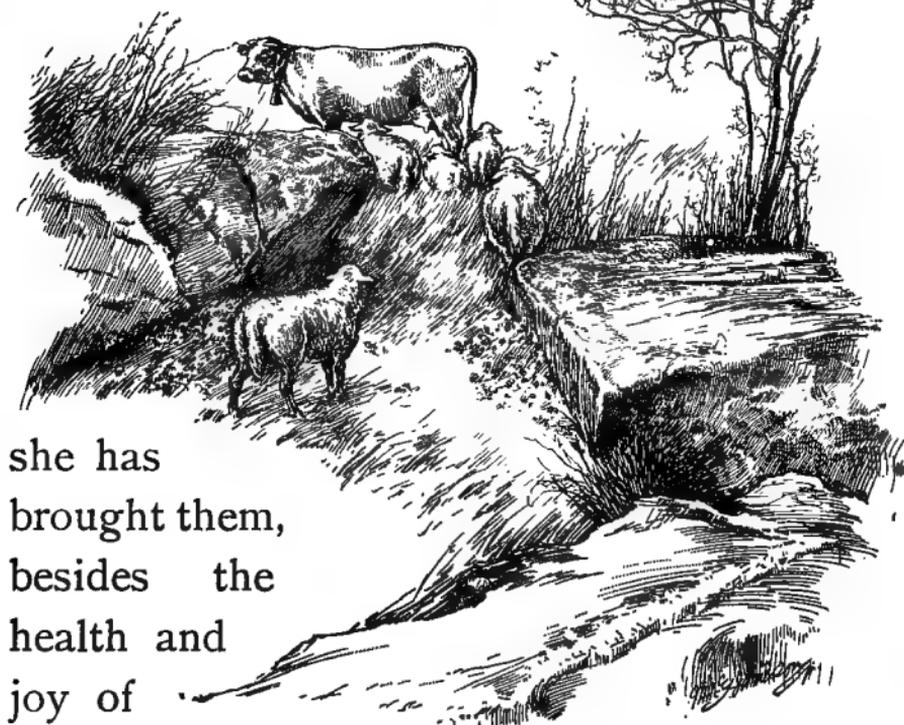
WHERE can we find a more charming inspiration to song than the little swallow, with whom the children of many lands live the long summer through in close companionship? To her who brings them, as they believe, the sunshine and the rain, and who sets them the example of her cheerfulness and her industry, they turn with pretty songs of welcome, of entreaty, and of longing; but when the hateful sparrow appears, then the bird herself tells us in mournful cadences the sad tale of thievery and destruction.

As soon as they hear the twitter of the first swallow upon her arrival from over the desert, the children of Greece arise at the peep of dawn and call upon the hills and the flowers to rejoice with them at the

coming of the swallows; and they ask the bird to tell them where and how she has passed the time since her departure:—

March has come! It fills the air!  
Rejoice, ye birds and hills and flowers!  
And tell us, swallows, of the hours  
That you have passed, and where.

Then, after the manner of children, they beg to know what she has brought them from afar; and the bird answers that



she has brought them, besides the health and joy of

the new season, some bright eggs for the coming Easter:—

Little swallow, joyous one,  
Joyous one, my swallow;  
From the desert what dost bring?  
“Health, red eggs, and joy I sing!”

The swallow builds her nest, and, perching upon the edge of it, she recites to the children all the delights of the new season. She tells them that the trees will soon be green, the hens will cluck and lay, the herds will skip to the mountains, and all created things will rejoice in the departure of the snow, and the coming of the sun:—

From the Black Sea the swallow comes,  
She o'er the waves has sped;  
And she has built herself a nest,  
And resting there she said:—  
“Thou February cold and wet,  
And snowy March and drear,  
Soft April heralds its approach,  
And soon it will be here.  
The little birds begin to sing,  
Trees don their green array,  
Hens in the yard begin to cluck,  
And store of eggs to lay.

The herds their winter shelter leave  
For mountain side and top ;  
And goats begin to sport and skip,  
And early buds to crop ;  
Beasts, birds, and men all give themselves  
To joy and merry heart,  
And ice and snow and northern winds  
Are melted and depart.  
Foul February, snowy March,  
Fair April will not tarry.  
Hence, February! March, begone!  
Away the winter carry!  
Pritz! Pritz!"

— *Translated by* COUNTESS MARTINENGO-CESARESCO.

A cordial and unique welcome was given the swallows to the Island of Rhodes about twenty-five centuries ago. In the month of Boedromion (our February) the children were accustomed to go about the streets of the villages singing the "Swallow Song," and demanding of the people gifts of cakes, wine, cheese, etc., for the swallows. They even threatened to break down the door and carry off the little wife of him who dared to refuse them. This was their song, in the charming

English version of the Countess Martinengo-Cesaresco:—

The swallow comes! She comes, she brings  
Glad days and hours upon her wings.

See on her back  
Her plumes are black,  
But all below  
As white as snow.

Then from your well-stored house with haste,  
Bring sweet cakes of dainty taste,  
Bring a flagon full of wine,  
Wheaten meal bring, white and fine;  
And a platter load with cheese,  
Eggs and porridge add — for these  
Will the swallows not decline.

Now shall we go, or gifts receive!  
Give, or ne'er your house we leave,  
Till we the door or lintel break,  
Or your little wife we take;  
She so light, small toil will make.

But whate'er ye bring us forth,  
Let the gift be one of worth.  
Ope, ope your door to greet the swallows then,  
For we are only boys, not bearded men.

This custom was continued through the centuries, and, as late as one hundred years ago, a traveler in Greece saw the little boys



of Athens going about the streets each carrying in his hands a crude wooden image of a swallow attached to a little windlass, which made it spin rapidly round and round. They stopped before the doors of the principal houses and sang this song:—

O'er the white sea the swallow is winging,  
She rests; and she's singing:—

“To March, my good month of March,  
And to you, February,  
All snowy and dreary,  
The fragrance of springtime you're bringing.”

Then they received gifts of eggs, cakes, fruit, etc.

From these old Grecian swallow greetings sprang a custom, common still in several countries of Europe, for the children, and sometimes older people as well, to go about in bands on New Year's Eve, Easter Eve, and Martinmas (or Feast of Saint Martin, celebrated on November 11). They sing

before the houses of the chief citizens and the shops of the sellers of eatables, and accept in return gifts of money and of food. To these same pretty songs we trace our own gift-giving customs of the New Year, the Easter, and the Maytime.

The children of Albania, the country lying along the eastern coast of the Adriatic Sea, beg the swallow for good tidings to cheer them after the dreary winter, and she tells them to go out into the bright sunshine and there they will find happiness : —

Welcome March, mild month and stormy,  
Bringing sunshine with the rain,  
Bringing flowers to fill the meadows,  
Bringing mountain snows again.

O Lady Swallow, Lady Swallow,  
Dancing there upon that beam,  
If you have some news to tell me,  
Tell, that I may happier seem.

— “ O wretched youth, the news I bring  
Is posted far and near —  
Happiness is out of doors,  
And the sea is calm and clear.”

Then they invite the bird to come and build her home in the eaves of their houses, promising her to care for her young:—

O-swallow, little swallow,  
Welcome as you now appear!  
The snow has gone from off our mountains,  
Winter's ended, spring is here,  
With all its little flowers and sun,  
Because of your return.

Build your nest beneath my window,  
Wake me with your morning song,  
And I'll give you and your nestlings  
Food for all the summer long.  
O swallow, little swallow,  
Welcome, as to us you come!

But these promises are not always kept, for from Spain there comes to our ears the bird's wail of anguish over a wanton injury to her new nest. The wicked one tells us himself:—

To St. Felix, on the way,  
I met a swallow one bright day;  
Her little nest was nearly done,  
When with my sword point, just for fun,  
I struck away the tiny thing.  
You should have heard her loud wail ring!

She wept, she cried : " Oh ! My poor home !  
 I'll build no more where armed men roam,  
 But on a mountain top so high  
 That cruel men will not pass by ;  
 Only perchance the King of France  
 May come that way, by some good chance,  
 If so, my love I'll manifest  
 By giving him my little nest."

But alas for the nest ! The home which  
 the returning swallow left in the fall, so  
 pretty and so well  
 stored, has been  
 robbed and in-  
 jured. Listen, as  
 the poor bird grieves :—



When I went away  
 In the fall, —  
 Full was all ;  
 When I come again  
 In the spring,  
 Not a thing —  
 Eaten all ! Eaten all !

As she examines more closely  
 the ruin of her home, her sorrow in-  
 creases, and she sobs :—

Pretty was my nest,  
 When away I flew ;  
 Ruin covers all,  
 As I come anew !

Soon she discovers that it is her enemy,  
 the sparrow, who is the robber, and she cries  
 out in anger : —

My house was full of food,  
 When I went away last fall ;  
 And now, come home, I find  
 A sparrow's eaten all !

Overcome with grief, she looks about to  
 discover some friend to whom she may  
 tell her troubles, but, instead of a  
 friend, she spies another enemy  
 and she sighs : —



How nice it would be,  
 How nice it would be,  
 To sit down and chat  
 With my neighbor, were  
 she

Not a horrible cat !  
 Not a horrible cat !



At last, as she cannot gossip with her neighbor,  
 she goes out for a walk and meets with another  
 misfortune. Listen to her woeful tale : —

I went for a walk,  
Tore my coat to a shred!  
To mend it I'd like —  
But I have no thread.

But the good-natured little bird soon forgets her wrongs, and she goes about her tasks so contented and gay that the Italian youth who live in the Valley of the Magra river beg her for a song to encourage them as they labor: —

Swallow, lift your little voice,  
And cheer me in my work;  
'Twill aid me in the task I do,  
And shame me when I shirk.

Hark! From across the sea floats an echo in accents soft and musical. It is a little Spanish swallow telling the young men that to accomplish their tasks they must be up betimes in the morning. She recites to them, as an example, all that she has done while they were asleep, even making the long pilgrimage to the famous shrine of Monserat: —

I rose very early,  
I ate in a hurry,

I went to Monserrat ;  
 In bed you are still ?  
 Get up with a will !  
 Get up and equal that !

In place of good cheer and homely advice, some children ask the friendly swallow for sympathy in their sorrow. A Greek maiden who is grieving over the departure of a loved one begs the swallows to cease their gay chatter and to join in her lament : —

To Sweet Basil I cried,  
 When behold ! I espied  
 In its branches widespread,  
 A rose rear its head.

Then the swallows there clinging  
 Set up a loud singing, —  
 O, my swallows ! I pray,  
 Cease your songs on this day,

For my heart's core, my own,  
 Far away has he gone ;  
 Far from port he is sailing,  
 Where tempests are wailing.

O, my swallows, I pray,  
 Do not sing on this day !  
 But change your gay ditty  
 To low sobs of pity.

In a little Servian swallow song  
our bird appears in the rôle of  
a comforter to some neglected  
young eagles. She promises



to take the fatherless little ones far away to  
a happier land: —

“O silent dew, why fallest thou not on me?”  
The small-leaved Basil made her plaintive cry.  
“Two mornings now, my moisture freshened thee,”  
The dew, reproachful, whispered in reply.  
“This morn an eagle and a sprite I saw,  
A mountain spirit, quarreling o’er yon mount —  
‘The mount is mine, ’twas given me by law!’  
The spirit cried. The eagle took no count.

‘Tis mine!’ she said — and now with broken wings  
Atones her boldness. While the eaglets small  
Bemoan their fate, a kindly swallow sings : —  
‘ Comfort, young eaglets, I will take you all  
Unto the land of Ind, far, far o’er seas,  
Where to the horses’ shoulders clover grows,  
And amaranth reaches even to their knees.  
The sun sets never on that happy shore.’  
And now the little eaglets mourn no more.”

A bird of the south, the ortolan, which is much liked as a food, asks the swallow how it is that so many of them come back in the spring, when so few went away in the fall. The wise bird answers them with another question. Portuguese children sing this dialogue : —

Little swallow, whence come you,  
That return so many, and were so few ?

The swallow answers : —

Foolish ortolan, whence come you,  
That were so many, and return so few ?

As they see the swallow flying so swiftly and easily through the air, the children naturally ask her to be a messenger to distant

friends, to carry sighs and notes — and sometimes the petitioner himself!

The Spanish youth of the Province of Galicia, where rest the bones



of Saint James, asks only that she carry a sigh in her gentle little beak: —

Oh! Thou who far away dost fly,  
 Away to shores less bleak;  
 Carry to my love a sigh,  
 In thy gentle beak.

The young man of Roumania is not content with a sigh — he begs her to bear a note to some far-away land: —

Swallow, little bird free,  
Will'st a message bear for me?  
Take this note to far off land,  
Drop it in my sweetheart's hand.

Should she ask from whence it came,  
Should she seek the writer's name,  
Say: "The one from whom I've flown"  
Loves thee, darling, thee alone."

— *Translated by* HENRY PHILLIPS, JR.

The Italian wants still more — he would have a feather from her wing with which to pen the note for her to carry, using his own heart as a seal: —

O swallow, flying o'er the sea,  
Stop awhile and list to me.  
A feather from your wings so bright  
Give, that I to my love may write.  
With my lifeblood I'll reveal it,  
With my own heart I will seal it,  
And when all is neatly done,  
Take it to my dearest one.

Neither sighs nor notes will satisfy the Portuguese youth. He asks the little bird

to take with her no less than his own sad and lonely self :—

Sad, sad is my life to me,  
Sad as ever can be ;  
Take me with you, let me follow  
Where you wander, little swallow.

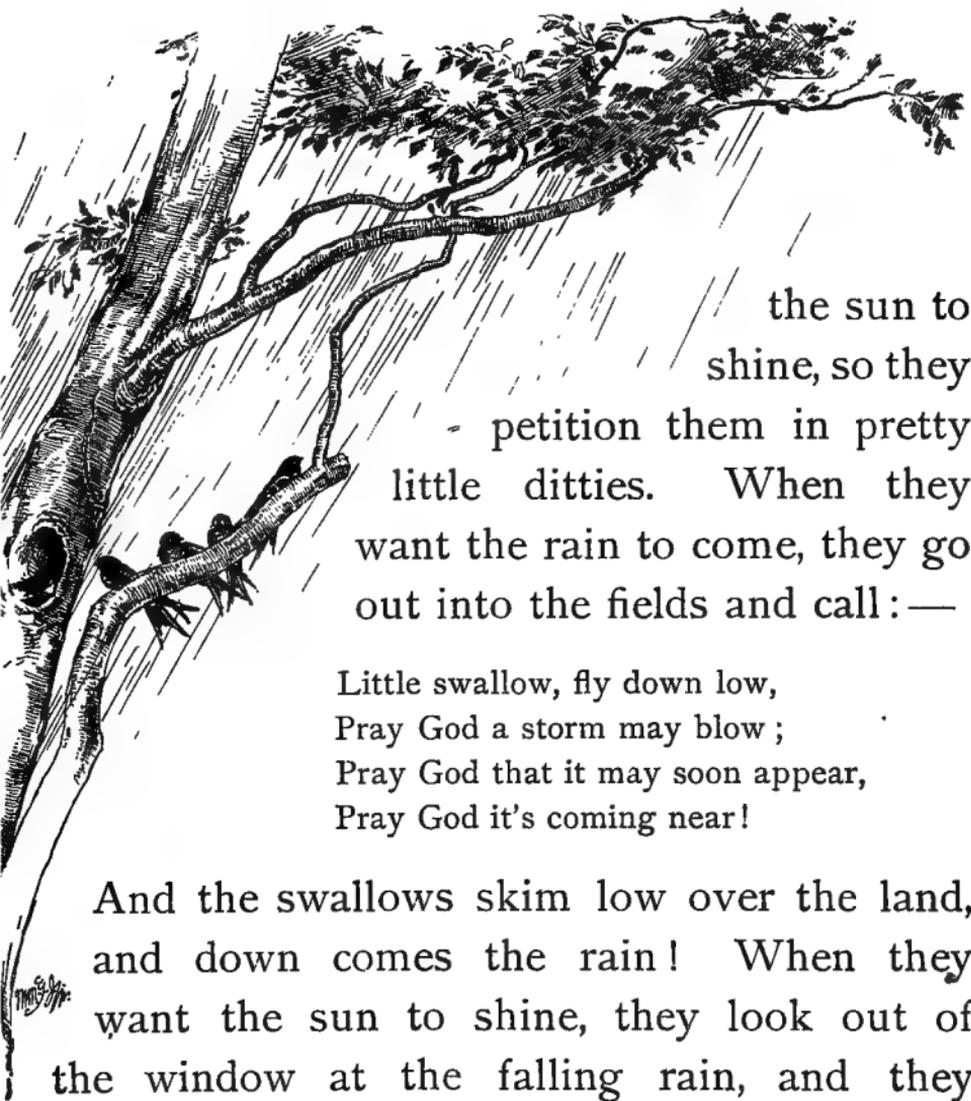
But in France, sighs, notes, and companionship, all are of no avail. There the young man longs to be the bird herself. He returns from the wars to his own city, and knocks at the door of his promised bride. She refuses to open the door. Listen to his plaint :—

A swallow I'd be,  
And then I would flee  
To the arms of Marrienne ;  
There I'd alight,  
And from her face white  
Sweet kiss take by right.

But the maiden saucily replies :—

No branches are my arms  
For you to rest upon ;  
In father's garden, see,  
You'll find rosebushes three,  
That'll furnish rest for thee !

The children of Parma, Italy, believe that the swallows can bring the rain or make



the sun to  
shine, so they  
petition them in pretty  
little ditties. When they  
want the rain to come, they go  
out into the fields and call:—

Little swallow, fly down low,  
Pray God a storm may blow;  
Pray God that it may soon appear,  
Pray God it's coming near!

And the swallows skim low over the land,  
and down comes the rain! When they  
want the sun to shine, they look out of  
the window at the falling rain, and they  
sing this little song, certain that the birds  
will bring the bright sunshine:—

Little swallow, God's loved one,  
 Pray Him to send the sun ;  
 Pray God it soon shine low —  
 Ah ! There it's coming now !

And the sun soon scatters the clouds and sends its rays down upon them. When rain is threatening, and the swallows still persist in twittering cheerily, the Spanish boys and girls of Andalusia sing to them :—

Little swallow,  
 Why so gay ?  
 March has not yet  
 Gone away.  
 To-morrow, plain,  
 We shall have rain.  
 Doña Beatrice.

When September approaches, and the children see their little friend making ready to depart for warmer lands, they turn to her with songs of sorrow, chiding her for not telling them when she will return :—

O swallow, when I've nourished thee,  
 And given thee wings of gold ;  
 Up to the sky so blue thou'rt gone,  
 Nor thy return hast told.

One child asks her to find and salute her pretty godmother over the sea:—

Thou who art setting out o'er sea,  
Salute my godmother there for me;  
Take her my love, I fondly pray,  
Her with the wig and the ribbons gay.

Another mourns because the bird will find a new nest over the seas, but where will his own home be?

The swallows have all flown away, —  
To a land that is warmer, more gay;  
New nests they will make o'er the sea,  
But my nest — Ah! where shall it be?

I would build it, my love, in your heart,  
I would bide with you never to part.  
There let me rest, let me stay,  
Till life and the world pass away.

After listening to all these sentimental songs, a practical little swallow from the shores of Greece tells the children that the harvest remains for them to gather, and that she will return after it is all stored away:—

I am going away — and with you I leave  
The figs and the nuts, the grapes and the grain,  
Which stored away in the bins will be,  
When I come back to this land again.

But the French children are curious to know where their little companion is going, and where she will pass the cold months, and they ask her:—

Swallow, pretty swallow,  
In winter where do you go?  
“To Athens I fly,  
To Stephen I hie,—  
Why do you ask me so?”

Let us hope that Stephen is one of the little Athenian boys who is watching and waiting for her coming, and who will welcome her in the pretty Greek way.





## CHAPTER VII

### THE SWALLOW IN MEDICINE

STRANGE and varied are the powers which, we have learned, are attributed to the swallow, but the strangest of all is yet to be told — her power to lessen human ills. With the little swallow stone taken out of her stomach or from her nest, with the burned ashes of her body, and with her warm bleeding heart, she was said to perform marvelous cures. Even more than this, a small plant which springs up in the fields each year upon the arrival of the swallows was held to possess the same magic virtue.

Let us first examine the swallow stone and its manner of use. Faith in the healing power of this little stone is very old and comes to us originally, with our prettiest songs and legends, from the ancient land of

Greece. In the Middle Ages its use spread over into Italy and Spain, and thence into northern Europe,—and is it not possible that the eyestone of to-day, which is sometimes used to remove foreign particles from the eye, is a remnant of this old superstition?

The swallow stone of popular medicine was a tiny oval-shaped pebble, generally white in color, although Pliny tells us there were two kinds of swallow stone “renowned in magic art”—one white and the other red. German scholars also mention two, one red or speckled with red, and the other black, the red one alone possessing healing virtue.

Where was this stone to be found? Among the peasant folk of Denmark you may still hear it said that out of one hundred little swallows which have never touched earth, one has in its stomach this healing stone. The Germans will tell you that if a swallow returns to the same nest

year after year for seven consecutive years, at the end of the seventh summer she will leave this precious stone in the nest. A French fable gives still another version. It tells us that the parent swallows search for the stone in the sands of the sea, and when found they take it home and use it to heal the eyes of their nestlings, even restoring the sight when they are blind. It is to this folk tale that Longfellow refers in the opening lines of *Evangeline*:—

Oft in the barns they climbed to the populous nests on the  
    rafters,  
Seeking with eager eyes that wondrous stone, which the  
    swallow  
Brings from the shore of the sea to restore the sight of its  
    fledglings;  
Lucky was he who found that stone in the nest of the  
    swallow!

How was this magic stone used by man? For long centuries it was a popular remedy for all manner of eye troubles; and many were the cures, including even blindness, which it was claimed to perform. But more astonish-

ing still were the other uses to which it was put. It was ground fine and taken as a powder to heal tumors, to soothe convulsions, and to cure "falling sickness," as the disease called epilepsy was then known.

A learned man of the Middle Ages styled the stone a "noble and efficacious stone," and said that it might be taken internally or else wrapped in a little piece of cotton or silk and worn in the armpit, around the neck, or upon other parts of the body which needed healing. Others recommended that it be done up in the skin of a raven or of a calf, and tied under the left arm as a talisman against dizziness, falling sickness, melancholia, or fainting spells. Physicians bound the stone upon the insane and upon children suffering from croup. When they wished to relieve a baby in convulsions, they wrapped the stone in a piece of cloth and tied it around its neck like a charm, at the same time saying prayers over the child — "three

Paternosters and three Ave Marias, to deliver it from the evil.”

A curious old book called *The Secrets of Medicine* gives us careful directions as to the finding and use of the swallow stone. It says the stone must be extracted from the belly of the first-born swallow, just before the full of the moon or when the sun is “in the sign of the Lion,” and before the bird has touched earth. The author calls it a ready remedy for falling sickness “because it has the power to scatter that tenacious and glutinous humor which is the source and seed of this disease.” Strange medical practices indeed!

More curious still than the remedies of the swallow stone are the medicines which were made of the bird’s little body. About seven hundred years ago, if you had gone to a doctor in Italy and asked for medicine to cure your eyes, you probably would have been given a mixture containing the burned ashes of a swallow. If your eyes were very

much inflamed, the ashes of an old mother bird mixed with honey would be handed to you. Or, the ashes of the swallow's heart stirred into white wine would be prescribed. A very special eye remedy was then concocted from the ashes of the bird taken in the days of hatching, mixed with certain waters "at the full of the moon," together with other absurd observances, — all of which seem to us very ridiculous.

To heal other bodily ills in those ignorant and superstitious times, they made as many as seventeen different kinds of healing lotions out of our bird. In one, her ashes were stirred into castor oil, and in another her blood was mixed with incense. The people treated all diseases of the throat and of the skin with this absurd medicine, as well as fever and ague, drunkenness and hydrophobia.

The mud nest also had a place in the medieval doctor's medicine case. He advised its use for sore throats and for aching teeth, for deaf ears and for weak brains.

It was even given to cows suffering with dysentery !

Do you know a little plant with a tiny yellow blossom, which grows wild in our fields and which is called celandine or swallowwort? It appears in the spring with the swallows, and it withers at their departure, hence its name which means "swallow" in the Greek language. Spanish folk say that this herb cannot be seen by human eyes, being visible only to the swallows. But our poets have surely looked upon its bright sunny blossom, else how could one have sung: —



There's a flower that shall be mine,  
'Tis the little celandine.

\* \* \* \* \*

. . . The thrifty cottager  
Who stirs little out of doors,  
Joys to spy thee near at home ;  
Spring is coming, thou art come !

Swallowwort, in the far-away and ignorant times of which we are learning, was believed to have the same healing power as the swallow stone. It was fabled that swallows used the herb upon the eyes of their young, and that they first taught its use to man. But whether this be true or not, swallowwort was once so common and well recognized a remedy, that an old scholar wrote of it: "When a child loses its sight through some disease they apply an herb called celandine, which heals the eyes and restores the sight."

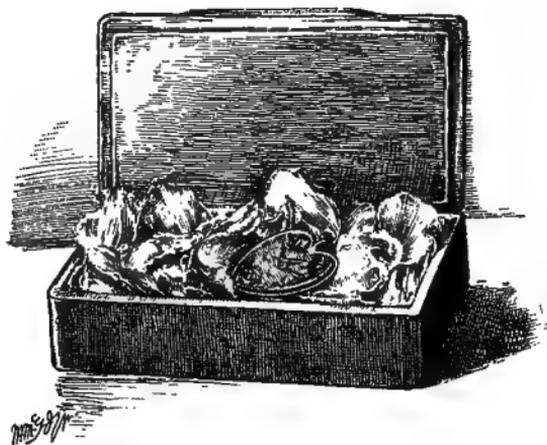
We must also mention another practice, one which was very common many years ago in the countries of the south of Europe. It was to kill a swallow, take out its warm beating heart, and give it to a boy or girl to eat. Why did they do this? Because the parents believed that the swallow's heart, if eaten, would make the child grow up wise and learned. In different places they looked for different results from this strange diet.

Some believed it would strengthen the memory, others that it would bring wisdom and love of study. The parents of the children who lived in the land of Dalmatia forced their boys and girls to swallow not one, but three hearts. And in order to make the hearts more palatable, they covered them with sugar.

In contrast to these grim usages of the south lands, the youths of northern Europe look upon the heart of the swallow as a symbol of affection. The young man of Denmark who wishes the maiden he loves to love him in return, wears a swallow's heart in a charm. When he has won her love, he gives her a ring which has lain for nine days in the nest of a swallow. The boys and girls also take a swallow's heart, embed it in white wax and wear it as an amulet or charm, which is sure to bring good fortune.

We will close this Chapter of the story of the sufferings inflicted upon our beloved

and gentle little bird, sufferings caused by the folk's belief in her power to do them all kinds of good, with the explanation of a pretty symbol. On the first day of March the children of the country of Roumania hang from their necks a charm in the form



of a heart, which they call the "Martzisor." On one side is engraved "March 1," and on the other are pictured swallows and roses, symbols of the return of spring. Around the pictured swallows are the words which the Hungarian maidens say when they spy the first swallow in the spring: "I see a swallow! Now I wash my freckles!" This charm is made of brass, silver, or gold,

according to the wealth of the owner. All through the month of March they wear it; then they take it off and carefully lay it away in a bed of dried rose leaves until the next spring comes round.





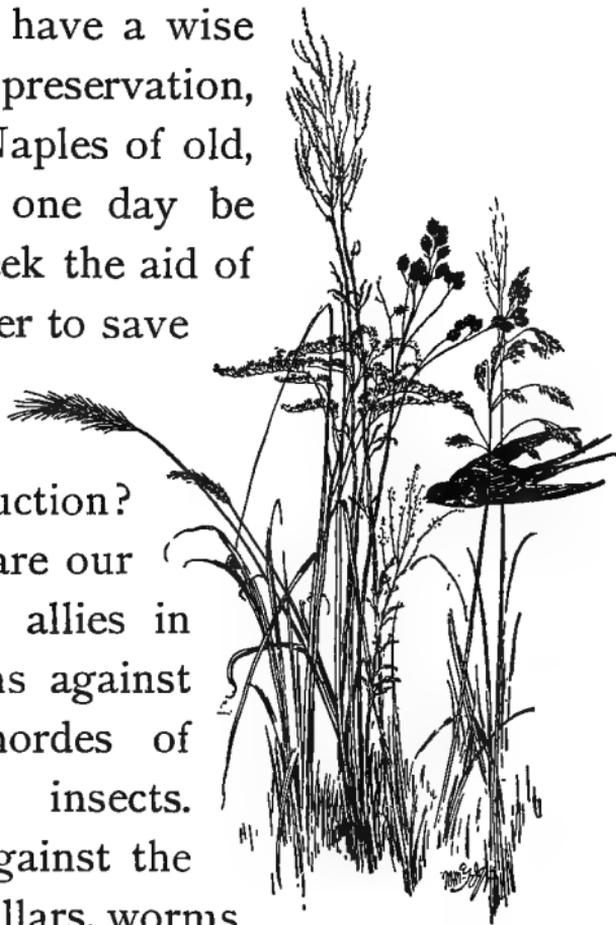
## CHAPTER VIII

### OUR DEBT TO THE SWALLOWS

A CURIOUS old legend of Naples tells us how the poet Vergil once rid that city of its pest of flies. One day Vergil, who for centuries after his death was looked upon as a wizard by the folk of southern Italy, met the young Marcellus as he was going fowling. Vergil asked him which of two blessings he would choose — a bird which would catch all other birds, or a fly which would drive away all flies. Before deciding upon such an important question, Marcellus consulted the Emperor Augustus, who, mindful of the city's need, promptly voted in favor of the fly. Thereupon Vergil made a huge bronze fly, and set it high upon one of the gates of Naples. As long as that fly remained in place it banished every other insect from the town.

To-day we have no enchanted fly to rid us of our harmful insects, but have we not its equivalent in our birds? And should we not, therefore, have a wise care for their preservation, so that, like Naples of old, we may not one day be tempted to seek the aid of some enchanter to save us from suffering and possible destruction?

Our birds are our most efficient allies in our campaigns against those vast hordes of enemies, the insects. By warring against the moths, caterpillars, worms, and lice which feed upon our grains and orchards, and by devouring the seeds of noxious weeds, they do what man unaided is unable to accomplish. Seventy-six mil-



lions of dollars a year is calculated to be the money value of our birds to agriculture. In the state of Illinois it has been estimated that if the operations of birds were stopped for a period of seven years, the entire state would be covered with insects to the number of one to a square inch.

Because of their habits of living in the air and feeding upon the insects they catch on the wing, the several species of the swallow family known to us form one of the most serviceable divisions of this vast, protecting army. Our Department of Agriculture, in a recent paper, says:—

“From the standpoint of the farmer and the orchardist, perhaps no birds more useful than the swallows exist. They have been described as the light cavalry of the avian army. Specially adapted for flight and unexcelled in aërial evolutions, they have few rivals in the art of capturing insects in mid air. They eat nothing of value to man except a few wasps and bugs, and in return for

their services in destroying vast numbers of noxious insects, ask only for harborage and protection. It is to the fact that they capture their prey on the wing that their peculiar value to the cotton grower is due. Orioles do royal service in catching weevils on the bolls; and blackbirds, wrens, flycatchers, and others contribute to the good work; but when swallows are migrating over the cotton fields, they find the weevils flying in the open and wage active war against them. As many as forty-seven adult weevils have been found in the stomach of a single cliff swallow."

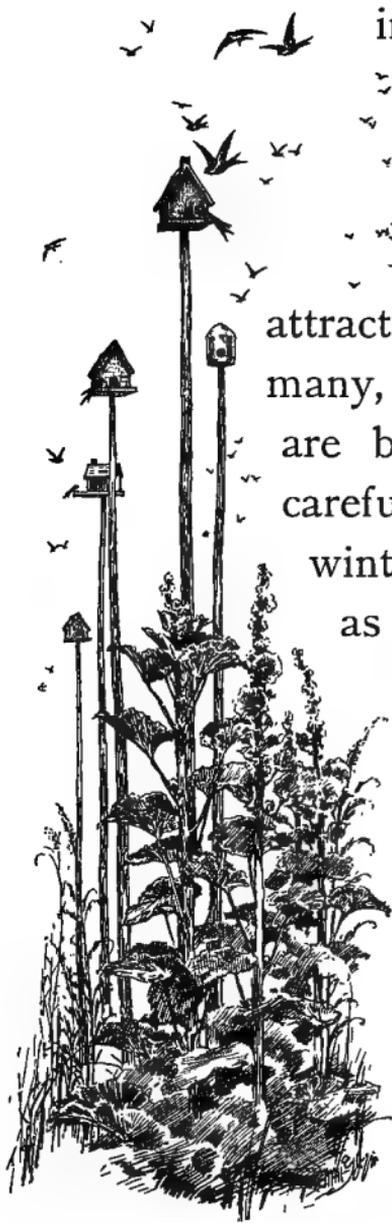
We, of this country, are not alone in recognizing the valuable service of swallows. An Italian journal states that no less than five hundred insects make up the daily portion of one swallow, a total of about four thousand in one week; and that one swallow can save in a day thirty-two hundred seeds of grain and one thousand bunches of grapes.

In addition to destroying insect pests,

swallows aid farmers by eating the seeds of weeds which choke the grain fields. Examination of the contents of the stomachs of swallows in our southern states has shown that many species of them eat, on an average, more than twenty thousand seeds of weeds in a day.

Still another asset of the swallow is to be noted — her æsthetic value. The beauty, the sociability, and the graceful flight of swallows are a keen source of pleasure to every lover of nature, and go far to endear the little birds to all hearts. •

As a return for these varied services to man, and as a provision for their continuance, should not our birds be protected and their nesting encouraged? In olden times the snaring and killing of birds was such a favorite sport that elaborate bird decoys were a carefully planned feature of pleasure gardens, the remains of which may still be seen in the ruins of old European gardens. But public sentiment in Europe as well as



in this country has so changed that now, instead of snares to capture birds, we learn of the newest devices in artificial nests to attract and house them. In Germany, low-growing nesting bushes are being planted, nesting boxes carefully placed on trees, and winter feeding houses arranged, as polite invitations to the birds to come and settle near man.

The presence of swallows is so much desired around houses in that country, that artificial nests of clay are made and offered them rent-free for dwellings. The city of Hamburg has a Keeper of Birds appointed by the state, whose duty it is to assist in their preservation. And we of this country have our many Audubon and

other societies whose aim it is to help in the conservation of our own feathered tribes.

Everywhere to-day not superstitious fear of evil omens, as in the days of old, prompts kindly treatment of swallows, but a true appreciation of their practical and æsthetic value. Although now we may not stand in fear of being stricken blind or dumb if we are tempted to injure a swallow or her nest, is it not through regard for her and her benefits to us that we refrain? Although in these days we do not greet the swallows with spring songs, as the Athenian children of long ago, nor preach sermons to them, like Saint Francis, may we not, with Saint Guthlac, welcome the tree swallows and the beautiful martins with a little rush basket or a bird house carefully placed in our gardens? May we not make a convenient opening in our modern tightly built barns for our friend, the barn swallow? And, perhaps more helpful than all, guard them from the prowling

cat and wage war against their worst enemy, the English sparrow?

We may have grave doubts to-day as to the healing virtue of the ashes of the swallow's body, but, through a knowledge of her and of the strange beliefs and superstitions which cluster about her, we may at last come to realize the true worth of our little bird friend — that, like Vergil's enchanted fly, she sits continual guard over our forests, our grain fields, our vineyards — yes, over our very homes and lives.

