

VIGOR'S WREN.

One day I found the nest of a Vigor's wren in a little hole in an old alder stump. When I climbed up to look in I saw several full-grown nestlings. I was attracted to the place by the queer antics of the male bird. The mother was going and coming continually with food for her young, the father was scolding and storming like a trooper. The rating he gave me was not very much more severe than the little wretch gave his wife, every time she returned with morsels of food. But with all his fault-finding, he made not a single attempt in helping her feed the five hungry youngsters in the heart of the dead alder. He grew more rigorous in his language, then, a little later, when the mother returned with a white grub, he darted at her like a madman. She retreated down the limb and through the bushes, trembling in terror. It looked as if the wren household was to be wrecked. She quivered through the fern toward me on fluttering wing, and then, as if thoroughly subdued, she gave the grub to the father. This was the bone of contention. The scolding ceased. The mother continued to search just as actively for bugs and insects, but at each return to the nest her husband always whirled out to take the morsel she carried.

But what of his actions? The selfish little tyrant flew about the alder, calling in a soft tone to his children within and then swallowed the grub himself. Two or three times he did this, until I was so disgusted I could hardly endure him. If he were hungry, he could at least skirmish for himself.

mother returned

While I was chiding him for his infamous actions, the mother appeared with a large moth, which he readily took. Among the alder limbs, the father flew, and finally up ^{HERE} to the nest-hole, out of which was issuing such a series of hungry screams as no parent with the least bit of devotion could resist. I could hardly believe my eyes, for the little knave just went to the door where each hungry nestling could get a good view of the morsel, then, as if scolding the little ones for being so noisy and hungry, he hopped back down the tree into the bushes.

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This was indeed cause for a family revolt. The brown nestling nearest the door grew so bold with hunger, that he forgot his fear and plunged headlong down, catching in the branches below where the father perched. And the precocious youngster got the large moth as a reward for his bravery.

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Not till then did it dawn upon me that there was a reason for the father's queer action. The wrenlets were old enough to leave the nest. Outside, in the warm sunshine they could be fed and would grow more rapidly, and learn the ways of woodcraft. In half an hour, the little wrens had been persuaded, even compelled, to leave the narrow confines of the nest and launch out into the world. It was surely a trying time for both parents for they had to scurry here and there watching the restless youngsters and at the same time find enough to satisfy their ever-growing appetites.

My attention was directed in particular to one wrenlet,

5 * who, each time the brown father came back, insisted vociferously that his turn was next. Once in particular, when the camera did not fail to record, papa wren was approaching with a larger spider. The chick was all in ecstasy, fluttering his wings in delight, as he hopped to the next limb near the hesitating parent.

6 * But the youngster's appeal failed to persuade the father, for the next instant, he crammed the morsel in the mouth of a less boisterous child. What a change in the enthusiastic chick, who at one moment fairly tasted the billsome bit and the next saw it disappear down the throat of a less noisy brother! He stood looking in amazement, as his feathers ruffled up in anger and an astonished peep of disgust escaped his throat.

7 * Two of the wrenlets perched on the top of a little stub, where the father was accustomed to light. Here they sat in sleepy attitude, each awaiting his turn to be fed. Not the least accomodating were they from the photographer's point of view, for generally when the camera was focused for a picture, they would nod lower and lower, as children do at bed time, till both were sound asleep in the warm sunshine. It was remarkable, however, to witness the effect of the mother's trill, as she heralded the approach of something ⁿeatable. In a flash, both wrenlets on the wooden watch-tower, were wide awake and on the tip-toe of expectancy.

8 * Often do I remember trying to play foster parent to young birds and yet, with all my care and patience, I have seldom

succeeded. I never could understand why some nestlings are so particular as to whether their dinner comes from their mother's mouth or from some kindly disposed neighbor. These wrenlets looked wise enough (to judge of anything that was eatable, so digging into a rotten stump with my knife, I collected half a dozen, fat grubs; a stock of provisions that would take the mother two hours to gather. "I'll just test the little wrens," I said to my self, as I impaled two of the choicest grubs on a sharpened stick, and held up my offering. There was hardly room to doubt its acceptance. Such a reaching and stretching! I could not divide up fast enough. Nor was one grub sufficient. Quiet was not restored, till each wrenlet had stored away two of the largest and fattest.

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For the first time, the parents seemed to realize that I was actually of some use. The trying task of satisfying five growing appetites was lessened to some degree and the busy parents took household affairs somewhat more easily the rest of the day.