

The Lark or Lavrock

By LAVONIA STOCKELBACH, Verona, New Jersey

Editor's Note: Mrs. Stockelbach, artist and author, is a Canadian by birth although she has lived in New Jersey for a number of years. Mrs. Stockelbach, as may be surmised from her article, has done a lot of travelling. For a review of her book, *The Birds of Shakespeare*, see page 185.

Of the many delightful surprises on my northwestern pilgrimage this year none was greater than to see and hear the skylark in British Columbia. I had heard that it had become established there, but I did not quite believe that I would have the good fortune to meet *Alauda arvensis*. However, a kind lady was sure she could find him for me, and called early one morning in the middle of May to drive me the few miles from the centre of the city of Victoria to a likely field.

And there, suddenly, as the car went along a country road, was the skylark singing his heart out on a fence post not twenty-five feet away. For more than twelve minutes we listened. It was not necessary to be especially quiet, because the reason for the outburst was a rival skylark on another post across the narrow road. Although I had heard the skylark many times in Europe, this was the first time I had ever heard one singing perched on a fence post. However, on my return home I came across a note to the effect that they are known to sing from such a perch. Their hind claws are very long and straight and they are thus prevented from claspng small twigs but may use larger branches. But I associate skylarks, except when they are in flight, chiefly with the ground.

So, here the gentle lark, weary of rest,
From his moist cabinet mounts up on high
And wakes the morning, from whose silver breast
The sun ariseth in his majesty;

Who doth the world so gloriously behold,
That cedar-tops and hills seem burnished gold.
—(Venus and Adonis)

This particular lark may have awakened the morning—I was not up at such an unearthly hour of May to check—but at ten o'clock he apparently had only one motive, to outstrip his rival. We should have had a movie camera to portray the pulsating of the tiny throat feathers like an animated fichu, as he faced us.

It has been noted that larks, as do other birds, sing differently in different countries and indeed in different sections of the same country, but whether you hear him in March with Freza Stark on the island of



Failichah, in the Persian Gulf, on Beachy Head in England, or in Jutland, Denmark, you could never mistake the lark's song. The first loud clangorous notes can startle one if the bird is flushed close by, and it is only after he has attained a certain height that the full glory of his song is manifest.

P. H. Warning of Denmark lays stress upon the careful building up of the lark's song: the composition—sometimes a long composition—has well arranged themes, with varied re-shapings, but always it has a definite framework. There are not many notes: an octave comprises the whole gamut, so his song has not much colour variation, but its clear

tones and silvery trill make up for that lack.

It is indeed pleasant for Canadians to have this bond of union with Europe, and especially with England, the land of Shakespeare. In the more than six hundred references to birds in Shakespeare's plays, a score refer to the skylark. In *Cymbeline*, the delightful song "Hark, Hark! the Lark at Heaven's gate sings" has enchanted thousands of listeners, though Imogen herself vouchsafed no notice. In *Henry V* it sounds so natural and commonplace to have the Dauphin say: "from the rising of the lark to the lodging of the lamb."

As a small boy Shakespeare noted, as have all who know larks, that the first sound as he rises is loud and rather harsh, so in *King Lear* we read "The shrill-gorged lark so far cannot be seen or heard." In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia says "the crow doth sing as sweetly as the lark when neither is attended," and that humorous statement none can gainsay.

Bird-song seems to have been in every fibre of the man. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Helena says enviously to Hermia "your tongue's sweet air is more tuneable than lark to shepherd's ear," and the tragic note is struck in *Richard II* with:

Down Court! Down King!

For night owls shriek where mounting larks should sing.

Again, a different note when Troilus says to Cressida "the busy day, wake by the lark, hath roused the ribald crows."

Then in that touching scene of *Romeo and Juliet* where Juliet tries to persuade Romeo that he is listening to the nightingale, he responds "It was the lark, the herald of the morn — no nightingale — night candles are burnt out and jocund day stands tip-toe on the misty mountain tops."

In the fourteenth stanza of *The Passionate Pilgrim*, as the fretful sleepless man listens to Philomel the nightingale, singing, he moaningly wishes "her lays were tuned like the lark; for she doth welcome daylight with her ditty, and drives away dark dismal-dreaming night."

So all through his life the small town boy recalls the birds he knew and loved in his youth. These are only a few of the hundreds of references showing an accurate knowledge of those that came under Shakespeare's own observation, but they encourage one to take greater notice of those within one's own neighborhood.

Besant - A Memory

By ROSE McLAUGHLIN, Indian Head

Between Caron and Mortlach, Saskatchewan, there lies a scrubby stretch of pasture and wasteland, its choppy hillsides pitted with the sandy scars of eroding winds, and its brushy flats threaded by a trickle which swells into a flood in years of bountiful rainfall. Traversed today by the mainline of the C.N.R., and by Trans-Canada highways and skyways, it was likewise in the stream of man's earliest migrations, for this is the region known as Besant, happy hunting ground of our archaeologists.

In the *Blue Jay* I read of their comings and goings in Besant, and wonder nostalgically if their finds include a sheltered glade carpeted with lawn grass and tiny pink and white clover. Do they have any scientific theory for its presence in that wild and lonely spot? And do they spread their picnic cloth there

on the gentle bank by the stream edge, as we have done so often in summers past?

To dwellers of the plains, west of Moose Jaw, Besant was a place of enchantment where one might find again all the flora and fauna lost to the change-over to cultivation. Deer sometimes strayed into the open, and little gray ground squirrels nibbled furtively at our tossed crusts. Hawthorn, chokecherry, and saskatoon perfumed the air in spring, and sunflowers fused it with color in the fall. The profusion of wildflowers was divided by this frustrated naturalist into two classes: the common ones that everyone knows and the strangers that only one knows.

Nowhere have I seen the brevity of our prairie summer so emphasized as at Besant. In July when the queens of the summer — lily, ro