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DOROTHY DE MONTMORENCY



988 ROLLAND AVENUE,
VERDUN, P.Q.

VERDUN HIGH SCHOOL

L
V. Good

Covers almost
whole Simpson
well written

Birds and Beasts in Other Parts
of the Commonwealth which I Would like to see.

"I've never seen a Jaguar
Nor yet an Armadillo,
Dillying in his armour.
And I s'pose I never will."

To see these animals Rudyard Kipling would have to have gone to Rio, and he expressed the hope that some day, before he was old, he would board a ship at Southampton and go "Rolling down to Rio." So the world everywhere is rich with treasures waiting to be revealed. Nearly every Canadian girl or boy has, at some time or another, longed to sail from Vancouver or Halifax, or board a plane at Dorval or Malton, to visit the different countries of the British Commonwealth of Nations. One would touch some part of every continent and there would certainly be a great deal both to see and do. Before I left each new country I would have seen, among other things, the birds and beasts indigenous to that country and especially those whose names one naturally associates with that part of the world.

The first place I would visit would be Great Britain. In a comparatively small place such as this, which is highly industrialized and in a temperate zone, one would not expect to find any strange, exotic birds and beasts, but I would certainly not want to miss the opportunity of hearing the storied nightingale.

Although the nightingale is a plain, dull-coloured, shy little bird, it has been famous since very early times for its beautiful song. One never tires, it is said, of listening to its "floods of liquid melody." Perhaps there could be no more beautiful recollection of the Mother of the Commonwealth than that of standing in a Surrey wood, listening while the nightingale is "pouring forth its soul in such an ecstasy."

Next I would travel down the Mediterranean to Africa, long the Dark Continent. There would be so much

to see here that I might easily miss a great deal, but I would certainly make an attempt to see the giraffe and the ostrich. Owing chiefly to the remarkable length of its neck the giraffe is the tallest of living animals. I am sure I would never forget the sight of this tawny animal with its reddish brown spots, extending its elongated neck to the higher branches of a tree. Here in the savannahs where trees are not too plentiful the giraffe's long neck gives it an advantage over the other animals who feed upon leaves. Its tongue is also very long, in keeping with its neck, being eighteen inches in length. The head of the giraffe is crowned with a pair of skin-covered, bony protrusions which might be called horns. It has erect ears and large brilliant eyes so placed that it can see in almost any direction. The giraffe is surely a strange looking animal and after seeing it, I would understand the boy who, when he saw the giraffe at the Zoo, declared he didn't believe it.

The ostrich is the largest and one of the most interesting of all birds. It is found in the sandy, barren plains and from a distance it so resembles a camel that it used to be known as the camel-bird. It is an awkward, long-legged and long-necked bird with a small head and a large heavy body. A full-grown male is often eight feet tall and weighs three hundred pounds. The ostrich differs from other birds in three ways. First, its broad feet have only two toes and are padded as a protection against the heat of the sand. Its breast is also padded like that of a camel. Second, the feathers of an ostrich are not compact as in most birds, but loose so that they allow air to pass through them freely while at the same time protecting the body from the sun. On the male they are a glossy black except for the soft plumes on the wings and tail which are white. These are the expensive plumes used for decorative purposes. The third and most striking

difference is the inability of the ostrich to fly. Its wings are so small and under-developed that they cannot support the weight of the body. However, the ostrich is so swift of foot that it actually does not need to fly for protective purposes. With its wings spread out as sails and its legs taking unbelievably long strides it is able to travel as fast as thirty miles an hour. I would leave Africa with a lively recollection of many strange sights and with something of a chuckle at these "bizarre naturae."

But there would be little feeling of amusement as I viewed from safe distance the Indian tiger, long regarded as the most ferocious of beasts. Large, heavy and powerful it roams the jungles of India, especially those of Bengal. It is at once graceful and frightening, beautiful and vile. Seeing the tiger bare its fangs in an angry growl, one can readily believe the stories of the den-eating terrors of the jungle. One can admire the reddish fawn and dark brown stripes of its body, one can feel and respect the tremendous reserve of strength in its graceful limbs, but one can scarcely love it for in its eyes there is a "den of wild things."

Across the Bay of Bengal to the Malay Peninsula we find much the same variety of natural life as characterized the jungles of India. We have heard so much of the elephant, seen pictures of this animal so often, that when we see him go about his domestic labours, so graceless, so stolid, so slow, we forget him as we would a clumsy servant and give our attention to the small, entertaining, tailless gibbon. Its small round head has the countenance of a wizzened old man, though its habits belie this appearance. It is the most agile of all the apes and king of the monkey acrobats, capable of feats no circus artist could attempt to reproduce. The gibbon alone of the apes commonly walks upright when upon the ground,

maintaining balance with its exceptionally long arms which reach to the ground. We generally remember what is amusing rather than what is useful and so as we leave the East Indies we forget the elephant and remember the gibbon.

Travelling southwest I would come to Australia which, in my opinion, contains the most interesting variety of animal life in the British Commonwealth of Nations. Perhaps it is because that part of the world was the last to be discovered and so the creatures which inhabit it seem strange and new to us. Here there are so many interesting birds and animals to choose from that selection is very difficult. Certainly I would want to take a good look at the kangaroo. It is, without doubt, a very strange looking animal. Its forelegs are small while its hind legs are very long and strong. Therefore it does not run, as almost all other animals do, but hops along in a nearly upright position. The larger species of kangaroo can cover fifteen feet of ground in one hop, and could out distance an ordinary horse. Kangaroos can be black, grey or red, depending on their environment. When sitting, they rest on their hind legs and the root of their tail which is very strong. Their eyes are enormous but very mild. The most distinguishing feature of a kangaroo is, of course, the pouch of the female. Many other animals (called marsupials) have this pouch also, but that of the kangaroo has become most famous. It is just like a pocket in the front of the female kangaroo in which the young stay until they are ready to protect and find food for themselves.

Another memory of Australia would be of the lyre bird, a remarkable bird whose tail measures twenty-five inches. This tail is in the shape of a lyre or harp and from this characteristic the bird takes its common name. During the breeding season the cock displays this tail proudly as he performs his

curious counting dance for the lady of his choice. In spite of its beauty, the lyre-bird is very shy and one hears his melodious song long before one is able to catch a glimpse of him. In this he offers a contrast to many a human and certainly I would retain a lively recollection of his unusual tail.

In New Zealand I would look for the kiwi, a relative of the ostrich. It, too, is a flightless bird, but swift of foot. It has a very long bill and is slightly larger than a domestic fowl. The white eggs laid by the female are of enormous size for the bulk of the bird. These characteristics would attract my attention, but would not hold it as the Bird of Paradise in neighbouring New Guinea.

One traveller has described the Bird of Paradise as follows "The body is no longer than that of a thrush but contains large tufts of golden plumes two feet long which can be raised and spread out at will, so as to almost conceal the body. The wings, body and tail are of a rich coffee brown, deepening to dark velvet on the breast. The head and neck are yellow and emerald green, while the bill is light blue and the feet ashy pink." Other birds of paradise are quite as gorgeous. Who would not want to see such a beauty as this? It would be well worth the journey and the heat.

Before returning northward I would brave the cold to call in that "most formal" of birds, the penguin. One would think that Antarctica, a barren frigid land, would be almost devoid of animal life. This is quite true. However, the hardy penguin manages to live and apparently thrive on this climate. The penguin varies in length from twenty to fifty inches. In colour it is usually slate above with white breasts and black heads and throats. A yellow stripe is present on each side of the head. The plumage consists largely of small scale-like

1. "The World of Animal Life" Fred Smith. (London)

feathers white, instead of wings, it has "flippers" covered with the same scaly feathers. These make powerful paddles for swimming, and so the bird is able to swim rapidly and for long distances at a time. When on land the penguin walks nearly erect with a strange awkward waddle. No one could forget such a pleasant bird, and certainly the cold would not deter a Canadian from making the acquaintance of such a dignified, if awkward, family man.

Proceeding north now to South America we find a British Colony there also, British Guiana. This colony consists largely of jungle country in which strange creatures go about their affairs undisturbed by man. One of these animals is the tree sloth. It is a member of an almost extinct group of mammals called the edentata - toothless ones. This name is not quite correct for the sloth has teeth of a kind. However they are simply blacks of dentine without the enamel covering and there are no teeth in the front of the jaws. The tree sloth spends almost all its life hanging upside down from branches of trees - eating, walking and sleeping in this position. Its two or three-toed feet are curved in such a way that they can be hooked over a bough, and for this reason are useless and almost useless for walking on the ground. The sloth is from one and a half to two feet long and covered with coarse, shaggy grey hair on which there is often a lichenous growth, giving a greenish tinge to the fur and making it indistinguishable among the moss-covered trees of the jungle in which it lives. One should not miss such an oddity as the tree sloth especially since it lies on our way home.

Before I come to the end of my journey, I might call in at Bermuda where the climate is, according to the poet "far kinder than our own." He

was referring to the cold of Britain, but this also applies to Canada. Here in Bermuda I would find those well-dressed aristocrats, the cardinal and the bluebird, spending the winter. It is interesting to see them but we cannot stay long.

Back in Montreal we would be much the richer for this trip around the Commonwealth. The many birds and animals, some menacing, some whimsical, some beautiful, some odd, all would remain vivid in the memory. How happy I would be if, as I throw crumbs to the sparrows in the morning, I could tell them about these things. They would be interested, I expect, in how the other half lives.

Books Consulted

The World of Animal Life - Fred Smith
 Man and the Vertebrates - Professor Sherwood Romer
 Champlin Encyclopedia (Chicago)
 Encyclopedia Britannica