

# A Condor as a Pet

Ornithology

WILLIAM L. and IRENE FINLEY, in *Wild Animal Pets* (Scribner's):

The die was cast. We slipped the young condor into a gunny sack, cutting a hole for his head. Both parents watched us curiously a few feet away. What could have been in their minds? They made no movement of alarm. It was as if they understood and were willing to part with their offspring. They could have had no premonition of a tragedy yet to come.

When General, for so he was called, began his long journey from the mountain haunts in southern California to his new home, a camp on the bank of the Willamette River in Oregon, he quickly put away his cave-like tactics; fear and ferocity gave way to gentleness. It was a response to kindly treatment. By the middle of August his wings were well fledged but he still wore a vest of gray down. With wings extended he measured nine feet. Still his pinions were in the making; they could not yet support such a heavy body.

At night he stayed in a big enclosure, where he had the stump of an old tree

for a perch. During the day the primordial freedom of the race made him restless, so each morning he was let out. If he was not released at the usual time, he soon attracted our attention by climbing up the wire and poking his nose through the gate. When it opened, out he stalked, but always stopped cautiously a minute or two outside to look about. He did nothing without deliberation. With several heavy hops, he went half-way across the yard, flapping his big wings. Then he went through a regular dance as if celebrating his freedom. He stretched his wings and jumped straight up in the air several times in succession; but he never said a word.

General was as playful as a pup. In the morning, after his breakfast, he was ready for a game. Down he jumped and pounced upon a stick or a leaf, shook it in his bill, dropped it just to jump upon it with both feet and toss it up again. He was extremely fond of pulling on a rope, and sat back and tugged on it like a bulldog, with lunging jerks and excited eyes. This was his hilarity after confine-

ment: he could hardly control himself.

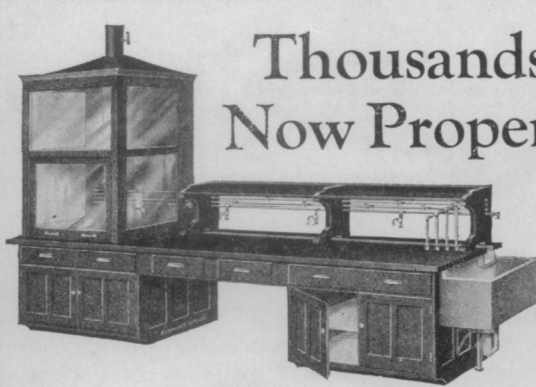
Down on the river-bank, just below camp, a big stump stuck in the sand. This was General's lookout, where he loved to sit, with wings spread wide to the sun and watching the life on the river. Almost daily a turkey-vulture or two sailed overhead, turning to look at him, not quite understanding why he stayed there. The crows, with a pretense of alarm, perched in the willows and alders near by, or cawed raucously down at him as they sailed off toward the tall firs. Casting a weird and gentle eye about, he sat as if in reverie, watching every movement.

Two things were a nuisance in General's life. Visitors he treated with an air of shyness closely akin to suspicion; the camera was a positive bore to him. Ordinarily we petted him any place about the yard, but let a camera come into view and he edged away. Perhaps he remembered it in his early days, when he was pulled out of the nest and hissed in defiance at being set up before the one-eyed monster. He was in a savage state then and fought as best he could; now he took refuge on one of his highest perches.

With the members of the family alone at home he came and went about the yard as if he were one of them. When his friend and companion took an axe and went across the creek to split wood, General tagged at his heels. . . .

Contrary to expectations, General was cleanly in his habits. He had been fed on fresh meat since he was taken from his nest, and soon he would have nothing else. Several times we tried him on stale meat, but he would have none of it. If a piece dropped on the ground, or was the least bit dirty, he refused it. Neither would he touch wild game, such as squirrel and rabbit, if he could get fresh beef. Running water was a luxury. He pattered along in the creek for an hour at a time, and played about the hydraulic ram. When he decided to bathe he jumped under the spouting water and wallowed in the pool. He was soon soaked through and stepped out for a moment; but, not feeling thoroughly washed, in he went again. He kept this up until he could hardly walk, then climbed a perch and hung out his wings to dry by stretching them wide in the sun.

*Science News-Letter, October 20, 1928*



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