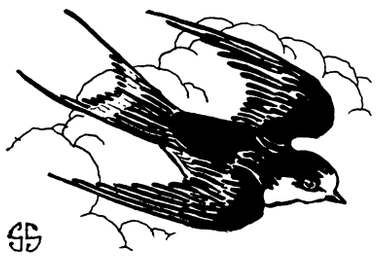
Nature Ramblings

By Frank Thone



Swift Wings

ONE of the favorite sentimental songs of our mothers—and of the younger generation among our grandmothers—was "When the Swallows Homeward Fly." As music that song was mighty good (ask Dad; he knows), but as ornithology it can have no standing at all.

For it envisaged, sadly, as all the good old songs liked to do, these swift-winged birds flying away to some unknown home in the South, leaving the northern skies as desolate and empty as a disappointed lover's heart. But as a matter of fact when the swallows fly southward in autumn they are going away from home. Their home is here, among our own chimneys and cliffs, and when the swallows homeward fly they are coming back to us. And that is what they are doing now.

The swallow, with his cousin the swift, does not come north quite so promptly and in defiance of chances of late snowstorms as do the robins and redwinged blackbirds. He is an early comer, but a safe one, and when you see him circling in the air it is safe to call spring an established fact.

Swallows and swifts are not identical, though they are usually lumped into one by the average citizen. They look a good deal alike, and their habits in flight are very similar, so that only the most meticulous of scientists would find fault with this popular confusion in nomenclature. As a matter of fact, one of the most notable of early American ornithologists called the chimney swift a swallow.

Both swallows and swifts are "wing feeders," catching their insect prey on the fly. That explains their swoopings and circlings and occasional eccentric dartings. They do fly for fun a part of the time, but a great part of their energetic wing work is involved in the serious business of getting a living.

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King Sargon—*Cont'd*

heads and will make one of the most beautiful examples of Assyrian art. And the Assyrians, in my opinion, have surpassed even the Greeks in their representations of animals. This cannot be said of the human figures, because there they followed too closely their own artistic conventions.

The "quarry" was carefully excavated, and we were able to save for science several important slabs. One of these represents two small horses and three attendants, all perfectly preserved. We excavated in a large, well-paved courtyard, and there we had the prize find: six large slabs of stone, two and one-half by three and one-half meters (about eight by eleven and a half feet), each one representing two immense figures of eunuchs bearing gifts to King Sargon. Four of these six slabs, and the most interesting ones at that, had never been seen by anyone since Assyrian days. A number of small objects also were salvaged, among which the most notable are a group of clay labels that had been used in closing cloth bags. Against the clay seals could still be seen the impression of the cloth, and imbedded in the clay was still the cord which had been used in tying them. Most of these labels were impressed with Assyrian seals; but one of them had an inscription in early Aramaic, and another in the still unreadable Hittite characters.

The published plans of the palace were improved upon, at least for the portion of it that could be excavated during the first campaign. Last, perhaps, in scientific interest, but first for its popular appeal, was the discovery and transportation of a huge Assyrian bull, weighing about thirty-five tons. He is one of those hybrid figures, with the head and beard of a man, the wings of an eagle, and the body of a bull, that used to watch the gates of the palace to ward off evil spirits. He lies now, well protected in strong cases, under the north stand of the football field at the University of Chicago. When the new building of the Oriental Institute shall have been completed, he will resume his duties, interrupted for twenty-seven centuries. Though six thousand miles from his original location and among strange people, he will have at least one consolation: the new building will never be permitted to fall over his head, for scientific interest will outlive the whole Assyrian Empire.

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World System—*Cont'd*

progress of condensation of the nebulous matter, we descend to the consideration of the Sun, formerly surrounded by an immense atmosphere, to which consideration we can also arrive, from an examination of the phenomena of the solar system, as we shall see in our last note. Such a marked coincidence, arrived at by such different means, renders the existence of this anterior state of the Sun extremely probable.

Connecting the formation of comets with that of nebulæ, they may be considered as small nebulæ, wandering from one solar system to another, and formed by the condensation of the nebulous matter which is so profusely distributed throughout the universe. The comets will be thus, relatively to our system, what the meteoric stones appear to be relatively to the earth, to which they do not appear to have originally belonged. When these stars first become visible, they present an appearance perfectly similar to the nebulæ; so much so, that they are frequently mistaken for them, and it is only by their motion, or by our knowing all the nebulæ contained in our part of the heavens, that we are able to distinguish one from the other. This hypothesis explains, in a satisfactory manner, the increase of the heads and tails of the comets, according as they approach the sun, and the extreme rarity of their tails; motions of the comets, which are performed in every direction, and the great eccentricity of their orbits.

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