

HIS CLAIM TO HEAVEN.

DR. Axel Munthe, the author of "The Story of San Michele," recently confessed that for three years he has been pondering over the filming of his immortal bird story.

The great question that caused the delay was whether a love story should be added. The film people who negotiated with Dr. Munthe did not know whether they could sell birds. They knew they could sell love.

"They complimented me," writes Dr. Munthe, "on having kissed the beautiful young nun in cholera-stricken Naples, but they could not get over it that I had not run away with her. Breaking it to me as gently as possible, they finally informed me that they were at a complete loss to know what to do with me in their scenario. I seemed to be everywhere and nowhere. To show them my goodwill, I offered to run away with any woman they liked if, more lucky than I, they could persuade somebody to run away with me. As for the lack of murders, I suggested a compromise. I told them that, having been a hard-working doctor for twenty-five years, I might at least see my way to supply their scenario with a few cases of manslaughter."

But the negotiations with the film people who wanted love, or murder, or sex appeal finally broke down, and Dr. Munthe goes on to say:

"After three years of hard thinking, I have now at last consented to have the book filmed by another company at their own risk and peril, on the sole condition that the film should become a gospel of kindness to all animals. I have loved animals all my life; all that is best in me I have given to them, and I mean to stand by them to the last."

"What solace and pure joy have I not derived from my beloved birds. How could I live without them? Is there anything more moving than the rhythmic beating of the wings of the migratory birds high overhead? Is there in the whole world's literature a greater lyric poet than the skylark pouring out his very heart to heaven and earth in his immortal hymn to the rising sun?"

Munthe Relies on the Birds.

"Capri was known to the Romans as a favourite resting-place for the migratory birds. In the Middle Ages the island was for centuries the seat of a bishop entirely financed by the sale of the netted and trapped birds of passage; the quail-bishop he was called in Rome. Not many years ago I counted over two thousand migratory birds caught during one single night in the nets spread over the mountain slope behind San Michele before the mountain became mine. Shortly after the publication of the Italian translation of 'The Story of San Michele,' the whole island of Capri was declared a bird sanctuary by a Government decree."

"It was worth writing a book for such a price; it is, besides, the only thing I have achieved during my long and useless life that has given me any lasting satisfaction. It will be the only thing I shall have to say in my defence to my stern judges when the day of reckoning comes. But perhaps it would be better to bend one's head and say nothing and leave it all to the birds. I have always had luck, and maybe when all seems lost a blackcap will fly past and sing into the ear of the nearest angel to put in a kind word for me if nobody else will. I am sure God must be a great lover of birds, or He would not have given them the same pair of wings He gave to His own angels."



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