

"Cursed be thou who hast prevented my carrying Nature's secrets to my people. And a curse for ever be on those who likewise slay strange birds who appear in their midst. Had I been a stranger, thou would'st have welcomed me, but because I was a bird thou did'st slay me. Beware! Thou and thy like shall bitterly rue the day of thy cruelty."

Days passed, and when the man's fruit crops, which he had tended so carefully, were destroyed by insects and ruin stared him in the face, he sought his wife, to try and lessen his terror by sharing his guilty secret with her. And she, woman-like, hastened to her neighbour to prove by revealing her knowledge that she held her husband's confidence, having first strictly cautioned her to keep the matter a secret.

In this way the news travelled quicker than usual, and everyone knew that the man's ruin was due to his wanton destruction.

Came a time when the story reached a benevolent king. Aware that "forewarned is forearmed," he caused his wise men to record the warning for all to read. He also decreed that the story should be circulated among school-children.

Alas! it befell that, though the books were there, none but a few read them, and the children forgot to pass on their knowledge. So, it still befalls that, though they put it down to bad luck or insect pests, or tricks of the weather, ill luck preys on those who, disobeying the law of hospitality, destroy strange birds which appear in their midst. For the curse of Queen Egretta was a strong one, and, although there are powerful persons on earth at present who could remove it if they chose, yet they approve of what she did and add their curse to hers, but they call a blessing on those who protect their birds.

*White Herons.*

