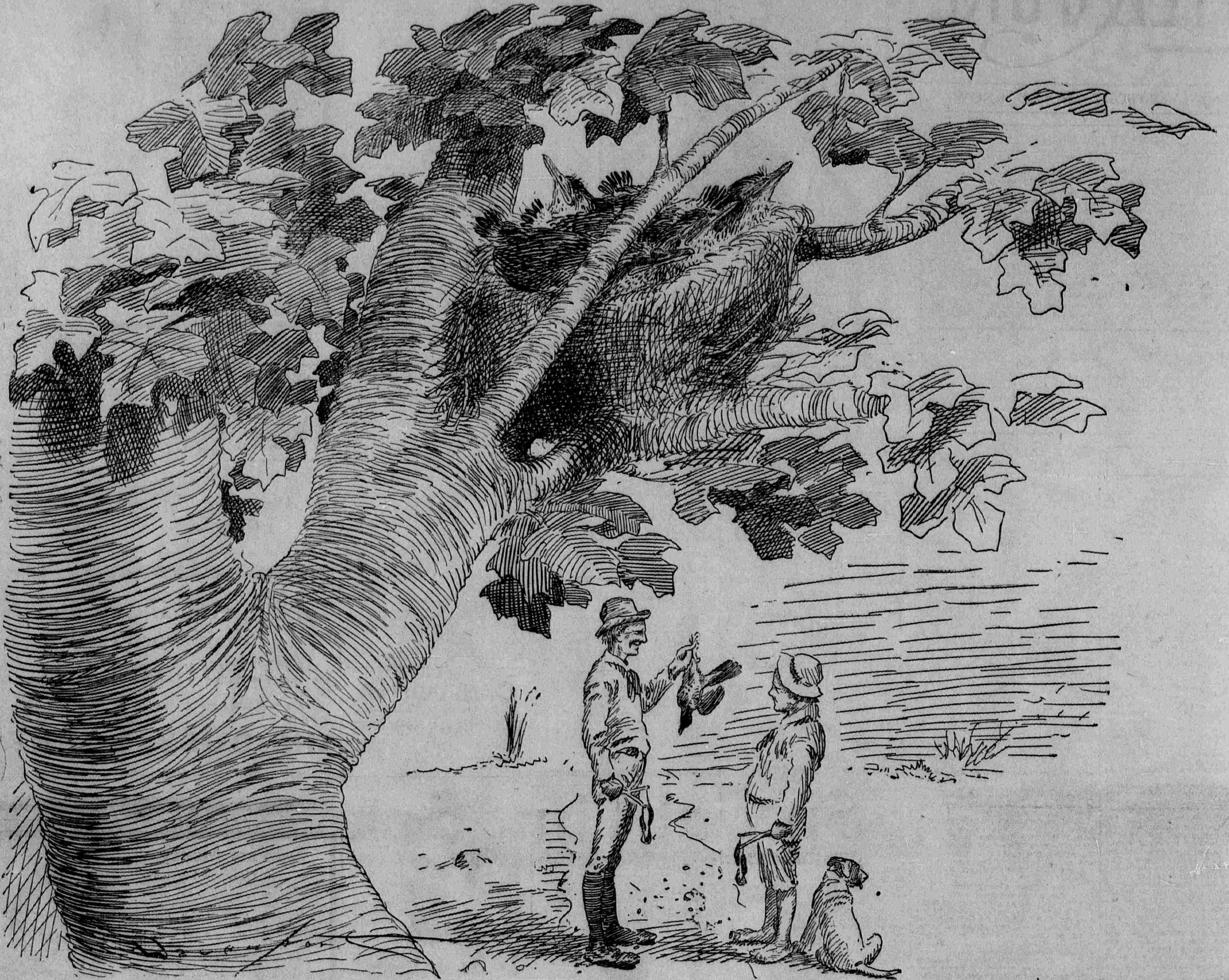


DAVENPORT PLEADS FOR ANIMALS TORTURED TO MAKE MAN'S PLEASURE.

VI. CRUEL BUT THOUGHTLESS.

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There are few boys who haven't at some time in their lives robbed birds' nests. This does not mean that these boys are really cruel; that they kill and destroy with a desire to be inhuman. It of course means that they do not think. You cannot find a boy that would kill a robin with his slingshot, if he knew that, somewhere, hidden away in a tree, there was a nest containing helpless young robins dependent entirely on the mother bird.

But you can find thousands of boys who would kill a robin, or any other bird, with a brand-new slingshot without stopping to think of just what it means. Boys like to hunt and kill mainly because they hear the hunting stories of their elders. These stories take them through a wilder age, where the heroes hunt and kill. Airguns and slingshots that are made and offered for sale stimulate the killing instincts of children.

But there is no need to stop making airguns and slingshots. Our boys

can keep on using these good old "weapons" if we will only give them the proper training. I believe the most hardened birds'-nest-robbing boy in New York would be reformed if he could spend a season with a man like John Burroughs. Such a naturalist as Mr. Burroughs could show the boy how diligently the mother and father birds work to build their nest and to rear their young and with what care they protect their nestlings. He could teach him to see the real beauty of the birds' life.

To know well the difference in species of birds at once lessens the desire to kill. To see, year after year, the same bluebirds return to the same bird house to nest; to watch the orioles weave and lace their stocking-like nests—if this is once taught and explained to a boy, even if he is an expert with a slingshot, the finer side of his nature will rule and he will have less desire to aim his boyish "weapon" at a feathered mark.

Killing by boys, anyway, is done for the most part to study the bird or animal at close range. It takes only a brief explanation to convince a boy that to kill a beautiful creature just to see the few red feathers of his neck or the blue feathers of his wings is heartless as well as foolish selfishness.

Reverse the process. Imagine the horror and sadness in the world if a certain kind of bird, just to tell whether boys had blue or brown eyes, killed children! You have, however, seen boys exhibiting with pride some beautiful little wild canary they killed as he sang on the back yard fence. They were attracted first by this bird's beautiful song, next by his pretty plumage. They knew when they killed him that the song would stop, never to be heard again, but they wanted to examine his bright yellow breast at closer range.

An hour's talk a week would stop boys from depredations of this kind—they would awake to the fact that a life is a life.

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