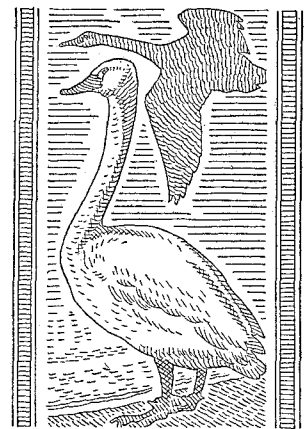


# AFTER HOURS



*A department in which readers tell what they do to get fun out of life. Contributions selected for publication will be paid for. In view of the enthusiasm which this department has aroused and in order that readers may exchange observations and experiences, we shall be glad to forward letters from Scribnerians to "After Hours" authors*

## HOMER STRADIVARIUS

BY HOMER A. HARVEY

*Doctor Harvey's letter, in response to our request for biographical material and suggestions for interested readers, appears entire on page 191 of "Behind the Scenes." It will be noted that in publishing it we have betrayed him.*

My infatuation for the violin dates back to my schoolboy days and the incomparable artistry of "Dude" Barnes. His rendition of "Hearts and Flowers" carried for me a deadly voltage of sentiment. I had to be practically carried home on a shutter after every performance. Dude and I have long since parted ways, but never has the lustrous memory of that gorgeous tune been dimmed, "tho' years have stretched their weary length between."

A violently red fiddle, dear at \$2.50, and labelled "Antonius Stradivarius fecit Cremonensis 1723. Made in Germany" was the earliest vehicle of my musical yearnings. I accepted its authenticity with that peculiar form of mental myopia common to all violin fanciers. Some five ambitious years with Winner's *Self Instructor* (fingerboard chart included) set me firmly upon the road to virtuosity. I even achieved a certain local fame by playing my way through college in a campus dance orchestra. *Sic transit.* I am still wondering myself how it happened. I showed better discretion than many wooers of the fickle goddess, and retired from active musical life with my laurels still green upon my brow.

It appears quite natural to me now, in view of my abortive vocation as a performer, that I transferred my very genuine affection for the fiddle into another sphere and began making in-

struments. That was twenty years ago. Plenty of grist has gone through the mill since, what with a war, marriage, and a family, and the frustration of many well-laid plans, but still the wheel grinds out two or three fiddles a year with no apparent abatement of fervor. Some good and some not so good—but all alike bearing a touch of that idealism which strains upward to the stars. It has been a sort of sanctuary against blatant realism. I am coming to think of it definitely as my contribution to the confused pattern of the present design for living.

My first creation lies today in our attic—a mute reproach upon the fair name of lutherie, I will admit, but weighted down with honors none the less as an historic battlefield of family tradition. I could never forget the gluey fingers and the discreet damning—I worked on the kitchen table within earshot of my wife—which accompanied my efforts to compel that writhing wisp of purfling into its tiny groove to form the clean unbroken sweep and the delicately mitred corners which are the insignia of the finished craftsman. Years of patient practice have even now scarcely sufficed to span the gap between that perspiring ordeal and the facile execution of the masterly corner, with its exquisite "bee-sting." Let no man smile, furthermore, at the connoisseur's rhapsodies over a pair of Stradivarian f-holes. I invite the skeptic to take his knife in hand and try his valiant best to execute the graceful pattern in the soft, grain-ribbed texture of fine old spruce. Or let him probe his skill in setting free from a block of hard, wavy-grained maple a scroll which will not suffer by comparison with the superb curves of a *del Gesu* masterpiece!

I have made in all about fifty violins. Of this number ten might rate awful, ten terrible, twenty good, seven fine, and three solo instruments. I have learned a good deal from reading and experience, I hope, so that today I feel reasonably certain of producing at least a good instrument. But there is always present that little residue of uncertainty, that variability in the quality of the wood so difficult of appraisal, that shade of doubt as to the precise distribution of thicknesses in belly and back which will best conduce to free vibration without sacrificing quality of tone—these constitute the priceless ingredient whose very elusiveness quickens the amateur's pulse. In violin-making, as in almost no other art, the race is not always to the fleet. It ever dangles before the amateur's imagination the enchanting possibility that he may, by some happy combination of accidents, achieve a ranking masterpiece. In this he senses delectably his kinship with Stradivarius and Guarnerius, reminding himself modestly now and then, lest he forget, that these geniuses knew none of the limitations to which his feeble clay is subject. Their hands were guided by the same instinct that sends the wild duck winging to the North, and is as unexplainable.

I sell an occasional instrument, reluctantly, as unbecoming in a true avocationist, and only to cover the cost of materials, which is considerable, as much as \$25.00 or more for a choice fiddle. The majority I send joyously on their way out into the world of music, into the hands of artists whose playing has given me pleasure. I have rarely failed of response from a concert player to whom I have written suggesting that I make for him an instrument to conform to his personal ideas as to model,

wood, and varnish. If he happens to be a real connoisseur, which is by no means always the case, and especially if he has a dash of adventure in his makeup, we usually get together. Many of my most pleasant personal experiences have grown out of these approaches, in some instances involving lasting family relationships. In some instances the matter has gone no further than a cordial correspondence, which was true of Einstein and Yehudi Menuhin. In the case of Toscha Seidel it has brought me and my wife countless delightful experiences and contacts. I am at present making an instrument for Jascha Heifetz. Other artists possessing my violins are Alexander Leventon, Louis Persinger, and Esther Rabirot. Numerous other examples are in the hands of worthy students whom it has been my pleasure to help in this substantial way. My brain-children bring me constant and increasing returns upon the time and wholly pleasurable effort invested.

If any proof is needed of how deadly in earnest I am about this fiddle business, let me say here and now that I would not only walk a mile—I would crawl a half dozen—to get a choice piece of curly maple. Try me!

### RARE WATERFOWL

By GAYLORD J. BELL

*Mr. Bell's first passion is duck-hunting. He feels that his second, which he describes for us here, is in some measure an atonement.*

*The Federal Bureau of Biological Survey supplies information on successful domestication of wild fowl and also a list of breeders in this country and in Canada.*

A few years ago I sought a hobby with enough outdoorsiness to counter the confining nature of my office work. My home is just outside the city limits and a small stream trickles through the rear yard into a waterlily pool. One day, looking through the classified advertisement of a sportsman's magazine, I noticed a small ad. offering ornamental waterfowl. I thought of my pool and sent a postcard for further information. A fascinating folder came in a few days, replete with detailed data concerning the various varieties which were offered. There were foreign and

domestic ducks and other strange water birds—blue-wing, green-wing, cinnamon, European, and Formosan teals, coots, gallinules, kingly canvasbacks, streamlined pintails, gaudily painted wood ducks and mandarins, quaint shovellers, noisy mallards and gadwalls, plump widgeon and redheads, diminutive black-and-white buffleheads, and many kinds of geese and swans. And, because of my pool, I discovered that I could have any of these wonderful birds if I chose! I thought of the stupid-looking utility chickens in my friends' back yards and decided at once that I would have something other than white leghorns or Rhode Island reds! Messy, dull poultry they could care for if they chose—I would raise something else.

From the price list I ordered, as a start, a pair of mallards, two kinds of exquisite teals, a pair of ugly-attractive coots, a pair of gay ruddy ducks and a pair of the graceful pintails. They came early in February and by June all had raised families except the ruddy duck, the female being too undomesticated to make a nest or set. She laid her eggs all over the place and I gathered each one and hatched them under Mrs. Mallard, who raised them all with supreme indifference along with her own considerable family. Little ducks are easily raised. The mother takes very good care of her offspring and woe unto the cat or dog who would chase a duckling while Madame is about! Mrs. Pintail flew so savagely into the face of an inquisitive airedale, the other day, that the dog fled the premises in an ear-splitting series of terrified cries, not knowing what sort of creature had struck it. The drakes of nearly all species of waterfowl have negligible voices, and most female ducks have a variation of the usual "quaaak," for their speech.

At first I raised only a representative pair or two of as many specimens of duckdom as I could conveniently quarter. But, as families grew, I found a definite, extensive market for these beautiful birds. Homes with a pool, no matter how small, can usually accommodate from three to fifteen pairs of waterfowl and the birds tend greatly to ornament the grounds. Dogs and cats do not ordinarily molest them, although rats will take the little ducklings. Ducks will not wander from the

place and seldom far from the security of their pool or pond or stream. They need not be fenced or penned in if their pool is sufficiently distant from a roadway or neighbor's yard. If pinioned, or clipped, a two-foot fence will contain them.

Perhaps you may care only to raise one pair of ducks at first. The ordinary lawn, however, is sufficiently large for at least five pairs and their flocks. Excess birds can be sold, or given to friends or public parks. My trouble is, I want to keep them all! Does the distant crying of wild geese thrill you, when, at night they pass overhead on their mysterious flight along the invisible roadways of the sky? Then undoubtedly you would enjoy having a pair or two of the stately Canadian "honkers," as tame as chickens, beautifying your home grounds. Or, if you're a duck-hunter, possibly you have marvelled at the iridescent beauty of a pintail's plumage, before plucking that unfortunate bird for the table? Pintails are quickly tamed to take grain from the hand and are the most swan-like of the ducks—the greyhounds of duckland. Or maybe you would prefer the exotic, multicolored Chinese mandarins, one of the most beautiful birds in the world. There is almost no end to it: from the tiny teals to the magnificent trumpeter swan, waterfowls present an array of colors, shapes and sizes. Too few realize that most of these water birds can be domesticated and made into unusual, fascinating pets, always a source of interest and always things of animated beauty.

There are not very many breeders of waterfowls today and some of the varieties of birds are pretty expensive. In this case, if I find I absolutely must have a pair of some particularly desirable specimen, I write to zoos the country over, and get in touch usually with some one who has the desired birds. Then I buy the eggs, when I can, and hatch them under my own birds. (It is less expensive this way, of course, but the breeders would rather sell the mature stock.) It is something of a job, trying to locate, say, a rare Lake Baikal teal, only to find that the possessor of a pair is reluctant to sell or trade. But what an achievement to eventually own a pair of rare birds which perhaps no one else in the country owns! I imag-