# THE FOOT-PATH WAY



BRADFORD TORREY

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**Transcriber's Note:**

Author's irregular hyphenation has been kept.
For a complete list of corrections made, please see the end of this document.



# THE FOOT-PATH WAY

**BY**

## BRADFORD TORREY

Jog on, jog on, the foot-path way,
And merrily hent the stile-a:
A merry heart goes all the day,
Your sad tires in a mile-a.

THE WINTER'S TALE




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# THE FOOT-PATH WAY.

## JUNE IN FRANCONIA.

ToC

"Herbs, fruits, and flowers,
Walks, and the melody of birds."
MILTON.

THERE were six of us, and we had the entire hotel, I may almost say the entire valley, to ourselves. If the verdict of the villagers could have been taken, we should, perhaps, have been voted a queer set, familiar as dwellers in Franconia are with the sight of idle tourists,—

"Rapid and gay, as if the earth were air,
And they were butterflies to wheel about
Long as the summer lasted."

We were neither "rapid" nor "gay," and it was still only the first week of June; if we were summer boarders, therefore, we must be of some unusual early-blooming variety.

First came a lady, in excellent repute among the savants of Europe and America as an entomologist, but better known to the general public as a writer of stories. With her, as companion and assistant, was a doctor of laws, who is also a newspaper proprietor, a voluminous author, an art connoisseur, and many things beside. They had turned their backs thus unseasonably upon the metropolis, and in this

pleasant out-of-the-way corner were devoting themselves to one absorbing pursuit,—the pursuit of moths. On their daily drives, two or three insect nets dangled conspicuously from the carriage,—the footman, thrifty soul, was never backward to take a hand,—and evening after evening the hotel piazza was illuminated till midnight with lamps and lanterns, while these enthusiasts waved the same white nets about, gathering in geometries, noctuids, sphinges, and Heaven knows what else, all of them to perish painlessly in numerous "cyanide bottles," which bestrewed the piazza by night, and (happy thought!) the closed piano by day. In this noble occupation I sometimes played at helping; but with only meagre success, my most brilliant catch being nothing more important than a "beautiful Io." The kind-hearted lepidopterist lingered with gracious emphasis upon the adjective, and assured me that the specimen would be all the more valuable because of a finger-mark which my awkwardness had left upon one of its wings. So—to the credit of human nature be it spoken—so does amiability sometimes get the better of the feminine scientific spirit. To the credit of human nature, I say; for, though her practice of the romancer's art may doubtless have given to this good lady some peculiar flexibility of mind, some special, individual facility in subordinating a lower truth to a higher, it surely may be affirmed, also, of humanity in general, that few things become it better than its inconsistencies.

Of the four remaining members of the company, two were botanists, and two—for the time—ornithologists. But the botanists were lovers of birds, also, and went nowhere without opera-glasses; while the ornithologists, in turn, did not hold themselves above some elementary knowledge of plants, and

amused themselves with now and then pointing out some rarity—sedges and willows were the special desiderata—which the professional collectors seemed in danger of passing without notice. All in all, we *were* a queer set. How the Latin and Greek polysyllables flew about the dining-room, as we recounted our forenoon's or afternoon's discoveries! Somebody remarked once that the waiters' heads appeared to be more or less in danger; but if the waiters trembled at all, it was probably not for their own heads, but for ours. [1]

Our first excursion—I speak of the four who traveled on foot—was to the Franconia Notch. It could not well have been otherwise; at all events, there was one of the four whose feet would not willingly have carried him in any other direction. The mountains drew us, and there was no thought of resisting their attraction.

Love and curiosity are different, if not incompatible, sentiments; and the birds that are dearest to the man are, for that very reason, not most interesting to the ornithologist. When on a journey, I am almost without eyes or ears for bluebirds and robins, song sparrows and chickadees. Now is my opportunity for extending my acquaintance, and such every-day favorites must get along for the time as best they can without my attention. So it was here in Franconia. The vesper sparrow, the veery, and a host of other friends were singing about the hotel and along the roadside, but we heeded them not. Our case was like the boy's who declined gingerbread, when on a visit: he had plenty of that at home.

When we were nearly at the edge of the mountain woods, however, we heard across the field a few

notes that brought all four of us to an instant standstill. What warbler could that be? Nobody could tell. In fact, nobody could guess. But, before the youngest of us could surmount the wall, the singer took wing, flew over our heads far into the woods, and all was silent. It was too bad; but there would be another day to-morrow. Meantime, we kept on up the hill, and soon were in the old forest, listening to bay-breasted warblers, Blackburnians, black-polls, and so on, while the noise of the mountain brook on our right, a better singer than any of them, was never out of our ears. "You are going up," it said. "I wish you joy. But you see how it is; you will soon have to come down again."

I took leave of my companions at Profile Lake, they having planned an all-day excursion beyond, and started homeward by myself. Slowly, and with many stops, I sauntered down the long hill, through the forest (the stops, I need not say, are commonly the major part of a naturalist's ramble,—the golden beads, as it were, the walk itself being only the string), till I reached the spot where we had been serenaded in the morning by our mysterious stranger. Yes, he was again singing, this time not far from the road, in a moderately thick growth of small trees, under which the ground was carpeted with club-mosses, dog-tooth violets, clintonia, linnæa, and similar plants. He continued to sing, and I continued to edge my way nearer and nearer, till finally I was near enough, and went down on my knees. Then I saw him, facing me, showing white under parts. A Tennessee warbler! Here was good luck indeed. I ogled him for a long time ("Shoot it," says Mr. Burroughs, authoritatively, "not ogle it with a glass;" but a man must follow his own method), impatient to see his back, and especially the top of his head.

What a precious frenzy we fall into at such moments! My knees were fairly upon nettles. He flew, and I followed. Once more he was under the glass, but still facing me. How like a vireo he looked! For one instant I thought, Can it be the Philadelphia vireo? But, though I had never seen that bird, I knew its song to be as different as possible from the notes to which I was listening. After a long time the fellow turned to feeding, and now I obtained a look at his upper parts,—the back olive, the head ashy, like the Nashville warbler. That was enough. It was indeed the Tennessee (*Helminthophila peregrina*), a bird for which I had been ten years on the watch.

The song, which has not often been described, is more suggestive of the Nashville's than of any other, but so decidedly different as never for a moment to be confounded with it. "When you hear it," a friend had said to me several years before, "you will know it for something new." It is long (I speak comparatively, of course), very sprightly, and peculiarly staccato, and is made up of two parts, the second quicker in movement and higher in pitch than the first. I speak of it as in two parts, though when my companions came to hear it, as they did the next day, they reported it as in three. We visited the place together afterwards, and the discrepancy was readily explained. As to pitch, the song *is* in three parts, but as to rhythm and character, it is in two; the first half being composed of double notes, the second of single notes. The resemblance to the Nashville's song lies entirely in the first part; the notes of the concluding portion are not run together or jumbled, after the Nashville's manner, but are quite as distinct as those of the opening measure.

As there were at least two pairs of the birds, and they were unmistakably at home, we naturally had hope of finding one of the nests. We made several random attempts, and one day I devoted an hour or more to a really methodical search; but the wily singer gave me not the slightest clue, behaving as if there were no such thing as a bird's nest within a thousand miles, and all my endeavors went for nothing.

As might have been foreseen, Franconia proved to be an excellent place in which to study the difficult family of flycatchers. All our common eastern Massachusetts species were present,—the kingbird, the phœbe, the wood pewee, and the least flycatcher, —and with them the crested flycatcher (not common), the olive-sided, the traill, and the yellow-bellied. The phœbe-like cry of the traill was to be heard constantly from the hotel piazza. The yellow-bellied seemed to be confined to deep and rather swampy woods in the valley, and to the mountain-side forests; being most numerous on Mount Lafayette, where it ran well up toward the limit of trees. In his notes, the yellow-belly may be said to take after both the least flycatcher and the wood pewee. His *killic* (so written in the books, and I do not know how to improve upon it) resembles the *chebec* of the least flycatcher, though much less emphatic, as well as much less frequently uttered, while his *twee*, or *tuwee*, is quite in the voice and manner of the wood pewee's clear, plaintive whistle; usually a monosyllable, but at other times almost or quite dissyllabic. The olive-sided, on the other hand, imitates nobody; or, if he does, it must be some bird with which I have yet to make acquaintance. *Que-qúe-o* he vociferates, with a strong emphasis and drawl upon the middle syllable. This is his song, or

what answers to a song, but I have seen him when he would do nothing but repeat incessantly a quick trisyllabic call, *whit, whit, whit*; corresponding, I suppose, to the well-known *whit* with which the phœbe sometimes busies himself in a similar manner.

Of more interest than any flycatcher—of more interest even than the Tennessee warbler—was a bird found by the roadside in the village, after we had been for several days in the place. Three of us were walking together, talking by the way, when all at once we halted, as by a common impulse, at the sound of a vireo song; a red-eye's song, as it seemed, with the faintest touch of something unfamiliar about it. The singer was in a small butternut-tree close upon the sidewalk, and at once afforded us perfectly satisfactory observations, perching on a low limb within fifteen feet of our eyes, and singing again and again, while we scrutinized every feather through our glasses. As one of my companions said, it was like having the bird in your hand. There was no room for a question as to its identity. At last we had before us the rare and long-desired Philadelphia greenlet. As its song is little known, I here transcribe my notes about it, made at two different times, between which there appears to have been some discussion among us as to just how it should be characterized:—

"The song is very pretty, and is curiously compounded of the red-eye's and the solitary's, both as to phrase and quality. The measures are all brief; with fewer syllables, that is to say, than the red-eye commonly uses. Some of them are exactly like the red-eye's, while others have the peculiar sweet upward inflection of the solitary's. To hear some of the measures, you would pass the bird for a red-eye;

to hear others of them, you might pass him for a solitary. At the same time, he has not the most highly characteristic of the solitary's phrases. His voice is less sharp and his accent less emphatic than the red-eye's, and, so far as we heard, he observes decidedly longer rests between the measures."

This is under date of June 16th. On the following day I made another entry:—

"The song is, I think, less varied than either the solitary's or the red-eye's, but it grows more distinct from both as it is longer heard. Acquaintance will probably make it as characteristic and unmistakable as any of our four other vireo songs. But I do not withdraw what I said yesterday about its resemblance to the red-eye's and the solitary's. The bird seems quite fearless, and keeps much of the time in the lower branches. In this latter respect his habit is in contrast with that of the warbling vireo."

On the whole, then, the song of the Philadelphia vireo comes nearest to the red-eye's, differing from it mainly in tone and inflection rather than in form. In these two respects it suggests the solitary vireo, though it never reproduces the indescribably sweet cadence, the real "dying fall," of that most delightful songster. At the risk of a seeming contradiction, however, I must mention one curious circumstance. On going again to Franconia, a year afterwards, and, naturally, keeping my ears open for *Vireo philadelphicus*, I discovered that I was never for a moment in doubt when I heard a red-eye; but once, on listening to a distant solitary,—catching only part of the strain,—I was for a little quite uncertain whether he might not be the bird for which I was looking. How this fact is to be explained I am unable

to say; it will be least surprising to those who know most of such matters, and at all events I think it worth recording as affording a possible clue to some future observer. The experience, inconsistent as the assertion may sound, does not in the least alter my opinion that the Philadelphia's song is practically certain to be confused with the red-eye's rather than with the solitary's. Upon that point my companions and I were perfectly agreed while we had the bird before us, and Mr. Brewster's testimony is abundantly conclusive to the same effect. He was in the Umbagog forests on a special hunt for Philadelphia vireos (he had collected specimens there on two previous occasions), and after some days of fruitless search discovered, almost by accident, that the birds had all the while been singing close about him, but in every instance had passed for "nothing but red-eyes." [2]

For the benefit of the lay reader, I ought, perhaps, to have explained before this that the Philadelphia vireo is in coloration an exact copy of the warbling vireo. There is a slight difference in size between the two, but the most practiced eye could not be depended upon to tell them apart in a tree. *Vireo philadelphicus* is in a peculiar case: it looks like one common bird, and sings like another. It might have been invented on purpose to circumvent collectors, as the Almighty has been supposed by some to have created fossils on purpose to deceive ungodly geologists. It is not surprising, therefore, that the bird escaped the notice of the older ornithologists. In fact, it was first described,—by Mr. Cassin,—in 1851, from a specimen taken, nine years before, near Philadelphia; and its nest remained unknown for more than thirty years longer, the first one having been discovered, apparently in Canada, in 1884. [3]

Day after day, the bare, sharp crest of Mount Lafayette silently invited my feet. Then came a bright, favorable morning, and I set out. I would go alone on this my first pilgrimage to the noble peak, at which, always from too far off, I had gazed longingly for ten summers. It is not inconsistent with a proper regard for one's fellows, I trust, to enjoy now and then being without their society. It *is* good, sometimes, for a man to be alone,—especially on a mountain-top, and more especially at a first visit. The trip to the summit was some seven or eight miles in length, and an almost continual ascent, without a dull step in the whole distance. The Tennessee warbler was singing; but perhaps the pleasantest incident of the walk to the Profile House—in front of which the mountain footpath is taken—was a Blackburnian warbler perched, as usual, at the very top of a tall spruce, his orange throat flashing fire as he faced the sun, and his song, as my notebook expresses it, "sliding up to high *Z* at the end" in his quaintest and most characteristic fashion. I spent nearly three hours in climbing the mountain path, and during all that time saw and heard only twelve kinds of birds: redstarts, Canada warblers (near the base), black-throated blues, black-throated greens, Nashvilles, black-polls, red-eyed vireos, snowbirds (no white-throated sparrows!), winter wrens, Swainson and gray-cheeked thrushes, and yellow-bellied flycatchers. Black-poll and Nashville warblers were especially numerous, as they are also upon Mount Washington, and, as far as I have seen, upon the White Mountains generally. The feeble, sharp song of the black-poll is a singular affair; short and slight as it is, it embraces a perfect crescendo and a perfect decrescendo. Without question I passed plenty of white-throated sparrows, but by some

coincidence not one of them announced himself. The gray-cheeked thrushes, which sang freely, were not heard till I was perhaps halfway between the Eagle Cliff Notch and the Eagle Lakes. This species, so recently added to our summer fauna, proves to be not uncommon in the mountainous parts of New England, though apparently confined to the spruce forests at or near the summits. I found it abundant on Mount Mansfield, Vermont, in 1885, and in the summer of 1888 Mr. Walter Faxon surprised us all by shooting a specimen on Mount Graylock, Massachusetts. Doubtless the bird has been singing its perfectly distinctive song in the White Mountain woods ever since the white man first visited them. During the vernal migration, indeed, I have more than once heard it sing in eastern Massachusetts. My latest delightful experience of this kind was on the 29th of May last (1889), while I was hastening to a railway train within the limits of Boston. Preoccupied as I was, and faintly as the notes came to me, I recognized them instantly; for while the gray-cheek's song bears an evident resemblance to the veery's (which I had heard within five minutes), the two are so unlike in pitch and rhythm that no reasonably nice ear ought ever to confound them. The bird was just over the high, close, inhospitable fence, on the top of which I rested my chin and watched and listened. He sat with his back toward me, in full view, on a level with my eye, and sang and sang and sang, in a most deliciously soft, far-away voice, keeping his wings all the while a little raised and quivering, as in a kind of musical ecstasy. It does seem a thing to be regretted—yes, a thing to be ashamed of—that a bird so beautiful, so musical, so romantic in its choice of a dwelling-place, and withal so characteristic of New England should be

known, at a liberal estimate, to not more than one or two hundred New Englanders! But if a bird wishes general recognition, he should do as the robin does, and the bluebird, and the oriole,—dress like none of his neighbors, and show himself freely in the vicinity of men's houses. How can one expect to be famous unless he takes a little pains to keep himself before the public?

From the time I left my hotel until I was fairly above the dwarf spruces below the summit of Lafayette, I was never for many minutes together out of the hearing of thrush music. Four of our five summer representatives of the genus *Turdus* took turns, as it were, in the serenade. The veeries—Wilson's thrushes—greeted me before I stepped off the piazza. As I neared the Profile House farm, the hermits were in tune on either hand. The moment the road entered the ancient forest, the olive-backs began to make themselves heard, and halfway up the mountain path the gray-cheeks took up the strain and carried it on to its heavenly conclusion. A noble processional! Even a lame man might have climbed to such music. If the wood thrush had been here, the chorus would have been complete,—a chorus not to be excelled, according to my untraveled belief, in any quarter of the world.

To-day, however, my first thoughts were not of birds, but of the mountain. The weather was all that could be asked,—the temperature perfect, and the atmosphere so transparent as to be of itself a kind of lens; so that in the evening, when I rejoined my companions at the hotel, I found to my astonishment that I had been plainly visible while at the summit, the beholders having no other help than an opera-glass! It was almost past belief. I had felt some

dilation of soul, it was true, but had been quite unconscious of any corresponding physical transformation. What would our aboriginal forerunners have said could they have stood in the valley and seen a human form moving from point to point along yonder sharp, serrated ridge? I should certainly have passed for a god! Let us be thankful that all such superstitious fancies have had their day. The Indian, poor child of nature,

"A pagan suckled in a creed outworn,"

stood afar off and worshiped toward these holy hills; but the white man clambers gayly up their sides, guide-book in hand, and leaves his sardine box and eggshells—and likely enough his business card—at the top. Let us be thankful, I repeat, for the light vouchsafed to us; ours is a goodly heritage; but there are moods—such creatures of hereditary influence are we—wherein I would gladly exchange both the guide-book and the sardine box for a vision, never so indistinct and transient, of Kitche Manitoo. Alas! what a long time it is since any of us have been able to see the invisible. "In the mountains," says Wordsworth, "did he feel his faith." But the poet was speaking then of a very old-fashioned young fellow, who, even when he grew up, made nothing but a peddler. Had he lived in our day, he would have felt not his faith, but his own importance; especially if he had put himself out of breath, as most likely he would have done, in accomplishing in an hour and forty minutes what, according to the guide-book, should have taken a full hour and three quarters. The modern excursionist (how Wordsworth would have loved that word!) has learned wisdom of a certain wise fowl who once taught St. Peter a lesson, and who never finds himself in a high place without an

impulse to flap his wings and crow.

For my own part, though I spent nearly three hours on the less than four miles of mountain path, as I have already acknowledged, I was nevertheless somewhat short-winded at the end. So long as I was in the woods, it was easy enough to loiter; but no sooner did I leave the last low spruces behind me than I was seized with an importunate desire to stand upon the peak, so near at hand just above me. I hope my readers are none of them too old to sympathize with the boyish feeling. At all events, I quickened my pace. The distance could not be more than half a mile, I thought. But it was wonderful how that perverse trail among the boulders did unwind itself, as if it never would come to an end; and I was not surprised, on consulting a guide-book afterwards, to find that my half mile had really been a mile and a half. One's sensations in such a case I have sometimes compared with those of an essay-writer when he is getting near the end of his task. He dallied with it in the beginning, and was half ready to throw it up in the middle; but now the fever is on him, and he cannot drive the pen fast enough. Two days ago he doubted whether or not to burn the thing; now it is certain to be his masterpiece, and he must sit up till morning, if need be, to finish it. What would life be worth without its occasional enthusiasm, laughable in the retrospect, perhaps, but in itself pleasurable almost to the point of painfulness?

It was a glorious day. I enjoyed the climb, the lessening forest, the alpine plants (the diapensia was in full flower, with its upright snowy goblets, while the geum and the Greenland sandwort were just beginning to blossom), the magnificent prospect, the

stimulating air, and, most of all, the mountain itself. I sympathized then, as I have often done at other times, with a remark once made to me by a Vermont farmer's wife. I had sought a night's lodging at her house, and during the evening we fell into conversation about Mount Mansfield, from the top of which I had just come, and directly at the base of which the farmhouse stood. When she went up "the mounting," she said, she liked to look off, of course; but somehow what she cared most about was "the mounting itself."

The woman had probably never read a line of Wordsworth, unless possibly, "We are Seven" was in the old school reader; but I am sure the poet would have liked this saying, especially as coming from such a source. *I* liked it, at any rate, and am seldom on a mountain-top without recalling it. Her lot had been narrow and prosaic,—bitterly so, the visitor was likely to think; she was little used to expressing herself, and no doubt would have wondered what Mr. Pater could mean by his talk about natural objects as possessing "more or less of a moral or spiritual life," as "capable of a companionship with man, full of expression, of inexplicable affinities and delicacies of intercourse." From such refinements and subtleties her mind would have taken refuge in thoughts of her baking and ironing. But she enjoyed the mountain; I think she had some feeling for it, as for a friend; and who knows but she, too, was one of "the poets that are sown by Nature"?

I spent two happy hours and a half at the summit of Lafayette. The ancient peak must have had many a worthier guest, but it could never have entertained one more hospitably. With what softly temperate breezes did it fan me! I wish I were there now! But

kind as was its welcome, it did not urge me to remain. The word of the brook came true again,—as Nature's words always do, if we hear them aright. Having gone as high as my feet could carry me, there was nothing left but to go down again. "Which things," as Paul said to the Galatians, "are an allegory."

I was not asked to stay, but I was invited to come again; and the next season, also in June, I twice accepted the invitation. On the first of these occasions, although I was eight days later than I had been the year before (June 19th instead of June 11th), the diapensia was just coming into somewhat free bloom, while the sandwort showed only here and there a stray flower, and the geum was only in bud. The dwarf paper birch (trees of no one knows what age, matting the ground) was in blossom, with large, handsome catkins, while Cutler's willow was already in fruit, and the crowberry likewise. The willow, like the birch, has learned that the only way to live in such a place is to lie flat upon the ground and let the wind blow over you. The other flowers noted at the summit were one of the blueberries (*Vaccinium uliginosum*), Bigelow's sedge, and the fragrant alpine holy-grass (*Hierochloa alpina*). Why should this sacred grass, which Christians sprinkle in front of their church doors on feast-days, be scattered thus upon our higher mountain-tops, unless these places are indeed, as the Indian and the ancient Hebrew believed, the special abode of the Great Spirit?

But the principal interest of this my second ascent of Mount Lafayette was to be not botanical, but ornithological. We had seen nothing noteworthy on

the way up (I was not alone this time, though I have so far been rude enough to ignore my companion); but while at the Eagle Lakes, on our return, we had an experience that threw me into a nine days' fever. The other man—one of the botanists of last year's crew—was engaged in collecting viburnum specimens, when all at once I caught sight of something red in a dead spruce on the mountain-side just across the tiny lake. I leveled my glass, and saw with perfect distinctness, as I thought, two pine grosbeaks in bright male costume,—birds I had never seen before except in winter. Presently a third one, in dull plumage, came into view, having been hidden till now behind the bole. The trio remained in sight for some time, and then dropped into the living spruces underneath, and disappeared. I lingered about, while my companion and the black flies were busy, and was on the point of turning away for good, when up flew two red birds and alighted in a tree close by the one out of which the grosbeaks had dropped. But a single glance showed that they were not grosbeaks, but white-winged crossbills! And soon they, too, were joined by a third bird, in female garb. Here was a pretty piece of confusion! I was delighted to see the crossbills, having never before had the first glimpse of them, summer or winter; but what was I to think about the grosbeaks? "Your determination is worthless," said my scientific friend, consolingly; and there was no gainsaying his verdict. Yet by what possibility could I have been so deceived? The birds, though none too near, had given me an excellent observation, and as long as they were in sight I had felt no uncertainty whatever as to their identity. The bill alone, of which I had taken particular note, ought in all reason to be held conclusive. So much for one side of the case. On the other hand, however,

the second trio were unmistakably crossbills. (They had been joined on the wing by several others, as I ought to have mentioned, and with their characteristic chattering cry had swept out of sight up the mountain). It was certainly a curious coincidence: three grosbeaks—two males and a female—had dropped out of a tree into the undergrowth; and then, five minutes later, three crossbills—two males and a female—had risen out of the same undergrowth, and taken almost the very perch which the others had quitted! Had this strange thing happened? Or had my eyes deceived me? This was my dilemma, on the sharp horns of which I tried alternately for the next eight days to make myself comfortable.

During all that time, the weather rendered mountain climbing impracticable. But the morning of the 28th was clear and cold, and I set out forthwith for the Eagle Lakes. If the grosbeaks were there, I meant to see them, though I should have to spend all day in the attempt. My botanist had returned home, leaving me quite alone at the hotel; but, as good fortune would have it, before I reached the Profile House, I was overtaken unexpectedly by a young ornithological friend, who needed no urging to try the Lafayette path. We were creeping laboriously up the long, steep shoulder beyond the Eagle Cliff gorge, and drawing near the lakes, when all at once a peculiarly sweet, flowing warble fell upon our ears. "A pine grosbeak!" said I, in a tone of full assurance, although this was my first hearing of the song. The younger man plunged into the forest, in the direction of the voice, while I, knowing pretty well how the land lay, hastened on toward the lakes, in hopes to find the singer visible from that point. Just as I ran down the little incline into the open, a bird flew past

me across the water, and alighted in a dead spruce (it might have been the very tree of nine days before), where it sat in full sight, and at once broke into song,—"like the purple finch's," says my notebook; "less fluent, but, as it seemed to me, sweeter and more expressive. I think it was not louder." Before many minutes, my comrade came running down the path in high glee, calling, "Pine grosbeaks!" He had got directly under a tree in which two of them were sitting. So the momentous question was settled, and I commenced feeling once more a degree of confidence in my own eyesight. The loss of such confidence is a serious discomfort; but strange as it may seem to people in general, I suspect that few field ornithologists, except beginners, ever succeed in retaining it undisturbed for any long time together. As a class, they have learned to take the familiar maxim, "Seeing is believing," with several grains of allowance. With most of them, it would be nearer the mark to say, Shooting is believing.

My special errand at the lakes being thus quickly disposed of, there was no reason why I should not accompany my friend to the summit. Lafayette gave us a cold reception. We might have addressed him as Daniel Webster, according to the time-worn story, once addressed Mount Washington; but neither of us felt oratorically inclined. In truth, after the outrageous heats of the past few days, it seemed good to be thrashing our arms and crouching behind a boulder, while we devoured our luncheon, and between times studied the landscape. For my own part, I experienced a feeling of something like wicked satisfaction; as if I had been wronged, and all at once had found a way of balancing the score. The diapensia was already quite out of bloom, although only nine days before we had thought it hardly at its

best. It is one of the prettiest and most striking of our strictly alpine plants, but is seldom seen by the ordinary summer tourist, as it finishes its course long before he arrives. The same may be said of the splendid Lapland azalea, which I do not remember to have found on Mount Lafayette, it is true, but which is to be seen in all its glory upon the Mount Washington range, in middle or late June; so early that one may have to travel over snow-banks to reach it. The two flowers oftenest noticed by the chance comer to these parts are the Greenland sandwort (the "mountain daisy"!) and the pretty geum, with its handsome crinkled leaves and its bright yellow blossoms, like buttercups.

My sketch will hardly fulfill the promise of its title; for our June in Franconia included a thousand things of which I have left myself no room to speak: strolls in the Landaff Valley and to Sugar Hill; a walk to Mount Agassiz; numerous visits—by the way, and in uncertain weather—to Bald Mountain; several jaunts to Lonesome Lake; and wanderings here and there in the pathless valley woods. We were none of us of that unhappy class who cannot enjoy doing the same thing twice.

I wished, also, to say something of sundry minor enjoyments: of the cinnamon roses, for example, with the fragrance of which we were continually greeted, and which have left such a sweetness in the memory that I would have called this essay "June in the Valley of Cinnamon Roses," had I not despaired of holding myself up to so poetic a title. And with the roses the wild strawberries present themselves. Roses and strawberries! It is the very poetry of science that these should be classified together. The berries, like

the flowers, are of a generous turn (it is a family trait, I think), loving no place better than the roadside, as if they would fain be of refreshment to beings less happy than themselves, who cannot be still and blossom and bear fruit, but are driven by the Fates to go trudging up and down in dusty highways. For myself, if I were a dweller in this vale, I am sure my finger-tips would never be of their natural color so long as the season of strawberries lasted. On one of my solitary rambles I found a retired sunny field, full of them. To judge from appearances, not a soul had been near it. But I noticed that, while the almost ripe fruit was abundant, there was scarce any that had taken on the final tinge and flavor. Then I began to be aware of faint, sibilant noises about me, and, glancing up, I saw that the ground was already "preëmpted" by a company of cedar-birds, who, naturally enough, were not a little indignant at my poaching thus on their preserves. They showed so much concern (and had gathered the ripest of the berries so thoroughly) that I actually came away the sooner on their account. I began to feel ashamed of myself, and for once in my life was literally hissed off the stage.

Even on my last page I must be permitted a word in praise of Mount Cannon, of which I made three ascents. It has nothing like the celebrity of Mount Willard, with which, from its position, it is natural to compare it; but to my thinking it is little, if at all, less worthy. Its outlook upon Mount Lafayette is certainly grander than anything Mount Willard can offer, while the prospect of the Pemigewasset Valley, fading away to the horizon, if less striking than that of the White Mountain Notch, has some elements of beauty which must of necessity be lacking in any more narrowly circumscribed scene, no matter how

romantic.

In venturing upon a comparison of this kind, however, one is bound always to allow for differences of mood. When I am in tune for such things, I can be happier on an ordinary Massachusetts hilltop than at another time I should be on any New Hampshire mountain, though it were Moosilauke itself. And, truly, Fortune did smile upon our first visit to Mount Cannon. Weather conditions, outward and inward, were right. We had come mainly to look at Lafayette from this point of vantage; but, while we suffered no disappointment in that direction, we found ourselves still more taken with the valley prospect. We lay upon the rocks by the hour, gazing at it. Scattered clouds dappled the whole vast landscape with shadows; the river, winding down the middle of the scene, drew the whole into harmony, as it were, making it in some nobly literal sense picturesque; while the distance was of such an exquisite blue as I think I never saw before.

How good life is at its best! And in such

"charmëd days,
When the genius of God doth flow,"

what care we for science or the objects of science,—for grosbeak or crossbill (may the birds forgive me!), or the latest novelty in willows? I am often where fine music is played, and never without being interested; as men say, I am pleased. But at the twentieth time, it may be, something touches my ears, and I hear the music within the music; and, for the hour, I am at heaven's gate. So it is with our appreciation of natural beauty. We are always in its

presence, but only on rare occasions are our eyes anointed to see it. Such ecstasies, it seems, are not for every day. Sometimes I fear they grow less frequent as we grow older.

We will hope for better things; but, should the gloomy prognostication fall true, we will but betake ourselves the more assiduously to lesser pleasures,—to warblers and willows, roses and strawberries. Science will never fail us. If worse comes to worst, we will not despise the moths.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[1] Just how far the cause of science was advanced by all this activity I am not prepared to say. The first ornithologist of the party published some time ago (in *The Auk*, vol. v. p. 151) a list of our Franconia birds, and the results of the botanists' researches among the willows have appeared, in part at least, in different numbers of the *Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club*. As for the lepidopterist, I have an indistinct recollection that she once wrote to me of having made some highly interesting discoveries among her Franconia collections,—several undescribed species, as well as I can now remember; but she added that it would be useless to go into particulars with a correspondent entomologically so ignorant.

[2] *Bulletin of the Nuttall Ornithological Club*, vol. v. p. 3.

[3] E. E. T. Seton, in *The Auk*, vol. ii. p. 305.

## DECEMBER OUT-OF-DOORS.

ToC

"December's as pleasant as May."
*Old Hymn.*

FOR a month so almost universally spoken against, November commonly brings more than its full proportion of fair days; and last year (1888) this proportion was, I think, even greater than usual. On the 1st and 5th I heard the peeping of hylas; Sunday, the 4th, was enlivened by a farewell visitation of bluebirds; during the first week, at least four sorts of butterflies—Disippus, Philodice, Antiopa, and Comma—were on the wing, and a single Philodice (our common yellow butterfly) was flying as late as the 16th. Wild flowers of many kinds—not less than a hundred, certainly—were in bloom; among them the exquisite little pimpernel, or poor man's weather-glass. My daily notes are full of complimentary allusions to the weather. Once in a while it rained, and under date of the 6th I find this record, —"Everybody complaining of the heat;" but as terrestrial matters go, the month was remarkably propitious up to the 25th. Then, all without warning, —unless possibly from the pimpernel, which nobody heeded,—a violent snow-storm descended upon us. Railway travel and telegraphic communication were seriously interrupted, while from up and down the coast came stories of shipwreck and loss of life. Winter was here in earnest; for the next three months good walking days would be few.

December opened with a mild gray morning. The snow had already disappeared, leaving only the remains of a drift here and there in the lee of a stone-wall; the ground was saturated with water; every meadow was like a lake; and but for the greenness of the fields in a few favored spots, the season might have been late March instead of early December. Of course such hours were never meant to be wasted within doors. So I started out, singing as I went,—

"While God invites, how blest the day!"

But the next morning was pleasant likewise; and the next; and still the next; and so the story went on, till in the end, omitting five days of greater or less inclemency, I had spent nearly the entire month in the open air. I could hardly have done better had I been in Florida.

All my neighbors pronounced this state of things highly exceptional; many were sure they had never known the like. At the time I fully agreed with them. Now, however, looking back over my previous year's notes, I come upon such entries as these: "December 3d. The day has been warm. Found chickweed and knawel in bloom, and an old garden was full of fresh-looking pansies." "4th. A calm, warm morning." "5th. Warm and rainy." "6th. Mild and bright." "7th. A most beautiful winter day, mild and calm." "8th. Even milder and more beautiful than yesterday." "11th. Weather very mild since last entry. Pickering hylas peeping to-day." "12th. Still very warm; hylas peeping in several places." "13th. Warm and bright." "14th. If possible, a more beautiful day than yesterday."

So much for December, 1887. Its unexpected good behavior would seem to have made a profound impression upon me; no doubt I promised never to forget it; yet twelve months later traditionary notions had resumed their customary sway, and every pleasant morning took me by surprise.

The winter of 1888-89 will long be famous in the ornithological annals of New England as the winter of killdeer plovers. I have mentioned the great storm of November 25th-27th. On the first pleasant morning afterwards—on the 28th, that is—my out-

of-door comrade and I made an excursion to Nahant. The land-breeze had already beaten down the surf, and the turmoil of the waters was in great part stilled; but the beach was strewn with sea-weeds and eel-grass, and withal presented quite a holiday appearance. From one motive and another, a considerable proportion of the inhabitants of the city had turned out. The principal attraction, as far as we could perceive, was a certain big clam, of which great numbers had been cast up by the tide. Baskets and wagons were being filled; some of the men carried off shells and all, while others, with a celerity which must have been the result of much practice, were cutting out the plump dark bodies, leaving the shells in heaps upon the sand. The collectors of these molluscan dainties knew them as quahaugs, and esteemed them accordingly; but my companion, a connoisseur in such matters, pronounced them not the true quahaug (*Venus mercenaria*,—what a profanely ill-sorted name, even for a bivalve!) but the larger and coarser *Cyprina islandica*. The man to whom we imparted this precious bit of esoteric lore received it like a gentleman, if I cannot add like a scholar. "We *call* them quahaugs," he answered, with an accent of polite deprecation, as if it were not in the least to be wondered at that he should be found in the wrong. It was evident, at the same time, that the question of a name did not strike him as of any vital consequence. *Venus mercenaria* or *Cyprina islandica*, the savoriness of the chowder was not likely to be seriously affected.

It was good, I thought, to see so many people out-of-doors. Most of them had employment in the shops, probably, and on grounds of simple economy, so called, would have been wiser to have stuck to their lasts. But man, after all that civilization has done for

him (and against him), remains at heart a child of nature. His ancestors may have been shoemakers for fifty generations, but none the less he feels an impulse now and then to quit his bench and go hunting, though it be only for a mess of clams.

Leaving the crowd, we kept on our way across the beach to Little Nahant, the cliffs of which offer an excellent position from which to sweep the bay in search of loons, old-squaws, and other sea-fowl. Here we presently met two gunners. They had been more successful than most of the sportsmen that one falls in with on such trips; between them they had a guillemot, two horned larks, and a brace of large plovers, of some species unknown to us, but noticeable for their bright cinnamon-colored rumps. "Why couldn't *we* have found those plovers, instead of that fellow?" said my companion, as we crossed the second beach. I fear he was envious at the prosperity of the wicked. But it was only a passing cloud; for on reaching the main peninsula we were speedily arrested by loud cries from a piece of marsh, and after considerable wading and a clamber over a detestable barbed-wire fence, such as no rambler ever encountered without at least a temptation to profanity, we caught sight of a flock of about a dozen of the same unknown plovers. This was good fortune indeed. We had no firearms, nor even a pinch of salt, and coming shortly to a ditch, too wide for leaping and too deep for cold-weather fording, we were obliged to content ourselves with opera-glass inspection. Six of the birds were grouped in a little plot of grass, standing motionless, like so many robins. Their novelty and their striking appearance, with two conspicuous black bands across the breast, their loud cries, and their curious movements and attitudes were enough to drive a pair of enthusiasts

half crazy. We looked and looked, and then reluctantly turned away. On getting home we had no difficulty in determining their identity, and each at once sent off to the other the same verdict,—"killdeer plover."

This, as I say, was on the 28th of November. On the 3d of December we were again at Nahant, eating our luncheon upon the veranda of some rich man's deserted cottage, and at the same time enjoying the sunshine and the beautiful scene.

It was a summery spot; moths were flitting about us, and two grasshoppers leaped out of our way as we crossed the lawn. They showed something less than summer liveliness, it is true; it was only afterwards, and by way of contrast, that I recalled Leigh Hunt's

> "Green little vaulter in the sunny grass,
> Catching his heart up at the feel of
> June."

But they had done well, surely, to weather the recent snow-storm and the low temperature; for the mercury had been down to 10° within a fortnight, and a large snow-bank was still in sight against the wall. Suddenly a close flock of eight or ten birds flew past us and disappeared behind the hill. "Pigeons?" said my companion. I thought not; they were sea-birds of some kind. Soon we heard killdeer cries from the beach, and, looking up, saw the birds, three of them, alighting on the sand. We started down the hill in haste, but just at that moment an old woman, a miserable gatherer of drift rubbish, walked directly upon them, and they made off. Then we saw that our "pigeons," or "sea-birds," had been nothing but killdeer plovers, which, like other long-winged birds,

look much larger in the air than when at rest. Returning towards Lynn, later in the afternoon, we came upon the same three birds again; this time feeding among the boulders at the end of the beach. We remarked once more their curious, silly-looking custom of standing stock-still with heads indrawn. But our own attitudes, as we also stood stock-still with glasses raised, may have looked, in their eyes, even more singular and meaningless. As we turned away—after flushing them two or three times to get a view of their pretty cinnamon rump-feathers—a sportsman came up, and proved to be the very man on whose belt we had seen our first killdeers, a week before. We left him doing his best to bag these three also. He will never read what I write, and I need not scruple to confess that, seeing his approach, we purposely startled the birds as badly as possible, hoping to see them make off over the hill, out of harm's way. But the foolish creatures could not take the hint, and alighted again within a few rods, at the same time calling loudly enough to attract the attention of the gunner, who up to this moment had not been aware of their presence. He fired twice before we got out of sight, but, to judge from his motions, without success. A man's happiness is perhaps of more value than a plover's, though I do not see how we are to prove it; but my sympathies, then as always, were with the birds.

Within a week or so I received a letter from Mrs. Celia Thaxter, together with a wing, a foot, and one cinnamon feather. "By this wing which I send you," she began, "can you tell me the name of the bird that owned it?" Then after some description of the plumage, she continued: "In the late tremendous tempest myriads of these birds settled on the Isles of Shoals, filling the air with a harsh, shrill, incessant

cry, and not to be driven away by guns or any of man's inhospitable treatment. Their number was so great as to be amazing, and they had never been seen before by any of the present inhabitants of the Shoals. They are plovers of some kind, I should judge, but I do not know." On the 16th she wrote again: "All sorts of strange things were cast up by the storm, and the plovers were busy devouring everything they could find; always running, chasing each other, very quarrelsome, fighting all the time. They were in poor condition, so lean that the men did not shoot them after the first day, a fact which gives your correspondent great satisfaction. They are still there! My brother came from the Shoals yesterday, and says that the place is alive with them, all the seven islands."

Similar facts were reported—as I began in one way and another to learn—from different points along the coast; especially from Cape Elizabeth, Maine, where hundreds of the birds were seen on the 28th and 29th of November. The reporter of this item [4] pertinently adds: "Such a flight of killdeer in Maine—where the bird is well known to be rare—has probably not occurred before within the memory of living sportsmen." Here, as at the Isles of Shoals, the visitors were at first easily shot (they are not counted among game birds where they are known, on account of their habitual leanness, I suppose); but they had landed upon inhospitable shores, and were not long in becoming aware of their misfortune. In the middle of December one of our Cambridge ornithologists went to Cape Cod on purpose to find them. He saw about sixty birds, but by this time they were so wild that he succeeded in getting only a single specimen. "Poor fellows!" he wrote me; "they looked unhappy enough, that cold Friday, with the

mercury at 12° and everything frozen stiff. Most of them were on hillsides and in the hollows of pastures; a few were in the salt marshes, and one or two on the beach." Nobody expected them to remain hereabouts, as they normally winter in the West Indies and in Central and South America; [5] but every little while Mrs. Thaxter wrote, "The killdeers are still here!" and on the 21st of December, as I approached Marblehead Neck, I saw a bird skimming over the ice that covered the small pond back of the beach. I put up my glass and said to myself, "A killdeer plover!" There proved to be two birds. They would not suffer me within gunshot,—though I carried no gun,—but flew off into some ploughed ground, with their usual loud vociferations. (The killdeer is aptly named *Ægialitis vocifera*.)

During the month with the history of which we are now especially concerned, I saw nothing more of them; but by way of completing the story I may add that on the 28th of January, in the same spot, I found a flock of seven, and there they remained. I visited them four times in February and once in March, and found them invariably in the same place. Evidently they had no idea of making another attempt to reach the West Indies for *this* season; and if they were to remain in our latitude, they could hardly have selected a more desirable location. The marsh, or meadow, was sheltered and sunny, while the best protected corner was at the same time one of those peculiarly springy spots in which the grass keeps green the winter through. Here, then, these seven wayfarers stayed week after week. Whenever I stole up cautiously and peeped over the bank into their verdant hiding-place, I was sure to hear the familiar cry; and directly one bird, and then another, and another, would start up before me, disclosing the

characteristic brown feathers of the lower back. They commonly assembled in the middle of the marsh upon the snow or ice, where they stood for a little, bobbing their heads in mutual conference, and then flew off over the house and over the orchard, calling as they flew.

Throughout December, and indeed throughout the winter, brown creepers and red-bellied nuthatches were surprisingly abundant. Every pine wood seemed to have its colony of them. Whether the extraordinary mildness of the season had anything to do with this I cannot say; but their presence was welcome, whatever the reason for it. Like the chickadee, with whom they have the good taste to be fond of associating, they are always busy and cheerful, appearing not to mind either snow-storm or low temperature. No reasonable observer would ever tax them with effeminacy, though the creeper, it must be owned, cannot speak without lisping.

Following my usual practice, I began a catalogue of the month's birds, and at the end of a fortnight discovered, to my astonishment, that the name of the downy woodpecker was missing. He had been common during November, and is well known as one of our familiar winter residents. I began forthwith to keep a sharp lookout for him, particularly whenever I went near any apple orchard. A little later, I actually commenced making excursions on purpose to find him. But the fates were against me, and go where I would, he was not there. At last I gave him up. Then, on the 27th, as I sat at my desk, a chickadee chirped outside. Of course I looked out to see him; and there, exploring the branches of an old apple-tree, directly under my window, was the black-and-white woodpecker for whom I had been

searching in vain through five or six townships. The saucy fellow! He rapped smartly three or four times; then he straightened himself back, as woodpeckers do, and said: "Good-morning, sir! Where have you been so long? If you wish to see *me*, you had better stay at home." He might have spoken a little less pertly; for after all, if a man would know what is going on, whether in summer or winter, he must not keep too much in his own door-yard. Of the thirty birds in my December list, I should have seen perhaps ten if I had sat all the time at my window, and possibly twice that number had I confined my walks within the limits of my own town.

While the migration is going on, to be sure, one may find birds in the most unexpected places. Last May I glanced up from my book and espied an olive-backed thrush in the back yard, foraging among the currant-bushes. Raising a window quietly, I whistled something like an imitation of his inimitable song; and the little traveler—always an easy dupe—pricked up his ears, and presently responded with a strain which carried me straight into the depths of a White Mountain forest. But in December, with some exceptions, of course, birds must be sought after rather than waited for. The 15th, for example, was a most uncomfortable day,—so uncomfortable that I stayed indoors,—the mercury only two or three degrees above zero, and a strong wind blowing. Such weather would drive the birds under shelter. The next forenoon, therefore, I betook myself to a hill covered thickly with pines and cedars. Here I soon ran upon several robins, feeding upon the savin berries, and in a moment more was surprised by a *tseep* so loud and emphatic that I thought at once of a fox sparrow. Then I looked for a song sparrow,—badly startled, perhaps,—but found to my delight a

white-throat. He was on the ground, but at my approach flew into a cedar. Here he drew in his head and sat perfectly still, the picture of discouragement. I could not blame him, but was glad, an hour later, to find him again on the ground, picking up his dinner. I leveled my glass at him and whistled his Peabody song (the simplest of all bird songs to imitate), but he moved not a feather. Apparently he had never heard it before! He was still there in the afternoon, and I had hopes of his remaining through the winter; but I never could find him afterwards. Ten days prior to this I had gone to Longwood on a special hunt for this same sparrow, remembering a certain peculiarly cozy hollow where, six or eight years before, a little company of song sparrows and white-throats had passed a rather severe winter. The song sparrows were there again, as I had expected, but no white-throats. The song sparrows, by the way, treated me shabbily this season. A year ago several of them took up their quarters in a roadside garden patch, where I could look in upon them almost daily. This year there were none to be discovered anywhere in this neighborhood. They figure in my December list on four days only, and were found in four different towns,—Brookline (Longwood), Marblehead, Nahant, and Cohasset. Like some others of our land birds (notably the golden-winged woodpecker and the meadow lark), they seem to have learned that winter loses a little of its rigor along the sea-board.

Three kinds of land birds were met with at Nahant Beach, and nowhere else: the Ipswich sparrow,—on the 3d and 26th,—the snow bunting, and the horned lark. Of the last two species, both of them rather common in November, I saw but one individual each. They were feeding side by side, and, after a

short separation,—under the fright into which my sudden appearance put them,—one called to the other, and they flew off in company towards Lynn. It was a pleasing display of sociability, but nothing new; for in winter, as every observer knows, birds not of a feather flock together. The Ipswich sparrow, a very retiring but not peculiarly timid creature, I have now seen at Nahant in every one of our seven colder months,—from October to April,—though it is unquestionably rare upon the Massachusetts coast between the fall and spring migrations. Besides the species already named, my monthly list included the following: herring gull, great black-backed gull, ruffed grouse, hairy woodpecker, flicker, goldfinch, tree sparrow, snowbird, blue jay, crow, shrike, white-bellied nuthatch (only two or three birds), golden-crowned kinglet, and one small hawk.[6]

The only birds that sang during the month—unless we include the red-bellied nuthatches, whose frequent quaint twitterings should, perhaps, come under this head—were the chickadees and a single robin. The former I have down as uttering their sweet phœbe whistle—which I take to be certainly their song, as distinguished from all their multifarious calls—on seven of the thirty-one days. They were more tuneful in January, and still more so in February; so that the titmouse, as becomes a creature so full of good humor and high spirits, may fairly be said to sing all winter long. The robin's music was a pleasure quite unexpected. I was out on Sunday, the 30th, for a few minutes' stroll before breakfast, when the obliging stranger (I had not seen a robin for a fortnight, and did not see another for nearly two months) broke into song from a hill-top covered with pitch-pines. He was in excellent voice, and sang again and again. The morning invited

music,—warm and cloudless, like an unusually fine morning in early April.

For an entire week, indeed, the weather had seemed to be trying to outdo itself. I remember in particular the day before Christmas. I rose long before daylight, crossed the Mystic River marshes as the dawn was beginning to break, and shortly after sunrise was on my way down the South Shore. Leaving the cars at Cohasset, I sauntered over the Jerusalem Road to Nantasket, spent a little while on the beach, and brought up at North Cohasset, where I was attracted by a lonesome-looking road running into the woods all by itself, with a guide-board marked "Turkey Hill." Why not accept the pleasing invitation, which seemed meant on purpose for just such an idle pedestrian as myself? As for Turkey Hill, I had never heard of it, and presumed it to be some uninteresting outlying hamlet. My concern, as a saunterer's ought always to be, was with the road itself, not with what might lie at the end of it. I did not discover my mistake till I had gone half a mile, more or less, when the road all at once turned sharply to the right and commenced ascending. Then it dawned upon me that Turkey Hill must be no other than the long, gradual, grassy slope at which I had already been looking from the railway station. The prospect of sea and land was beautiful; all the more so, perhaps, because of a thick autumnal haze. It might be called excellent Christmas weather, I said to myself, when a naturally prudent man, no longer young, could sit perched upon a fence rail at the top of a hill, drinking in the beauties of the landscape.

At the station, after my descent, I met a young man of the neighborhood. "Do you know why they call that Turkey Hill?" said I. "No, sir, I don't," he

answered. I suggested that probably somebody had killed a wild turkey up there at some time or other. He looked politely incredulous. "I don't *think* there are any wild turkeys up there," said he; "*I* never saw any." He was not more than twenty-five years old, and the last Massachusetts turkey was killed on Mount Tom in 1847, so that I had no doubt he spoke the truth. Probably he took me for a simple-minded fellow, while I thought nothing worse of him than that he was one of those people, so numerous and at the same time so much to be pitied, who have never studied ornithology.

The 25th was warmer even than the 24th; and it, likewise, I spent upon the South Shore, though at a point somewhat farther inland, and in a town where I was not likely to lose myself, least of all in any out-of-the-way woodland road. In short, I spent Christmas on my native heath,—a not inappropriate word, by the bye, for a region so largely grown up to huckleberry bushes. "Holbrook's meadows," and "Norton pasture!"—the names are not to be found on any map, and will convey no meaning to my readers; but in my ears they awaken memories of many and many a sunny hour. On this holiday I revisited them both. Warm as it was, boys and girls were skating on the meadows (in spite of their name, these have been nothing but a pond for as long as I can remember), and I stood awhile by the old Ross cellar, watching their evolutions. How bright and cheery it was in the little sheltered clearing, with nothing in sight but the leafless woods and the ice-covered pond! "Shan't I take your coat?" the sun seemed to be asking. At my elbow stood a bunch of lilac bushes ("laylocks" they were probably called by the man who set them out [7]) that had blossomed freely in the summer. The house has been gone for these thirty years or more

(alas! my sun must be rapidly declining when memory casts so long a shadow), but the bushes seem likely to hold their own for at least a century. They might have prompted a wise man to some wise reflections; but for myself, it must be acknowledged, I fell instead to thinking how many half days I had fished—and caught nothing, or next to nothing—along this same pleasant, willow-bordered shore.

In Norton pasture, an hour or two later, I made myself young again by putting a few checkerberries into my mouth; and in a small new clearing just over the brook ("Dyer's Run," this used to be called, but I fear the name is falling into forgetfulness) I stumbled upon a patch of some handsome evergreen shrub, which I saw at once to be a novelty. I took it for a member of the heath family, but it proved to belong with the hollies,—*Ilex glabra*, or ink-berry, a plant not to be found in the county where it is my present lot to botanize. So, even on my native heath, I had discovered something new.

The flora of a Massachusetts December is of necessity limited. Even in the month under review, singularly favorable as it was, I found but sixteen sorts of wild blossoms; a small number, surely, though perhaps larger by sixteen than the average reader would have guessed. The names of these hardy adventurers must by no means go unrecorded: shepherd's purse, wild pepper-grass, pansy, common chickweed (*Stellaria media*), mouse-ear chickweed (*Cerastium viscosum*), knawel, common mallow, witch-hazel, cinque-foil (*Potentilla Norvegica*,—not *argentea*, as I should certainly have expected), many-flowered aster, cone-flower, yarrow, two kinds of groundsel, fall dandelion, and jointweed. Six of these—mallow, cinque-foil, aster, cone-flower, fall dandelion, and

jointweed—were noticed only at Nahant; and it is further to be said that the jointweed was found by a friend, not by myself, while the cone-flower was not in strictness a blossom; that is to say, its rays were well opened, making what in common parlance is called a flower, but the true florets were not yet perfected. Such witch-hazel blossoms as can be gathered in December are of course nothing but belated specimens. I remarked a few on the 2d, and again on the 10th; and on the afternoon of Christmas, happening to look into a hamamelis-tree, I saw what looked like a flower near the top. The tree was too small for climbing and almost too large for bending, but I managed to get it down; and sure enough, the bit of yellow was indeed a perfectly fresh blossom. How did it know I was to pass that way on Christmas afternoon, and by what sort of freemasonry did it attract my attention? I loved it and left it on the stalk, in the true Emersonian spirit, and here I do my little best to embalm its memory.

One of the groundsels (*Senecio viscosus*) is a recent immigrant from Europe, but has been thoroughly established in the Back Bay lands of Boston—where I now found it, in perfect condition, December 4th—for at least half a dozen years. In Gray's "Flora of North America" it is said to grow there and in the vicinity of Providence; but since that account was written it has made its appearance in Lowell, and probably in other places. It is a coarse-looking little plant, delighting to grow in pure gravel; but its blossoms are pretty, and now, with not another flower of any sort near it, it looked, as the homely phrase is, "as handsome as a picture." Its more generally distributed congener, *Senecio vulgaris*,—also a foreigner—is, next to the common chickweed, I should say, our very hardiest bloomer. At the

beginning of the month it was in flower in an old garden in Melrose; and at Marblehead Neck a considerable patch of it was fairly yellow with blossoms all through December and January, and I know not how much longer. I saw no shepherd's purse after December 27th, but knawel was in flower as late as January 18th. The golden-rods, it will be observed, are absent altogether from my list; and the same would have been true of the asters, but for a single plant. This, curiously enough, still bore five heads of tolerably fresh blossoms, after all its numberless companions, growing upon the same hillside, had succumbed to the frost.

Of my sixteen plants, exactly one half are species that have been introduced from Europe; six are members of the composite family; and if we omit the cone-flower, all but three of the entire number are simple whites and yellows. Two red flowers, the clover and the pimpernel, disappointed my search; but the blue hepatica would almost certainly have been found, had it come in my way to look for it.

Prettier even than the flowers, however, was the December greenness, especially of the humbler sorts: St. John's-wort, five-finger, the creeping blackberries, —whose modest winter loveliness was never half appreciated,—herb-robert, corydalis, partridge-berry, checkerberry, wintergreen, rattlesnake-plantain, veronica, and linnæa, to say nothing of the ferns and mosses. Most refreshing of all, perhaps, was an occasional patch of bright green grass, like the one already spoken of, at Marblehead, or like one even brighter and prettier, which I visited more than once in Swampscott.

As I review what I have written, I am tempted to

exclaim with Tennyson:—

"And was the day of my delight
As pure and perfect as I say?"

But I answer, in all good conscience, yes. The motto with which I began states the truth somewhat strongly, perhaps (it must be remembered where I got it), but aside from that one bit of harmless borrowed hyperbole, I have delivered a plain, unvarnished tale. For all that, however, I do not expect my industrious fellow-citizens to fall in at once with my opinion that winter is a pleasant season at the seashore (it would be too bad they should, as far as my own enjoyment is concerned), and December a month propitious for leisurely all-day rambles. How foreign such notions are to people in general I have lately had several forcible reminders. On one of my jaunts from Marblehead to Swampscott, for example, I had finally taken to the railway, and was in the narrow, tortuous cut through the ledges, when, looking back, I saw a young gentleman coming along after me. He was in full skating rig, fur cap and all, with a green bag in one hand and a big hockey stick in the other. I stopped every few minutes to listen for any bird that might chance to be in the woods on either hand, and he could not well avoid overtaking me, though he seemed little desirous of doing so. The spot was lonesome, and as he went by, and until he was some rods in advance, he kept his head partly turned. There was no mistaking the significance of that furtive, sidelong glance; he had read the newspapers, and didn't intend to be attacked from behind unawares! If he should ever cast his eye over these pages (and whatever he may have thought of my

appearance, I am bound to say of him that he looked like a man who might appreciate good literature), he will doubtless remember the incident, especially if I mention the field-glass which I carried slung over one shoulder. Evidently the world sees no reason why a man with anything better to do should be wandering aimlessly about the country in midwinter. Nor do I quarrel with the world's opinion. The majority is wiser than the minority, of course; otherwise, what becomes of its divine and inalienable right to lay down the law? The truth with me was that I *had* nothing better to do. I confess it without shame. Surely there is no lack of shoemakers. Why, then, should not here and there a man take up the business of walking, of wearing out shoes? Everything is related to everything else, and the self-same power that brought the killdeers to Marblehead sent me there to see them and do them honor. Should it please the gods to order it so, I shall gladly be kept running on such errands for a score or two of winters.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[4] Mr. N. C. Brown, in *The Auk*, January, 1889, page 69.

[5] It seems probable that the birds started from some point in the Southern States for a long southward flight, or perhaps for the West Indies, on the evening of November 24th, and on getting out to sea were caught by the great gale, which whirled them northward over the Atlantic, landing them—such of them, that is, as were not drowned on the way—upon the coast of New England. The grounds for such an opinion are set forth by Dr. Arthur P. Chadbourne in *The Auk* for July, 1889, page 255.

[6] To this list my ornithological comrade before mentioned added seven species, namely: white-

winged scoter, barred owl, cowbird, purple finch, white-winged crossbill, fox sparrow, and winter wren. Between us, as far as land birds went, we did pretty well.

[7] So they were called, too, by that lover of flowers, Walter Savage Landor, who, as his biographer says, followed a pronunciation "traditional in many old English families."

## DYER'S HOLLOW.

ToC

"Quiet hours
Pass'd among these heaths of ours
By the grey Atlantic sea."

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

I LIVED for three weeks at the "Castle," though, unhappily, I did not become aware of my romantic good fortune till near the close of my stay. There was no trace of battlement or turret, nothing in the least suggestive of Warwick or Windsor, or of Sir Walter Scott. In fact, the Castle was not a building of any kind, but a hamlet; a small collection of houses—a somewhat scattered collection, it must be owned,—such as, on the bleaker and sandier parts of Cape Cod, is distinguished by the name of village. On one side flowed the river, doubling its course through green meadows with almost imperceptible motion. As I watched the tide come in, I found myself saying,—

"Here twice a day the Pamet fills,
The salt sea-water passes by."

But the rising flood could make no "silence in the hills;" for the Pamet, as I saw it, is far too sedate a stream ever to be caught "babbling." It has only some three miles to run, and seems to know perfectly well that it need not run fast.

My room would have made an ideal study for a lazy man, I thought, the two windows facing straight into a sand-bank, above which rose a steep hill, or perhaps I should rather say the steep wall of a plateau, on whose treeless top, all by themselves, or with only a graveyard for company, stood the Town Hall and the two village churches. Perched thus upon the roof of the Cape, as it were, and surmounted by cupola and belfry, the hall and the "orthodox" church made invaluable beacons, visible from far and near in every direction. For three weeks I steered my hungry course by them twice a day, having all the while a pleasing consciousness that, however I might skip the Sunday sermon, I was by no means neglecting my religious privileges. The second and smaller meeting-house belonged to a Methodist society. On its front were the scars of several small holes which had been stopped and covered with tin. A resident of the Castle assured me that the mischief had been done by pigeon woodpeckers,—flickers,—a statement at which I inwardly rejoiced. Long ago I had announced my belief that these enthusiastic shouters must be of the Wesleyan persuasion, and here was the proof! Otherwise, why had they never sought admission to the more imposing and, as I take it, more fashionable orthodox sanctuary? Yes, the case was clear. I could understand now how Darwin and men like him must have felt when some great hypothesis of theirs received sudden confirmation from an unexpected quarter. At the same time I was pained to see that the flickers' attempts at church-

going had met with such indifferent encouragement. Probably the minister and the class leaders would have justified their exclusiveness by an appeal to that saying about those who enter "not by the door into the sheepfold;" while the woodpeckers, on their part, might have retorted that just when they had most need to go in the door was shut.

One of my favorite jaunts was to climb this hill, or plateau, the "Hill of Storms" (I am still ignorant whether the storms in question were political, ecclesiastical, or atmospheric, but I approve the name), and go down on the other side into a narrow valley whose meanderings led me to the ocean beach. This valley, or, to speak in the local dialect, this hollow, like the parallel one in which I lived,—the valley of the Pamet,—runs quite across the Cape, from ocean to bay, a distance of two miles and a half, more or less.

At my very first sight of Dyer's Hollow I fell in love with it, and now that I have left it behind me, perhaps forever, I foresee that my memories of it are likely to be even fairer and brighter than was the place itself. I call it Dyer's Hollow upon the authority of the town historian, who told me, if I understood him correctly, that this was its name among sailors, to whom it is a landmark. By the residents of the town I commonly heard it spoken of as Longnook or Pike's Hollow, but for reasons of my own I choose to remember it by its nautical designation, though myself as far as possible from being a nautical man.

To see Dyer's Hollow at its best, the visitor should enter it at the western end, and follow its windings till he stands upon the bluff looking out upon the

Atlantic. If his sensations at all resemble mine, he will feel, long before the last curve is rounded, as if he were ascending a mountain; and an odd feeling it is, the road being level, or substantially so, for the whole distance. At the outset he is in a green, well-watered valley on the banks of what was formerly Little Harbor. The building of the railway embankment has shut out the tide, and what used to be an arm of the bay is now a body of fresh water. Luxuriant cat-tail flags fringe its banks, and cattle are feeding near by. Up from the reeds a bittern will now and then start. I should like to be here once in May, to hear the blows of his stake-driver's mallet echoing and reëchoing among the close hills. At that season, too, all the uplands would be green. So we were told, at any rate, though the pleasing story was almost impossible of belief. In August, as soon as we left the immediate vicinity of Little Harbor, the very bottom of the valley itself was parched and brown; and the look of barrenness and drought increased as we advanced, till toward the end, as the last houses were passed, the total appearance of things became subalpine: stunted, weather-beaten trees, and broad patches of bearberry showing at a little distance like beds of mountain cranberry.

All in all, Dyer's Hollow did not impress me as a promising farming country. Acres and acres of horseweed, pinweed, stone clover, poverty grass, [8] reindeer moss, mouse-ear everlasting, and bearberry! No wonder such fields do not pay for fencing-stuff. No wonder, either, that the dwellers here should be mariculturalists rather than agriculturalists. And still, although their best garden is the bay, they have their gardens on land also,—the bottoms of the deepest hollows being selected for the purpose,—and by hook or by crook manage to coax a kind of return

out of the poverty-stricken soil. Even on Cape Cod there must be some potatoes to go with the fish. Vegetables raised under such difficulties are naturally sweet to the taste, and I was not so much surprised, therefore, on a certain state occasion at the Castle, to see a mighty dish of string beans ladled into soup-plates and exalted to the dignity of a separate course. Here, too,—but this was in Dyer's Hollow,—I found in successful operation one of the latest, and, if I may venture an unprofessional opinion, one of the most valuable, improvements in the art of husbandry. An old man, an ancient mariner, no doubt, was seated on a camp-stool and plying a hoe among his cabbages. He was bent nearly double with age ("triple" is the word in my notebook, but that may have been an exaggeration), and had learned wisdom with years. I regretted afterward that I had not got over the fence and accosted him. I could hardly have missed hearing something rememberable. Yet I may have done wisely to keep the road. Industry like his ought never to be intruded upon lightly. Some, I dare say, would have called the sight pathetic. To me it was rather inspiring. Only a day or two before, in another part of the township, I had seen a man sitting in a chair among his bean-poles picking beans. Those heavy, sandy roads and steep hills must be hard upon the legs, and probably the dwellers thereabout (unlike the Lombardy poplars, which there, as elsewhere, were decaying at the top) begin to die at the lower extremities. It was not many miles from Dyer's Hollow that Thoreau fell in with the old wrecker, "a regular Cape Cod man," of whom he says that "he looked as if he sometimes saw a doughnut, but never descended to comfort." Quite otherwise was it with my wise-hearted agricultural economists; and quite otherwise shall it be with me,

also, who mean to profit by their example. If I am compelled to dig when I get old (to beg may I ever be ashamed!), I am determined not to forget the camp-stool. The Cape Cod motto shall be mine,—He that hoeth cabbages, let him do it with assiduity.

This aged cultivator, not so much "on his last legs" as beyond them, was evidently a native of the soil, but several of the few houses standing along the valley road were occupied by Western Islanders. I was crossing a field belonging to one of them when the owner greeted me; a milkman, as it turned out, proud of his cows and of his boy, his only child. "How old do you think he is?" he asked, pointing to the young fellow. It would have been inexcusable to disappoint his fatherly expectations, and I guessed accordingly: "Seventeen or eighteen." "Sixteen," he rejoined,—"sixteen!" and his face shone till I wished I had set the figure a little higher. The additional years would have cost me nothing, and there is no telling how much happiness they might have conferred. "Who lives there?" I inquired, turning to a large and well-kept house in the direction of the bay. "My nephew." "Did he come over when you did?" "No, I sent for him." He himself left the Azores as a cabin boy, landed here on Cape Cod, and settled down. Since then he had been to California, where he worked in the mines. "Ah! that was where you got rich, was it?" said I. "Rich!"—this in a tone of sarcasm. But he added, "Well, I made something." His praise of his nearest neighbor—whose name proclaimed his Cape Cod nativity—made me think well not only of his neighbor, but of him. There were forty-two Portuguese families in Truro, he said. "There are more than that in Provincetown?" I suggested. He shrugged his shoulders. "Yes, about half the people." And pretty good people they are, if

such as I saw were fair representatives. One boy of fourteen (unlike the milkman's heir, he was very small for his years, as he told me with engaging simplicity) walked by my side for a mile or two, and quite won my heart. A true Nathanael he seemed, in whom was no guile. He should never go to sea, he said; nor was he ever going to get married so long as his father lived. He loved his father so much, and he was the only boy, and his father couldn't spare him. "But didn't your father go to sea?" "Oh, yes; both my fathers went to sea." That was a puzzle; but presently it came out that his two fathers were his father and his grandfather. He looked troubled for a moment when I inquired the whereabouts of the poorhouse, in the direction of which we happened to be going. He entertained a very decided opinion that he shouldn't like to live there; a wholesome aversion, I am bound to maintain, dear Uncle Venner to the contrary notwithstanding.

A stranger was not an every-day sight in Dyer's Hollow, I imagine, and as I went up and down the road a good many times in the course of my visit, I came to be pretty well known. So it happened that a Western Islands woman came to her front door once, broom in hand and the sweetest of smiles on her face, and said, "Thank you for that five cents you gave my little boy the other day." "Put that in your pocket," I had said, and the obedient little man did as he was bidden, without so much as a side glance at the denomination of the coin. But he forgot one thing, and when his mother asked him, as of course she did, for mothers are all alike, "Did you thank the gentleman?" he could do nothing but hang his head. Hence the woman's smile and "thank you," which made me so ashamed of the paltriness of the gift (Thackeray never saw a boy without wanting to give

him a *sovereign*!) that my mention of the matter here, so far from indicating an ostentatious spirit, ought rather to be taken as a mark of humility.

All things considered, I should hardly choose to settle for life in Dyer's Hollow; but with every recollection of the place I somehow feel as if its score or two of inhabitants were favored above other men. Why is it that people living thus by themselves, and known thus transiently and from the outside as it were, always seem in memory like dwellers in some land of romance? I cannot tell, but so it is; and whoever has such a picture on the wall of his mind will do well, perhaps, never to put the original beside it. Yet I do not mean to speak quite thus of Dyer's Hollow. Once more, at least, I hope to walk the length of that straggling road. As I think of it now, I behold again those beds of shining bearberry ("resplendent" would be none too fine a word; there is no plant for which the sunlight does more), loaded with a wealth of handsome red fruit. The beach-plum crop was a failure; plum wine, of the goodness of which I heard enthusiastic reports, would be scarce; but one needed only to look at the bearberry patches to perceive that Cape Cod sand was not wanting in fertility after a manner of its own. If its energies in the present instance happened to be devoted to ornament rather than utility, it was not for an untaxed and disinterested outsider to make complaint; least of all a man who was never a wine-bibber, and who believes, or thinks he believes, in "art for art's sake." Within the woods the ground was carpeted with trailing arbutus and a profusion of checkerberry vines, the latter yielding a few fat berries, almost or quite a year old, but still sound and spicy, still tasting "like tooth-powder," as the benighted city boy expressed it. It was an especial pleasure to eat them

here in Dyer's Hollow, I had so many times done the same in another place, on the banks of Dyer's Run. Lady's-slippers likewise (nothing but leaves) looked homelike and friendly, and the wild lily of the valley, too, and the pipsissewa. Across the road from the old house nearest the ocean stood a still more ancient-seeming barn, long disused, to all appearance, but with old maid's pinks, catnip, and tall, stout pokeberry weeds yet flourishing beside it. Old maid's pinks and catnip! Could that combination have been fortuitous?

No botanist, nor even a semi-scientific lover of growing things, like myself, can ever walk in new fields without an eye for new plants. While coming down the Cape in the train I had seen, at short intervals, clusters of some strange flower,—like yellow asters, I thought. At every station I jumped off the car and looked hurriedly for specimens, till, after three or four attempts, I found what I was seeking,—the golden aster, *Chrysopsis falcata*. Here in Truro it was growing everywhere, and of course in Dyer's Hollow. Another novelty was the pale greenbrier, *Smilax glauca*, which I saw first on the hill at Provincetown, and afterward discovered in Longnook. It was not abundant in either place, and in my eyes had less of beauty than its familiar relatives, the common greenbrier (cat-brier, horse-brier, Indian-brier) of my boyhood, and the carrion flower. This glaucous smilax was one of the plants that attracted Thoreau's attention, if I remember right, though I cannot now put my finger upon his reference to it. Equally new to me, and much more beautiful, as well as more characteristic of the place, were the broom-crowberry and the greener kind of poverty grass (*Hudsonia ericoides*), inviting pillows or

cushions of which, looking very much alike at a little distance, were scattered freely over the grayish hills. These huddling, low-lying plants were among the things which bestowed upon Longnook its pleasing and remarkable mountain-top aspect. The rest of the vegetation was more or less familiar, I believe: the obtuse-leaved milkweed, of which I had never seen so much before; three sorts of goldenrod, including abundance of the fragrant *odora*; two kinds of yellow gerardia, and, in the lower lands at the western end of the valley, the dainty rose gerardia, just now coming into bloom; the pretty *Polygala polygama*,—pretty, but not in the same class with the rose gerardia; ladies' tresses; bayberry; sweet fern; crisp-leaved tansy; beach grass; huckleberry bushes, for whose liberality I had frequent occasion to be thankful; bear oak; chinquapin; chokeberry; a single vine of the Virginia creeper; wild carrot; wild cherry; the common brake,—these and doubtless many more were there, for I made no attempt at a full catalogue. There must have been wild roses along the roadside and on the edge of the thickets, I should think, yet I cannot recollect them, nor does the name appear in my penciled memoranda. Had the month been June instead of August, notebook and memory would record a very different story, I can hardly doubt; but out of flower is out of mind.

In the course of my many visits to Dyer's Hollow I saw thirty-three kinds of birds, of the eighty-four species in my full Truro list. The number of individuals was small, however, and, except at its lower end, the valley was, or appeared to be, nearly destitute of feathered life. A few song sparrows, a cat-bird or two, a chewink or two, a field sparrow, and perhaps a Maryland yellow-throat might be seen above the last houses, but as a general thing the

bushes and trees were deserted. Walking here, I could for the time almost forget that I had ever owned a hobby-horse. But farther down the hollow there was one really "birdy" spot, to borrow a word—useful enough to claim lexicographical standing—from one of my companions: a tiny grove of stunted oaks, by the roadside, just at the point where I naturally struck the valley when I approached it by way of the Hill of Storms. Here I happened upon my only Cape Cod cowbird, a full-grown youngster, who was being ministered unto in the most devoted manner by a red-eyed vireo,—such a sight as always fills me with mingled amusement, astonishment, admiration, and disgust. That any bird should be so befooled and imposed upon! Here, too, I saw at different times an adult male blue yellow-backed warbler, and a bird of the same species in immature plumage. It seemed highly probable, to say the least, that the young fellow had been reared not far off, the more so as the neighboring Wellfleet woods were spectral with hanging lichens, of the sort which this exquisite especially affects. At first I wondered why this particular little grove, by no means peculiarly inviting in appearance, should be the favorite resort of so many birds,—robins, orioles, wood pewees, kingbirds, chippers, golden warblers, black-and-white creepers, prairie warblers, red-eyed vireos, and blue yellow-backs; but I presently concluded that a fine spring of water just across the road must be the attraction. Near the spring was a vegetable garden, and here, on the 22d of August, I suddenly espied a water thrush teetering upon the tip of a bean-pole, his rich olive-brown back glistening in the sunlight. He soon dropped to the ground among the vines, and before long walked out into sight. His action when he saw me was amusing. Instead of darting back, as a

sparrow, for instance, would have done, he flew up to the nearest perch; that is, to the top of the nearest bean-pole, which happened to be a lath. Wood is one of the precious metals on Cape Cod, and if oars are used for fence-rails, and fish-nets for hen-coops, why not laths for bean-poles? The perch was narrow, but wide enough for the bird's small feet. Four times he came up in this way to look about him, and every time alighted thus on the top of a pole. At the same moment three prairie warblers were chasing each other about the garden, now clinging to the side of the poles, now alighting on their tips. It was a strange spot for prairie warblers, as it seemed to me, though they looked still more out of place a minute later, when they left the bean-patch and sat upon a rail fence in an open grassy field. Cape Cod birds, like Cape Cod men, know how to shift their course with the wind. Where else would one be likely to see prairie warblers, black-throated greens, and black-and-white creepers scrambling in company over the red shingles of a house-roof, and song sparrows singing day after day from a chimney-top?

In all my wanderings in Dyer's Hollow, only once did I see anything of that pest of the seashore, the sportsman; then, in the distance, two young fellows, with a highly satisfactory want of success, as well as I could make out, were trying to take the life of a meadow lark. No doubt they found existence a dull affair, and felt the need of something to enliven it. A noble creature is man,—"a little lower than the angels!" Two years in succession I have been at the seashore during the autumnal migration of sandpipers and plovers. Two years in succession have I seen men, old and young, murdering sandpipers and plovers at wholesale for the mere fun of doing it. Had they been "pot hunters," seeking to earn bread

by shooting for the market, I should have pitied them, perhaps,—certainly I should have regretted their work; but I should have thought no ill of them. Their vocation would have been as honorable, for aught I know, as that of any other butcher. But a man of twenty, a man of seventy, shooting sanderlings, ring plovers, golden plovers, and whatever else comes in his way, not for money, nor primarily for food, but because he enjoys the work! "A little lower than the angels!" What numbers of innocent and beautiful creatures have I seen limping painfully along the beach, after the gunners had finished their day's amusement! Even now I think with pity of one particular turnstone. Some being made "a little lower than the angels" had fired at him and carried away one of his legs. I watched him for an hour. Much of the time he stood motionless. Then he hobbled from one patch of eel-grass to another, in search of something to eat. My heart ached for him, and it burns now to think that good men find it a pastime to break birds' legs and wings and leave them to perish. I have seen an old man, almost ready for the grave, who could amuse his last days in this way for weeks together. An exhilarating and edifying spectacle it was,—this venerable worthy sitting behind his bunch of wooden decoys, a wounded tern fluttering in agony at his feet. Withal, be it said, he was a man of gentlemanly bearing, courteous, and a Christian. He did not shoot on Sunday,—not he. Such sport is to me despicable. Yet it is affirmed by those who ought to know—by those, that is, who engage in it—that it tends to promote a spirit of manliness.

But thoughts of this kind belong not in Dyer's Hollow. Rather let me remember only its stillness and tranquillity, its innocent inhabitants, its gray hills, its sandy road, and the ocean at the end of the

way. Even at the western extremity, near the railway and the busy harbor, the valley was the very abode of quietness. Here, on one of my earlier excursions, I came unexpectedly to a bridge, and on the farther side of the bridge to a tidy house and garden; and in the garden were several pear-trees, with fruit on them! Still more to my surprise, here was a little shop. The keeper of it had also the agency of some insurance company,—so a signboard informed the passer-by. As for his stock in trade,—sole leather, dry goods, etc.,—that spoke for itself. I stepped inside the door, but he was occupied with an account book, and when at last he looked up there was no speculation in his eyes. Possibly he had sold something the day before, and knew that no second customer could be expected so soon. We exchanged the time of day,—not a very valuable commodity hereabout,—and I asked him a question or two touching the hollow, and especially "the village," of which I had heard a rumor that it lay somewhere in this neighborhood. He looked bewildered at the word,—he hardly knew what I could mean, he said; but with a little prompting he recollected that a few houses between this point and North Truro (there used to be more houses than now, but they had been removed to other towns,—some of them to Boston!) were formerly called "the village." I left him to his ledger, and on passing his house I saw that he was a dealer in grain as well as in sole leather and calico, and had telephonic communication with somebody; an enterprising merchant, after all, up with the times, in spite of appearances.

The shop was like the valley, a careless tourist might have said,—a sleepy shop in Sleepy Hollow. To me it seemed not so. Peaceful, remote, sequestered,—these

and all similar epithets suited well with Longnook; but for myself, in all my loitering there I was never otherwise than wide awake. The close-lying, barren, mountainous-looking hills did not oppress the mind, but rather lifted and dilated it, and although I could not hear the surf, I felt all the while the neighborhood of the sea; not the harbor, but the ocean, with nothing between me and Spain except that stretch of water. Blessed forever be Dyer's Hollow, I say, and blessed be its inhabitants! Whether Western Islanders or "regular Cape Cod men," may they live and die in peace.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[8] In looking over the town history, I was pleased to come upon a note in defense of this lowly plant, on the score not only of its beauty, but of its usefulness in holding the sand in place; but, alas, "all men have not faith," and where the historian wrote *Hudsonia tomentosa* the antipathetic compositor set up *Hudsonia tormentosa*. That compositor was a Cape Cod man,—I would wager a dinner upon it. "Thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges," I hear him mutter, as he slips the superfluous consonant into its place.

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## FIVE DAYS ON MOUNT MANSFIELD.

ToC

"Lead him through the lovely mountain-paths,
And talk to him of things at hand and common."

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

I WENT up the mountain from the village of Stowe in very ignoble fashion,—in a wagon,—and was three hours on the passage. One of the "hands" at the Summit House occupied the front seat with the driver, and we were hardly out of the village before a seasonable toothache put him in mind of his pipe. Would smoking be offensive to me? he inquired. What could I say, having had an aching tooth before now myself? It was a pleasure almost beyond the luxury of breathing mountain air to see the misery of a fellow-mortal so quickly assuaged. The driver, a sturdy young Vermonter, was a man of different spirit. He had never used tobacco nor drunk a glass of "liquor," I heard him saying. Somebody had once offered him fifty cents to smoke a cigar.

"Why didn't you take it?" asked his companion in a tone of wonder.

"Well, I'm not that kind of a fellow, to be bought for fifty cents."

As we approached the base of the mountain, a white-throated sparrow was piping by the roadside.

"I love to hear that bird sing," said the driver.

It was now my turn to be surprised. Our man of principle was also a man of sentiment.

"What do you call him?" I inquired, as soon as I could recover myself.

"Whistling Jack," he answered; a new name to me, and a good one; it would take a nicer ear than mine to discriminate with certainty between a white-throat's voice and a school-boy's whistle.

The morning had promised well, but before we

emerged from the forest as we neared the summit we drove into a cloud, and, shortly afterward, into a pouring rain. In the office of the hotel I found a company of eight persons, four men and four women, drying themselves about the stove. They had left a village twenty miles away at two o'clock that morning in an open wagon for an excursion to the summit. Like myself, they had driven into a cloud, and up to this time had seen nothing more distant than the stable just across the road, within a stone's toss of the window, and even that only by glimpses. One of the party was a doctor, who must be at home that night. Hour after hour they watched the clouds, or rather the rain (we were so beclouded that the clouds could not be seen), and debated the situation. Finally, at three o'clock, they got into their open wagon, the rain pelting them fiercely, and started for the base. Doubtless they soon descended into clear weather, but not till they were well drenched. Verily the clouds are no respecters of persons. It is nothing to them how far you have come, nor how worthy your errand. So I reflected, having nothing better to do, when my wagonful of pilgrims had dropped out of sight in the fog—as a pebble drops into the lake—leaving me with the house to myself; and presently, as I sat at the window, I heard a white-throated sparrow singing outside. Here was one, at least, whom the rain could not discourage. A wild and yet a sweet and home-felt strain is this of "Whistling Jack,"—a mountain bird, well used to mountain weather, and just now too happy to forego his music, no matter how the storm might rage. I myself had been in a cloud often enough to feel no great degree of discomfort or lowness of spirits. I had not decided to spend the precious hours of a brief vacation upon a mountain-top without taking into account the

additional risk of unfavorable weather in such a place. Let the clouds do their worst; I could be patient and wait for the sun. But this whistling philosopher outside spoke of something better than patience, and I thanked him for the timely word.

Toward noon of the next day the rain ceased, the cloud vanished, and I made haste to clamber up the rocky peak—the Nose, so called—at the base of which the hotel is situated. Yes, there stretched Lake Champlain, visible for almost its entire length, and beyond it loomed the Adirondacks. I was glad I had come. *I* could sing now. It does a man good to look afar off.

Even before the fog lifted I had discovered, to my no small gratification, that the evergreens immediately about the house were full of gray-cheeked thrushes, a close colony, strictly confined to the low trees at the top of the mountain. They were calling at all hours, *yeep, yeep*, somewhat in the manner of young chickens; and after supper, as it grew dark, I stood on the piazza while they sang in full chorus. At least six of them were in tune at once. *Wee-o, wee-o, tit-ti wee-o*, something like this the music ran, with many variations; a most ethereal sound, at the very top of the scale, but faint and sweet; quite in tune also with my mood, for I had just come in from gazing long at the sunset, with Lake Champlain like a sea of gold for perhaps a hundred miles, and a stretch of the St. Lawrence showing far away in the north. During the afternoon, too, I had been over the long crest of the mountain to the northern peak, the highest point, belittled in local phraseology as the Chin; a delightful jaunt of two miles, with magnificent prospects all the way. It was like walking on the ridge-pole of Vermont, a truly exhilarating

experience.

All in all, though the forenoon had been so rainy, I had lived a long day, and now, if ever, could appreciate the singing of this characteristic northern songster, himself such a lover of mountains as never to be heard, here in New England, at least, and in summer-time, except amid the dwindling spruce forests of the upper slopes. I have never before seen him so familiar. On the Mount Washington range and on Mount Lafayette it is easy enough to hear his music, but one rarely gets more than a flying glimpse of the bird. Here, as I say, he was never out of hearing, and seldom long out of sight, even from the door-step. The young were already leaving the nest, and undoubtedly the birds had disposed themselves for the season before the unpainted, inoffensive-looking little hotel showed any signs of occupancy. The very next year a friend of mine visited the place and could discover no trace of them. They had found their human neighbors a vexation, perhaps, and on returning from their winter's sojourn in Costa Rica, or where not, had sought summer quarters on some less trodden peak.

Not so was it with the myrtle warblers, I venture to assert, though on this point I have never taken my friend's testimony. Perfectly at home as they are in the wildest and most desolate places, they manifest a particular fondness for the immediate vicinity of houses, delighting especially to fly about the gutters of the roof and against the window panes. Here, at the Summit House, they were constantly to be seen hawking back and forth against the side of the building, as barn swallows are given to doing in the streets of cities. The rude structure was doubly serviceable,—to me a shelter, and to the birds a fly-

trap. I have never observed any other warbler thus making free with human habitations.

This yellow-rump, or myrtle bird, is one of the thrifty members of his great family, and next to the black-poll is the most numerous representative of his tribe in Massachusetts during the spring and fall migrations; a beautiful little creature, with a characteristic flight and call, and for a song a pretty trill suggestive of the snow-bird's. Within two or three years he has been added to the summer fauna of Massachusetts, and as a son of the Bay State I rejoice in his presence and heartily bid him welcome. We shall never have too many of such citizens. I esteem him, also, as the only one of his delicate, insectivorous race who has the hardihood to spend the winter—sparingly, but with something like regularity—within the limits of New England. He has a genius for adapting himself to circumstances; picking up his daily food in the depths of a mountain forest or off the panes of a dwelling-house, and wintering, as may suit his fancy or convenience, in the West Indies or along the sea-coast of Massachusetts.

One advantage of a sojourn at the summit of any of our wooded New England mountains is the easy access thus afforded to the upper forest. While I was here upon Mount Mansfield I spent some happy hours almost every day in sauntering down the road for a mile or two, looking and listening. Just after leaving the house it was possible to hear three kinds of thrushes singing at once,—gray-cheeks, olive-backs, and hermits. Of the three the hermit is beyond comparison the finest singer, both as to voice and tune. His song, given always in three detached measures, each higher than the one before it, is

distinguished by an exquisite liquidity, the presence of *d* and *l*, I should say, as contrasted with the inferior *t* sound of the gray-cheek. If it has less variety, and perhaps less rapture, than the song of the wood-thrush, it is marked by greater simplicity and ease; and if it does not breathe the ineffable tranquillity of the veery's strain, it comes to my ear, at least, with a still nobler message. The hermit's note is aspiration rather than repose. "Peace, peace!" says the veery, but the hermit's word is, "Higher, higher!" "Spiritual songs," I call them both, with no thought of profaning the apostolic phrase.

I had been listening to thrush music (I think I could listen to it forever), and at a bend of the road had turned to admire the wooded side of the mountain, just here spread out before me, miles and miles of magnificent hanging forest, when I was attracted by a noise as of something gnawing—a borer under the bark of a fallen spruce lying at my feet. Such an industrious and contented sound! No doubt the grub would have said, "Yes, I could do *this* forever." What knew he of the beauties of the picture at which I was gazing? The very light with which to see it would have been a torture to him. Heaven itself was under the close bark of that decaying log. So peradventure, may we ourselves be living in darkness without knowing it, while spiritual intelligences look on with wondering pity to see us so in love with our prison-house. Well, yonder panorama was beautiful to *me*, at all events, however it might look to more exalted beings, and, like my brother under the spruce-tree bark, I would make the best of life as I found it.

This way my thoughts were running when all at once two birds dashed by me—a black-poll warbler in hot pursuit of an olive-backed thrush. The thrush

alighted in a tree and commenced singing, and the warbler sat by and waited, following the universal rule that a larger bird is never to be attacked except when on the wing. The thrush repeated his strain once or twice, and then flew to another tree, the little fellow after him with all speed. Again the olive-back perched and sang, and again the black-poll waited. Three times these manœuvres were repeated, before the birds passed out of my range. Some wrong-doing, real or fancied, on the part of the larger bird, had excited the ire of the warbler. Why should he be imposed upon, simply because he was small? The thrush, meantime, disdaining to defend himself, would only stop now and then to sing, as if to show to the world (every creature is the centre of a world) that such an insect persecution could never ruffle his spirit. Birds are to be commiserated, perhaps, on having such an excess of what we call human nature; but the misfortune certainly renders them the more interesting to us, who see our more amiable weaknesses so often reflected in their behavior.

For the sympathetic observer every kind of bird has its own temperament. On one of my jaunts down this Mount Mansfield road I happened to espy a Canada jay in a thick spruce. He was on one of the lower branches, but pretty soon began mounting the tree, keeping near the bole and going up limb by limb in absolute silence, exactly in the manner of our common blue jay. I was glad to see him, but more desirous to hear his voice, the loud, harsh scream with which the books credit him, and which, *a priori*, I should have little hesitation in ascribing to any member of his tribe. I waited till I grew impatient. Then I started hastily toward him, making as much commotion as possible in pushing through the

undergrowth. It was a clever scheme, but the bird was not to be surprised into uttering so much as an exclamation. He dropped out of his tree, flew a little distance to a lower and less conspicuous perch, and there I finally left him. Once before, on Mount Clinton, I had seen him, and had been treated with the same studied silence. And later, I fell in with a little family party on the side of Mount Washington, and they, too, refused me so much as a note. Probably I was too near the birds in every case, though in the third instance there was no attempt at skulking, nor any symptom of nervousness. I have often been impressed and amused by the blue jay's habit in this respect. No bird could well be noisier than he when the noisy mood takes him; but come upon him suddenly at close quarters, and he will be as still as the grave itself. He has a double gift, of eloquence and silence,—silver and gold—and no doubt his Canadian cousin is equally well endowed.

The reader may complain, perhaps, that I speak only of trifles. Why go to a mountain-top to look at warblers and thrushes? I am not careful to justify myself. I love a mountain-top, and go there because I love to be there. It is good, I think, to be lifted above the every-day level, and to enjoy the society—and the absence of society—which the heights afford. Looking over my notes of this excursion, I come upon the following sentence: "To sit on a stone beside a mountain road, with olive-backed thrushes piping on every side, the ear catching now and then the distant tinkle of a winter wren's tune, or the nearer *zee, zee, zee* of black-poll warblers, while white-throated sparrows call cheerily out of the spruce forest—this is to be in another world."

This sense of distance and strangeness is not to be

obtained, in my case at all events, by a few hours' stay in such a spot. I must pitch my tent there, for at least a night or two. I cannot even see the prospect at first, much less feel the spirit of the place. There must be time for the old life to drop off, as it were, while eye and ear grow wonted to novel sights and sounds. Doubtless I did take note of trivial things,—the call of a bird and the fragrance of a flower. It was a pleasing relief after living so long with men whose minds were all the time full of those serious and absorbing questions, "What shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed?"

I remember with special pleasure a profusion of white orchids (*Habenaria dilatata*) which bordered the roadside not far from the top, their spikes of waxy snow-white flowers giving out a rich, spicy odor hardly to be distinguished from the scent of carnation pinks. I remember, too, how the whole summit, from the Nose to the Chin, was sprinkled with the modest and beautiful Greenland sandwort, springing up in every little patch of thin soil, where nothing else would flourish, and blossoming even under the door-step of the hotel. Unpretending as it is, this little alpine adventurer makes the most of its beauty. The blossoms are not crowded into close heads, so as to lose their individual attractiveness, like the florets of the golden-rod, for example; nor are they set in a stiff spike, after the manner of the orchid just now mentioned. At the same time the plant does not trust to the single flower to bring it into notice. It grows in a pretty tuft, and throws out its blossoms in a graceful, loose cluster. The eye is caught by the cluster, and yet each flower shows by itself, and its own proper loveliness is in no way sacrificed to the general effect. How wise, too, is the

sandwort in its choice of a dwelling-place! In the valley it would be lost amid the crowd. On the bare, brown mountain-top its scattered tufts of green and white appeal to all comers.

To what extent, if at all, the sandwort depends upon the service of insects for its fertilization, I do not know, but it certainly has no scarcity of such visitors. "Bees will soar for bloom high as the highest peak of Mansfield;" so runs an entry in my notebook, with a pardonable adaptation of Wordsworth's line; and I was glad to notice that even the splendid black-and-yellow butterfly (*Turnus*), which was often to be seen sucking honey from the fragrant orchids, did not disdain to sip also from the sandwort's cup. This large and elegant butterfly—our largest—is thoroughly at home on our New England mountains, sailing over the very loftiest peaks, and making its way through the forests with a strong and steady flight. Many a time have I taken a second look at one, as it has threaded the treetops over my head, thinking to see a bird. Besides the *Turnus*, I noted here the nettle tortoise-shell butterfly (*Vanessa Milberti*—a showy insect, and the more attractive to me as being comparatively a stranger); the common cabbage butterfly; the yellow *Philodice*; the copper; and, much more abundant than any of these, a large orange-red fritillary (*Aphrodite*, I suppose), gorgeously bedecked with spots of silver on the under surface of the wings. All these evidently knew that plenty of flowers were to be found along this seemingly barren, rocky crest. Whether they have any less sensuous motive for loving to wander over such heights, who will presume to determine? It may very well be that their almost ethereal structure—such spread of wing with such lightness of body—is only the outward sign of gracious thoughts and

feelings, of a sensitiveness to beauty far surpassing anything of which we ourselves are capable. What a contrast between them and the grub gnawing ceaselessly under the spruce-tree bark! Can the highest angel be as far above the lowest man? And yet (how mysteriously suggestive would the fact be, if only it were new to us!) this same light-winged Aphrodite, flitting from blossom to blossom in the mountain breeze, was but a few days ago an ugly, crawling thing, close cousin to the borer. Since then it has fallen asleep and been changed,—a parable, past all doubt, though as yet we lack eyes to read it.

I have spoken hitherto as if I were the only sojourner at the summit, but there was another man, though I seldom saw him; a kind of hermit, living in a little shanty under the lee of the Nose. Almost as a matter of course he was reputed to be of good family and to read Greek, and the fact that he now and then received a bank draft evidently gave him a respectable standing in the eye of the hotel clerk. Something—something of a very romantic nature, we may be sure—had driven him away from the companionship of his fellows, but he still found it convenient to be within reach of human society. Like all such solitaries, he had some half-insane notions. He could not sleep indoors, not for a night; it would ruin his health, if I understood him correctly; and because of wild animals—bears and what not—he made his bed on the roof of his hermitage. I had often dreamed of the enjoyment of a life in the woods all by one's self, but such a mode of existence did not gain in attractiveness as I saw it here in the concrete example. On the whole I was well satisfied to sleep in the hotel and eat at the hotel table. Liberty is good, but I thought it might be undesirable to be a slave to my own freedom.

Two or three times a wagon-load of tourists appeared at the hotel. They strolled about the summit, admired the prospect, picked a bunch of sandwort, perhaps, but especially they went to see the snow. They had been at much trouble to stand upon the highest land in Vermont, and now that they were here, they wished to do or see something unique, something that should mark the day as eventful. So they were piloted to a cave midway between the Nose and the Chin, into which the sun never peeped, and wherein a snow-bank still lingered. The mountain was grand, the landscape was magnificent, but to eat a handful of snow and throw a snow-ball in the middle of July—this was almost like being at the North Pole; it would be something to talk about after getting home.

One visitor I rejoiced to see, though a stranger. I was on the Nose in the afternoon, enjoying once more the view of Lake Champlain and the Adirondacks, when I descried two men far off toward the Chin. They had come up the mountain, not by the carriage road, but by a trail on the opposite side, and plainly were in no haste, though the afternoon was wearing away. As I watched their movements, a mile or two in the distance, I said to myself, "Good! they are botanists." So it proved; or rather one of them was a botanist,—a college professor on a pedestrian collecting-excursion. We compared notes after supper and walked together the next morning, enjoying that peculiar good fellowship which nothing but a kindred interest and an unexpected meeting in a lonesome place can make possible. Then he started down the carriage road with the design of exploring Smugglers' Notch, and I have never seen or heard from him since. I hope he is still botanizing on the shores of time, and finding many a precious rarity;

and should he ever read this reference to himself, may it be with a feeling as kindly as that with which the lines are written.

That afternoon I followed him, somewhat unexpectedly. I went down, as I had come up, on wheels; but I will not say in ignoble fashion, for the driver—the hotel proprietor himself—was in haste, the carriage had no brake, and the speed with which we rattled down the steep pitches and round the sharp curves, with the certainty that if anything should break, the horse would run and our days would be ended,—these things, and especially the latter consideration, of which I thought and the other man spoke, made the descent one of pleasurable excitement. We reached the base in safety and I was left at the nearest farmhouse, where by dint of some persuasion the housewife was induced to give me a lodging for the night, so that on the morrow I might make a long day in Smugglers' Notch, a famous botanical resort between Mount Mansfield and Mount Sterling, which I had for years been desirous of visiting.

I would gladly have stayed longer on the heights, but it was pleasant also to be once more in the lowlands; to walk out after supper and look up instead of down, while the chimney swifts darted hither and thither with their merry, breathless cacklings. How welcome, too, were the hearty music of the robin and the carol of the grass finch! After all, I thought, home is in the valley; but the whistle of the white-throat reminded me that I was not yet back in Massachusetts.

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## A WIDOW AND TWINS.

ToC

"The fatherless and the widow ... shall eat and be satisfied."—DEUTERONOMY xiv. 29.

ON the 1st of June, 1890, I formally broke away from ornithological pursuits. For two months, more or less,—till the autumnal migration should set in,—I was determined to have my thoughts upon other matters. There is no more desirable plaything than an outdoor hobby, but a man ought not to be forever in the saddle. Such, at all events, had always been my opinion, so that I long ago promised myself never to become, what some of my acquaintances, perhaps with too much reason, were now beginning to consider me, a naturalist, and nothing else. That would be letting the hobby-horse run away with its owner. For the time being, then, birds should pass unnoticed, or be looked at only when they came in my way. A sensible resolve. But the maker of it was neither Mede nor Persian, as the reader, if he have patience enough, may presently discover for himself.

As I sat upon the piazza, in the heat of the day, busy or half busy with a book, a sound of humming-bird's wings now and then fell on my ear, and, as I looked toward the honeysuckle vine, I began after a while to remark that the visitor was invariably a female. I watched her probe the scarlet tubes and dart away, and then returned to my page. She might have a nest somewhere near; but if she had there was small likelihood of my finding it, and, besides, I was just now not concerned with such trifles. On the 24th of June, however, a passing neighbor dropped into the yard. Was I interested in humming-birds? he inquired. If so, he could show me a nest. I put down my book, and went with him at once.

The beautiful structure, a model of artistic workmanship, was near the end of one of the lower branches of an apple-tree, eight or ten feet from the ground, saddled upon the drooping limb at a point where two offshoots made a good holding-place, while an upright twig spread over it a leafy canopy against rain and sun. Had the builders sought my advice as to a location, I could hardly have suggested one better suited to my own convenience. The tree was within a stone's toss of my window, and, better still, the nest was overlooked to excellent advantage from an old bank wall which divided my premises from those of my next-door neighbor. How could I doubt that Providence itself had set me a summer lesson?

At our first visit the discoverer of the nest—from that moment an ornithologist—brought out a step-ladder, and we looked in upon the two tiny white eggs, considerately improving a temporary absence of the owner for that purpose. It was a picture to please not only the eye, but the imagination; and before I could

withdraw my gaze the mother bird was back again, whisking about my head so fearlessly that for a moment I stood still, half expecting her to drop into the nest within reach of my hand.

This, as I have said, was on the 24th of June. Six days later, on the afternoon of the 30th, the eggs were found to be hatched, and two lifeless-looking things lay in the bottom of the nest, their heads tucked out of sight, and their bodies almost or quite naked, except for a line of grayish down along the middle of the back.

Meanwhile, I had been returning with interest the visits of the bird to our honeysuckle, and by this time had fairly worn a path to a certain point in the wall, where, comfortably seated in the shade of the hummer's own tree, and armed with opera-glass and notebook, I spent some hours daily in playing the spy upon her motherly doings.

For a widow with a house and family upon her hands, she took life easily; at frequent intervals she absented herself altogether, and even when at home she spent no small share of the time in flitting about among the branches of the tree. On such occasions, I often saw her hover against the bole or a patch of leaves, or before a piece of caterpillar or spider web, making quick thrusts with her bill, evidently after bits of something to eat. On quitting the nest, she commonly perched upon one or another of a certain set of dead twigs in different parts of the tree, and at once shook out her feathers and spread her tail, displaying its handsome white markings, indicative of her sex. This was the beginning of a leisurely toilet operation, in the course of which she scratched herself with her feet and dressed her feathers with

her bill, all the while darting out her long tongue with lightning-like rapidity, as if to moisten her beak, which at other times she cleansed by rubbing it down with her claws or by wiping it upon a twig. In general she paid little attention to me, though she sometimes hovered directly in front of my face, as if trying to stare me out of countenance. One of the most pleasing features of the show was her method of flying into the nest. She approached it, without exception, from the same quarter, and, after an almost imperceptible hovering motion, shut her wings and dropped upon the eggs.

When the young were hatched I redoubled my attentions. Now I should see her feed them. On the first afternoon I waited a long time for this purpose, the mother conducting herself in her customary manner: now here, now there, preening her plumage, driving away a meddlesome sparrow, probing the florets of a convenient clover-head (an unusual resource, I think), or snatching a morsel from some leaf or twig. Suddenly she flew at me, and held herself at a distance of perhaps four feet from my nose. Then she wheeled, and, as I thought, darted out of the orchard. In a few seconds I turned my head, and there she sat in the nest! I owned myself beaten. While I had been gazing toward the meadow, she had probably done exactly what I had wasted the better part of the afternoon in attempting to see.

Twenty-four hours later I was more successful, though the same ruse was again tried upon me. The mother left the nest at my approach, but in three minutes (by the watch) flew in again. She brooded for nine minutes. Then, quite of her own motion, she disappeared for six minutes. On her return she spent four minutes in dressing her feathers, after which she

alighted on the edge of the nest, fed the little ones, and took her place upon them. This time she brooded for ten minutes. Then she was away for six minutes, dallied about the tree for two minutes longer, and again flew into the nest. While sitting, she pecked several times in quick succession at a twig within reach, and I could plainly see her mandibles in motion, as if she were swallowing. She brooded for thirteen minutes, absented herself for three minutes, and spent six minutes in her usual cautionary manœuvres before resuming her seat. For the long interval of twenty-two minutes she sat still. Then she vanished for four minutes, and on her return gave the young another luncheon, after a fast of one hour and six minutes.

The feeding process, which I had been so desirous to see, was of a sort to make the spectator shiver. The mother, standing on the edge of the nest, with her tail braced against its side, like a woodpecker or a creeper, took a rigidly erect position, and craned her neck until her bill was in a perpendicular line above the short, wide-open, upraised beak of the little one, who, it must be remembered, was at this time hardly bigger than a humble-bee. Then she thrust her bill for its full length down into his throat, a frightful-looking act, followed by a series of murderous gesticulations, which fairly made one observer's blood run cold.

On the day after this (on the 2d of July, that is to say) I climbed into the tree, in the old bird's absence, and stationed myself where my eyes were perhaps fifteen feet from the nest, and a foot or two above its level. At the end of about twenty minutes, the mother, who meantime had made two visits to the tree, flew into place, and brooded for seventeen

minutes. Then she disappeared again, and on her return, after numberless pretty feints and sidelong approaches, alighted on the wall of the nest, and fed both little ones. The operation, though still sufficiently reckless, looked less like infanticide than before,—a fact due, as I suppose, to my more elevated position, from which the nestlings' throats were better seen. After this she brooded for another seventeen minutes. On the present occasion, as well as on many others, it was noticeable that, while sitting upon the young, she kept up an almost incessant motion, as if seeking to warm them, or perhaps to develop their muscles by a kind of massage treatment. A measure of such hitchings and fidgetings might have meant nothing more than an attempt to secure for herself a comfortable seat; but when they were persisted in for fifteen minutes together, it was difficult not to believe that she had some different end in view. Possibly, as human infants get exercise by dandling on the mother's knee, the baby humming-bird gets his by this parental kneading process. Whether brooding or feeding, it must be said that the hummer treated her tiny charges with no particular carefulness, so far as an outsider could judge.

The next day I climbed again into the tree. The mother bird made off at once, and did not resume her seat for almost an hour, though she would undoubtedly have done so earlier but for my presence. Again and again she perched near me, her bill leveled straight at my face. Finally she alighted on the nest, and, after considerable further delay, as if to assure herself that everything was quite safe, fed the two chicks from her throat, as before. "She thrust her bill into their mouths so far" (I quote my notes) "that the tips of their short little beaks were up

against the root of her mandibles!"

Only once more, on the 4th of July, I ventured into the apple-tree. For more than an hour and a half I waited. Times without number the mother came buzzing into the tree, made the circuit of her favorite perches, dressed her plumage, darted away again, and again returned, till I was almost driven to get down, for her relief. At last she fed the nestlings, who by this time must have been all but starved, as indeed they seemed to be. "The tips of their bills *do* come clean up to the base of the mother's mandibles." So I wrote in my journal; for it is the first duty of a naturalist to verify his own observations.

On the 10th we again brought out the ladder. Though at least eleven days old, the tiny birds—the "widow's mites," as my facetious neighbor called them—were still far from filling the cup. While I stood over it, one of them uttered some pathetic little cries that really went to my heart. His bill, perceptibly longer than on the 5th, was sticking just above the border of the nest. I touched it at the tip, but he did not stir. Craning my neck, I could see his open eye. Poor, helpless things! Yet within three months they would be flying to Central America, or some more distant clime. How little they knew what was before them! As little as I know what is before me.

The violence of the feeding act was now at its height, I think, but it would be impossible to do justice to it by any description. My neighbor, who one day stood beside me looking on, was moved to loud laughter. When the two beaks were tightly joined, and while the old bird's was being gradually withdrawn, they were shaken convulsively,—by the mother's attempts

to disgorge, and perhaps by the young fellow's efforts to hasten the operation. It was plain that he let go with reluctance, as a boy sucks the very tip of the spoon to get the last drop of jam; but, as will be mentioned in the course of the narrative, his behavior improved greatly in this respect as he grew older.

On the 12th, just after the little ones had been fed, one of them got his wings for the first time above the wall of the nest, and fluttered them with much spirit. He had spent almost a fortnight in the cradle, and was beginning to think he had been a baby long enough.

From the first I had kept in mind the question whether the feeding of the young by regurgitation, as described briefly by Audubon, and more in detail by Mr. William Brewster,[9] would be continued after the nestlings were fully grown. On the 14th I wrote in my journal: "The method of feeding remains unchanged, and, as it seems, is likely to remain so to the end. It must save the mother much labor in going and coming, and perhaps renders the coöperation of the male parent unnecessary." This prediction was fulfilled, but with a qualification to be hereafter specified.

Every morning, now, I went to the apple-tree uncertain whether the nest would not be found empty. According to Audubon, Nuttall, Mr. Burroughs, and Mrs. Treat, young humming-birds stay in the nest only seven days. Mr. Brewster, in his notes already cited, says that the birds on which his observations were made—in the garden of Mr. E. S. Hoar, in Concord—were hatched on the 4th of July, [10] and forsook the nest on the 18th. My birds were

already fifteen days old, at least, and, unless they were to prove uncommonly backward specimens, ought to be on the wing forthwith. Nevertheless they were in no haste. Day after day passed. The youngsters looked more and more like old birds, and the mother grew constantly more and more nervous.

On the 18th I found her in a state of unprecedented excitement, squeaking almost incessantly. At first I attributed this to concern at my presence, but after a while it transpired that a young oriole—a blundering, tailless fellow—was the cause of the disturbance. By some accident he had dropped into the leafy treetop, as guiltless of any evil design as one of her own nestlings. How she did buzz about him! In and out among the branches she went, now on this side of him, now on that, and now just over his back; all the time squeaking fiercely, and carrying her tail spread to its utmost. The scene lasted for some minutes. Through it all the two young birds kept perfectly quiet, never once putting up their heads, even when the mother, buzzing and calling, zigzagged directly about the nest. I had seen many birds in the tree, first and last, but none that created anything like such a stir. The mother was literally in a frenzy. She went the round of her perches, but could stay nowhere. Once she dashed out of the tree for an instant, and drove a sparrow away from the tomato patch. Ordinarily his presence there would not have annoyed her in the least, but in her present state of mind she was ready to pounce upon anybody. All of which shows once more how "human-like" birds are. The bewilderment of the oriole was comical. "What on earth can this crazy thing be shooting about my ears in this style for?" I imagined him saying to himself. In fact, as he glanced my way, now and then, with his innocent

baby face, I could almost believe that he was appealing to me with some such inquiry.

The next morning ("at 7.32," as my diary is careful to note) one of the twins took his flight. I was standing on the wall, with my glass leveled upon the nest, when I saw him exercising his wings. The action was little more pronounced than had been noticed at intervals during the last three or four days, except that he was more decidedly on his feet. Suddenly, without making use of the rim of the nest, as I should have expected him to do, he was in the air, hovering in the prettiest fashion, and in a moment more had alighted on a leafless twig slightly above the level of the nest, and perhaps a yard from it. Within a minute the mother appeared, buzzing and calling, with answering calls from the youthful adventurer. At once—after a hasty reconnaissance of the man on the wall—she perched beside him, and plunged her bill into his throat. Then she went to the nest, served the other one in the same way, and made off. She had no time to waste at this juncture of affairs.

When she had gone, I stepped up to the trunk of the tree to watch the little fellow more closely. He held his perch, and occupied himself with dressing his plumage, though, as the breeze freshened, he was compelled once in a while to keep his wings in motion to prevent the wind from carrying him away. When the old bird returned,—in just half an hour,—she resented my intrusion (what an oppressor of the widow and the fatherless she must by this time have thought me!) in the most unmistakable manner, coming more than once quite within reach. However, she soon gave over these attempts at intimidation, perched beside the percher, and again put something into his maw. This time she did not feed the nestling.

As she took her departure, she told the come-outer—or so I fancied—that there was a man under the tree, a pestilent fellow, and it would be well to get a little out of his reach. At all events, she had scarcely disappeared before the youngster was again on the wing. It was wonderful how much at home he seemed,—poising, backing, soaring, and alighting with all the ease and grace of an old hand. One only piece of awkwardness I saw him commit: he dropped upon a branch much too large for his tiny feet, and was manifestly uncomfortable. But he did not stay long, and at his next alighting was well up in the tree, where it was noticeable that he remained ever after.

With so much going on outside, it was hard to remain indoors, and finally I took a chair to the orchard, and gave myself up to watching the drama. The feeding process, though still always by regurgitation, was by this time somewhat different from what it had been when the bills of the young were less fully developed. In my notes of this date I find the following description of it: "Number Two is still in the nest, but uneasy. At 10.25 the mother appeared and fed him. [11]Her beak was thrust into his mouth at right angles,—the change being necessitated, probably, by the greater length of his bill,—and he seemed to be jerking strenuously at it. Then he opened his beak and remained motionless, while the black mandibles of the mother could be seen running down out of sight into his throat."

The other youngster, Number One, as I now called him, stayed in the tree, or at most ventured only into the next one, and was fed at varying intervals,—as often, apparently, as the busy mother could find anything to give him. Would he go back to his cradle

for the night? It seemed not improbable, notwithstanding he had shown no sign of such an intention so long as daylight lasted. At 3.50 the next morning, therefore, I stole out to see. No: Number Two was there alone.

At seven o'clock, when I made my second visit, the mother was in the midst of another day's hard work. Twice within five minutes she brought food to the nestling. Once the little fellow—not so very little now—happened to be facing east, while the old bird alighted, as she had invariably done, on the western side. The youngster, instead of facing about, threw back his head and opened his beak. "Look out, there!" exclaimed my fellow-observer; "you'll break his neck if you feed him in that way." But she did not mind. Young birds' necks are not so easily broken. Within ten minutes of this time she fed Number One, giving him three doses. They were probably small, however (and small wonder), for he begged hard for more, opening his bill with an appealing air. The action in this case was particularly well seen, and the vehement jerking, while the beaks were glued together, seemed almost enough to pull the young fellow's head off. Within another ten minutes the mother was again ministering to Number Two! Poor little widow! Between her incessant labors of this kind and her overwhelming anxiety whenever any strange bird came near, I began to be seriously alarmed for her. As a member of a strictly American family, she was in a fair way, I thought, to be overtaken by the "most American of diseases,"—nervous prostration. It tired me to watch her.

With us, and perhaps with her likewise, it was a question whether Number Two would remain in the nest for the day. He grew more and more restless; as

my companion—a learned man—expressed it, he began to "ramp round." Once he actually mounted the rim of the nest, a thing which his more precocious brother had never been seen to do, and stretched forward to pick at a neighboring stem. Late that afternoon the mother fed him five times within an hour, instead of once an hour, or thereabouts, as had been her habit three weeks before. She meant to have him in good condition for the coming event; and he, on his part, was active to the same end,—standing upon the wall of the nest again and again, and exercising his wings till they made a cloud about him. A dread of launching away still kept him back, however, and shortly after seven o'clock I found him comfortably disposed for the night. "He is now on his twenty-first day (at least) in the nest. To-morrow will see him go." So end my day's notes.

At 5.45 the next morning he was still there. At 6.20 I absented myself for a few minutes, and on returning was hailed by my neighbor with the news that the nest was empty. Number Two had flown between 6.25 and 6.30, but, unhappily, neither of us was at hand to give him a cheer. I trust that he and his mother were not hurt in their feelings by the oversight. The whole family (minus the father) was still in the apple-tree; the mother full, and more than full, of business, feeding one youngster after the other, as they sat here and there in the upper branches.

Twenty-four hours later, as I stood in the orchard, I heard a hum of wings, and found the mother over my head. Presently she flew into the top of the tree, and the next instant was sitting beside one of the young ones. His hungry mouth was already wide open, but before feeding him she started up from the

twig, and circled about him so closely as almost or quite to touch him with her wings. On completing the circle she dropped upon the perch at his side, but immediately rose again, and again flew round him. It was a beautiful act,—beautiful beyond the power of any words of mine to set forth; an expression of maternal ecstasy, I could not doubt, answering to the rapturous caresses and endearments in which mothers of human infants are so frequently seen indulging. Three days afterward, to my delight, I saw it repeated in every particular, as if to confirm my opinion of its significance. The sight repaid all my watchings thrice over, and even now I feel my heart growing warm at the recollection of it. Strange thoughtlessness, is it not, which allows mothers capable of such passionate devotion, tiny, defenseless things, to be slaughtered by the million for the enhancement of woman's charms!

At this point we suddenly became aware that for at least a day or two the old bird had probably been feeding her offspring in two ways,—sometimes by regurgitation, and sometimes by a simple transfer from beak to beak. The manner of our discovery was somewhat laughable. The mother perched beside one of the young birds, put her bill into his, and then apparently fell off the limb head first. We thought she had not finished, and looked to see her return; but she flew away, and after a while the truth dawned upon us. Thereafter, unless our observation was at fault, she used whichever method happened to suit her convenience. If she found a choice collection of spiders, [12] for instance, she brought them in her throat (as cedar-birds carry cherries),to save trips; if she had only one or two, she retained them between her mandibles. It will be understood, I suppose, that we did not see the food in its passage

from one bird to the other,—human eyesight would hardly be equal to work of such nicety; but the two bills were put together so frequently and in so pronounced a manner as to leave us in no practical uncertainty about what was going on. Neither had I any doubt that the change was connected in some way with the increasing age of the fledgelings; yet it is to be said that the two methods continued to be used interchangeably to the end, and on the 28th, when Number Two had been out of the nest for seven days, the mother thrust her bill down his throat, and repeated the operation, just as she had done three weeks before.

For at least two days longer, as I believe, the faithful creature continued her loving ministrations, although I failed to detect her in the act. Then, on the 1st of August, as I sat on the piazza, I saw her for the last time. The honeysuckle vine had served her well, and still bore half a dozen scattered blossoms, as if for her especial benefit. She hovered before them, one by one, and in another instant was gone. May the Fates be kind to her, and to her children after her, to the latest generation! Our intercourse had lasted for eight weeks,—wanting one day,—and it was fitting that it should end where it had begun, at the sign of the honeysuckle.

The absence of the father bird for all this time, though I have mentioned it but casually, was of course a subject of continual remark. How was it to be explained? My own opinion is, reluctant as I have been to reach it, that such absence or desertion—by whatever name it may be called—is the general habit of the male ruby-throat. Upon this point I shall have some things to say in a subsequent paper.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[9] *The Auk*, vol. vii. p. 206.

[10] But Mr. Hoar, from whom Mr. Brewster had his dates, informs me that the time of hatching was not certainly known; and from Mr. Brewster's statement about the size of the nestlings, I cannot doubt that they had been out of the shell some days longer than Mr. Hoar then supposed.

[11] For convenience, I use the masculine pronoun in speaking of both the young birds; but I knew nothing as to the sex of either of them, though I came finally to believe that one was a male and the other a female.

[12] Mr. E. H. Eames reports (in *The Auk*, vol. vii. p. 287) that, on dissecting a humming-bird, about two days old, he found sixteen young spiders in its throat, and a pultaceous mass of the same in its stomach.

## THE MALE RUBY-THROAT.

ToC

"Your fathers, where are they?"—ZECHARIAH i. 5.

WHILE keeping daily watch upon a nest of our common humming-bird, in the summer of 1890, I was struck with the persistent absence of the head of the family. As week after week elapsed, this feature of the case excited more and more remark, and I turned to my out-of-door journal for such meagre notes as it contained of a similar nest found five years before. From these it appeared that at that time, also, the father bird was missing. Could such truancy be habitual with the male ruby-throat? I had never supposed that any of our land birds were given to behaving in this ill-mannered, unnatural way, and the matter seemed to call for investigation.

My first resort was, of course, to books. The language of Wilson and Audubon is somewhat ambiguous, but may fairly be taken as implying the male bird's presence throughout the period of nidification. Nuttall speaks explicitly to the same effect, though with no specification of the grounds on which his statement is based. The later systematic biographers —Brewer, Samuels, Minot, and the authors of New England Bird Life—are silent in respect to the point. Mr. Burroughs, in Wake-Robin, mentions having found two nests, and gives us to understand that he saw only the female birds. Mrs. Treat, on the other hand, makes the father a conspicuous figure about the single nest concerning which she reports. Mr. James Russell Lowell, too, speaks of watching both parents as they fed the young ones: "The mother always alighted, while the father as uniformly remained upon the wing."

So far, then, the evidence was decidedly, not to say decisively, in the masculine ruby-throat's favor. But while I had no desire to make out a case against him, and in fact was beginning to feel half ashamed of my uncomplimentary surmises, I was still greatly impressed with what my own eyes had seen, or rather had not seen, and thought it worth while to push the inquiry a little further.

I wrote first to Mr. E. S. Hoar, in whose garden Mr. Brewster had made the observations cited in my previous article. He replied with great kindness, and upon the point in question said: "I watched the nest two or three times a day, from a time before the young were hatched till they departed; and *now you mention it*, it occurs to me that I never did see the male, but only the white-breasted female."

Next I sought the testimony of professional ornithologists; and here my worst suspicions seemed in a fair way to be confirmed, although the greater number of my correspondents were unhappily compelled to plead a want of knowledge. Dr. A. K. Fisher had found, as he believed, not less than twenty-five nests, and to the best of his recollection had never seen a male bird near one of them after it was completed. He had watched the female feeding her young, and, when the nests contained eggs, had waited for hours on purpose to secure the male, but always without result.

Mr. William Brewster wrote: "I have found, or seen *in situ*, twelve hummers' nests, all in Massachusetts. Of these I took nine, after watching each a short time, probably not more than an hour or two in any case. Of the remaining three, I visited one three or four times at various hours of the day, another only twice, the third but once. Two of the three contained young when found. The third was supposed to have young, also, but could not be examined without danger to its contents. I have never seen a male hummer anywhere near a nest, either before or after the eggs were laid, but, as you will gather from the above brief data, my experience has not been extensive; and in the old days, when most of my nests were found, the methods of close watching now in vogue were unthought of. In the light of the testimony to which you refer, I should conclude, with you, that the male hummer must occasionally assist in the care of the young, but I am very sure that this is not usually, if indeed often, the case."

Mr. H. W. Henshaw reported a similar experience. He had found four nests of the ruby-throat, but had seen no male about any of them after nidification

was begun. "I confess," he says, "that I had never thought of his absence as being other than accidental, and hence have never made any observations directly upon the point; so that my testimony is of comparatively little value. In at least one instance, when the female was building her nest, I remember to have seen the male fly with her and perch near by, while she was shaping the nest, and then fly off with her after more material. I don't like to believe that the little villain leaves the entire task of nidification to his better half (we may well call her better, if he does); but my memory is a blank so far as testimony affirmative of his devotion is concerned." Mr. Henshaw recalls an experience with a nest of the Rivoli humming-bird (*Eugenes fulgens*), in Arizona,—a nest which he spent two hours in getting. "I was particularly anxious to secure the male, but did not obtain a glimpse of him, and I remember thinking that it was very strange." He adds that Mr. C. W. Richmond has told him of finding a nest and taking the eggs without seeing the father bird, and sums up his own view of the matter thus:—

"Had any one asked me offhand, 'Does the male hummer help the female feed the young?' I am quite sure I should have answered, 'Of course he does.' As the case now stands, however, I am inclined to believe him a depraved wretch."

Up to this point the testimony of my correspondents had been unanimous, but the unanimity was broken by Dr. C. Hart Merriam, who remembers that on one occasion his attention was called to a nest (it proved to contain a set of fresh eggs) by the flying of both its owners about his head; and by Mr. W. A. Jeffries, who in one case saw the father bird in the vicinity of a nest occupied by young ones, although he did not

see him feed or visit them. This nest, Mr. Jeffries says, was one of five which he has found. In the four other instances no male birds were observed, notwithstanding three of the nests were taken,—a tragedy which might be expected to bring the father of the family upon the scene, if he were anywhere within call.

In view of the foregoing evidence, it appears to me reasonably certain that the male ruby-throat, as a rule, takes no considerable part in the care of eggs and young. The testimony covers not less than fifty nests. Some of them were watched assiduously, nearly all were examined, and the greater part were actually taken; yet of the fifty or more male proprietors, only two were seen; and concerning these exceptions, it is to be noticed that in one case the eggs were just laid, and in the other, while the hungry nestlings must have kept the mother bird extremely busy, her mate was not observed to do anything in the way of lightening her labors.

As against this preponderance of negative testimony, and in corroboration of Mr. Lowell's and Mrs. Treat's circumstantial narratives, there remain to be mentioned the fact communicated to me by Mr. Hoar, that a townsman of his had at different times had two hummers' nests in his grounds, the male owners of which were constant in their attentions, and the following very interesting and surprising story received from Mr. C. C. Darwin, of Washington, through the kindness of Mr. Henshaw. Some years ago, as it appears, a pair of ruby-throats built a nest within a few feet of Mr. Darwin's window and a little below it, so that they could be watched without fear of disturbing them. He remembers perfectly that the male fed the female during the entire period of

incubation, "pumping the food down her throat." All this time, so far as could be discovered, the mother did not once leave the nest (in wonderful contrast with my bird of a year ago), and of course the father was never seen to take her place. Mr. Darwin cannot say that the male ever fed the young ones, but is positive that he was frequently about the nest after they were hatched. While they were still too young to fly, a gardener, in pruning the tree, sawed off the limb on which the nest was built. Mr. Darwin's mother rescued the little ones and fed them with sweetened water, and on her son's return at night the branch was fixed in place again, as best it could be, by means of wires. Meanwhile the old birds had disappeared, having given up their children for lost; and it was not until the third day that they came back,—by chance, perhaps, or out of affection for the spot. At once they resumed the care of their offspring, who by this time, it is safe to say, had become more or less surfeited with sugar and water, and gladly returned to a diet of spiders and other such spicy and hearty comestibles.

Mr. Henshaw, with an evident satisfaction which does him honor, remarks upon the foregoing story as proving that, whatever may be true of male hummers in general, there are at least some faithful Benedicts among them. For myself, indeed, as I have already said, I hold no brief against the ruby-throat, and, notwithstanding the seemingly unfavorable result of my investigation into his habits as a husband and father, it is by no means clear to me that we must call him hard names. Before doing that, we ought to know not only that he stays away from his wife and children, but *why* he stays away; whether he is really a shirk, or absents himself unselfishly and for their better protection, at the risk of being misunderstood

and traduced. My object in this paper is to raise that question about him, rather than to blacken his character; in a word, to call attention to him, not as a reprobate, but as a mystery. To that end I return to the story of my own observations.

In last month's article [13] I set forth somewhat in detail (if the adverb seem inappropriate, as I fear it will, I can only commend it to the reader's mercy) the closeness of our watch upon the nest there described. For more than a month it was under the eye of one or other of two men almost from morning till night. We did not once detect the presence of the father, and yet I shall never feel absolutely sure that he did not one day pay us a visit. I mention the circumstance for what it may be worth, and because, whatever its import, it was at least a lively spectacle. It occurred upon this wise: On the 19th of July, the day when the first of the young birds bade good-by to its cradle, I had gone into the house, leaving my fellow-observer in the orchard, with a charge to call me if anything noteworthy should happen. I was hardly seated before he whistled loudly, and I hastened out again. Another hummer had been there, he said, and the mother had been chasing him (or her) about in a frantic manner; and even while we were talking, the scene was reënacted. The stranger had returned, and the two birds were shooting hither and thither through the trees, the widow squeaking and spreading her tail at a prodigious rate. The new-comer did not alight (it couldn't), and there was no determining its sex. It may have been the recreant husband and father, unable longer to deny himself a look at his bairns,—who knows? Or it may have been some bachelor or widower who had come a-wooing. One thing is certain,—husband, lover, or inquisitive

stranger, he had no encouragement to come again.

As if to heighten the dramatic interest of our studies (I come now to the promised mystery), we had already had the singular good fortune to find a male humming-bird who seemed to be stationed permanently in a tall ash-tree, standing by itself in a recent clearing, at a distance of a mile or more from our widow's orchard. Day after day, for at least a fortnight (from the 2d to the 15th of July), he remained there. One or both of us went almost daily to call upon him, and, as far as we could make out, he seldom absented himself from his post for five minutes together! What was he doing? At first, in spite of his sex, it was hard not to believe that his nest was in the tree; and to satisfy himself, my companion "shinned" it, schoolboy fashion,—a frightful piece of work, which put me out of breath even to look at it,—while I surveyed the branches from all sides through an opera-glass. All was without avail. Nothing was to be seen, and it was as good as certain, the branches being well separated, and easily overlooked, that there was nothing there.

Four days later I set out alone, to try my luck with the riddle. As I entered the clearing, the hummer was seen at his post, and my suspicions fastened upon a small wild apple-tree, perhaps twenty rods distant. I went to examine it, and presently the bird followed me. He perched in its top, but seemed not to be jealous of my proximity, and soon returned to his customary position; but when I came back to the apple-tree, after a visit to a clump of oaks at the top of the hill, he again came over. I could find no sign of a nest, however, nor did the female show herself, as she pretty confidently might have been expected to do had her nest been near by. After this I went to

the edge of the wood, where I could keep an eye upon both trees without being myself conspicuous. The sentinel spent most of his time in the ash, visiting the apple-tree but once, and then for a few minutes only. I stayed an hour and a half, and came away no wiser than before. The nest, if nest there was, must be elsewhere, I believed. But where? And what was the object of the male's watch?

My curiosity was fully roused. I had never seen or heard of such conduct on the part of any bird, and the next forenoon I spent another hour and a half in the clearing. The hummer was at his post, as he always was. We had never to wait for him. Soon after my arrival he flew to the apple-tree, the action seeming to have no connection with my presence. Presently he went back to the ash, and drove out of it two intruding birds. A moment later two humming-birds were there, and in another moment they flew away in a direction opposite to the apple-tree. Here, then, was a real clue. The birds were probably our sentinel and his mate. I made after them with all speed, pausing under such scattered trees as had been left standing in that quarter. Nothing was to be found, and on my return there sat the male, provokingly, at the top of the apple-tree, whence he soon returned to the ash. A warbler entered the tree, and after a while ventured upon the branch where the hummer was sitting. Instead of driving her away he took wing himself, and paid another visit to the apple-tree,—a visit of perhaps five minutes,—at the end of which he went back to the ash. Then two kingbirds happened to alight in the apple-tree. At once the hummer came dashing over and ordered them off, and in his excitement dropped for a moment into the leafy top of a birch sapling,—a most unnatural proceeding,—after which

he resumed his station in the ash. What could I make of all this? Apparently he claimed the ownership of both trees, and yet his nest was in neither! He sat motionless for five minutes at a time upon certain dead twigs of the ash, precisely as our female was accustomed to sit in her apple-tree. For at least seven days he had been thus occupied. Where was his mate? On the edge of the wood, perhaps. But, if so, why did I hear nothing from her, as I passed up and down? Again my hour and a half had been spent to no purpose.

Not yet discouraged, I returned the next morning. For the three quarters of an hour that I remained, the hummer was not once out of the ash-tree for five minutes. I am not sure that he left it for five minutes altogether. As usual, he perched almost without exception on one or other of two dead limbs, while a similar branch, on the opposite side of the trunk, he was never seen to touch. A Maryland yellow-throat alighted on one of his two branches and began to sing, but had repeated his strain only three or four times before the hummer, who had been absent for the moment, darted upon him and put him to flight. A little afterward, a red-eyed vireo alighted on his other favorite perch, and he showed no resentment. The day before, a warbler had sat on the same branch which the yellow-throat now invaded, and the hummer not only did not offer to molest him, but flew away himself. These inconsistencies made it hard to draw any inference from his behavior. During my whole stay he did not once go to the apple-tree, although, for want of anything better to do, I again scrutinized its branches. This time I *was* discouraged, and gave over the search. His secret, whatever it might be, was "too dear for my possessing." But my fellow-observer kept up his

visits, as I have said, and the hummer remained faithful to his task as late as July 15th, at least.

Some readers may be prompted to ask, as one of my correspondents asked at the time, whether the mysterious sentry may not have been the mate of our home bird. I see no ground for such a suspicion. The two places were at least a mile apart, as I have already mentioned, and woods and hills, to say nothing of the village, lay between. If he was our bird's mate, his choice of a picket station was indeed an enigma. He might almost as well have been on Mount Washington. Nor can I believe that he had any connection with a nest found two months afterward in a pitch-pine grove within a quarter of a mile, more or less, of his clearing. It was undoubtedly a nest of that season, and might have been his for aught I know, so far as the mere fact of distance was concerned; but here again an intervening wood must have cut off all visual communication. If his mate and nest were not within view from his ash-tree perch, what could be the meaning of his conduct? Without some specific constraining motive, no bird in his normal condition was likely to stay in one tree hour after hour, day after day, and week after week, so that one could never come in sight of it without seeing him. But even if his nest was in the immediate neighborhood, the closeness and persistency of his lookout are still, to my mind, an absolute mystery. Our female bird, whether she had eggs or offspring, made nothing of absenting herself by the half hour; but this male hardly gave himself time to eat his necessary food; indeed, I often wondered how he kept himself alive. Is such a course of action habitual with male hummers? If so, had our seemingly widowed or deserted mother a husband, who somewhere, unseen

by us, was standing sentry after the same heroic, self-denying fashion? These and all similar questions I must leave to more fortunate observers, or postpone to a future summer. Meantime, my judgment as to the male ruby-throat's character remains in suspense. It is not plain to me whether we are to call him the worst or the best of husbands.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[13] These two humming-bird papers were printed in consecutive numbers of *The Atlantic Monthly*, June and July, 1891.

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## ROBIN ROOSTS.

ToC

"From every side they hurried in,
Rubbing their sleepy eyes."

KEATS.

OF all the nearly eight hundred species of North American birds, the robin is without question the one most generally known. Its great commonness and wide distribution have something to do with this fact, but can hardly be said to account for it altogether. The red-eyed vireo has almost as extensive a range, and at least in New England is possibly more numerous; but except among ornithologists it remains a stranger, even to country-bred people. The robin owes its universal recognition partly to its size and perfectly distinctive dress, partly to its early arrival in the spring, but especially to the nature of its nesting and feeding habits, which bring it constantly under every one's eye.

It would seem impossible, at this late day, to say anything new about so familiar a bird; but the robin has one interesting and remarkable habit, to which there is no allusion in any of our systematic ornithological treatises, so far as I am aware, although many individual observers must have taken notice of it. I mean the habit of roosting at night in large flocks, while still on its breeding grounds, and long before the close of the breeding season. [14]

Toward the end of summer, two years ago, I saw what looked like a daily passage back and forth of small companies of robins. A friend, living in another town, had noticed similar occurrences, and more than once we discussed the subject; agreeing that such movements were probably not connected in any way with the grand southward migration, which, so far as we could judge, had not yet commenced, but that the birds must be flying to and from some nightly resort. The flocks were small, however, and neither of us suspected the full significance of what we had seen.

On the 19th of July, 1889, the same friend informed me that one of our Cambridge ornithologists had found a robin roost in that city,—a wood in which great numbers of birds congregated every night. This led me to keep a sharper eye upon my own robins, whom I had already noticed repeating their previous year's manœuvres. Every evening, shortly before and after sunset, they were to be seen flying, now singly, now by twos and threes, or even by the half dozen, evidently on their way to some rendezvous. I was suspicious of a rather distant hill-top covered with pine-trees; but before I could make it convenient to visit the place at the proper hour, I discovered, quite unexpectedly, that the roost was close by the very

road up and down which I had been walking; an isolated piece of swampy wood, a few acres in extent, mostly a dense growth of gray birches and swamp white oaks, but with a sprinkling of maples and other deciduous trees. It is bounded on the further side by a wet meadow, and at the eastern end by a little ice-pond, with a dwelling-house and other buildings beside it, all within a stone's throw of the wood.

This discovery was made on the evening of July 25th, and I at once crossed a narrow field between the wood and the highway, and pushed in after the birds. It was too dark for me to see what was going on, but as I brushed against the close branches the robins set up a lively cackling, and presently commenced flying from tree to tree before me as I advanced, though plainly with no intention of deserting their quarters. The place was full of them, but I could form no estimate of their number.

On the following evening I took my stand upon a little knoll commanding the western end of the wood. According to my notes, the birds began to arrive about sunset,—but this was pretty certainly an error,—and though I did not undertake an exact count until the flight was mainly over, it seemed likely that at least three hundred passed in at that point. This would have made the total number twelve hundred, or thereabout, on the assumption that my outlook had covered a quarter of the circuit. After the flight ceased I went into the wood, and from the commotion overhead it was impossible not to believe that such a calculation must be well within the truth.

The next day was rainy, but on the evening of the

28th I stood by the shore of the pond, on the eastern side of the wood, and made as accurate a count as possible of the arrivals at that point. Unfortunately I was too late; the robins were already coming. But in fifty minutes, between 6.40 and 7.30, I counted 1072 birds. They appeared singly and in small flocks, and it was out of the question for me to make sure of them all; while I was busy with a flock on the right, there was no telling how many might be passing in on the left. If my observations comprehended a quarter of the circle, and if the influx was equally great on the other sides (an assumption afterward disproved), then it was safe to set the whole number of birds at five thousand or more. Of the 1072 actually seen, 797 came before the sunset gun was fired,—a proportion somewhat larger than it would have been had the sky been clear.

On the afternoon of the 29th I again counted the arrivals at the eastern end; but though I set out, as I thought, in good season, I found myself once more behind time. At 6.30 robins were already dropping in, notwithstanding the sky was cloudless. In the first five minutes eighteen birds appeared; at sunset 818 had been counted; and at 7.30, when I came away, the figures stood at 1267. "The robins came more rapidly than last night," I wrote in my notebook, "and for much of the time I could keep watch of the southeastern corner only. My vision then covered much less than a quarter of the circuit; so that if the birds came as freely from other directions, at least five thousand must have entered the wood between 6.30 and 7.30. As long as it was light they avoided passing directly by me, going generally to the left, and slipping into the roost behind some low outlying trees; though, fortunately, in doing this they were compelled to cross a narrow patch of the illuminated

western sky. I suspect that the number increases from night to night. Between 6.40 and 7.30, 1235 birds came, as compared with 1072 last evening."

Two days afterward (July 31st) I went to the western end of the wood, and found the influx there much smaller than on the opposite side; but I arrived late, and made a partial count only. After sunset 186 birds were seen, whereas there had been 455 entries at the eastern end, two nights before, during the same time.

Thus far I had always been too late to witness the beginning of the flight. On the evening of August 1st I resolved to be in season. I reached the border of the pond at 5.15, and at that very moment a single robin flew into the wood. No others were seen for eighteen minutes, when three arrived together. From this time stragglers continued to appear, and at 6.30 I had counted 176. In the next ten minutes 180 arrived; in the next five minutes, 138. Between 6.45 and 7, I counted 549; then, in six minutes, 217 appeared. At 7.25, when I concluded, the figures stood at 1533 birds. For about twenty minutes, as will be noticed, the arrivals were at the rate of thirty-six a minute. Throughout the thickest of the flight I could keep a lookout upon only one side of me, and, moreover, the gathering darkness was by that time making it more and more difficult to see any birds except such as passed above the dark tree line; and from what went on just about me, it was evident that the number of arrivals was increasing rather than diminishing as my count fell off. There seemed to be no good reason for doubting that at least two thousand robins entered the wood at the eastern end.

Two nights later I stationed myself in the meadow southwest of the roost. Here I counted but 935

entries. The movement appeared to be fully as steady as on the opposite side, but as darkness came on I found myself at a great disadvantage; a hill occupied the background, giving me no illuminated sky to bring the birds into relief, so that I could see only such as passed close at hand. Of the 935 birds, 761 came before seven o'clock, but it was reasonably certain that the flight afterward was nearly or quite as great, only that I wanted light wherewith to see it.

On the evening of August 4th I went back to the eastern end, and as the sky was perfectly clear I hoped to make a gain upon all my previous figures. But the fair weather was perhaps a hindrance rather than a help; for the robins came later than before, and more in a body, and continued to arrive long after it was impossible to see them. I counted 1480, —53 less than on the 1st.

I attempted no further enumeration until the 18th. Then, in an hour and ten minutes, 1203 birds were seen to enter the roost at the eastern end. But they arrived more than ever in flocks, and so late that for much of the time I missed all except the comparatively small number that passed in my immediate vicinity. Many were flying at a great height,—having come from a long distance, as I inferred,—and sometimes I knew nothing of their approach till they dropped out of the sky directly over the wood. On this occasion, as well as on many others,—but chiefly during the latter part of the season,—it was noticeable that some of the robins appeared to be ignorant of the precise whereabouts of the roost; they flew past it at first, and then, after more or less circling about, with loud cackling, dived hurriedly into the wood. I took special note of one fellow, who came from the south at a great altitude,

and went directly over the wood. When he was well past it he suddenly pulled himself up, as if fancying he had caught a signal. After a moment of hesitation he proceeded on his northerly course, but had not gone far before he met half a dozen birds flying south. Perhaps he asked them the way. At all events, he wheeled about and joined them, and in half a minute was safe in port. He had heard of the roost, apparently (how and where?), but had not before visited it.

This count of August 18th was the last for nearly a month, but I find a minute of August 27th stating that, while walking along the highway on the westerly side of the roost,—the side that had always been the least populous,—I saw within less than two minutes (as I calculated the time) more than eighty robins flying toward the wood. Up to this date, then, there could not have been any considerable falling off in the size of the gathering. Indeed, from my friend's observations upon the Belmont roost, to be mentioned later, it seems well-nigh certain that it was still upon the increase.

Toward the close of August I became interested in the late singing of several whippoorwills, and so was taken away from the robins' haunt at the hour of sunset. Then, from the 5th to the 13th of September, I was absent from home. On the night of my return I went to the shore of the pond, where, on the 1st of August, I had counted 1533 entries. The weather was favorable, and I arrived in good season and remained till the stars came out, but I counted only 137 robins! It was plain that the great majority of the congregation had departed.

As I have said, there was little to be learned by going

into the wood after the robins were assembled. Nevertheless I used frequently to intrude upon them, especially as friends or neighbors, who had heard of my "discovery," were desirous to see the show. The prodigious cackling and rustling overhead seemed to make a deep impression upon all such visitors, while, for myself, I should have had no difficulty in crediting the statement had I been told that *ten thousand* robins were in the treetops. One night I took two friends to the place after it was really dark. All was silent as we felt our way among the trees, till, suddenly, one of the trio struck a match and kindled a blaze of dry twigs. The smoke and flame speedily waked the sleepers; but even then they manifested no disposition to be driven out.

For curiosity's sake, I paid one early morning visit to the roost, on the 30th of July. It would be worth while, I thought, to see how much music so large a chorus would make, as well as to note the manner of its dispersion. To tell the truth, I hoped for something spectacular,—a grand burst of melody, and then a pouring forth of a dense, uncountable army of robins. I arrived about 3.40 (it was still hardly light enough to show the face of the watch), and found everything quiet. Pretty soon the robins commenced cackling. At 3.45 a song sparrow sang, and at the same moment I saw a robin fly out of the wood. Five minutes later a robin sang; at 3.55 another one flew past me; at four o'clock a few of the birds were in song, but the effect was not in any way peculiar,—very much as if two or three had been singing in the ordinary manner. They dispersed precisely as I had seen them gather: now a single bird, now two or three, now six, or even ten. A casual passer along the road would have remarked nothing out of the common course. They flew low,—

not as if they were starting upon any prolonged flight,—and a goodly number alighted for a little in the field where I was standing. Shortly before sunrise I went into the wood and found it deserted. The robin is one of our noisiest birds. Who would have believed that an assembly of thousands could break up so quietly? Their behavior in this regard may possibly have been influenced by prudential considerations. I have said that many of them seemingly took pains to approach the roost indirectly and under cover. On the westerly side, for example, they almost invariably followed a line of bushes and trees which runs toward the roost along the edge of the meadow, even though they were obliged sharply to alter their course in so doing.

All this time I had been in correspondence with my friend before referred to, who was studying a similar roost,[15] —in Belmont,—which proved to be more populous than mine, as was to be expected, perhaps, the surrounding country being less generally wooded. It was a mile or more from his house, which was so situated that he could sit upon his piazza in the evening and watch the birds streaming past. On the 11th of August he counted here 556 robins, of which 336 passed within five minutes. On the 28th he counted 1180, of which 456 passed within five minutes,—ninety-one a minute! On the 2d of September, from a knoll nearer the roost, he counted 1883 entries.

This gathering, like the one in Melrose, was greatly depleted by the middle of September. "Only 109 robins flew over the place to-night," my correspondent wrote on the 25th, "against 538 September 4th, 838 August 30th, and 1180 August 28th." Two evenings later (September 27th) he went

to the neighborhood of the roost, and counted 251 birds,—instead of 1883 on the 2d. Even so late as October 9th, however, the wood was not entirely deserted. During the last month or so of its occupancy, the number of the birds was apparently subject to sudden and wide fluctuations, and it seemed not unlikely that travelers from the north were making a temporary use of the well-known resort. It would not be surprising if the same were found to be true in the spring. In April, 1890, I saw some things which pointed, as I thought, in this direction, but I was then too closely occupied to follow the matter.

How early in the season does this nightly flocking begin? This question often presented itself. It was only the middle of July when the Cambridge roost was found in full operation, though at that time many robins must still have had family duties, and some were probably building new nests. Next summer, we said, we would try to mark the beginnings of the congregation.

My own plans to this end came near being thwarted. In December I was dismayed to see the owner of the wood cutting it down. Happily some kind power stayed his hand when not more than a third of the mischief was done, and on the 29th of June, 1890, while strolling homeward along the highway, listening to the distant song of a veery, I noticed within five or ten minutes seventeen robins making toward the old rendezvous. On the following evening I stood beside the ice-pond and saw one hundred and ninety-two robins enter the wood. The flight had begun before my arrival, and was not entirely over when I came away. Evidently several hundreds of the birds were already passing their nights in company.

In my ignorance, I was surprised at the early date; but when I communicated my discovery to the Belmont observer, he replied at once that he had noticed a movement of the same kind on the 11th of June. The birds, about a dozen, were seen passing his house.

Thinking over the matter, I began to ask myself—though I hesitate about making such a confession—whether it might not be the adult males who thus unseasonably went off to bed in a crowd, leaving their mates to care for eggs and little ones. At this very moment, as it happened, I was watching with lively sympathy the incessant activities of a female humming-bird, who appeared to be bringing up a family (two very hungry nestlings), with no husband to lift a finger for her assistance; and the sight, as I fear, put me into a cynical mood. Male robins were probably like males in general,—lovers of clubs and shirkers of home duties. Indeed, a friend who went into the roost with me, one evening, remarked upon the continual cackling in the treetops as "a very social sound;" and upon my saying something about a sewing circle, he answered, quite seriously, "No, it is rather like a gentleman's club." But it would have been unscientific, as well as unchristian, to entertain an hypothesis like this without putting its soundness to some kind of test. I adopted the only plan that occurred to me,—short of rising at half past two o'clock in the morning to see the birds disperse. I entered the wood just before the assemblage was due (this was on the 9th of July), and took a sheltered position on the eastern edge, where, as the robins flew by me, or alighted temporarily in the trees just across the brook, they would have the sunlight upon their breasts. Here, as often as one came sufficiently near and in a sufficiently favorable light, I noted

whether it was an adult, or a streaked, spotted bird of the present season. As a matter of course, the number concerning which this point could be positively determined under such conditions was very small,—only fifty-seven altogether. Of these, forty-nine were surely birds of the present summer, and only eight unmistakable adult males. If any adult females came in, they passed among the unidentified and uncounted. [16] I was glad I had made the test. As a kind-hearted cynic (I confess to being nothing worse than this), I was relieved to find my misanthropic, or, to speak more exactly, my misornithic, notions ill founded. As for the sprinkling of adult males, they may have been, as a "friend and fellow woodlander" suggests, birds which, for one reason or another, had taken up with the detestable opinion that "marriage is a failure."

During the month of July, 1890, I made frequent counts of the entries at the eastern end of the roost, thinking thus to ascertain in a general way the rate at which its population increased. On the whole, the growth proved to be fairly steady, in spite of some mysterious fluctuations, as will be seen by the following table:—

| July | | July | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 247 | 16 | 1064 |
| " | " | " | " |
| 5 | 383 | 17 | 1333 |
| " | " | " | " |
| 6 | 356 | 19 | 1584 |
| " | " | " | " |
| 10 | 765 | 22 | 1520 |
| " | " | " | " |
| 12 | 970 | 23 | 1453 |

| | |
|---|---|
| " | " |
| 14 1120 | 27 2314 |

After July 6th all the enumerations were made with the help of another man, though we stood side by side, and covered no more ground than I had hitherto attempted to compass alone. The figures of the 27th were far in excess of any obtained in 1889, and for a day I was disposed to take seriously the suggestion of a friend that some other roost must have been broken up and its members turned into the Melrose gathering. But on the evening of the 28th I tried a count by myself, and made only 1517 birds! The conditions were favorable, and the robins came, as they had come the night before, in flocks, almost in continuous streams. The figures had fallen off, not because there were fewer birds, but because I was unable to count them. They were literally too many for me. The difficulties of the work, it should be explained, are greatly enhanced by the fact that at the very corner where the influx is largest none of the low-flying birds can be seen except for a second or two, as they dart across a bit of sky between the roost and an outlying wood. To secure anything like a complete census, this point must be watched continuously; and meantime birds are streaming in at the other corner and shooting over the distracted enumerator's head, and perhaps dropping out of the sky. I conclude, therefore, not that the roost had increased in population, but that my last year's reckoning was even more inadequate than I then supposed. Even with two pairs of eyes, it is inevitable that multitudes of birds should pass in unnoticed, especially during the latter half of the flight. I have never had an assistant or a looker-on to whom this was not perfectly apparent.

As I stood night after night watching the robins stream into this little wood,—no better, surely, than many they had passed on their way,—I asked myself again and again what could be the motive that drew them together. The flocking of birds for a long journey, or in the winter season, is less mysterious. In times of danger and distress there is no doubt a feeling of safety in a crowd. But robins cannot be afraid of the dark. Why, then, should not each sleep upon its own feeding grounds, alone, or with a few neighbors for company, instead of flying two or three miles, more or less, twice a day, simply for the sake of passing the night in a general roost?

Such questions we must perhaps be content to ask without expecting an answer. By nature the robin is strongly gregarious, and though his present mode of existence does not permit him to live during the summer in close communities,—as marsh wrens do, for example, and some of our swallows,—his ancestral passion for society still asserts itself at nightfall. Ten or twelve years ago, when I was bird-gazing in Boston, there were sometimes a hundred robins at once about the Common and Garden, in the time of the vernal migration. By day they were scattered over the lawns; but at sunset they gathered habitually in two or three contiguous trees, not far from the Frog Pond and the Beacon Street Mall (I wonder whether the same trees are still in use for the same purpose), where, after much noise and some singing, they retired to rest,—if going to sleep in a leafless treetop can be called retiring.

Whatever the origin and reason of this roosting habit, I have no doubt that it is universal. Middlesex County birds cannot be in any respect peculiar. Whoever will keep a close eye upon the robins in his

neighborhood, in July and August, will find them at sunset flocking to some general sleeping-place.

It would be interesting to know how far they travel at such times. The fact that so many hundreds were to be seen at a point more than a mile away from the Belmont roost is significant; but I am not aware that any one has yet made a study of this part of the subject. My own birds seemed to come, as a rule, by easy stages. In the long narrow valley east of the roost, where I oftenest watched their approach, they followed habitually—not invariably—a zigzag route, crossing the meadow diagonally, and for the most part alighting for a little upon a certain wooded hill, whence they took a final flight to their nightly haven, perhaps a quarter of a mile beyond. Farther down the valley, a mile or more from the roost, birds were to be seen flying toward it, but I found no place at which a general movement could be observed and large numbers counted.

As to the size of these nightly gatherings, it seems wisest not to guess; though, treating the subject in this narrative manner, I have not scrupled to mention, simply as a part of the story, some of my temporary surmises. What I am told of the Belmont wood is true also of the one in Melrose: its shape and situation are such as to make an accurate census impossible, no matter how many "enumerators" might be employed. It could be surrounded easily enough, but it would be out of the question to divide the space among the different men so that no two of them should count the same birds. At present it can only be said that the robins are numbered by thousands; in some cases, perhaps, by tens of thousands.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[14] Mr. William Brewster has been aware of this habit for twenty-five years, but, like myself, has never seen it mentioned in print. He devotes to it a paper in *The Auk* for October, 1890, to which I am happy to refer readers who may wish a more thorough discussion of the matter than I have been able to give. My own paper was printed at the same time, in *The Atlantic Monthly*, and had been accepted by the editor before I knew of Mr. Brewster's intention to write. References to a roost in Belmont, Mass., discovered by Mr. Brewster six years before, are frequent in the following pages.

[15] This roost was discovered by Mr. William Brewster, in August, 1884, as already mentioned.

[16] A week later, my correspondent reported a similar state of things at the Belmont roost. "A very large proportion of the birds are spotted-breasted young of the year, but occasionally I have detected an adult male." He examined the birds at near range, and at rest, after they had come into the roost in the earlier part of the evening.

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## THE PASSING OF THE BIRDS.

ToC

"The Bird of Time has but a little way
To flutter—and the Bird is on the Wing."

OMAR KHAYYÁM.

BY the first of August the bird-lover's year is already on the wane. In the chestnut grove, where a month ago the wood thrush, the rose-breasted grosbeak, and the scarlet tanager were singing, the loiterer now hears nothing but the wood pewee's pensive whistle and the sharp monotony of the red-eyed vireo. The

thrasher is silent in the berry pasture, and the bobolink in the meadow. The season of jollity is over. Orioles, to be sure, after a month of silence, again have fits of merry fifing. The field sparrow and the song sparrow are still in tune, and the meadow lark whistles, though rarely. Catbirds still practice their feeble improvisations and mimicries in the thickets along the brooksides as evening comes on, and of the multitudes of robins a few are certain to be heard warbling before the day is over. Goldfinches have grown suddenly numerous, or so it seems, and not infrequently one of them breaks out in musical canary-like twitterings. On moonlight evenings the tremulous, haunting cry of the screech-owl comes to your ears, always from far away, and if you walk through the chestnut grove aforesaid in the daytime you may chance to catch his faint, vibratory, tree-frog whistle. For myself, I never enter the grove without glancing into the dry top of a certain tall tree, to see whether the little rascal is sitting in his open door. More than half the time he is there, and always with his eye on me. What an air he has!—like a judge on the bench! If I were half as wise as he looks, these essays of mine would never more be dull. For his and all other late summer music let us be thankful; but it is true, nevertheless, that the year is waning. How short it has been! Only the other day the concert opened, and already the performers are uneasy to be gone. They have crowded so much into so brief a space! The passion of a life-time into the quarter of a year! They are impatient to be gone, I say; but who knows how many of them are gone already? Where are the blue golden-winged warblers that sang daily on the edge of the wood opposite my windows, so that I listened to them at my work? I have heard nothing of their rough *dsee, dsee* since the

21st of June, and in all that time have seen them but once—a single bird, a youngling of the present year, stumbled upon by accident while pushing my way through a troublesome thicket on the first day of August. Who knows, I say, how many such summer friends have already left us? An odd coincidence, however, warns me at this very moment that too much is not to be made of merely negative experiences; for even while I was penciling the foregoing sentence about the blue golden-wing there came through the open window the hoarse upward-sliding chant of his close neighbor, the prairie warbler. I have not heard that sound before since the 6th of July, and it is now the 22d of August. The singers had not gone, I knew; I saw several of them (and beautiful creatures they are!) a few days ago among the pitch pines; but why did that fellow, after being dumb for six or seven weeks, pipe up at that precise moment, as if to punctuate my ruminations with an interrogation point? Does he like this dog-day morning, with its alternate shower and sunshine, and its constant stickiness and heat? In any case I was glad to hear him, though I cannot in the spirit of veracity call him a good singer. Whist! There goes an oriole, a gorgeous creature, flashing from one elm to another, and piping in his happiest manner as he flies. It might be the middle of May, to judge from his behavior. *He* likes dog-day weather, there can be no question of that, however the rest of the world may grumble.

This is a time when one sees many birds, but few species. Bluebirds are several times as abundant as in June. The air is sweet with their calls at this moment, and once in a while some father of the flock lets his happiness run over in song. One cannot go far now without finding the road full of chipping

sparrows, springing up in their pretty, characteristic way, and letting the breeze catch them. The fences and wayside apple-trees are lively with kingbirds and phœbes. I am already watching the former with a kind of mournful interest. In ten days, or some such matter, we shall have seen the last of their saucy antics. Gay tyrants! They are among the first birds of whom I can confidently say, "They are gone;" and they seem as wide-awake when they go as when they come. Being a man, I regret their departure; but if I were a crow, I think I should be for observing the 31st of August as a day of annual jubilee.

A few years ago, in September, I saw the white-breasted swallows congregated in the Ipswich dunes, —a sight never to be forgotten. On the morning of the 9th, the fourth day of our visit, a considerable flock—but no more, perhaps, than we had been seeing daily—came skimming over the marshes and settled upon a sand-bar in the river, darkening it in patches. At eight o'clock, when we took the straggling road out of the hills, a good many—there might be a thousand, I guessed—sat, upon the fence wires, as if resting. We walked inland, and on our return, at noon, found, as my notes of the day express it, "an innumerable host, thousands upon thousands," about the landward side of the dunes. Fences and haycocks were covered. Multitudes were on the ground,—in the bed of the road, about the bare spots in the marsh, and on the gray faces of the hills. Other multitudes were in the bushes and low trees, literally loading them. Every few minutes a detachment would rise into the air like a cloud, and anon settle down again. As we stood gazing at the spectacle, my companion began chirping at a youngster who sat near him on a post, as one might chirp to a caged canary. The effect was magical. The

bird at once started toward him, others followed, and in a few seconds hundreds were flying about our heads. Round and round they went, almost within reach, like a cloud of gnats. "Stop! stop!" cried my companion; "I am getting dizzy." We stopped our squeakings, and the cloud lifted; but I can see it yet. Day after day the great concourse remained about the hills, till on the 13th we came away and left them. The old lighthouse keeper told me that this was their annual rendezvous. He once saw them circle for a long time above the dunes, for several hours, if I remember right, till, as it seemed, all stragglers had been called in from the beach, the marsh, and the outlying grassy hills. Then they mounted into the sky in a great spiral till they passed out of sight; and for that year there were no more swallows. This, he insisted, took place in the afternoon, "from three to four o'clock." He was unquestionably telling a straightforward story of what he himself had seen, but his memory may have been at fault; for I find it to be the settled opinion of those who ought to know, that swallows migrate by day and not by night, while the setting out of a great flock late in the afternoon at such a height would seem to indicate a nocturnal journey. Morning or evening, I would give something to witness so imposing a start.

The recollection of this seaside gathering raises anew in my mind the question why, if swallows and swifts migrate exclusively in the daytime, we so rarely see anything of them on the passage. Our Ipswich birds were all tree swallows,—white-breasted martins,—and might fairly be supposed to have come together from a comparatively limited extent of country. But beside tree swallows there are purple martins, barn swallows, sand martins, cliff swallows, and chimney

swifts, all of which breed to the northward of us in incalculable numbers. All of them go south between the middle of July and the first of October. But who in New England has ever seen any grand army of them actually on the wing? Do they straggle along so loosely as to escape particular notice? If so, what mean congregations like that in the Ipswich dunes? Or are their grand concerted flights taken at such an altitude as to be invisible?

On several afternoons of last September, this time in an inland country, I observed what might fairly be called a steady stream of tree swallows flying south. Twice, while gazing up at the loose procession, I suddenly became aware of a close bunch of birds at a prodigious height, barely visible, circling about in a way to put a count out of the question, but evidently some hundreds in number. On both occasions the flock vanished almost immediately, and, as I believed, by soaring out of sight. The second time I meant to assure myself upon this point, but my attention was distracted by the sudden appearance of several large hawks within the field of my glass, and when I looked again for the swallows they were nowhere to be seen. Were the stragglers which I had for some time been watching, flying high, but well within easy ken, and these dense, hardly discernible clusters—hirundine nebulæ, as it were—were all these but parts of one innumerable host, the main body of which was passing far above me altogether unseen? The conjecture was one to gratify the imagination. It pleased me even to think that it *might* be true. But it was only a conjecture, and meantime another question presented itself.

When this daily procession had been noticed for two or three afternoons, it came to me as something

remarkable that I saw it always in the same place, or rather on the same north and south line, while no matter where else I walked, east or west, not a swallow was visible. Had I stumbled upon a regular route of swallow migration? It looked so, surely; but I made little account of the matter till a month afterward, when, in exactly the same place, I observed robins and bluebirds following the same course. The robins were seen October 26th, in four flocks, succeeding each other at intervals of a few minutes, and numbering in all about 130 birds. They flew directly south, at a moderate height, and were almost certainly detachments of one body. The bluebird movement was two days later, at about the same hour, the morning being cold, with a little snow falling. This time, too, as it happened, the flock was in four detachments. Three of these were too compact to be counted as they passed; the fourth and largest one was in looser order and contained a little more than a hundred individuals. In all, as well as I could guess, there might have been about three hundred birds. They kept a straight course southward, flying high, and with the usual calls, which, in autumn at least, always have to my ears a sound of farewell. Was it a mere coincidence that these swallows, bluebirds, and robins were all crossing the valley just at this point?

This question, too, I count it safer to ask than to answer, but all observers, I am sure, must have remarked so much as this,—that birds, even on their migrations, are subject to strong local preferences. An ornithologist of the highest repute assures me that his own experience has convinced him so strongly of this fact that if he shoots a rare migrant in a certain spot he makes it a rule to visit the place again a year afterward on the same day, and, if

possible, at the same hour of the day. Another friend sends me a very pretty story bearing upon the same point. The bird of which he speaks, Wilson's black-cap warbler, is one of the less common of our regular Massachusetts migrants. I count myself fortunate if I see two or three specimens during its spring or autumn passage. My correspondent shall tell the story for himself.

"While I was making the drawings for the 'Silva,' at the old Dwight house, I was in the habit of taking a turn every pleasant day in the gardens after my scanty lunch. On the 18th of May, 1887, in my daily round I saw a Wilson's black-cap for the first time in my life. He was in a bush of *Spiræa media*, which grew in the midst of the rockery, and allowed me to examine him at near range with no appearance of fear. Naturally I made a note of the occurrence in my diary, and talked about it with my family when I got home. The seeing of a new bird always makes a red-letter day.

"The next spring, as I was looking over my notebook of the previous year, I came upon my entry of May 18th, and thought I would be on the lookout for a black-cap on that date. Several times during the morning I thought of the matter, and after my lunch I sauntered into the rockery just as I had done the year before. Imagine my start when there, in the very same bush, was the black-cap peering at me; and I found on looking at my watch that it was precisely the same hour,—half past one! I rubbed my eyes and pinched myself to make sure it was not a dream. No, it was all real. Of course, I thought the coincidence very singular, and talked about it, not only with my family, but also with other people. You must remember that I had never seen the bird elsewhere.

"Well, another spring came round. The 18th of May was fixed in my mind, and I thought many times of my black-cap (I called it *my* black-cap now), and wondered if it would keep tryst again. On the morning of the 18th, the first thing I thought of when I awoke was my black-cap. That forenoon I actually felt nervous as the time approached, for I felt a sort of certainty (you smile) that I should see my bird again. My lunch was hastier than usual, and I was about to sally forth when it flashed across me —'Suppose the bird should be there again, who would believe my story? Hold! I will have a witness.' I called to Mr. J——, who was at work upstairs, and after explaining what I wanted, invited him to accompany me. We cautiously entered the rockery, and within a few minutes there flitted from a neighboring thicket into that very Spiræa bush my black-cap! I took out my watch. It was just half past one!"

My own experiences in this kind have been much less striking and dramatic than the foregoing, but I may add that a few years ago I witnessed the vernal migration in a new piece of country—ten miles or so from my old field—and found myself at a very considerable disadvantage. I had never realized till then how much accustomed I had grown to look for particular birds in particular places, and not in other places of a quite similar character.

I speak of witnessing a migration; but what we see for the most part (ducks and geese being excepted) is not the actual movement northward or southward. We see the stragglers, more or less numerous, that happen to have dropped out of the procession in our immediate neighborhood,—a flock of sandpipers about the edge of the pond, some sparrows by the

roadside, a bevy of warblers in the wood,—and from these signs we infer the passing of the host.

Unlike swallows, robins, bluebirds, blackbirds, and perhaps most of the sparrows, our smaller wood birds, the warblers and vireos especially, appear to move as a general thing in mixed flocks. Whenever the woods are full of them, as is the case now and then every spring and fall, one of the most striking features of the show is the number of species represented. For the benefit of readers who may never have observed such a "bird wave," or "rush," let me sketch hastily one which occurred a few years ago, on the 22d of September. As I started out at six o'clock in the morning, in a cool northwest wind, birds were passing overhead in an almost continuous stream, following a westerly course. They were chiefly warblers, but I noted one fairly large flock of purple finches. All were at a good height, and the whole movement had the air of a diurnal migration. I could only conjecture that it was the end of the nocturnal flight, so far, at least, as the warblers were concerned; in other words, that the birds, on this particular occasion, did not finish their nightly journey till a little after sunrise. But if many were still flying, many others had already halted; for presently I came to a piece of thin, stunted wood by the roadside, and found in it a highly interesting company. Almost the first specimen I saw was a Connecticut warbler perched in full view and exposing himself perfectly. Red-bellied nuthatches were calling, and warblers uncounted were flitting about in the trees and underbrush. A hurried search showed black-polls, black-throated greens, blue yellow-backs, one redstart, one black-and-white creeper, one Blackburnian, one black-and-yellow, one Canadian flycatcher (singing lustily), one yellow

redpoll, and one clearly-marked bay-breast. The first yellow-bellied woodpecker of the season was hammering in a tree over my head, and not far away was the first flock of white-throated sparrows. After breakfast I passed the place again, and the only bird to be found was one phœbe! Within half a mile of the spot, however, I came upon at least three goodly throngs, including scarlet tanagers (all in yellow and black), black-throated blue warblers, pine warblers, olive-backed and gray-cheeked thrushes, a flock of chewinks (made up exclusively of adult males, so far as I could discover), red-eyed vireos, one solitary vireo, brown thrashers, with more redstarts, a second Blackburnian, and a second black-and-yellow. Every company had its complement of chickadees. Of the morning's forty species, thirteen were warblers; and of these thirteen, four were represented by one specimen each. For curiosity's sake I may add that a much longer walk that afternoon, through the same and other woods, was utterly barren. Except for two or three flocks of white-throated sparrows; there was no sign whatever that the night before had brought us a "flight."

Autumnal ornithology may almost be called a science by itself. Not only are birds harder to find (being silent) and harder to recognize in autumn than in spring, but their movements are in themselves more difficult of observation. A few years of note-taking will put one in possession of the approximate dates of arrival of all our common vernal migrants. Every local observer will tell you when to look for each of the familiar birds of his neighborhood; but he will not be half so ready with information as to the time of the same birds' departure. Ask him about a few of the commonest,—the least flycatcher and the oven-bird, or the golden warbler and the Maryland yellow-

throat. He will answer, perhaps, that he has seen Maryland yellow-throats in early October, and golden warblers in early September; but he will very likely add that these were probably voyagers from the North, and that he has never made out just when his own summer birds take their leave.

After the work of nidification is over, birds as a rule wander more or less from their breeding haunts; and even if they do not wander they are likely to become silent. If we miss them, therefore, we are not to conclude as a matter of course that they have gone south. Last year, during the early part of the season, cuckoos were unusually plentiful, as it seemed to me. Then I discovered all at once that there were none to be found. After the first of July I neither saw nor heard a cuckoo of either species! Had they moved away? I do not know; but the case may be taken as an extreme illustration of the uncertainty attaching to the late-summer doings of birds in general. Every student must have had experiences of a sort to make him slow to dogmatize when such points are in question. Throughout May and June, for example, he has heard and seen wood thrushes in a certain grove. After that, for a whole month, he hears and sees nothing, though he is frequently there. The thrushes have gone? So it would seem. But then, suddenly, they are singing again in the very same trees, and he is forced to conclude that they have not been away, but during their period of midsummer silence have eluded his notice. On the whole, therefore, after making allowance for particular cases in which we may have more precise information, it would be hard, I think, to say just when our nocturnal travelers set out on their long journey. As the poet prayed Life to do,—

They steal away, give little warning,
Choose their own time;
Say not good-night,—but in May's brighter clime
Bid us good-morning.

Their departure bereaves us, but, all in all, it must be accounted a blessing. Like the falling of the leaves, it touches the heart with a pleasing sadness,—a sadness more delicious, if one is born to enjoy it, than all the merry-making of springtime. And even for the most unsentimental of naturalists the autumnal season has many a delightful hour. The year is almost done; but for the moment the whole feathered world is in motion, and the shortest walk may show him the choicest of rarities. Thanks to the passing of the birds, his local studies are an endless pursuit. "It is now more than forty years that I have paid some attention to the ornithology of this district, without being able to exhaust the subject," says Gilbert White; "new occurrences still arise as long as any inquiries are kept alive." A happy man is the bird-lover; always another species to look for, another mystery to solve. His expectations may never be realized; but no matter; it is the hope, not its fulfillment, that makes life worth having. How can any New Englander imagine that he has exhausted the possibilities of existence so long as he has never seen the Lincoln finch and the Cape May warbler?

But "I speak as a fool." Our happiness, if we are bird-lovers indeed, waits not upon novelties and rarities. All such exceptional bits of private good fortune let the Fates send or withhold as they will. The grand spectacle itself will not fail us. Even now, through all the northern country, the procession is getting under way. For the next three months it will be passing,—

millions upon millions: warblers, sparrows, thrushes, vireos, blackbirds, flycatchers, wrens, kinglets, woodpeckers, swallows, humming-birds, hawks; with sandpipers, plovers, ducks and geese, gulls, and who knows how many more? Night and day, week days and Sundays, they will be flying: now singly or in little groups, and flitting from one wood or pasture to another; now in great companies, and with protracted all-day or all-night flights. Who could ask a better stimulus for his imagination than the annual southing of this mighty host? Each member of it knows his own time and his own course. On such a day the snipe will be in such a meadow, and the golden plover in such a field. Some, no doubt, will lose their way. Numbers uncounted will perish by storm and flood; numbers more, alas, by human agency. As I write, with the sad note of a bluebird in my ear, I can see the sea-beaches and the marshes lined with guns. But the army will push on; they will come to their desired haven; for there is a spirit in birds, also, "and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding."

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## A GREAT BLUE HERON.

ToC

"Why appear you with this ridiculous boldness?"
SHAKESPEARE.

THE watcher of birds in the bush soon discovers that they have individual as well as race characteristics. They are not things, but persons,—beings with intellect, affections, and will,—and a strong specific resemblance is found to be consistent with no small measure of personal variation. All robins, we say,

look and act alike. But so do all Yankees; yet it is part of every Yankee's birthright to be different from every other Yankee. Nature abhors a copy, it would seem, almost as badly as she abhors a vacuum. Perhaps, if the truth were known, a copy *is* a vacuum.

I walked down the bay shore of Cape Cod one summer morning, and at a certain point climbed the steep cliff to the railway track, meaning to look into a large cranberry meadow where, on previous visits, I had found a few sandpipers and plovers. Near one end of the perfectly level, sand-covered meadow was a little pool, and my first glance in that direction showed me a great blue heron wading about its edge. With as much quietness as possible I stole out of sight, and then hastened up the railway through a cut, till I had the sun at my back and a hill between me and the bird. Then I began a stealthy approach, keeping behind one object after another, and finally going down flat upon the ground (to roll in the soil is an excellent method of cleansing one's garments on Cape Cod) and crawling up to a patch of bayberry bushes, the last practicable cover.

Here let me say that the great blue heron is, as its name implies, a big bird, standing almost as high as an ordinary man, and spreading its wings for nearly or quite six feet. Its character for suspiciousness may be gathered from what different writers have said about it. "He is most jealously vigilant and watchful of man," says Wilson, "so that those who wish to succeed in shooting the heron must approach him entirely unseen, and by stratagem." "Extremely suspicious and shy," says Audubon. "Unless under very favorable circumstances, it is almost hopeless to attempt to approach it. To walk up towards one

would be a fruitless adventure." Dr. Brewer's language is to the same effect,—"At all times very vigilant and difficult of approach."

This, then, was the bird which I now had under my field-glass, as I lay at full length behind the friendly bayberry bushes. Up to this point, for aught that appeared, he was quite unaware of my espionage. Like all the members of his family that I have ever seen, he possessed so much patience that it required much patience to watch him. For minutes together he stood perfectly still, and his movements, as a rule, were either so slow as to be all but imperceptible, or so rapid as almost to elude the eye. Boys who have killed frogs—which was pretty certainly my heron's present employment—will need no explanation of his behavior. They know very well that, if the fatal club is to do its work, the slowest kind of preliminary motion must be followed by something like a flash of lightning.

I watched the bird for perhaps half an hour, admiring his handsome blue wings as now and then he spread them, his dainty manner of lifting his long legs, and the occasional flashing stroke of his beak. My range was short (for a field-glass, I mean), and, all in all, I voted it "a fine show."

When I wearied of my position I rose and advanced upon the heron in full sight, expecting every moment to see him fly. To my astonishment he held his ground. Down the hillside I went, nearer and nearer, till I came to a barbed-wire fence, which bounded the cranberry field close by the heron's pool. As I worried my way through this abominable obstruction, he stepped into a narrow, shallow ditch and started slowly away. I made rapidly after him,

whereupon he got out of the ditch and strode on ahead of me. By this time I was probably within twenty yards of him, so near that, as he twisted his long neck every now and then, and looked at me through his big yellow eyes, I began to wonder whether he might not take it into his head to turn the tables upon me. A stab in the face with that ugly sharp beak would have been no laughing matter; but I did not believe myself in any danger, and quickened my steps, being now highly curious to see how near the fellow I could get. At this he broke into a kind of dog-trot, very comical to witness, and, if I had not previously seen him fly a few yards, I should have supposed him disabled in the wing. Dr. Brewer, by the way, says that this bird is "never known to run, or even to walk briskly;" but such negative assertions are always at the maker's risk.

He picked up his legs at last, for I pressed him closer and closer, till there could not have been more than forty or fifty feet between us; but even then he settled down again beside another pool, only a few rods further on in the same meadow, and there I left him to pursue his frog-hunt unmolested. The ludicrousness of the whole affair was enhanced by the fact, already mentioned, that the ground was perfectly flat, and absolutely without vegetation, except for the long rows of newly planted cranberry vines. As to what could have influenced the bird to treat me thus strangely, I have no means of guessing. As we say of each other's freaks and oddities, it was *his way*, I suppose. He might have behaved otherwise, of course, had I been armed; but of that I felt by no means certain at the time, and my doubts were strengthened by an occurrence which happened a month or so afterward.

I was crossing the beach at Nahant with a friend when we stole upon a pair of golden plovers, birds that both of us were very happy to see. The splendid old-gold spotting of their backs was plain enough; but immature black-bellied plovers are adorned in a similar manner, and it was necessary for us to see the rumps of our birds before we could be sure of their identity. So, after we had scrutinized them as long as we wished, I asked my companion to put them up while I should keep my glass upon their backs and make certain of the color of their rumps as they opened their wings. We were already within a very few paces of them, but they ran before him as he advanced, and in the end he had almost to tread on them.

The golden plover is not so unapproachable as the great blue heron, I suppose, but from what sportsmen tell me about him I am confident that he cannot be in the habit of allowing men to chase him along the beach at a distance of five or six yards. And it is to be added that, in the present instance, my companion had a gun in his hand.

Possibly all these birds would have behaved differently another day, even in what to us might have seemed exactly the same circumstances. Undoubtedly, too, it is easier, as an almost universal rule, to approach one or two birds than a considerable flock. In the larger body there are almost certain to be a few timorous souls,—a few wider-awake and better instructed souls, let us rather say,—who by their outcries and hasty flight will awaken all the others to a sense of possible danger. But it is none the less true, as I said to begin with, that individual birds have individual ways. And my great blue heron, I am persuaded, was a "character."

It would be worth something to know what was passing behind those big yellow eyes as he twisted his neck to look once more at the curious fellow—curious in two senses—who was keeping after him so closely. Was the heron curious, as well as his pursuer? Or was he only a little set in his own way; a little resentful of being imposed upon; a little inclined to withstand the "tyrant of his fields," just for principle's sake, as patriots ought to do? Or was he a young fellow, in whom heredity had mysteriously omitted to load the bump of caution, and upon whom experience had not yet enforced the lesson that if a creature is taller and stronger than you are, it is prudent to assume that he will most likely think it a pleasant bit of sport to kill you? It is nothing to the credit of humankind that the sight of an unsuspicious bird in a marsh or on the beach should have become a subject for wonder.

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## FLOWERS AND FOLKS.

ToC

"To know one element, explore another,
And in the second reappears the first."
EMERSON.

EVERY order of intelligent beings naturally separates the world into two classes,—itself and the remainder. Birds, for instance, have no doubt a feeling, more or less clearly defined, which, if it were translated into human speech, might read, "Birds and nature." We, in our turn, say, "Man and nature." But such distinctions, useful as they are, and therefore admissible, are none the less arbitrary and liable to

mislead. Birds and men are alike parts of nature, having many things in common not only with each other, but with every form of animate existence. The world is not a patchwork, though never so cunningly put together, but a garment woven throughout.

The importance of this truth, its far-reaching and many-sided significance, is even yet only beginning to be understood; but its bearing upon the study of what we call natural history would seem to be evident. My own experience as a dabbler in botany and ornithology has convinced me that the pursuit of such researches is not at all out of the spirit of the familiar line,—

"The proper study of mankind is man,"—

whatever the author of the line may have himself intended by his apothegm. To become acquainted with the peculiarities of plants or birds is to increase one's knowledge of beings of his own sort.

There is room, I think, for a treatise on analogical botany,—a study of the human nature of plants. Thoroughly and sympathetically done, the work would be both surprising and edifying. It would give us a better opinion of plants, and possibly a poorer opinion of ourselves. Some wholesome first lessons of this kind we have all taken, as a matter of course. "We all do fade as a leaf." "All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field." There are no household words more familiar than such texts. But the work of which I am thinking will deal not so much with our likeness to tree and herb as with the likeness of tree and herb to us; and furthermore, it will go into the whole subject, systematically and at length. Meanwhile, it is open even to an amateur to offer something, in a general

and discursive way, upon so inviting a theme, and especially to call attention to its scope and variety.

As I sit at my desk, the thistles are in their glory, and in a vase at my elbow stands a single head of the tall swamp variety, along with a handful of fringed gentians. Forgetting what it is, one cannot help pronouncing the thistle beautiful,—a close bunch of minute rose-purple flowers. But who could ever feel toward it as toward the gentian? Beauty is a thing not merely of form and color, but of memory and association. The thistle is an ugly customer. In a single respect it lays itself out to be agreeable; but even its beauty is too much like that of some venomous reptile. Yet it has its friends, or, at all events, its patrons (if you wish to catch butterflies, go to the thistle pasture), and no doubt could give forty eloquent and logical excuses for its offensive traits. Probably it felicitates itself upon its shrewdness, and pities the poor estate of its defenseless neighbors. How they must envy its happier fortune! It sees them browsed upon by the cattle, and can hardly be blamed if it chuckles a little to itself as the greedy creatures pass it by untouched. School-girls and botanists break down the golden-rods and asters, and pull up the gerardias and ladies'-tresses; but neither school-girl nor collector often troubles the thistle. It opens its gorgeous blossoms and ripens its feathery fruit unmolested. Truly it is a great thing to wear an armor of prickles!

"The human nature of plants,"—have I any reader so innocent as not to feel at this moment the appropriateness of the phrase? Can there be one so favored as not to have some unmistakable thistles among his Christian townsmen and acquaintance? Nay, we all know them. They are the more easily

discovered for standing always a little by themselves. They escape many slight inconveniences under which more amiable people suffer. Whoever finds himself in a hard place goes not to them for assistance. They are recognized afar as persons to be let alone. Yet they, too, like their floral representatives, have a good side. If they do not give help, they seldom ask it. Once a year they may actually "do a handsome thing," as the common expression is; but they cannot put off their own nature; their very generosity pricks the hand that receives it, and when old Time cuts them down with his scythe (what should we do without this famous husbandman, unkindly as we talk of him?) there will be no great mourning.

Is it then an unpardonable misdemeanor for a plant to defend itself against attack and extermination? Has the duty of non-resistance no exceptions nor abatements in the vegetable kingdom? That would be indeed a hard saying; for what would become of our universal favorite, the rose? On this point there may be room for a diversity of opinion; but for one, I cannot wish the wild rose disarmed, lest, through the recklessness of its admirers, what is now one of the commonest of our wayside ornaments should grow to be a rarity. I esteem the rose a patrician, and fairly entitled to patrician manners. As every one sees, people in high station, especially if they chance to possess attractive social qualities, are of necessity compelled to discountenance everything like careless familiarity, even from those with whom they may formerly have been most intimate. They must always stand more or less upon ceremony, and never be handled without gloves. So it is with the queen of flowers. Its thorns not only serve it as a protection, but are for its admirers an excellent discipline in

forbearance. They make it easier for us, as Emerson says, to "love the wood rose and leave it on the stalk." In addition to which I am moved to say that the rose, like the holly, illustrates a truth too seldom insisted upon; namely, that people are more justly condemned for the absence of all good qualities than for the presence of one or two bad ones.

Some such plea as this, though with a smaller measure of assurance, I should make in behalf of plants like the barberry and the bramble. The latter, in truth, sometimes acts as if it were not so much fighting us off as drawing us on. Leaning far forward and stretching forth its arms, it buttonholes the wayfarer, so to speak, and with generous country insistence forces upon him the delicious clusters which he, in his preoccupation, seemed in danger of passing untasted. I think I know the human counterparts of both barberry and bramble,—excellent people in their place, though not to be chosen for bosom friends without a careful weighing of consequences. Judging them not by their manners, but by their fruits, we must set them on the right hand. It would go hard with some of the most pious of my neighbors, I imagine, if the presence of a few thorns and prickles were reckoned inconsistent with a moderately good character.

As for reprobates like the so-called "poison ivy" and "poison dogwood," they have perhaps borrowed a familiar human maxim,—"All is fair in war." In any case, they are no worse than savage heathen, who kill their enemies with poisoned arrows, or than civilized Christians, who stab the reputation of their friends with poisoned words. Their marked comeliness of habit may be taken as a point in their favor; or, on the contrary, it may be held to make

their case only so much the blacker, by laying them liable to the additional charge of hypocrisy. The question is a nice one, and I gladly leave it for subtler casuists than I to settle.

How refreshing to turn from all these, from the thistle and the bramble, yea, even from the rose itself, to gentle spirits like the violet and anemone, the arbutus and hepatica! These wage no war. They are of the original Society of Friends. Who will may spoil them without hurt. Their defense is with their Maker. I wonder whether anybody ever thinks of such flowers as representative of any order of grown people, or whether to everybody else they are forever children, as I find, on thinking of it, they have always been to me. Lowly and trustful, sweet and frail, "of such is the kingdom of heaven." They pass away without losing their innocence. Ere the first heats of summer they are gone.

Yet the autumn, too, has its delicate blooms, though they are overshadowed and, as it were, put out of countenance by the coarser growths which must be said to characterize the harvest season. Nothing that May puts into her lap is more exquisite than are the purple gerardias with which August and September embroider the pasture and the woodland road. They have not the sweet breath of the arbutus, nor even the faint elusive odor of the violet, but for daintiness of form, perfection of color, and gracefulness of habit it would be impossible to praise them too highly. Of our three species, my own favorite is the one of the narrow leaves (*Gerardia tenuifolia*), its longer and slighter flower-stems giving it an airiness and grace peculiarly its own. A lady to whom I had brought a handful the other day expressed it well when she said, "They look like fairy flowers." They are of my

mind in this: they love a dry, sunny opening in the woods, or a grassy field on the edge of woods, especially if there be a seldom-used path running through it. I know not with what human beings to compare them. Perhaps their antitypes of our own kind are yet to be evolved. But I have before now seen a woman who might worthily be set in their company,—a person whose sweet and wise actions were so gracefully carried and so easily let fall as to suggest an order and quality of goodness quite out of relation to common flesh and blood.

What a contrast between such lowly-minded, unobtrusive beauties and egotists like our multitudinous asters and golden-rods! These, between them, almost take possession of the world for the two or three months of their reign. They are handsome, and they know it. What is beauty for, if not to be admired? They mass their tiny blossoms first into solid heads, then into panicles and racemes, and have no idea of hiding their constellated brightness under a bushel. "Let your light shine!" is the word they go on. How eagerly they crowd along the roadside, till the casual passer-by can see scarce anything else! If he does not see *them*, it is not their fault.

For myself, I am far from wishing them at all less numerous, or a jot less forward in displaying their charms. Let there be variety, I say. Because I speak well of the violet for its humility, I see no reason why I should quarrel with the aster for loving to make a show. Herein, too, plants are like men. An indisposition toward publicity is amiable in those to whom it is natural; but I am not clear that bashfulness is the only commendable quality. Let

plants and men alike carry themselves according to their birthright. Providence has not ordained a diversity of gifts for nothing, and it is only a narrow philosophy that takes offense at seeming contrarieties. The truer method, and the happier as well, is to like each according to its kind: to love that which is amiable, to admire that which is admirable, and to study that which is curious.

A few weeks ago, for example, I walked again up the mountain road that climbs out of the Franconia Valley into the Franconia Notch. I had left home twenty-four hours before, fresh from working upon the asters and golden-rods (trying to straighten out my local catalogue in accordance with Dr. Gray's more recent classification of these large and difficult genera), and naturally enough had asters and golden-rods still in my eye. The first mile or two afforded nothing of particular note, but by and by I came to a cluster of the sturdy and peculiar *Solidago squarrosa*, and was taking an admiring account of its appearance and manner of growth, when I caught sight of some lower blue flower underneath, which on a second glance proved to be the closed gentian. This grew in hiding, as one might say, in the shadow of its taller and showier neighbors. Not far off, but a little more within the wood, were patches of the linnæa, which had been at its prettiest in June, but even now, in late September, was still putting forth scattered blossoms. What should a man do? Discard the golden-rod for the gentian, and in turn forsake the gentian for the twin-flower? Nay, a child might do that, but not a man; for the three were all beautiful and all interesting, and each the more beautiful and interesting for its unlikeness to the others. If one wishes a stiff lesson in classification, there are few harder genera (among flowering

plants) than *Solidago*; if he would investigate the timely and taking question of the dependence of plants upon insects, this humble "proterandrous" gentian (which to human vision seems closed, but which the humble-bee knows well how to enter) offers him a favorable subject; while if he has an eye for beauty, a nose for delicate fragrance, and a soul for poetry, the linnæa will never cease to be one of his prime favorites. So I say again, let us have variety. It would be a stupid town all whose inhabitants should be of identical tastes and habits, though these were of the very best; and it would be a tiresome country that brought forth only a single kind of plants.

The flower of Linnæus is a flower by itself, as here and there appears a man who seems, as we say, *sui generis*. This familiar phrase, by the bye, is literally applicable to *Linnæa borealis*, a plant that spreads over a large part of the northern hemisphere, but everywhere preserves its own specific character; so that, whether it be found in Greenland or in Maryland, on the Alaskan Islands or in Utah, in Siberia or on the mountains of Scotland, it is always and everywhere the same,—a genus of one species. Diversities of soil and climate make no impression upon its originality. If it live at all, it must live according to its own plan.

The aster, on the contrary, has a special talent for variation. Like some individuals of another sort, it is born to adapt itself to circumstances. Dr. Gray enumerates no less than one hundred and ninety-six North American species and varieties, many of which shade into each other with such endless and well-nigh insensible gradations that even our great special student of the *Compositæ* pronounces the accurate

and final classification of this particular genus a labor beyond his powers. What shall we say of this habit of variability? Is it a mark of strength or of weakness? Which is nobler,—to be true to one's ideal in spite of circumstances, or to conquer circumstances by suiting one's self to them? Who shall decide? Enough that the twin-flower and the star-flower each obeys its own law, and in so doing contributes each its own part toward making this world the place of diversified beauty which it was foreordained to be.

I spoke of the linnæa's autumnal blossoms, though its normal flowering time is in June. Even this steady-going, unimpressible citizen of the world, it appears, has its one bit of freakishness. In these bright, summery September days, when the trees put on their glory, this lowliest member of the honeysuckle family feels a stirring within to make itself beautiful; and being an evergreen (instead of a summer-green), and therefore incapable of bedecking itself after the maple's manner, it sends up a few flower-stems, each with its couple of swinging, fragrant bells. So it bids the world good-by till the long winter once more comes and goes.

The same engaging habit is noticeable in the case of some of our very commonest plants. After the golden-rods and asters have had their day, late in October or well into November, when witch-hazel, yarrow, and clover are almost the only blossoms left us, you will stumble here and there upon a solitary dandelion reflecting the sun, or a violet giving back the color of the sky. And even so, you may find, once in a while, an old man in whom imaginative impulses have sprung up anew, now that all the prosaic activities of middle life are over. It is almost

as if he were born again. The song of the April robin, the blossoming of the apple-tree, the splendors of sunset and sunrise,—these and things like them touch him to pleasure, as he now remembers they used to do years and years ago. What means this strange revival of youth in age? Is it a reminiscence merely, a final flickering of the candle, or is it rather a prophecy of life yet to come? Well, with the dandelion and the violet we know with reasonable certainty how the matter stands. The autumnal blooms are not belated, but precocious; they belong not to the season past, but to the season coming. Who shall forbid us to hope that what is true of the violet will prove true also of the man?

It speaks well for human nature that in the long run the lowliest flowers are not only the best loved, but the oftenest spoken of. Men play the cynic: modest merit goes to the wall, they say; whoever would succeed, let him put on a brazen face and sharpen his elbows. But those who talk in this strain deceive neither themselves nor those who listen to them. They are commonly such as have themselves tried the trumpet and elbow method, and have discovered that, whatever may be true of transient notoriety, neither public fame nor private regard is to be won by such means. We do not retract what we have said in praise of diversity, and about the right of each to live according to its own nature, but we gladly perceive that in the case of the flowers also it is the meek that inherit the earth.

Our appreciation of our fellow-men depends in part upon the amount, but still more upon the quality, of the service they render us. We could get along without poets more comfortably than without cobblers, for the lower use is often first, in order

both of time and of necessity; but we are never in doubt as to their relative place in our esteem. One serves the body, the other the soul; and we reward the one with money, the other with affection and reverence. And our estimation of plants is according to the same rule. Such of them as nourish the body are good,—good even to the point of being indispensable; but as we make a difference between the barnyard fowl and the nightingale, and between the common run of humanity and a Beethoven or a Milton, so maize and potatoes are never put into the same category with lilies and violets. It must be so, because man is more than an animal, and "the life is more than meat."

Again we say, let each fulfill its own function. One is made for utility, another for beauty. For plants, too, are specialists. They know as well as men how to make the most of inherited capacities and aptitudes, achieving distinction at last by the simple process of sticking to one thing, whether that be the production of buds, blossoms, berries, leaves, bark, timber, or what not; and our judgment of them must be correspondingly varied. The vine bears blossoms, but is to be rated not by them, but by the grapes that come after them; and the rose-tree bears hips, but takes its rank not from them, but from the flowers that went to the making of them. "Nothing but leaves" is a verdict unfavorable or otherwise according to its application. The tea-shrub would hold up its head to hear it.

One of the most interesting and suggestive points of difference among plants is that which relates to the matter of self-reliance. Some are made to stand alone, others to twine, and others to creep. If it were allowable to attribute human feelings to them, we

should perhaps be safe in assuming that the upright look down upon the climbers, and the climbers in turn upon the creepers; for who of us does not felicitate himself upon his independence, such as it is, or such as he imagines it to be? But if independence is indeed a boon,—and I, for one, am too thoroughbred a New Englander ever to doubt it, —it is not the only good, nor even the highest. The nettle, standing straight and prim, asking no favors of anybody, may rail at the grape-vine, which must lay hold of something, small matter what, by which to steady itself; but the nettle might well be willing to forego somewhat of its self-sufficiency, if by so doing it could bring forth grapes. The smilax, also, with its thorns, its pugnacious habit, and its stony, juiceless berries, a sort of handsome vixen among vines,—the smilax, which can climb though it cannot stand erect, has little occasion to lord it over the strawberry. If one has done nothing, or worse than nothing, it is hardly worth while to boast of the original fashion in which he has gone about it. Moreover, the very plants of which we are speaking bear witness to the fact that it is possible to accept help, and still retain to the full one's own individuality. The strawberry is no more a plagiarist than the smilax, nor the grape than the nettle. If the vine clings to the cedar, the connection is but mechanical. Its spirit and life are as independent of the savin as of the planet Jupiter. Even the dodder, which not only twines about other weeds, but actually sucks its life from them, does not thereby lose an iota of its native character. If a man is only original to begin with,—so the parable seems to run, —he is under a kind of necessity to remain so (as Shakespeare did), no matter how much help he may draw from alien sources.

This truth of the vegetable world is the more noteworthy, because, along with it there goes a very strong and persistent habit of individual variation. The plant is faithful to the spirit of its inherited law, but is not in bondage to the letter. Our "high-bush blackberries," to take a familiar illustration, are all of one species, but it does not follow that they are all exactly alike. So far from it, I knew in my time—and the school-boys of the present day are not less accurately informed, we may presume—where to find berries of all shapes, sizes, and flavors. Some were sour, and some were bitter, and some (I can taste them yet) were finger-shaped and sweet. And what is true of *Rubus villosus* is probably true of all plants, though in varying degrees. I do not recall a single article of our annual wild crop—blueberries, huckleberries, blackberries, cherries, grapes, pig-nuts (a bad name for a good thing), shagbarks, acorns, and so forth—in which there was not this constant inequality among plants of the same species, perfectly well defined, and never lost sight of by us juvenile connoisseurs. If we failed to find the same true of other vines and bushes, which for our purposes bore blossoms only, the explanation is not far to seek. Our perceptions, æsthetic and gastronomic, were unequally developed. We were in the case of the man to whom a poet is a poet, though he knows very well that there are cooks and cooks.

It is this slight but everywhere present admixture of the personal quality—call it individuality, or what you will—that saves the world, animal and vegetable alike, from stagnation. Every bush, every bird, every man, together with its unmistakable and ineradicable likeness to the parent stock, has received also a something, be it more or less, that distinguishes it from all its fellows. Let our observation be delicate

enough, and we shall perceive that there are no duplicates of any kind, the world over. It is part of the very unity of the world, this universally diffused diversity.

It does a sympathetic observer good to see how humanly plants differ in their likes and dislikes. One is catholic: as common people say, it is not particular; it can live and thrive almost anywhere. Another must have precisely such and such conditions, and is to be found, therefore, only in very restricted localities. The *Dionæa*, or Venus's fly-trap, is a famous example of this fastidiousness, growing in a small district of North Carolina, and, as far as appears, nowhere else,—a highly specialized plant, with no generic relative. Another instance is furnished by a water lily (*Nymphæa elegans*), the rediscovery of which is chronicled in a late issue of one of our botanical journals. [17] "This lily was originally found in 1849, and has never been seen since, holding its place in botanical literature for these almost forty years on the strength of a single collection at a single vaguely described station on the broad prairies of southwestern Texas;" now, after all this time, it turns up again in another quarter of the same State. And every student could report cases of a similar character, though less striking than these, of course, within the limits of his own local researches. If you ask me where I find dandelions, I answer, anywhere; but if you wish me to show you the sweet colt's-foot (*Nardosmia palmata*), you must go with me to one particular spot. Any of my neighbors will tell you where the pink moccasin flower grows; but if it is the yellow one you are in search of, I shall swear you to secrecy before conducting you to its swampy hiding-place. Some plants, like some people (but the plants, be it noted, are mostly weeds), seem to flourish best away from home; others die under the most careful transplanting. Some are lovers of the open, and cannot be too much in the sun; others lurk

in deep woods, under the triple shadow of tree and bush and fern. Some take to sandy hill-tops; others must stand knee-deep in water. One insists upon the richest of meadow loam; another is content with the face of a rock. We may say of them as truly as of ourselves, *De gustibus non est disputandum*. Otherwise, how would the earth ever be clothed with verdure?

But plants are subject to other whims not less pronounced than these which have to do with the choice of a dwelling-place. We may call it the general rule that leaves come before flowers; but how many of our trees and shrubs reverse this order! The singular habit of the witch-hazel, whose blossoms open as the leaves fall, may be presumed to be familiar to all readers; and hardly less curious is the freak of the chestnut, which, almost if not quite alone among our amentaceous trees, does not put on its splendid coronation robes till late in June, and is frequently at the height of its magnificence in mid-July. What a pretty piece of variety have we, again, in the diurnal and the nocturnal bloomers! For my own part, being a watcher of birds, and therefore almost of necessity an early stirrer abroad, I profess a special regard for such plants as save their beauty for night-time and cloudy weather. The evening primrose is no favorite with most people, I take it, but I seldom fail to pick a blossom or two with the dew on them. Those to whom I carry them usually exclaim as over some wonderful exotic, though the primrose is an inveterate haunter of the roadside. Yet its blossoms have only to be looked at and smelled of to make their way, homely as is the stalk that produces them. They love darkness rather than light, but it certainly is not "because their deeds are evil." One might as well cast the opprobrious text in the

face of the moon and stars. Now and then some enterprising journalist, for want of better employment, investigates anew the habits of literary workers; and it invariably transpires that some can do their best only by daylight, while the minds of others seem to be good for nothing till the sun goes down; and the wise reader, who reads not so much to gain information as to see whether the writer tells the truth, shakes his head, and says, "Oh, it is all in use." Of course it is all in use, just as it is with whippoorwills and the morning-glory.

The mention of the evening primrose calls for the further remark that plants, not less than ourselves, have a trick of combining opposite qualities,—a coarse-grained and scraggy habit, for instance, with blossoms of exquisite fragrance and beauty. The most gorgeous flowers sometimes exhale an abominable odor, and it is not unheard of that inconspicuous or even downright homely sorts should be accounted precious for their sweetness; while, as everybody knows, few members of our native flora are more graceful in appearance than the very two whose simple touch is poison. Could anything be more characteristic of human nature than just such inconsistencies? Suavity and trickery, harshness and integrity, a fiery temper and a gentle heart,—how often do we see the good and the bad dwelling together! We would have ordered things differently, I dare say, had they been left to us,—the good should have been all good, and the bad all bad; and yet, if it be a grief to feel that the holiest men have their failings, it ought perhaps to be a consolation, rather than an additional sorrow, to perceive that the most vicious are not without their virtues. Beyond which, shall we presume to suggest that as poisons have their use, so moral evil, give it time enough, may

turn out to be not altogether a curse?

I have treated my subject too fancifully, I fear. Indeed, there comes over me at this moment a sudden suspicion that my subject itself is nothing but a fancy, or, worse yet, a profanation. If the flowers could talk, who knows how earnestly they might deprecate all such misguided attempts at doing them honor,—as if it were anything but a slander, this imputation to them of the foibles, or even the self-styled good qualities, of our poor humanity! What an egoist is man! I seem to hear them saying; look where he will, at the world or at its Creator, he sees nothing but the reflection of his own image.

**FOOTNOTES:**

[17] The *Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club* for January, 1888, page 13.

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## IN PRAISE OF THE WEYMOUTH PINE.

ToC

"I seek in the motion of the forest, in the sound of the pines, some accents of the eternal language." SÉNANCOUR.

I COULD never think it surprising that the ancients worshiped trees; that groves were believed to be the dwelling places of the gods; that Xerxes delighted in the great plane-tree of Lydia; that he decked it with golden ornaments and appointed for it a sentry, one of "the immortal ten thousand." Feelings of this kind are natural; among natural men they seem to have been well-nigh universal. The wonder is that any should be without them. For myself, I cannot recollect the day when I did not regard the Weymouth pine (the white pine I was taught to call

it, but now, for reasons of my own, I prefer the English name) with something like reverence. Especially was this true of one,—a tree of stupendous girth and height, under which I played, and up which I climbed till my cap seemed almost to rub against the sky. That pine ought to be standing yet; I would go far to lie in its shadow. But alas! no village Xerxes concerned himself for its safety, and long, long ago it was brought to earth, it and all its fair lesser companions. There is no wisdom in the grave, and it is nothing to them now that I remember them so kindly. Some of them went to the making of boxes, I suppose, some to the kindling of kitchen fires. In like noble spirit did the illustrious Bobo, for the love of roast pig, burn down his father's house.

No such pines are to be seen now. I have said it for these twenty years, and mean no offense, surely, to the one under which, in thankful mood, I happen at this moment to be reclining. Yet a murmur runs through its branches as I pencil the words. Perhaps it is saying to itself that giants are, and always have been, things of the past,—things gazed at over the beholder's shoulder and through the mists of years; and that this venerable monarch of my boyhood, this relic of times remote, has probably grown faster since it was cut down than ever it did while standing. I care not to argue the point. Rather, let me be glad that a tree is a tree, whether large or small. What a wonder of wonders it would seem to unaccustomed eyes! As some lover of imaginative delights wished that he could forget Shakespeare and read him new, so I would cheerfully lose all memory of my king of Weymouth pines, if by that means I might for once look upon a tree as upon something I had never seen or dreamed of.

For that purpose, were it given me to choose, I would have one that had grown by itself; full of branches on all sides, but with no suggestion of primness; in short, a perfect tree, a miracle hardly to be found in any forest, since the forest would be no better than a park if the separate members of it were allowed room to develop each after its own law. Nature is too cunning an artist to spoil the total effect of her picture by too fond a regard for the beauty of particular details.

I once passed a lazy, dreamy afternoon in a small clearing on a Canadian mountain-side, where the lumbermen had left standing a few scattered butternuts. I can see them now,—misshapen giants, patriarchal monstrosities, their huge trunks leaning awkwardly this way and that, and each bearing at the top a ludicrously small, one-sided bunch of leafy boughs. All about me was the ancient wood. For a week I had been wandering through it with delight. Such beeches and maples, birches and butternuts! I had not thought of any imperfection. I had been in sympathy with the artist, and had enjoyed his work in the same spirit in which it had been wrought. Now, however, with these unhappy butternuts in my eye, I began to look, not at the forest, but at the trees, and I found that the spared butternuts were in no sense exceptional. *All* the trees were deformed. They had grown as they could, not as their innate proclivities would have led them. A tree is no better than a man; it cannot be itself if it stands too much in a crowd.

I set it down, unwillingly, to the discredit of the Weymouth pine,—a symptom of some ancestral taint, perhaps,—that it suffers less than most trees from being thus encroached upon. Yet it does not

entirely escape. True, it leans neither to left nor right, its trunk is seldom contorted; if it grow at all it must grow straight toward the zenith; but it is sadly maimed, nevertheless,—hardly more than a tall stick with a broom at the top. If you would see a typical white pine you must go elsewhere to look for it. I remember one such, standing by itself in a broad Concord River meadow; not remarkable for its size, but of a symmetry and beauty that make the traveler turn again and again, till he is a mile away, to gaze upon it. No pine-tree ever grew like that in a wood.

I go sometimes through a certain hamlet, which has sprung suddenly into being on a hill-top where formerly stood a pine grove. The builders of the houses have preserved (doubtless they use that word) a goodly number of the trees. But though I have been wont to esteem the poorest tree as better than none, I am almost ready to forswear my opinion at sight of these slender trunks, so ungainly and unsupported. The first breeze, one would say, must bring them down upon the roofs they were never meant to shade. Poor naked things! I fancy they look abashed at being dragged thus unexpectedly and inappropriately into broad daylight. If I were to see the householder lifting his axe against one of them I think I should not say, "Woodman, spare *that* tree!" Let it go to the fire, the sooner the better, and be out of its misery.

Not that I blame the tree, or the power that made it what it is. The forest, like every other community, prospers—we may rather say exists—at the expense of individual perfection. But the expense is true economy, for, however it may be in ethics, in æsthetics the end justifies the means. The solitary pine, unhindered, symmetrical, green to its

lowermost twig, as it rises out of the meadow or stands a-tiptoe on the rocky ledge, is a thing of beauty, a pleasure to every eye. A pity and a shame that it should not be more common! But the pine *forest*, dark, spacious, slumberous, musical! Here is something better than beauty, dearer than pleasure. When we enter this cathedral, unless we enter it unworthily, we speak not of such things. Every tree may be imperfect, with half its branches dead for want of room or want of sun, but until the devotee turns critic—an easy step, alas, for half-hearted worshipers—we are conscious of no lack. Magnificence can do without prettiness, and a touch of solemnity is better than any amusement.

Where shall we hear better preaching, more searching comment upon life and death, than in this same cathedral? Verily, the pine is a priest of the true religion. It speaks never of itself, never its own words. Silent it stands till the Spirit breathes upon it. Then all its innumerable leaves awake and speak as they are moved. Then "he that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Wonderful is human speech,—the work of generations upon generations, each striving to express itself, its feelings, its thoughts, its needs, its sufferings, its joys, its inexpressible desires. Wonderful is human speech, for its complexity, its delicacy, its power. But the pine-tree, under the visitations of the heavenly influence, utters things incommunicable; it whispers to us of things we have never said and never can say,—things that lie deeper than words, deeper than thought. Blessed are our ears if we hear, for the message is not to be understood by every comer, nor, indeed, by any, except at happy moments. In this temple all hearing is given by inspiration, for which reason the pine-tree's language is inarticulate, as Jesus spake in

parables.

The pine wood loves a clean floor, and is intolerant of undergrowth. Grasses and sedges, with all bushes, it frowns upon, as a model housekeeper frowns upon dirt. A plain brown carpet suits it best, with a modest figure of green—preferably of evergreen—woven into it; a tracery of partridge-berry vine, or, it may be, of club moss, with here and there a tuft of pipsissewa and pyrola. Its mood is sombre, its taste severe. Yet I please myself with noticing that the pine wood, like the rest of us, is not without its freak, its amiable inconsistency, its one "tender spot," as we say of each other. It makes a pet of one of our oddest, brightest, and showiest flowers, the pink lady's-slipper, and by some means or other has enticed it away from the peat bog, where it surely should be growing, along with the calopogon, the pogonia, and the arethusa, and here it is, like some rare exotic, thriving in a bed of sand and on a mat of brown needles. Who will undertake to explain the occult "elective affinity" by which this rosy orchid is made so much at home under the heavy shadow of the Weymouth pine?

According to the common saying, there is no accounting for tastes. If by this is meant simply that *we* cannot account for them, the statement is true enough. But if we are to speak exactly, there are no likes nor dislikes except for cause. Every freak of taste, like every vagary of opinion, has its origin and history, and, with sufficient knowledge on our part, could be explained and justified. The pine-tree and the orchid are not friends by accident, however the case may look to us who cannot see behind the present nor beneath the surface. There are no mysteries *per se*, but only to the ignorant. Yet

ignorance itself, disparagingly as we talk of it, has its favorable side,—as it is pleasant sometimes to withdraw from the sun and wander for a season in the half-light of the forest. Perhaps we need be in no haste to reach a world where there is never any darkness. In some moods, at least, I go with the partridge-berry vine and the lady's-slipper. It is good, I think, to live awhile longer in the shadow; to see as through a glass darkly; and to hear overhead, not plain words, but inarticulate murmurs.

I am not to be understood as praising the pine at the expense of other trees. All things considered, no evergreen can be equal to a summer-green, on which we see the leaves budding, unfolding, ripening, and falling,—a "worlde whiche neweth everie daie." What would winter be worth without the naked branches of maples and elms, beeches and oaks? We speak of them sadly:

"Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang."

But the sadness is of a pleasing sort, that could ill be spared by any who know the pleasures of sentiment and sober reflection. But though one tree differeth from another tree in glory, we may surely rejoice in them all. One ministers to our mood to-day, another to-morrow.

"I hate those trees that never lose
their foliage;
They seem to have no sympathy with
Nature;
Winter and summer are alike to them."

So says Ternissa, in Landor's dialogue. I know what she means. But I do not "hate" an impassive, unchangeable temper, whether in a tree or in a man.

I have so little of such a spirit myself that I am glad to see some tokens of it—not too frequent, indeed, nor too self-assertive—in the world about me. And so I say, let me never be, for any long time together, where there are no Weymouth pines at which I may gaze from afar, or under which I may lie and listen. They boast not (rare stoics!), but they set us a brave example. No "blasts that blow the poplar white" can cause the pine-tree to blanch. No frost has power to strip it of a single leaf. Its wood is soft, but how dauntless its spirit!—a truly encouraging paradox, lending itself, at our private need, to endless consolatory moralizings. The great majority of my brothers must be comforted, I think, by any fresh reminder that the battle is not to the strong.

For myself, then, like the lowly partridge-berry vine, I would be always the pine-tree's neighbor. Who knows but by lifelong fellowship with it I may absorb something of its virtue? Summer and winter, its fragrant breath rises to heaven; and of it we may say, with more truth than Landor said of the over-sweet fragrance of the linden, "Happy the man whose aspirations are pure enough to mingle with it!"

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