

## THE MUSKRATS ARE BUILDING

**W**E have had a series of long, heavy rains, and water is standing over the swampy meadow. It is a dreary stretch, this wet, sedgy land in the cold twilight, drearier than any part of the woods or the upland pastures. They are empty, but the meadow is flat and wet, naked and all unsheltered. And a November night is falling.

The darkness deepens. A raw wind is rising. At nine o'clock the moon swings round and full to the crest of the ridge, and pours softly over. I button the heavy ulster close, and in my rubber boots go down to the river and follow it out to the middle of the meadow, where it meets the main ditch at the sharp turn toward the swamp. Here at the bend, behind a clump of black alders, I sit quietly down and wait.

I am not mad, nor melancholy; I am not after copy. Nothing is the matter with me. I have come out to the bend to watch the muskrats building, for that small mound up the ditch is not an old haycock, but a half-finished muskrat house.

The moon climbs higher. The water on the meadow shivers in the light. The wind bites through my heavy coat and sends me back, but not until I have seen one, two, three little figures scaling the walls of the house with loads of mud-and-reed mortar. I am driven back by the cold, but not until I know that here in the desolate meadow is being rounded off a lodge, thick-walled

and warm, and proof against the longest, bitterest of winters.

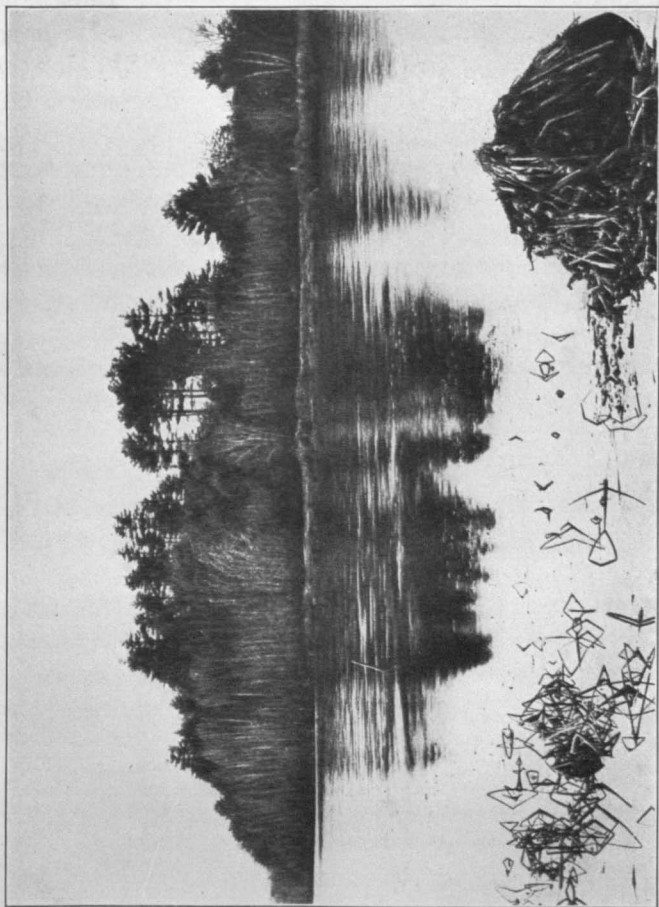
This is near the end of November. My wood is in the cellar; I am about ready to put on the double windows and storm doors; and the muskrats' house is all but finished. Winter is at hand: but we are prepared, the muskrats even better prepared than I, for theirs is an adequate house, planned perfectly.

Throughout the summer they had no house, only their tunnels into the sides of the ditch, their roadways out into the grass, and their beds under the tussocks or among the roots of the old stumps. All these months the water had been low in the ditch, and the beds among the tussocks had been safe and dry enough.

Now the autumnal rains have filled river and ditch, flooded the tunnels, and crept up into the beds under the tussocks. Even a muskrat will creep out of his bed when cold, wet water creeps in. What shall he do for a house? He does not want to leave his meadow. The only thing to do is to build, — move from under the tussock, out upon the top, and here, in the deep, wiry grass, make a new bed, high and dry above the rising water, and close the new bed in with walls that circle and dome and defy the winter.

Such a house will require a great deal of work to build. Why not combine, make it big enough to hold half a dozen, save labor and warmth, and, withal, live sociably together? So they left each one his bed and, joining efforts, started about the middle of October to build this winter house.

Slowly, night after night, the domed walls have been



THE MUSKRATS' HOUSE

rising, although for several nights at a time there would be no apparent progress with the work. The builders were in no hurry, it seems; the cold was far off; but it is coming, and to-night it feels near and keen. And to-night there is no loafing about the lodge.

When this house is done, then the rains may descend, and the floods come, but it will not fall. It is built upon a tussock; and a tussock, you will know, who have ever grubbed at one, has hold on the bottom of creation. The winter may descend, and the boys, and foxes, come, — and they will come, but not before the walls are frozen, — yet the house stands. It is boy-proof, almost; it is entirely rain-, cold-, and fox-proof. Many a time I have hacked its walls with my axe when fishing through the ice, but I never got in. I have often seen, too, where the fox has gone round and round the house in the snow, and where, at places, he has attempted to dig into the frozen mortar; but it was a foot thick, as hard as flint, and utterly impossible for his pick and shovel.

Yet, strangely enough, the house sometimes fails of the very purpose for which it was erected. I said the floods may come. So they may, ordinarily; but along in March when one comes as a freshet, it rises sometimes to the dome of the house, filling the single bed-chamber and drowning the dwellers out. I remember a freshet once in the end of February that flooded Lupton's Pond and drove the muskrats of the whole pond village to their ridgepoles, to the bushes, and to whatever wreckage the waters brought along.

"The best laid schemes o' *muskrats* too  
Gang aft a-gley."

But ganging a-gley is not the interesting thing, not the point with my muskrats; it is rather that my muskrats, and the mice that Burns ploughed up, the birds and the bees, and even the very trees of the forest, have foresight. They all look ahead and provide against the coming cold. That a mouse, or a muskrat, or even a bee, should occasionally prove foresight to be vain, only shows that the life of the fields is very human. Such foresight, however, oftener proves entirely adequate for the winter, dire as some of the emergencies are sure to be.

“The north wind doth blow,  
And we shall have snow,  
And what will Robin do then,  
Poor thing?”

And what will Muskrat do? and Chipmunk? and Whitefoot? and little Chickadee? poor things! Never fear. Robin has heard the trumpets of the north wind and is retreating leisurely toward the south, wise thing! Muskrat is building a warm winter lodge; Chipmunk has already dug his but and ben, and so far down under the stone wall that a month of zeros could not break in; Whitefoot, the woodmouse, has stored the hollow poplar stub full of acorns, and has turned Robin's deserted nest, near by, into a cosy house; and Chickadee, dear thing, Nature herself looks after him. There are plenty of provisions for the hunting, and a big piece of suet on my lilac bush. His clothes are warm, and he will hide his head under his wing in the elm-tree hole when the north wind doth blow, and never mind the weather.

I shall not mind it either, not so much, anyway, on

account of Chickadee. He lends me a deal of support. So do Chipmunk, Whitefoot, and Muskrat.

This lodge of my muskrats in the meadow makes a difference, I am sure, of at least ten degrees in the mean temperature of my winter. How can the out-of-doors freeze entirely up with such a house as this at the middle of it? For in this house is life, warm life, — and fire. On the coldest day I can look out over the bleak white waste to where the house shows, a tiny mound in the snow, and I can see the fire burn, just as I can see and feel the glow when I watch the slender blue wraith rise into the still air from the chimney of the old farmhouse along the road below. For I share in the life of both houses; and not less in the life of the mud house of the meadow, because, instead of Swedes, they are muskrats who live there. I can share the existence of a muskrat? Easily. I like to curl up with the three or four of them in that mud house and there spend the worst days of the winter. My own big house here on the hilltop is sometimes cold. And the wind! If sometimes I could only drive the insistent winter wind from the house-corners! But down in the meadow the house has no corners; the mud walls are thick, so thick and round that the shrieking wind sweeps past unheard, and all unheeded the cold creeps over and over the thatch, then crawls back and stiffens upon the meadow.

The doors of our house in the meadow swing open the winter through. Just outside the doors stand our stacks of fresh calamus roots, and iris, and arum. The roof of the universe has settled close and hard upon us, — a sheet of ice extending from the ridge of the house

far out to the shores of the meadow. The winter is all above the roof — outside. It blows and snows and freezes out there. In here, beneath the ice-roof, the roots of the sedges are pink and tender; our roads are all open and they run every way, over all the rich, rooty meadow.

The muskrats are building. Winter is coming. The muskrats are making preparations, but not they alone. The preparation for hard weather is to be seen everywhere, and it has been going on ever since the first flocking of the swallows back in July. Up to that time the season still seemed young; no one thought of harvest, of winter; — when there upon the telegraph-wires one day were the swallows, and work against the winter had commenced.

The great migratory movements of the birds, mysterious in some of their courses as the currents of the sea, were in the beginning, and are still, for the most part, mere shifts to escape the cold. Why in the spring these same birds should leave the southern lands of plenty and travel back to the hungrier north to nest, is not easily explained. Perhaps it is the home instinct that draws them back; for home to birds (and men) is the land of the nest. However, it is very certain that among the autumn migrants there would be at once a great falling off should there come a series of warm open winters with abundance of food.

Bad as the weather is, there are a few of the seed-eating birds, like the quail, and some of the insect-eaters, like the chickadee, who are so well provided for that they can stay and survive the winter. But the great

majority of the birds, because they have no storehouse nor barn, must take wing and fly away from the lean and hungry cold.

And I am glad to see them go. The thrilling honk of the flying wild geese out of the November sky tells me that the hollow forests and closing bays of the vast desolate north are empty now, except for the few creatures that find food and shelter in the snow. The wild geese pass, and I hear behind them the clang of the arctic gates, the boom of the bolt — then the long frozen silence. Yet it is not for long. Soon the bar will slip back, the gates will swing wide, and the wild geese will come honking over, swift to the greening marshes of the arctic bays once more.

Here in my own small woods and marshes there is much getting ready, much comforting assurance that Nature is quite equal to herself, that winter is not approaching unawares. There will be great lack, no doubt, before there is plenty again; there will be suffering and death. But what with the migrating, the strange, deep sleeping, the building and harvesting, there will be also much comfortable, much joyous and sociable living.

Long before the muskrats began to build, even before the swallows commenced to flock, my chipmunks started their winter stores. I don't know which began his work first, which kept harder at it, chipmunk or the provident ant. The ant has come by a reputation for thrift, which, though entirely deserved, is still not the exceptional virtue it is made to seem. Chipmunk is just as thrifty. So is the busy bee. It is the thought of approaching winter that keeps the bee busy far beyond her summer

needs. Much of her labor is entirely for the winter. By the first of August she has filled the brood chamber with honey — forty pounds of it, enough for the hatching bees and for the whole colony until the willows tassel again. But who knows what the winter may be? How cold and long drawn out into the coming May? So the harvesting is pushed with vigor on to the flowering of the last autumn asters — on until fifty, a hundred, or even three hundred pounds of surplus honey are sealed in the combs, and the colony is safe should the sun not shine again for a year and a day.

But here is Nature, in these extra pounds of honey, making preparation for me, incapable drone that I am. I could not make a drop of honey from a whole forest of linden bloom. Yet I must live, so I give the bees a bigger gum log than they need; I build them greater barns; and when the harvest is all in, this extra store I make my own. I too with the others am getting ready for the cold.

It is well that I am. The last of the asters have long since gone; so have the witch-hazels. All is quiet about the hives. The bees have formed into their warm winter clusters upon the combs, and except "when come the calm, mild days," they will fly no more until March or April. I will contract their entrances, — put on their storm doors. And now there is little else that I can do but put on my own.

The whole of my out-of-doors is a great hive, stored and sealed for the winter, its swarming life close-clustered, and covering in its centre, as coals in the ashes, the warm life-fires of summer.

I stand along the edge of the hillside here and look down the length of its frozen slope. The brown leaves have drifted into the entrances, as if every burrow were forsaken; sand and sticks have washed in, too, littering and choking the doorways.

There is no sign of life. A stranger would find it hard to believe that my whole drove of forty-six ground-hogs (woodchucks) are gently snoring at the bottoms of these old-uninteresting holes. Yet here they are, and quite out of danger, sleeping the sleep of the furry, the fat, and the forgetful.

The woodchuck's is a curious shift, a case of Nature outdoing herself. Winter spreads far and fast, and Woodchuck, in order to keep ahead out of danger, would need wings. But he was n't given any. Must he perish then? Winter spreads far, but does not go deep — down only about four feet; and Woodchuck, if he cannot escape overland, can, perhaps, *underland*. So down he goes *through* the winter, down into a mild and even temperature, five long feet away — but as far away from the snow and cold as Bobolink among the reeds of the distant Orinoco.

Indeed, Woodchuck's is a farther journey and even more wonderful than Bobolink's, for these five feet carry him beyond the bounds of time and space into the mysterious realm of sleep, of suspended life, to the very gates of death. That he will return with Bobolink, that he will come up alive with the spring out of this dark way, is very strange.

For he went in most meagrely prepared. He took nothing with him, apparently. The muskrat built him

a house, and under the spreading ice turned all the meadow into a well-stocked cellar. The beaver built a dam, cut and anchored under water a plenty of green sticks near his lodge, so that he too would be under cover when the ice formed, and have an abundance of tender bark at hand. Chipmunk spent half of his summer laying up food near his underground nest. But Woodchuck simply dug him a hole, a grave, then ate until no particle more of fat could be got into his baggy hide, and then crawled into his tomb, gave up the ghost, and waited the resurrection of the spring.

This is his shift! This is the length to which he goes, because he has no wings, and because he cannot cut, cure, and mow away in the depths of the stony hillside, enough clover hay to last him over the winter. The beaver cans his fresh food in cold water; the chipmunk selects long-keeping things and buries them; the woodchuck makes of himself a silo, eats all his winter hay in the summer while it is green, turns it at once into a surplus of himself, then buries that self, feeds upon it, and sleeps — and lives!

“The north wind doth blow,  
And we shall have snow,”

but what good reason is there for our being daunted at the prospect? Robin and all the others are well prepared. Even the wingless frog, who is also lacking in fur and feathers and fat, even he has no care at the sound of the cold winds. Nature provides for him too, in her way, which is the way neither for the robin, the muskrat, nor the woodchuck. He survives, and all he

has to do about it is to dig into the mud at the bottom of the ditch. This looks at first like the journey Woodchuck takes. But it is really a longer, stranger journey than Woodchuck's, for it takes the frog far beyond the realms of mere sleep, on into the cold, black land where no one can tell the quick from the dead.

The frost may or may not reach him here in the ooze. No matter. If the cold works down and freezes him into the mud, he never knows. But he will thaw out as good as new; he will sing again for joy and love as soon as his heart warms up enough to beat.

I have seen frogs frozen into the middle of solid lumps of ice in the laboratory. Drop the lump on the floor, and the frog would break out like a fragment of the ice itself. And this has happened more than once to the same frog without causing him the least apparent suffering or inconvenience. He would come to, and croak, and look as wise as ever.

“The north wind *may* blow,”

but the muskrats are building; and it is by no means a cheerless prospect, this wood-and-meadow world of mine in the gray November light. The frost will not fall to-night as falls the plague on men; the brightness of the summer is gone, yet this chill gloom is not the sombre shadow of a pall. Nothing is dying in the fields: the grass-blades are wilting, the old leaves are falling, but no square foot of greensward will the winter kill, nor a single tree perhaps in my wood-lot. There will be no less of life next April because of this winter, unless, perchance, conditions altogether exceptional starve

some of the winter birds. These suffer most; yet as the seasons go, life even for the winter birds is comfortable and abundant.

The fence-rows and old pastures are full of berries that will keep the fires burning in the quail and partridge during the bitterest weather. Last February, however, I came upon two partridges in the snow, dead of hunger and cold. It was after an extremely long severe spell. But this was not all. These two birds since fall had been feeding regularly in the dried fodder corn that stood shocked over the field. One day all the corn was carted away. The birds found their supply of food suddenly cut off, and, unused to foraging the fence-rows and tangles for wild seeds, they seem to have given up the struggle at once, although within easy reach of plenty.

Hardly a minute's flight away was a great thicket of dwarf sumac covered with berries; there were bay-berries, rose-hips, green-brier, bittersweet, black-alder, and checkerberries — hillsides of the latter — that they might have found. These were hard fare, doubtless, after an unstinted supply of sweet corn; but still they were plentiful, and would have been sufficient had the birds made use of them.

The smaller birds of the winter, like the tree sparrow and junco, feed upon the weeds and grasses that ripen unmolested along the roadsides and waste places. A mixed flock of these small birds lived several days last winter upon the seeds of the ragweed in my mowing. The weeds came up in the early fall after the field was laid down to clover and timothy. They threatened to choke out the grass. I looked at them, rising shoulder-

high and seedy over the greening field, and thought with dismay of how they would cover it by the next fall. After a time the snow came, a foot and a half of it, till only the tops of the seedy ragweeds showed above the level white; then the juncos, goldfinches, and tree sparrows came, and there was a five-day shucking of ragweed-seed in the mowing, and five days of life and plenty.

Then I looked and thought again — that, perhaps, into the original divine scheme of things were put even ragweeds. But then, perhaps, there was no original divine scheme of things. I don't know. As I watch the changing seasons, however, across the changeless years, I seem to find a scheme, a plan, a purpose, and there are weeds and winters in it, and it seems divine.

The muskrats are building; the last of the migrating geese have gone over; the wild mice have harvested their acorns; the bees have clustered; the woodchucks are asleep; and the sap in the big hickory by the side of the house has crept down out of reach of the fingers of the frost. I will put on the storm doors and the double windows. Even now the logs are blazing cheerily on the wide, warm hearth.

## CHRISTMAS IN THE WOODS

ON the night before this particular Christmas every creature of the woods that could stir was up and stirring, for over the old snow was falling swiftly, silently, a soft, fresh covering that might mean a hungry Christmas unless the dinner were had before morning.

But when the morning dawned, a cheery Christmas sun broke across the great gum swamp, lighting the snowy boles and soft-piled limbs of the giant trees with indescribable glory, and pouring, a golden flood, into the deep spongy bottoms below. It would be a perfect Christmas in the woods, clear, mild, stirless, with silent footing for me, and everywhere the telltale snow.

And everywhere the Christmas spirit, too. As I paused among the pointed cedars of the pasture, looking down into the cripple at the head of the swamp, a clear wild whistle rang in the thicket, followed by a flash through the alders like a tongue of fire, as a cardinal grosbeak shot down to the tangle of green-brier and magnolia under the slope. It was a fleck of flaming summer. As warm as summer, too, the stag-horn sumac burned on the crest of the ridge against the group of holly trees, — trees as fresh as April, and all aglow with berries. The woods were decorated for the holy day. The gentleness of the soft new snow touched everything; cheer and good-will lighted the unclouded sky and warmed the thick depths of the evergreens, and blazed

in the crimson-berried bushes of the ilex and alder. The Christmas woods were glad.

Nor was the gladness all show, mere decoration. There was real cheer in abundance, for I was back in the old home woods, back along the Cohansey, back where you can pick persimmons off the trees at Christmas. There are persons who say the Lord might have made a better berry than the strawberry, but He did n't. Perhaps He did n't make the strawberry at all. But He did make the Cohansey Creek persimmon, and He made it as good as He could. Nowhere else under the sun can you find such persimmons as these along the creek, such richness of flavor, such gummy, candied quality, woodsy, wild, crude, — especially the fruit of two particular trees on the west bank, near Lupton's Pond. But they never come to this perfection, never quite lose their pucker, until midwinter, — as if they had been intended for the Christmas table of the woods.

It had been nearly twenty years since I crossed this pasture of the cedars on my way to the persimmon trees. The cows had been crossing every year, yet not a single new crook had they worn in the old paths. But I was half afraid as I came to the fence where I could look down upon the pond and over to the persimmon trees. Not one of the Luptons, who owned pasture and pond and trees, had ever been a boy, so far as I could remember, or had ever eaten of those persimmons. Would they have left the trees through all these years?

I pushed through the hedge of cedars and stopped for an instant, confused. The very pond was gone! and the trees! No, there was the pond, — but how small the

patch of water! and the two persimmon trees? The bush and undergrowth had grown these twenty years. Which way — Ah, there they stand, only their leafless tops showing; but see the hard angular limbs, how closely globed with fruit! how softly etched upon the sky!

I hurried around to the trees and climbed the one with the two broken branches, up, clear up to the top, into the thick of the persimmons.

Did I say it had been twenty years? That could not be. Twenty years would have made me a man, and this sweet, real taste in my mouth only a *boy* could know. But there was college, and marriage, a Massachusetts farm, four boys of my own, and — no matter! it could not have been *years* — twenty years — since. It was only yesterday that I last climbed this tree and ate the rich rimy fruit frosted with a Christmas snow.

And yet, could it have been yesterday? It was storming, and I clung here in the swirling snow and heard the wild ducks go over in their hurry toward the bay. Yesterday, and all this change in the vast tree-top world, this huddled pond, those narrowed meadows, that shrunken creek! I should have eaten the persimmons and climbed straight down, not stopped to gaze out upon the pond, and away over the dark ditches to the creek. But, reaching out quickly, I gathered another handful, — and all was yesterday again.

I filled both pockets of my coat and climbed down. I kept those persimmons and am tasting them to-night. Lupton's Pond may fill to a puddle, the meadows may shrivel, the creek dry up and disappear, and old Time may even try his wiles on me. But I shall foil him to the

end; for I am carrying still in my pocket some of yesterday's persimmons, — persimmons that ripened in the rime of a winter when I was a boy.

High and alone in a bare persimmon tree for one's dinner hardly sounds like a merry Christmas. But I was not alone. I had noted the fresh tracks beneath the tree before I climbed up, and now I saw that the snow had been partly brushed from several of the large limbs as the 'possum had moved about in the tree for his Christmas dinner. We were guests at the same festive board, and both of us at Nature's invitation. It mattered not that the 'possum had eaten and gone this hour or more. Such is good form in the woods. He was expecting me, so he came early, out of modesty, and, that I too might be entirely at my ease, he departed early, leaving his greetings for me in the snow.

Thus I was not alone; here was good company and plenty of it. I never lack a companion in the woods when I can pick up a trail. The 'possum and I ate together. And this was just the fellowship I needed, this sharing the persimmons with the 'possum. I had broken bread, not with the 'possum only, but with all the out-of-doors. I was now fit to enter the woods, for I was filled with good-will and persimmons, as full as the 'possum; and putting myself under his gentle guidance, I got down upon the ground, took up his clumsy trail, and descended toward the swamp. Such an entry is one of the particular joys of the winter. To go in with a fox, a mink, or a 'possum through the door of the woods is to find yourself at home. Any one can get inside the out-of-doors, as the grocery boy or the census man gets inside

our houses. You can bolt in at any time on business. A trail, however, is Nature's invitation. There may be other, better beaten paths for mere feet. But go softly with the 'possum, and at the threshold you are met by the spirit of the wood, you are made the guest of the open, silent, secret out-of-doors.

I went down with the 'possum. He had traveled home leisurely and without fear, as his tracks plainly showed. He was full of persimmons. A good happy world this, where such fare could be had for the picking! What need to hurry home, except one were in danger of falling asleep by the way? So I thought, too, as I followed his winding path; and if I was tracking him to his den, it was only to wake him for a moment with the compliments of the season. But it was not even a momentary disturbance; for when I finally found him in his hollow gum, he was sound asleep, and only half realized that some one was poking him gently in the ribs and wishing him a merry Christmas.

The 'possum had led me to the centre of the empty, hollow swamp, where the great-boled gums lifted their branches like a timbered, unshingled roof between me and the wide sky. Far away through the spaces of the rafters I saw a pair of wheeling buzzards, and under them, in lesser circles, a broad-winged hawk. Here, at the feet of the tall, clean trees, looking up through the leafless limbs, I had something of a measure for the flight of the birds. The majesty and the mystery of the distant buoyant wings were singularly impressive.

I have seen the turkey-buzzard sailing the skies on the bitterest winter days. To-day, however, could

hardly be called winter. Indeed, nothing yet had felt the pinch of the cold. There was no hunger yet in the swamp, though this new snow had scared the raccoons out, and their half-human tracks along the margin of the swamp stream showed that, if not hungry, they at least feared that they might be.

For a coon hates snow. He will invariably sleep off the first light snowfalls, and even in the late winter he will not venture forth in fresh snow unless driven by hunger or some other dire need. Perhaps, like a cat or a hen, he dislikes the wetting of his feet. Or it may be that the soft snow makes bad hunting — for him. The truth is, I believe, that such a snow makes too good hunting for the dogs and the gunner. The new snow tells too clear a story. His home is no inaccessible den among the ledges; only a hollow in some ancient oak or tupelo. Once within, he is safe from the dogs, but the long fierce fight for life taught him generations ago that the nest-tree is a fatal trap when behind the dogs come the axe and the gun. So he has grown wary and enduring. He waits until the snow grows crusty, when without sign, and almost without scent, he can slip forth among the long shadows and prowl to the edge of dawn.

Skirting the stream out toward the higher back woods, I chanced to spy a bunch of snow in one of the great sour gums that I thought was an old nest. A second look showed me tiny green leaves, then white berries, then mistletoe.

It was not a surprise, for I had found it here before, — a long, long time before. It was back in my schoolboy days, back beyond those twenty years, that I first stood

here under the mistletoe and had my first romance. There was no chandelier, no pretty girl, in that romance, — only a boy, the mistletoe, the giant trees, and the sombre silent swamp. Then there was his discovery, the thrill of deep delight, and the wonder of his knowledge of the strange, unnatural plant! All plants had been plants to him until, one day, he read the life of the mistletoe. But that was English mistletoe; so the boy's wonder-world of plant-life was still as far away as Mars, when, rambling alone through the swamp along the creek, he stopped under a big curious bunch of green, high up in one of the gums, and — made his first discovery.

So the boy climbed up again this Christmas Day at the peril of his precious neck, and brought down a bit of that old romance.

I followed the stream along through the swamp to the open meadows, and then on under the steep wooded hillside that ran up to the higher land of corn and melon fields. Here at the foot of the slope the winter sun lay warm, and here in the sheltered briery border I came upon the Christmas birds.

There was a great variety of them, feeding and preening and chirping in the vines. The tangle was a-twitter with their quiet, cheery talk. Such a medley of notes you could not hear at any other season outside a city bird store. How far the different species understood one another I should like to know, and whether the hum of voices meant sociability to them, as it certainly meant to me. Doubtless the first cause of their flocking here was the sheltered warmth and the great numbers of berry-

laden bushes, for there was no lack of either abundance or variety on the Christmas table.

In sight from where I stood hung bunches of withering chicken or frost grapes, plump clusters of blue-black berries of the green-brier, and limbs of the smooth winterberry bending with their flaming fruit. There were bushes of crimson ilex, too, trees of fruiting dogwood and holly, cedars in berry, dwarf sumac and seedy sedges, while patches on the wood slopes uncovered by the sun were spread with trailing partridge-berry and the coral-fruited wintergreen. I had eaten part of my dinner with the 'possum; I picked a quantity of these wintergreen berries, and continued my meal with the birds. And they also had enough and to spare.

Among the birds in the tangle was a large flock of northern fox sparrows, whose vigorous and continuous scratching in the bared spots made a most lively and cheery commotion. Many of them were splashing about in tiny pools of snow-water, melted partly by the sun and partly by the warmth of their bodies as they bathed. One would hop to a softening bit of snow at the base of a tussock, keel over and begin to flop, soon sending up a shower of sparkling drops from his rather chilly tub. A winter snow-water bath seemed a necessity, a luxury indeed, for they all indulged, splashing with the same purpose and zest that they put into their scratching among the leaves.

A much bigger splashing drew me quietly through the bushes to find a marsh hawk giving himself a Christmas souse. The scratching, washing, and talking of the birds; the masses of green in the cedars, holly, and

laurels; the glowing colors of the berries against the snow; the blue of the sky, and the golden warmth of the light made Christmas in the heart of the noon that the very swamp seemed to feel.

Three months later there was to be scant picking here, for this was the beginning of the severest winter I ever knew. From this very ridge, in February, I had reports of berries gone, of birds starving, of whole coveys of quail frozen dead in the snow; but neither the birds nor I dreamed to-day of any such hunger and death. A flock of robins whirled into the cedars above me; a pair of cardinals whistled back and forth; tree sparrows, juncos, nuthatches, chickadees, and cedar-birds cheeped among the trees and bushes; and from the farm lands at the top of the slope rang the calls of meadowlarks.

Halfway up the hill I stopped under a blackjack oak, where, in the thin snow, there were signs of something like a Christmas revel. The ground was sprinkled with acorn-shells and trampled over with feet of several kinds and sizes, — quail, jay, and partridge feet, rabbit, squirrel, and mice feet, all over the snow as the feast of acorns had gone on. Hundreds of the acorns were lying about, gnawed away at the cup end, where the shell was thinnest, many of them further broken and cleaned out by the birds.

As I sat studying the signs in the snow, my eye caught a tiny trail leading out from the others straight away toward a broken pile of cord-wood. The tracks were planted one after the other, so directly in line as to seem like the prints of a single foot. "That's a weasel's trail," I said, "the death's-head at this feast," and fol-

lowed it slowly to the wood. A shiver crept over me as I felt, even sooner than I saw, a pair of small sinister eyes fixed upon mine. The evil pointed head, heavy but alert, and with a suggestion of fierce strength out of all relation to the slender body, was watching me from between the sticks of cord-wood. And so he had been watching the mice and birds and rabbits feasting under the tree!

I packed a ball of snow round and hard, slipped forward upon my knees, and hurled it. "Spat!" it struck the end of a stick within an inch of the ugly head, filling the crevice with snow. Instantly the head appeared at another crack, and another ball struck viciously beside it. Now it was back where it first appeared, and did not flinch for the next, nor the next ball. The third went true, striking with a "chug" and packing the crack. But the black, hating eyes were still watching me a foot lower down.

It is not all peace and good-will in the Christmas woods. But there is more of peace and good-will than of any other spirit. The weasels are few. More friendly and timid eyes were watching me than bold and murderous. It was foolish to want to kill — even the weasel. For one's woods are what one makes them, and so I let the man with the gun, who chanced along, think that I had turned boy again, and was snowballing the wood-pile, just for the fun of trying to hit the end of the biggest stick.

I was glad he had come. As he strode off with his stained bag I felt kindlier toward the weasel. There were worse in the woods than he, — worse, because all

of their killing was pastime. The weasel must kill to live, and if he gloated over the kill, why, what fault of his? But the other weasel, the one with the blood-stained bag, he killed for the love of killing. I was glad he was gone.

The crows were winging over toward their great roost in the pines when I turned toward the town. They, too, had had good picking along the creek flats and ditches of the meadows. Their powerful wing-beats and constant play told of full crops and no fear for the night, already softly gray across the white silent fields. The air was crisper; the snow began to crackle under foot; the twigs creaked and rattled as I brushed along; a brown beech leaf wavered down and skated with a thin scratch over the crust; and pure as the snow-wrapped crystal world, and sweet as the soft gray twilight, came the call of a quail.

The voices, colors, odors, and forms of summer were gone. The very face of things had changed; all had been reduced, made plain, simple, single, pure! There was less for the senses, but how much keener now their joy! The wide landscape, the frosty air, the tinkle of tiny icicles, and, out of the quiet of the falling twilight, the voice of the quail!

There is no day but is beautiful in the woods; and none more beautiful than one like this Christmas Day, — warm and still, and wrapped, to the round red berries of the holly, in the magic of the snow.

## AN ACCOUNT WITH NATURE

**T**HERE were chipmunks everywhere. The stone walls squeaked with them. At every turn, from early spring to early autumn, a chipmunk was scurrying away from you. Chipmunks were common. They did no particular harm, no particular good; they did nothing in particular, being only chipmunks and common, until one morning (it was June-bug time) I stopped and watched a chipmunk that sat atop the stone wall down in the orchard. He was eating, and the shells of his meal lay in a little pile upon the big flat stone which served as his table.

They were acorn-shells, I thought, yet June seemed rather early in the season for acorns, and, looking closer, I discovered that the pile was entirely composed of June-bug-shells, — wings and hollow bodies of the pestiferous beetles!

Well, well! I had never seen this before, never even heard of it. Chipmunk, a *useful* member of society! actually eating bugs in this bug-ridden world of mine! This was interesting and important. Why, I had really never known Chipmunk, after all!

So I had n't. He had always been too common. Flying squirrels were more worth while, because there were none on the farm. Now, however, I determined to cultivate the acquaintance of Chipmunk, for there might be other discoveries awaiting me.

And there were. A narrow strip of grass separated the

orchard and my garden patch. It was on my way to the garden that I most often stopped to watch this chipmunk, or rather the pair of them, in the orchard wall. June advanced, the beetles disappeared, and my garden grew apace. For the first time in four years there were prospects of good strawberries. Most of my small patch was given over to a new berry, one that I had originated, and I was waiting with an eagerness which was almost anxiety for the earliest berries.

The two chipmunks in the wall were now seven, the young ones quite as large as their parents, and both young and old on the best of terms with me.

I had put a little stick beside each of the three big berries that were reddening first (though I could have walked from the house blindfolded and picked them). I might have had the biggest of the three on June 7th, but for the sake of the flavor I thought it best to wait another day. On the 8th I went down with a box to get it. The big berry was gone, and so was one of the others, while only half of the third was left on the vine!

Gardening has its disappointments, its seasons of despair, — and wrath, too. Had a toad showed himself at that moment he would have fared badly. I snatched a stone and let it go at a robin flying over, for more than likely it was he who had stolen my berries. On the garden wall sat a friendly chipmunk eyeing me sympathetically.

Three days later several fine berries were ripe. On my way to the garden I passed the chipmunks in the orchard. A shining red spot among the vine-covered stones of their wall brought me to a stop, for I thought, on the instant, that it was my rose-breasted grosbeak,

and that I was about to get a clue to its nest. Then up to the slab where he ate the June-bugs scrambled the chipmunk, and the rose-red spot on the breast of the grosbeak dissolved into a big scarlet-red strawberry. And by its long wedge shape I knew it was one of my new variety.

I hurried across to the patch and found every berry gone, while a line of bloody fragments led me back to the orchard wall, where a half-dozen fresh calyx-crowns completed my second discovery.

No, it did not complete it. It took a little watching to find out that the whole family — all seven! — were after berries. They were picking them half-ripe, even, and actually storing them away, canning them down in the cavernous depths of the stone-pile!

Alarmed? Yes, and I was wrathful, too. The taste for strawberries is innate, original; you can't be human without it. But joy in chipmunks is a cultivated liking, æsthetic in its nature. What chance in such a circumstance has the nature-lover with the human man? What shadow of doubt as to his choice between the chipmunks and the strawberries?

I had no gun then and no time to go over to my neighbor's to borrow his. So I stationed myself near by with a fistful of stones, and waited for the thieves to show themselves. I came so near to hitting one of them once that the sweat started all over me. After that there was no danger. I lost my nerve. The little scamps knew that war was declared, and they hid and dodged and sighted me so far off that even with a gun I should have been all summer killing the seven of them.

Meantime, a big rain and the warm June days were turning the berries red by the quart. They had more than caught up to the squirrels. I dropped my stones and picked. The squirrels picked, too, so did the toads and robins. Everybody picked. It was free for all. We picked them and ate them, jammed them and canned them. I almost carried some over to my neighbor, but took peas instead. You simply can't give your strawberries in New England to ordinary neighbors, who are not of your choosing. You have no fears at all as to what they will say to your peas.

The season closed on the Fourth of July, and our taste was not dim nor this natural love for strawberries abated; but all four of the small boys had the hives from over-indulgence, so bountifully did nature provide, so many did the seven chipmunks leave us!

Peace between me and the chipmunks had been signed before the strawberry season closed, and the pact still holds. Other things have occurred since to threaten it, however. Among them, an article in a recent number of a carefully edited out-of-door magazine of wide circulation. Herein the chipmunk family was most roundly rated, in fact condemned to annihilation because of its wicked taste for birds' eggs and for young birds. Numerous photographs accompanied the article, showing the red squirrel with eggs in his mouth, but no such proof (even the red squirrel photographs I strongly believe were done from a *stuffed* squirrel) of Chipmunk's guilt, though he was counted equally bad and, doubtless, will suffer with Chickaree at the hands of those who took the article seriously.

I believe that is a great mistake. Indeed, I believe the whole article a deliberate falsehood, concocted in order to sell the fake photographs. Chipmunk is not an egg-sucker, else I should have found it out. But because I never caught him at it does not mean that no one else has. It does mean, however, that if Chipmunk robs at all he does it so seldom as to call for no alarm nor for any retribution.

There is scarcely a day in the nesting-season when I fail to see half a dozen chipmunks about the walls, yet I never noticed one even suspiciously near a bird's nest. In an apple-tree, barely six jumps from the home of the family in the orchard wall, a brood of white-bellied swallows came to wing one spring; while robins, chipmunks, and red-eyed vireos — not to mention a cowbird, which I wish they had devoured — have also hatched and flown away from nests that these squirrels might easily have rifled.

It is not often that one comes upon even the red squirrel in the very act of robbing a nest. But the black snake, the glittering fiend! and the dear house cats! If I run across a dozen black snakes in the early summer, it is safe to say that six of them will be discovered by the cries of the birds they are robbing. Likewise the cats. No creature, however, larger than a June-bug was ever distressed by a chipmunk.

In a recent letter to me Mr. Burroughs says: "No, I never knew the chipmunk to suck or destroy eggs of any kind, and I have never heard of any well-authenticated instance of his doing so. The red squirrel is the sinner in this respect, and probably the gray squirrel also."

It will be difficult to find a true bill against him. Were the evidence all in, I believe that instead of a culprit we should find Chipmunk a useful citizen. I reckon that the pile of June-bug bodies on the flat stone leaves me still in debt to him even after the strawberries have been credited. He may err occasionally, and may, on occasion, make a nuisance of himself, — but so do my four small boys, bless them! And, well — who does n't? When a family of chipmunks, which you have fed all summer on the veranda, take up their winter quarters inside the closed cabin, and chew up your quilts, hammocks, tablecloths, and whatever else there is of chewable properties, then they are anathema.

The litter and havoc that those squirrels made were dreadful. But instead of exterminating them root and branch, a big box was prepared the next summer and lined with tin, in which the linen was successfully wintered.

But how real was the loss, after all? Here is a rough log cabin on the side of Thorn Mountain. What sort of a tablecloth ought to be found in such a cabin, if not one that has been artistically chewed by chipmunks? Is it for fine linen that we take to the woods in summer? The chipmunks are well worth a tablecloth now and then, — well worth, besides these, all the strawberries and all the oats they can steal from my small patch.

Only it is n't stealing. Since I ceased throwing stones and began to watch the chipmunks carefully, I do not find their manner that of thieves in the least. They do not act as if they were taking what they have no right to. For who has told Chipmunk to earn his oats in the sweat of his brow? No one. Instead he seems to under-

stand that he is one of the innumerable factors ordained to make me sweat, — a good and wholesome experience for me so long as I get the necessary oats.

And I get them, in spite of the chipmunks, though I don't like to guess at how much they carried off, — anywhere, I should say, from a peck to a bushel, which they stored, as they tried to store the berries, somewhere in the big recesses of the stone wall.

All this, however, is beside the point. It is n't a case of oats and berries against June-bugs. You don't haggle with Nature after that fashion. The farm is not a marketplace where you get exactly what you pay for. You must spend on the farm all you have of time and strength and brains; but you must not expect merely your money's worth. Infinitely more than that, and oftentimes less. Farming is like virtue, — its own reward. It pays the man who loves it, no matter how short the oats and corn.

So it is with Chipmunk. Perhaps his books don't balance, — a few June-bugs short on the credit side. What then? It is n't mere bugs and berries, as I have just suggested, but stone-piles. What is the difference in value to me between a stone-pile with and without a chipmunk in it? Just the difference, relatively speaking, between the house with or without my four boys in it.

Chipmunk, with his sleek, round form, his rich color and his stripes, is the daintiest, most beautiful of all our squirrels. He is one of the friendliest of my tenants, too, friendlier even than Chickadee. The two are very much alike in spirit, but however tame and confiding Chickadee may become, he is still a bird, and, despite

his wings, belongs to a different and a lower order of beings. Chickadee is often curious about me; he can be coaxed to eat from my hand. Chipmunk is more than curious; he is interested; and it is not crumbs that he wants, but friendship. He can be coaxed to eat from my lips, sleep in my pocket, and even come to be stroked.

I have sometimes seen Chickadee in winter when he seemed to come to me out of very need for living companionship. But in the flood-tide of summer life Chipmunk will watch me from his stone-pile and tag me along with every show of friendship.

The family in the orchard wall have grown very familiar. They flatter me. I really believe, to be Emersonian, that I am the great circumstance in this household. One of the number is sure to be sitting upon the high flat slab to await my coming. He sits on the very edge of the crack, to be truthful, and if I take a single step aside toward him he flips, and all there is left of him is a little angry squeak from the depths of the stones. If, however, I pass properly along, do not stop or make any sudden motions, he sees me past, then usually follows me, especially if I get well off and pause.

During a shower one day I halted under a large hickory just beyond his den. He came running after me, so interested that he forgot to look to his footing, and just opposite me slipped and bumped his nose hard against a stone, — so hard that he sat up immediately and vigorously rubbed it. Another time he followed me across to the garden and on to the barbed-wire fence along the meadow. Here he climbed a post and continued after me by way of the middle strand of the wire, wriggling,

twisting, even grabbing the barbs, in his efforts to maintain his balance. He got midway between the posts, when the sagging strand tripped him and he fell with a splash into a shallow pool below.

Did the family in the orchard wall stay together as a family for the first summer, I should like to know. As late as August they all seemed to be in the wall, for in August I cut my oats, and during this harvest they all worked together.

I mowed the oats as soon as they began to yellow, cocking them to cure for hay. It was necessary to let them "make" for six or seven days, and all this time the squirrels raced back and forth between the cocks and the stone wall. They might have hidden their gleanings in a dozen crannies nearer at hand; but evidently they had a particular storehouse, near the home nest, where the family could get at their provisions in bad weather without coming forth.

Had I removed the stones and dug out the nest, I should have found a tunnel leading into the ground for a few feet and opening into a chamber filled with a bulky grass nest, — a bed capable of holding half a dozen chipmunks, and adjoining this, by a short passageway, the storehouse of the oats.

How many trips they made between this crib and the oat-patch, how many kernels they carried in their pouches at a trip, and how big a pile they had when all the grains were in, — these are more of the questions I should like to know.

I might have killed one of the squirrels and numbered the contents of his pouches, but my scientific zeal does

not quite reach that pitch any more. The knowledge of just how many oat-kernels a chipmunk can stuff into his left cheek (into *both* cheeks he can put twenty-nine kernels of corn) is really not worth the cost of his life. Of course some one has counted them, — just as some one has counted the hairs on the tail of the dog of the child of the wife of the Wild Man of Borneo, or at least seriously guessed at the number.

But this is thesis work for the doctors of philosophy, not a task for farmers and mere watchers in the woods. The chipmunks are in no danger because of my zeal for science; not that I am uninterested in the capacity of their cheeks in terms of oats, but that I am more interested in the whole squirrel, the whole family of squirrels.

When the first frosts come, the family — if they are still a family — seek the nest in the ground beneath the stone wall. But they do not go to sleep immediately. Their outer entrances have not yet been closed. There is still plenty of fresh air, and, of course, plenty of food, — acorns, chestnuts, hickory-nuts, and oats. They doze quietly for a time and eat, pushing the empty shells and hulls into some side passage prepared beforehand to receive the *débris*.

But soon the frost is creeping down through the stones and earth overhead, the rains are filling the outer doorways and shutting off the supply of fresh air, and one day, though not sound sleepers, the family cuddles down and forgets to wake, — until the frost has begun to creep back toward the surface, and down through the softened soil is felt the thrill of the waking spring.

**OLIVE THORNE MILLER**

## THE MOCKINGBIRD'S NEST

"Superb and sole upon a plumèd spray  
That o'er the general leafage boldly grew,"

as literally as though Lanier had sketched that particular bird, stood the first free mockingbird I ever heard. His perch was the topmost twig of the tallest tree in the group. It was a cedar, perhaps fifteen feet high, around which a jasmine vine had clambered, and that morning opened a cluster of fragrant blossoms at his feet, as though an offering to the most noted singer on our side of the globe. As I drew near he turned his clear, bright eye upon me, and sang a welcome to North Carolina; and several hours later, when the moon rose high over the waters of the Sound, he completed his perfect performance with a serenade, the like of which I fear I may never hear again. I chose to consider his attentions personal, because, of all the household, I am sure I was the only one who listened, and I had passed over many miles of rolling and tossing ocean to make his acquaintance.

Nothing would have been easier, or more delightful, than to pitch one's tent in a certain pine grove not far away, and pass days and weeks in forgetting the world of cares, and reading favorite books, lulled at all hours of day and night by the softened roar of the ocean and the wonderful bird

"Singing the song of everything,  
Consummate sweet, and calm."

But it was not merely as singer that I wished to know him; nor to watch his dainty and graceful ways as he went about the daily duties of food-hunting, singing, and driving off marauders, which occupied his hours from dawn to late evening, and left him spirit enough for many a midnight rhapsody. It was in his domestic relations that I desired to see him, — the wooing of the bride and building the nest, the training of mocking-bird babies and starting them in the world; and no loitering and dreaming in the pine grove, however tempting, would tell me this. I must follow him to his more secluded retreats, see where he had set up his homestead.

Thoreau — or is it Emerson? — says one always finds what he looks for, and of course I found my nests. One pair of birds I noticed through the courtship, the selection of the site, the building and occupying of the nest; another couple, already sitting when discovered, I watched through the incubation and nursing of the little ones, and at last assisted in giving them a fair chance for their lives and a start in the world. It may be thought that my assistance was not particularly valuable; the birds shared this opinion; none the less, but for my presence not one of those birdlings would be free and happy to-day, as I hope and believe they are. To the study of these two households I gave nearly every hour of daylight, in all weathers, for a month, and of the life that went on in and around them I can speak from personal knowledge; beyond that, and at other times in his life, I do not profess to know the mocking-bird.

The bird whose nest-making I witnessed was the one whose performance I chose to consider a welcome, and his home was in the pine grove, a group of about twenty trees, left from the original forest possibly, at any rate nearly a hundred feet high, with all branches near the top, as though they had grown in close woods. They were quite scattering now, and lower trees and shrubs flourished in their shade, making a charming spot, and a home worthy even of this superb songster. The bird himself was remarkably friendly. Seeming to appreciate my attitude of admiring listener, he often perched on the peak of a low roof (separated only by a carriage drive from the upper "gallery" where I sat), and sang for hours at a time, with occasional lunches; or, as Lanier, his most ardent lover, has it, —

"Then down he shot, bounced airily along  
The sward, twitched in a grasshopper, made song  
Midflight, perched, prinked, and to his art again."

Whatever he did, his eyes were upon me; he came to the corner nearest me to sing, and was so intelligent in look and bearing that I believe he liked a quiet listener.

His wooing, however, the bird did not intend me to see, though two or three times I surprised him at it. The first part that I chanced upon was curious and amusing. A female, probably the "beloved object," stood demurely on one of the dead top branches of a large tree down in the garden, while her admirer performed fantastic evolutions in the air about her. No flycatcher ever made half the eccentric movements this aerial acrobat indulged in. He flew straight up very high, execut-

ing various extraordinary turns and gyrations, so rapidly they could not be followed and described, and came back singing; in a moment he departed in another direction, and repeated the grotesque performance. He was plainly exerting himself to be agreeable and entertaining, in mockingbird style, and I noticed that every time he returned from an excursion he perched a little nearer his audience of one, until, after some time, he stood upon the same twig, a few inches from her. They were facing and apparently trying to stare each other out of countenance; and as I waited, breathless, to see what would happen next, the damsel coquettishly flitted to another branch. Then the whole scene was repeated; the most singular and graceful evolutions, the songs, and the gradual approach. Sometimes, after alighting on a top twig, he dropped down through the branches, singing, in a way to suggest the "dropping song" so graphically described by Maurice Thompson, but never really falling, and never touching the ground. Each performance ended in his reaching the twig which she occupied and her flight to another, until at last, by some apparently mutual agreement, both flew, and I saw no more.

A remarkable "dance" which I also saw, with the same bird as principal actor, seems to me another phase of the wooing, though I must say it resembled a war-dance as well; but love is so like war among the lower orders, even of men, that it is hard to distinguish between them. I shall not try to decide, only to relate, and, I beg to say, without the smallest exaggeration. The dances I saw were strictly *pas-de-deux*, and they

always began by a flash of wings and two birds alighting on the grass, about a foot apart. Both instantly drew themselves up perfectly erect, tail elevated at an angle of forty-five degrees, and wings held straight down at the sides. Then followed a most droll dance. Number one stood like a statue, while number two pranced around, with short, mincing steps and dainty little hops which did not advance him an inch; first he passed down the right, then turned and went down the left, all in the queer, unnatural manner of short hops and steps, and holding himself rigidly erect, while number one always faced the dancer, whichever way he turned. After a few moments of this movement, number one decided to participate, and when his partner moved to the right he did the same; to the left he still accompanied him, always facing, and maintaining the exact distance from him. Then number two described a circle around number one, who turned to face him with short hops where he stood. Next followed a *chassé* of both birds to the right; then a separation, one dancing to the right and the other to the left, always facing, and always slowly and with dignity. This stately minuet they kept up for some time, and appeared so much like a pair of old-fashioned human dancers that when, on one occasion, number two varied the performance by a spring over the head of his partner, I was startled, as if an old gentleman had suddenly hopped over the head of the grand dame his *vis-à-vis*. When this strange new figure was introduced, number one proved equal to the emergency, hopping backward, and turning so dexterously that when his partner alighted they were facing, and

about a foot apart, as before. The object of all this was very uncertain to a looker-on. It might be the approaches of love, and quite as probably the wary beginnings of war, and the next feature of the programme was not explanatory; they rose together in the air ten feet or more, face to face, fluttering and snatching at each other, apparently trying to clinch; succeeding in doing so, they fell to the ground, separated just before they touched it, and flew away. O wings! most maddening to a bird-student.

It was not very long after these performances, which seem to me to belong to the courtship period, when I noticed that my bird had won his bride, and they were busy house-hunting. The place they apparently preferred, and at last fixed upon, was at an unusual height for mockingbirds, near the top of one of the tall pines, and I was no less surprised than pleased to see them lay the foundation of their home in that spot. I congratulated myself that at least one brood in North Carolina would have a chance to come to maturity and be free; and so persistent is the warfare waged against this bird — unfortunately marketable at any stage from the egg — that I almost doubt if another will. The day after they began building a northwest storm set in, and for three days we had high winds and cold weather. In spite of this, the brave birds persevered, and finished their nest during those three days, although much of the time they made infrequent trips. It was really most touching to watch them at their unnatural task, and remember that nothing but the cruelty of man forced them to it (one nest had been destroyed). Their diffi-

culty was to get up against the wind, and, having little experience in flying upward, they made the natural mistake of starting from the foot of their chosen tree. Sometimes, at first, they flew with the body almost perpendicular; and afterwards, when they held the body in proper position, they wished to go so directly up that they turned the head back over the shoulder to see where they were going. The wind, too, beat them far out of their course, and they were obliged to alight and rest, occasionally being forced to cling to the trunk of a tree to recover breath and strength to go on. They never attempted to make the whole ascent at once, but always stopped four or five times, perching on the ends of fallen branches, of which there were eight or ten below the living part of the pine. Even when no wind disturbed them, they made these pauses on the way, and it was always a hard task to reach the top. They learned, after a few days, however, to begin their ascent at a distance, and not approach the tree till at least half as high as they wished to go, which simplified the matter very much. It was beautiful to see them, upon reaching the lowest of the living branches, bound gayly up, as though over a winding stair, to the particular spot they had fixed upon.

During the building I missed the daily music of the singer. Occasionally he alighted on the roof, looked over at me, and bubbled out a few notes, as much as to say, "You must excuse me now; I am very busy"; but all the time I hoped that while sitting was going on I should have him back. I reckoned ignorantly; I did not know my bird. No sooner was he the possessor of a

house and family than he suddenly became very wary. No more solos on the roof; no more confidential remarks; no more familiarities of any sort. Now he must beware of human beings, and even when on the grass he held himself very erect, wings straight down, every instant on guard. His happiness demanded expression in song, certainly, but instead of confining himself to the roof he circled the lawn, which was between two and three hundred feet wide. If he began in a group of cedars on the right, he sang awhile there, then flew to the fence next the road without a pause in the music, and in a few minutes passed to the group of pines at the left, perched on a dead branch, and finished his song there. It was most tantalizing, though I could but admit it a proof of intelligence.

Another change appeared in the bird with the advent of family cares: he was more belligerent; he drove the bluebird off the lawn, he worried the tufted titmouse when it chanced to alight on his tree, and in the most offensive way claimed ownership of pine trees, lawn, and all the fence bordering the same. Neighboring mockingbirds disputed his claim, and many a furious chase took place among the trees. (So universal is their habit of insisting upon exclusive right to certain grounds that two mockingbirds are never found nesting very near each other, in that part of the country. This I was told, and I found it true of those I observed.) These little episodes in his life kept the pine-tree bird from dullness, while his mate was engaged in the top of the tall pine, where, by the way, he went now and then to see how she was getting on. Sometimes his spouse re-

ceived him amiably, but occasionally, I regret to say, I heard a "huff" from the nest that said plainly, "Don't you touch those eggs!" And what was amusing, he acknowledged her right to dictate in the matter, and meekly took his departure. Whenever she came down for a lunch, he saw her instantly, and was ready for a frolic. He dropped to the grass near her, and they usually indulged in a lively romp, chasing each other over and through the trees, across the yard, around the garden, and back to the lawn, where she went on with her eating, and he resumed his singing.

While I was watching the pine-tree household, the other nest, in the top of a low, flat-topped cedar, perhaps twenty-five feet high, and profusely fringed with Spanish moss, became of even more interest. I could not see into the nest, for there was no building high enough to overlook it, but I could see the bird when he stood upon the edge. Sitting, in a warm climate, is not particularly close work. Although the weather was cool, yet when the sun was out the sitter left her nest from six to eight minutes at a time, and as often as once in twenty minutes. Of course in rain she had not so much liberty, and on some days left only when her mate was ready to take her place, which he frequently did.

On the ninth day of my watching (I had not seen the beginning of the sitting), the 3d of May, I found work was over and the youngsters were out. There was much excitement in the cedar tree, but in a quiet way; in fact, the birds became so silent and so wary in approaching the nest that it required the closest watching to see them go or come, and only occasionally could I

detect any food in the beak. I discovered very soon that mockingbird babies are brought up on hygienic principles, and have their meals with great regularity. For some time both parents were exceedingly busy, going and coming almost constantly; then there came a rest of a half-hour or more, during which no food was brought. Each bird had its own way of coming to the tree. Madam came over the roof of the cottage where I sat, and was exposed to view for only a few feet, over which she passed so quickly and silently that I had to be constantly on the alert to see her at all. The singer had another way, and by rising behind a hickory tree beyond the cedar managed to keep a screen of branches between him and myself nearly every foot of the way. I could see them both almost every time, but I could not always tell whether they carried food. Now the bluebird, honest soul, always stops in plain sight to rest, with his mouth full of dainties for his young brood, and a robin will stand staring at one for two minutes with three or four wriggling worms in his beak. It is quite a different affair in the mockingbird family, as is certainly natural, after the persecution it has endured. No special fear of me was the cause, — it is a marked peculiarity of the bird; and I think, with a little study, one could learn to know exactly the moment the eggs hatch by the sudden silence and wariness of both birds. Poor little creatures! a sympathetic friend hates to add to the anxiety they suffer, and he cannot help a feeling of reproach when the brave little head of the family alights on the fence, and looks him straight in the eye, as if to demand why he is subjected to all this annoyance. I had to console

myself by thinking that I was undoubtedly a providence to him; for I am certain that nothing but my watching him so conspicuously that every negro within a mile saw me, saved his family to him, so low and easy of access was the nest.

The day those nestlings were one week old they uttered their first cry. It was not at all a "peep," but a cry, continued a few seconds; at first only when food was offered to them, but, as they increased in age and strength, more frequently. It was much like a high-pitched *ē-ē-ē*, and on the first day there was but one voice, which grew rapidly stronger as the hours went by. The next day another and a weaker cry joined the first, now grown assured and strong. But the music of the father was hushed the moment the youngsters began; from that time until they had left the nest, he sang not a note in my hearing. Perhaps he was too busy, though he never seemed to work so hard as the robin or oriole; but I think it was cautiousness, for the trouble of those parents was painful to witness. They introduced a new sound among their musical notes, a harsh squawk; neither dog nor negro could cross the yard without being saluted with it. As for me, though I was meekness itself, taking the most obscure position I could find, and remaining as absolutely motionless as possible, they eyed me with suspicion; from the first they "huffed" at me, and at this point began to squawk the moment I entered the gate. On one occasion I discovered that by changing my seat I could actually see the nest, which I much desired; so I removed while the birds were absent. Madam was the first to return, with a beakful of food;

she saw me instantly, and was too much excited to dispose of her load. She came to my side of her tree, squawked loudly, flapping her wings and jerking herself about. I remained motionless and did not look at her, pretending to be absorbed in my book; but she refused to be mollified. It evidently did not please her to have me see so plainly; she desired to retain the friendly screen of leaves which had secured her a small measure of privacy. I could not blame her; I felt myself intrusive; and at last I respected her wishes and returned to my old place, when she immediately calmed down and administered the food she had held till then. Poor mother! those were trying times. Her solicitude overpowered her discretion, and her manner proclaimed to every one within hearing that the nestlings were out. Then, too, on the eighth day the little ones added their voices, and soon called loudly enough to attract the dullest of nest-robbers. I was so fearful lest that nest should be disturbed that I scarcely dared to sleep o' nights; the birds themselves were hardly more anxious than I was.

The eleventh day of the birdlings' life was exceedingly warm, without a breath of air stirring, suffocating to humanity, but preëminently inspiring to mockingbirds, and every singer within a mile of me, I am sure, was singing madly, excepting the newly made parent. Upon reaching my usual seat I knew at once, by the louder cry, that a young bird was out of the nest, and after some searching through the tree I found him, — a yellowish-drab little fellow, with very decided wing-markings, a tail perhaps an inch in length, and soft slate-colored spots, so long as almost to be streaks, on the breast. He

was scrambling about the branches, always trying to get a higher place; calling and perking his insignificant tail in true mockingbird fashion. I think the parents disapproved this early ambition, for they did not feed him for a long time, though they passed him to go to the nest. So far from being lightened, their cares were greatly increased by the precociousness of the youngster, and from this moment their trouble and worry were grievous to see. So much self-reliance has the mockingbird, even in the nest, that he cannot be kept there until his legs are strong enough to bear his weight, or his wings ready to fly. The full-grown spirit of the race blossoms out in the young one at eleven days, and for several more he is exposed to so many dangers that I wonder there is one left in the State.

The parents, one after the other, came down on to a bush near my seat to remonstrate with me; and I must admit that so great was my sympathy, and so uncomfortable did I feel at adding in the least to their anxiety, that I should never have seen that young family fledged, only that I knew perfectly well what they did not, that I was a protection to them. I tried to reassure the mother by addressing her in her own language (as it were), and she turned quickly, looked, listened, and returned to her tree, quieted. This sound is a low whistling through the teeth, which readily soothes cage-birds. It interests and calms them, though I have no notion what it means to them, for I am speaking an unknown tongue.

The baby on the tree was not quiet, climbing about the branches every moment that he was not engaged in

dressings his feathers, the first and most important business of the newly emancipated nestling. After an hour or more of watching there was a sudden stir in the family, and the youngster made his appearance on the ground. He was not under the side of the tree on which he had been resting, so, although I did not see the passage, I knew he had not fallen, as he is popularly said to do, but flown as well as he was able. I started slowly down the yard to examine the little stranger, but was absolutely startled by a cry from the mother, that sounded exactly like "Go 'way!" as I have often heard a negro girl say it. Later it was very familiar, a yearning, anxious, heartaching sound to hear.

The youth was very lively, starting off at once on his travels, never for an instant doubting his own powers. I saw his first movement, which was a hop, and, what surprised and delighted me, accompanied by a peculiar lifting of the wings, of which I shall have more to say. He quickly hopped through the thin grass till he reached a fence, passed down beside it till a break in the pickets left an open place on the bottom board, sprang without hesitation upon that, and after a moment's survey of the country beyond dropped down on the farther side. Now that was a lane much frequented by negroes, and, being alarmed for his safety, I sent a boy after him, and in a moment had him in my hand. He was a beautiful little creature, having a head covered with downy dark feathers, and soft black eyes, which regarded me with interest, but not at all with fear. All this time, of course, the parents were scolding and crying, and I held him only long enough to look carefully at him, when I re-

placed him on the grass. Off he started at once, directly west, — like the “march of empire,” — went through the same fence again, but further down, and, as I could tell by the conduct of the parents, in a few moments was safely through a second fence into a comparatively retired old garden beyond, where I hoped he would be unmolested. Thus departed number one, with energy and curiosity, to investigate a brand-new world, fearless in his ignorance and self-confidence, although his entrance into the world had not been the triumphant fly we might look for, but an ignominious “flop,” and was irresistibly and ludicrously suggestive of the manner of exit from the home nest of sundry individuals of our own race, which we consider of much greater importance.

The young traveler set out at exactly ten o'clock. As soon as he was out of sight, though not out of hearing, — for the youngster as well as the parents kept the whole world of boys and cats well informed of his whereabouts for three days, — I returned and gave my attention to number two, who was now out upon the native tree. This one was much more quiet than his predecessor. He did not cry, but occasionally uttered a mockingbird squawk, though spending most of his time dressing his plumage, in preparation for the grand *entrée*. At twelve o'clock he made the plunge, and came to the ground in a heap. This was plainly a bird of different disposition from number one; his first journey evidently tired him. He found the world hard and disappointing, so he simply stayed where he dropped in the middle of the path, and refused to move, though I touched him as a

gentle reminder of the duty he owed to his parents and his family. He sat crouched upon the gravel and looked at me with calm black eye, showing no fear and certainly no intention of moving, even indulging in a nap while I waited.

Now appeared upon the scene several persons, both white and black, each of whom wanted a young mockingbird for a cage; but I stood over him like a god-parent and refused to let any one touch him. I began to fear that I should have him on my hands at last, for even the parents seemed to appreciate his characteristics and to know that he could not be hurried, and both were still busy following the vagaries of number one. The mother now and then returned to look after him and was greatly disturbed by his unnatural conduct — and so was I. He appeared stupid, as if he had come out too soon, and did not even know how to hop. It was twenty minutes by the watch before he moved. His mother's calls at last aroused him; he raised himself upon his shaky little legs, cried out, and started off exactly as number one had done, — westward, hopping, and lifting his wings at every step. Then I saw by the enormous amount of white on his wings that he was a singer. He went as far as the fence, and there he paused again. In vain did the mother come and scold; in vain did I try to push him along. He simply knew his own will, and meant to have it; the world might be strange, but he was not in the least interested. He rested in that spot fifteen or twenty minutes more, while I stood guard as before, and preserved him from cages of both negroes and whites. At last he did manage to squeeze through

the fence, and, much relieved, I left him to the old birds, one of whom was down in the lot beyond the garden, no doubt following up his ambitious first-born.

Whoever, meanwhile, was left in the nest had a poor chance of food, and one was already crying. It was not until six o'clock that the birds seemed to remember the nestling; then it was well fed, and left again. Nothing would be easier than to follow the wandering youngsters, see how they got on and how soon they were able to fly, but this so disturbed the parents I had not the heart to do it; and besides I feared they would starve the infants, for one was never fed while I was near. Doubtless their experience of the human race forbade their confiding in the kindly intentions of any one. It was well that only two of the young appeared in one day, for keeping track of them was so serious a matter that two parents could scarcely manage it.

Number three differed from both of his elders; he was a cry-baby. He was not bright and lively like number one, and he did not squawk like number two, but he cried constantly, and at six P.M. I left him calling and crying at the top of his voice. Very early the next morning I hastened to the scene of yesterday's excitement. Number three was out on the tree. I could hear number two still crying and squawking in the garden, and from the position and labors of the male I concluded that number one was in the next lot. It was a dismal, damp morning, every grass-blade loaded with water, and a heavy fog driving in from the sea. I hoped number three would know enough to stay at home, but his fate was upon him, and no rain was ever wet enough to

overcome destiny. At about eight o'clock he stretched his little wings and flew to the ground, — a very good flight for his family, nearly thirty feet, twice as far as either of his predecessors had gone; silently, too, — no fuss about it. He began at once the baby mocker's hop with lifted wings, headed for the west fence, jumped upon the lower board, squeezed through and was off down the garden before the usual crowd of spectators had collected to strive for his head. I was delighted. The parents, who were not near when he flew, came back soon and found him at once. I left him to them and returned to my place.

But silence seemed to have fallen upon the cedar, late so full of life. In vain I listened for another cry; in vain I watched for another visit from the parents. All were busy in the garden and lot, and if any baby were in that nest it must surely starve. Occasionally a bird came back, hunted a little over the old ground in the yard, perched a moment on the fence, and saluted me with a low squawk, but their interest in the place was plainly over.

After two hours I concluded the nest was empty; and a curious performance of the head of the late family convinced me it was so. He came quite near to me, perched on a bush in the yard, fixed his eyes on me, and then, with great deliberation, first huffed, then squawked, then sang a little, then flew. I do not know what the bird meant to say, but this is what it expressed to me: "You've worried us all through this trying time, but you did n't get one of our babies! Hurrah!"

In the afternoon I had the nest brought down to me.

For foundation it had a mass of small twigs from six to eight inches long, crooked and forked and straight, which were so slightly held together that they could only be handled by lifting with both hands, and placing at once in a cloth, where they were carefully tied in. Within this mass of twigs was the nest proper, thick and roughly constructed, three and a half inches in inside diameter, made of string, rags, newspaper, cotton wadding, bark, Spanish moss, and feathers, lined with fine fibre, I think. The feathers were not inside for lining, but outside on the upper edge. It was, like the foundation, so frail that, though carefully managed, it could only be kept in shape by a string around it, even after the mass of twigs had been removed. I have a last year's nest, made of exactly the same materials, but in a much more substantial manner; so perhaps the cedar-tree birds were not so skillful builders as some of their family.

The mockingbird's movements, excepting in flight, are the perfection of grace; not even the catbird can rival him in airy lightness, in easy elegance of motion. In alighting on a fence, he does not merely come down upon it; his manner is fairly poetical. He flies a little too high, drops like a feather, touches the perch lightly with his feet, balances and tosses upward his tail, often quickly running over the tips of half a dozen pickets before he rests. Passing across the yard, he turns not to avoid a taller tree or shrub, nor does he go through it; he simply bounds over, almost touching it, as if for pure sport. In the matter of bounds the mocker is without a peer. The upward spring while singing is

an ecstatic action that must be seen to be appreciated; he rises into the air as though too happy to remain on earth, and opening his wings, floats down, singing all the while. It is indescribable, but enchanting to see. In courtship, too, as related, he makes effective use of this exquisite movement. In simple food-hunting on the ground, — a most prosaic occupation, truly, — on approaching a hummock of grass he bounds over it instead of going around. In alighting on a tree he does not pounce upon the twig he has selected, but upon a lower one, and passes quickly up through the branches, as lithe as a serpent. So fond is he of this exercise that one which I watched amused himself half an hour at a time in a pile of brush; starting from the ground, slipping easily through up to the top, standing there a moment, then flying back and repeating the performance. Should the goal of his journey be a fence-picket, he alights on the beam which supports it, and hops gracefully to the top.

Like the robin, the mockingbird seeks his food from the earth, sometimes digging it, but oftener picking it up. His manner on the ground is much like the robin's; he lowers the head, runs a few steps rapidly, then erects himself very straight for a moment. But he adds to this familiar performance a peculiar and beautiful movement, the object of which I have been unable to discover. At the end of a run he lifts his wings, opening them wide, displaying their whole breadth, which makes him look like a gigantic butterfly, then instantly lowers his head and runs again, generally picking up something as he stops. A correspondent in South Carolina, familiar

with the ways of the bird, suggests that his object is to startle the grasshoppers, or, as he expresses it, to "flush his game." I watched very closely and could not fix upon any theory more plausible, though it seemed to be weakened by the fact that the nestlings, as mentioned above, did the same thing before they thought of looking for food. The custom is not invariable; sometimes it is done, and sometimes not.

The mockingbird cannot be said to possess a gentle disposition, especially during the time of nesting. He does not seem malicious, but rather mischievous, and his actions resemble the naughty though not wicked pranks of an active child. At that time he does, it must be admitted, lay claim to a rather large territory, considering his size, and enforces his rights with many a hot chase and noisy dispute, as remarked above. Any mockingbird who dares to flirt a feather over the border of the ground he chooses to consider his own has to battle with him. A quarrel is a curious operation, usually a chase, and the war-cry is so peculiar and apparently so incongruous that it is fairly laughable. It is a rough breathing, like the "huff" of an angry cat, and a serious dispute between the birds reminds one of nothing but a disagreement in the feline family. If the stranger does not take the hint, and retire at the first huff, he is chased, over and under trees and through branches, so violently that leaves rustle and twigs are thrust aside, as long as the patience or wind holds out. On one occasion the defender of his homestead kept up a lively singing all through the furious flight, which lasted six or eight minutes, — a remarkable thing.

To others than his own kind the mocker seems usually indifferent, with the single exception of the crow. So long as this bird kept over the salt marsh, or flew quite high, or even held his mouth shut, he was not noticed; but let him fly low over the lawn, and above all let him "caw," and the hot-headed owner of the place was upon him. He did not seem to have any special plan of attack, like the kingbird or the oriole; his aim appeared to be merely to worry the enemy, and in this he was untiring, flying madly and without pause around a perching crow until he took flight, and then attempting to rise above him. In this he was not always successful, not being particularly expert on the wing, though I have two or three times seen the smaller bird actually rest on the back of the foe for three or four seconds at a time.

The song of the free mockingbird! With it ringing in my ear at this moment, after having feasted upon it and gloried in it day and night for many weeks, how can I criticise it! How can I do otherwise than fall into rhapsody, as does almost every one who knows it and delights in it, as I do! It is something for which one might pine and long, as the Switzer for the Ranz-des-Vaches, and the more one hears it the more he loves it. I think there will never come a May in my life when I shall not long to fold my tent and take up my abode in the home of the mockingbird, and yet I cannot say what many do. For variety, glibness, and execution the song is marvelous. It is a brilliant, bewildering exhibition, and one listens in a sort of ecstasy almost equal to the bird's own, for this, it seems to me, is the secret of the power of his music: he so enjoys it himself, he throws his whole

soul into it, and he is so magnetic that he charms a listener into belief that nothing can be like it. His manner also lends enchantment; he is seldom still. If he begins in a cedar-tree, he soon flies to the fence, singing as he goes, thence takes his way to a roof, and so on, changing his place every few minutes, but never losing a note. His favorite perch is the top spire of a pointed tree, low cedar or young pine, where he can bound into the air as already described, spread his wings, and float down, never omitting a quaver. It seems like pure ecstasy; and however critical one may be, he cannot help feeling deep sympathy with the joyous soul that thus expresses itself. With all the wonderful power and variety, the bewitching charm, there is not the "feeling," the heavenly melody, of the wood thrush. As an imitator, I think he is much overrated. I cannot agree with Lanier that

"Whate'er birds did or dreamed, this bird could say";

and that the birds are jealous of his song, as Wilson says, seems absurd. On the contrary, I do not think they recognize the counterfeit. The tufted titmouse called as loudly and constantly all day as though no mockingbird shouted his peculiar and easily imitated call from the house-top; the cardinal grosbeak sang every day in the grove, though the mocker copied him more closely than any other bird. He repeats the notes, rattles out the call, but he cannot put the cardinal's soul into them. The song of every bird seems to me the expression of himself; it is a perfect whole of its kind, given with proper inflections and pauses, and never hurried; whereas, when the mocker delivers it, it is simply one

more note added to his repertory, uttered in his rapid staccato, in his loud, clear voice, interpolated between incongruous sounds, without expression, and lacking in every way the beauty and attraction of the original.

The song consists entirely of short staccato phrases, each phrase repeated several times, perhaps twice, possibly five or six times. If he has a list of twenty or thirty, — and I think he has more, — he can make almost unlimited changes and variety, and can sing for two hours or longer, holding his listener spellbound and almost without consciousness that he has repeated anything.

So winning and so lasting is the charm with which this bird enthralls his lovers that scarcely had I left his enchanted neighborhood before everything else was forgotten, and there remain of that idyllic month only beautiful pictures and delightful memories.

“O thou heavenly bird!”

## ON THE COAST OF MAINE

ON an outlying island on the lonely — but lovely — coast of Maine some of the happiest summers of my life have been passed, hours slipping into days, and days running on into weeks, almost unheeded, while

“Dreaming sweet idle dreams of having strayed  
To Arcady with all its golden lore”; —

not, however, in studying the human life of its storm-beaten cottages, interesting as that may be, but in watching life's tragedies and comedies among our little neighbors of the fields and woods — the dramas of the tree-tops.

My abiding-place at the time my story begins differed materially from the picturesque “small gray house facing the morning light,” being a modern structure which offered the rare combination of a comfortable home in the edge of an undisturbed forest, completely secluded from roads and their traffic, yet within two minutes' reach of the common way to the village. The outlook from my window was into the tops of tall spruces and firs, relieved here and there by a pine, a birch, or a maple. Through a vista, and over the tops of more distant trees, could be seen the broad Atlantic Ocean, and above all

“The blue arch of sky  
Where clouds go sailing by.”

The feathered neighbors had evidently accepted the house as a part of the woods, for they came freely about, delighting especially in a worn and battered old spruce within fifteen feet of the window. On this tree, — which doubtless furnished a choice assortment of bird dainties, — first or last, appeared all the birds of the vicinity.

As usual, the bird-life possessed a character of its own, and it impressed me as a particularly refined neighborhood. No vulgar, squawking English sparrow disturbed its peace, no chippies squabbled in the grass, no tireless red-eyed vireo fretted the air with its endless iteration, and — what was not half so pleasing — no catbirds, orioles, bluebirds, goldfinches, or flycatchers could be numbered among the residents.

Juncoes and chickadees scrambled and frolicked over the old spruce, white-throated sparrows — the aristocrats of the family — chanted their solemn hymn from the underbrush one side; thrushes sang and called from the tall trees at the back, and it was above all the resort of warblers, the chosen home of these dainty small birds.

I had spent one summer in this retreat, and on arriving there the next time I anticipated no more than renewed acquaintance with my old neighbors. But a rare surprise awaited me. Others of the feathered tribes had discovered the charms of the spot, and were in possession when I reached it.

At dawn the first morning, listening as usual for the familiar songs of the morning, the recitative of the olive-back, the far-off hymn of the hermit, and the hearty little strains of the miscalled warblers, suddenly the air

seemed filled with strange sounds. They appeared to come from all points at once, most of them sharp "pip! pip's!" like the cry of a lost chicken, with others, indescribable and most confusing, and all loud, emphatic, and utterly strange to me.

Here was an extraordinary visitation! I sprang up and rushed to the window. There they were, the whole jolly crowd, on a tall balsam fir close by, a dozen or more, scrambling about the branches with a thousand antics and shouts of glee.

Such a merry party I never saw. The greater number wore dresses of olive-green, but some in dull red gave me a hint of their identity, and the crossed bills of all confirmed it. They were crossbills, whose strange utterances Longfellow felicitously characterizes as

"Songs like legends strange to hear."

This was treasure-trove indeed, for crossbills are the most erratic of the feathered race in our part of the world, the Bohemians of the bird-world and the despair of the systematist. Wandering about at their own sweet will; having no fixed home that is known, and no stated dates for traveling; coming no one knows whence, and going no one knows whither; one season making glad the bird-student in one place and the next driving him to despair by their absence, they totally defy classification and exasperate the classifier.

The opinions of man did not, however, dampen the boisterous spirits of my new neighbors, to whom I gave my days and almost my nights from that moment. They were the most joyous of feathered creatures, noisy and

talkative, clambering over the trees like a party of parrots, all chattering at once, voluble as a flock of chimney swifts, or a squad of school-children just released, and then suddenly — on a loud call from one of their number — starting off, bounding over the tree-tops in a sort of mad frenzy, all shouting at the top of their voices, leaving the baffled student to guess what it all meant.

A mysterious performance of these birds was a sort of medley. It was executed by a small flock settled together in one tree, all uttering the call which I have called the "lost-chicken" note, with utmost apparent agitation, and each individual in a different key, thus producing a strange, weird effect.

The crossbills were the most restless, as well as the most noisy of birds, appearing before my window a dozen times a day, sometimes staying but a few minutes, sometimes perhaps half an hour, biting off the cones, holding them under one foot, and extracting the seeds in eager haste as if they had but a minute to stay, and something terrible or important was about to take place.

The morning song to which they treated me about four o'clock was most droll. As nearly as it can be represented by syllables, it was like this: —

"Pip! pip! pip! [many times] pap! pap! pap! [many times] kid-dr-r-r! kid-dr-r-r! [with rolling r] qu! qu! pt! pt! pt — e!" and so on in various combinations, all in labored manner, as if it were hard work.

This party were in all stages of plumage, for it appears that in spite of their vagaries, they are obliged to conform to the ordinary bird-habit in moulting. The

young still calling for food — and getting it as I saw once or twice — in their peculiar youthful dress, the mothers of the flock in their usual olive-green, and the singers in all shades of red, from one mottled all over red and olive, to the full-dressed and brilliant personage of clear red with dark trimmings.

The most charming exhibition of crossbill eccentricities that I heard was a whisper-song. The bird came alone to the old spruce before my windows, and settled himself on a dead branch in the middle of the tree, where he was hidden from everybody except the spectator behind the blind, of whom he had no suspicion. In a moment he began a genuine whisper-song so low that I could scarcely hear it, near as I was and perfectly silent. He poured forth the whole crossbill repertoire, — all the various utterances I had heard during the weeks I had been studying them, — and all under his breath, with beak nearly closed. Thus softly rendered it was really charming. This enchanting exhibition of crossbill possibilities lasted fully fifteen minutes.

A favorite walk that summer was down to the shore, through a rustic road and a beautiful grove of very tall trees, which differed from every other bit of woods in the vicinity in having no undergrowth whatever. Sundry outcropping rocks and roadside banks made convenient seats for resting-places, and down this road I passed nearly every day.

One evening while lingering upon one of the rocky seats, as was my habit, I was startled by a new song, a wonderful, trilling strain, entirely unfamiliar to me, though I thought I knew all the birds of the vicinity.

I started up, eager to see the singer, but the most careful search was fruitless. By the sound I knew that the bird moved about, but I could not get a glimpse of him, and I went home greatly disturbed.

Although the voice of the unknown was of a different quality, the song resembled that of a canary in being long-continued, not in short clauses like a robin song. There were long bewitching tremolos varied by a rapturous "sweet! sweet!" and now and then a slurred couplet of thrilling effect, or a long-drawn single note of rich musical quality, or again a rapid succession of sharp staccato notes. Altogether it was enchanting, and it put me into a frenzy of excitement. What marvelous singer was this who had escaped the notoriety of the books! for I could find not the smallest record of this song.

After a night of puzzling and consulting of books I started again down the shore-road immediately after breakfast. I could not wait till the usual hour. The mysterious singer was still there; but after trying in vain to see him in the top branches of the tall old trees, which grew together and formed a close roof over the whole grove, I was forced to give it up and go home in despair.

I tried to comfort myself with the wise man's prophecy of the advantage of waiting, and at last his wisdom was proved. Sitting disconsolate on the piazza where I had paused a few minutes before going to my room, suddenly the song burst out close by. It was as if the long-sought singer had followed me home. Almost holding my breath, not to startle him, I crept softly to the end

where I could see into the woods, and behold, at the top of the tall pointed fir, beloved of all the birds for a singing-stand — a crossbill, reeling off the trills and quavers with the greatest ease and enthusiasm. While he sang, a second came and the first one flew, trilling as he went. I saw both of them clearly, and the white on the wings proclaimed them white-winged crossbills, closely related to the American crossbills I had been studying.

The song was so ecstatic it seemed it must belong to courtship days, yet it was then near the end of July, another eccentricity of the family. It could not be doubted that it was an overflowing flood of joy, — a joy which overwhelmed the listener, spell-bound as long as it lasted. Yet the most the books say of this remarkable performance is “the white-winged is said to be a fine singer” (or words to that effect).

After that morning the white-wings came about frequently, mixing freely with the others, and I learned to know them well. Not only did they differ from their American cousins in song, but in every note they uttered, even in the tone of voice. The call-note was a plaintive “peet! peet!” resembling that of the sandpiper, —

“Calling clear and sweet from cove to cove”; —

and like all other birds that I have studied, there was great variety and many degrees of excellence in their songs.

The habits of the white-wings were in general the same as those of the American, but they indulged in one eccentricity I could never explain. They paid mysteri-

ous visits to the shore, going down in little parties far out of my sight among the rocks, and staying a half hour at a time. There was no beach on which food might be found, and they did not select low tide for the excursions. Neither did it seem to be bathing which attracted them, for there was never any appearance of dressing plumage, and when I started them up in my efforts to see what they were doing they were always ready to fly, and never one was in the water or appeared to have been bathing.

Another favorite retreat of that July was a nook near the house, yet apparently undiscovered by people, and as secluded as if it had been miles away. It was merely a hollow like a little valley among the rocks, perhaps ten feet in extent, inclosed and sheltered by close-growing spruce and maple trees, and exquisitely carpeted with thick light-green moss mixed with several varieties of dark moss. On this as a foundation were beautiful growing things, bunchberry, now gorgeous in clustered scarlet berries sitting on their four green leaves like queens on a throne; blueberry bushes which had attained only four or five inches in height, but bravely held aloft their tiny blossoms, promise of rich blue fruit; wintergreens with tender green leaves; in one corner a patch of partridge-berry vines loaded with lovely, fragrant bloom, and, not the least attractive, some fine grasses, graceful, airy things, beautiful as flowers, holding their minute seed-cups like purple gems shining in the morning sun.

Other growths there were of different shapes and colors to me unknown, but all looked so peaceful, so

happy, each little plant coming up out of the ground where Nature had placed it, doing its little best in the spot, making itself as lovely as possible, putting out its perfect blossoms and never dreaming of being discontented with its lot. It was a bit of fairyland. One could easily imagine the "little people" at home in such a nook, and it held a salutary lesson, too, for restless and dissatisfied mortals, if one had eyes to see.

In this nook were passed many perfect morning hours, when, though not a breath stirred the leaves, it was delightfully cool and fresh, as if the whole earth were newly created. Not a soul was in sight, the whole green world was mine alone. I felt myself "akin to everything that grows," — akin to the dear birds shouting their morning hymns, to the dear "man-bodied trees," to the contented little plants, — I realized how truly we are all one, down to the grass under our heedless feet.

One morning I was passing through an unfrequented path in the woods, when, hearing crossbill song quite near, I looked about for the singers. There on one side, in a little pool left by a recent rain, were two of the family at their bath, singing as usual. For these birds are so full of joy they sing when they eat, when they play, when they watch me, and, as I now saw, when they bathe. They were plainly the young of the year, and, since they did not notice me, I had a close look at them. They were streaked all over on back and breast with fine streaks of dark brown on a yellowish-drab ground, the broad white bands on the wings proclaiming their identity.

Crossbills continued to sing till August was nearly over.

Into these halcyon days on that Island on the Coast of Maine burst August, and the "summer crowd." The two or three hotels, empty heretofore and unobtrusive, blossomed out with human life; fancy "turnouts" raised clouds of dust on my evening walk; baby-carriages with attendant white-capped genii desecrated my favorite wood; bicycle-bells haunted the solitary footpath; boys swarmed on the sandpiper shore; lonely byways became common thoroughfares; flowers were ruthlessly destroyed; bird-voices were lost amid the din with which we surround ourselves. The woods seemed to shrink into themselves. The birds retired to fastnesses where human feet could not follow. Solitude was banished, and everywhere were curious, staring eyes. Man, the destroyer, had taken possession, and it was time for the solitude-loving bird-student to take her departure, for this intrusion of the bustling world effectually

"Put her sweet summer dreams to rout."

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