VARIOUS

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Содержание

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A SONG FOR THE NEW YEAR'S EVE

Stay yet, my friends, a moment stay —
Stay till the good old year,
So long companion of our way,
Shakes hands and leaves us here.
Oh stay, oh stay,
One little hour, and then away.

The year, whose hopes were high and strong,
Has now no hopes to wake;
Yet one hour more of jest and song
For his familiar sake.
Oh stay, oh stay,
One mirthful hour, and then away.

The kindly year, his liberal hands
Have lavished all his store.
And shall we turn from where he stands,
Because he gives no more?
Oh stay, oh stay,
One grateful hour, and then away.

Days brightly came and calmly went,
While yet he was our guest;
How cheerfully the week was spent!
How sweet the seventh day's rest!
Oh stay, oh stay,
One golden hour, and then away.

Even while we sing he smiles his last,
And leaves our sphere behind.
The good old year is with the past;
Oh be the new as kind!
Oh stay, oh stay,
One parting strain, and then away.

– *William Cullen Bryant.*

THE GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET
(*Regulus satrapa.*)

The autumn wanes, and kinglets go,
Sweet-voiced and knightly in their way,
And all the birds our summers know,
They flock and leave us day by day.

– Frank H. Sweet, "Flocking of the Birds."

In these pleasing words the poet speaks of the kinglets. Yet his words may hardly apply to the Golden-crowned Kinglet, except in the northernmost part of its range, for it winters from the northern border of the United States southward to the Gulf of Mexico. "Muffled in its thick coat of feathers, the diminutive Goldcrest braves our severest winters, living evidence that, given an abundance of food, temperature is a secondary factor in a bird's existence."

But little larger than a hummingbird, though unlike that mite of bird life, it seeks in the cooler air of northern climes a place for its nest. It also breeds throughout the length of the Rocky Mountains and in the Alleghanies as far south as North Carolina.

This tiny and "charming sylvan ornament," both elegant in dress and graceful in movement, is one of the seven known species of kinglets, of which there are but three that frequent the New World. It is very active while searching for its food. Its colors are such that, as it moves from twig to twig hunting for insects among the leaves, it is frequently hard to locate though its voice may be heard among the tree tops.

Truly the name kinglet – little king – is not a misnomer, for the Golden-crown exhibits a decided character in every motion. It is fearless and though it will occasionally scold an intruder, wren-like, it does not visually resent the presence of man. Often in the forest or even in our city parks a Golden-crowned Kinglet will flash by one's face and, dropping to the ground, seize an insect or worm that its bright eyes have detected in the grass, even at one's feet.

Speaking of interesting phases of bird life, Mr. Keyser says, "On the same day my dancing dot in feathers, the Golden-crowned Kinglet, performed one of his favorite tricks, which is not often described in the books. You will remember that in the center of the yellow crown-patch of the males, there is a gleaming golden speck, visible only when you look at him closely. But when the little beau is in a particularly rollicksome mood, or wants to display his gem to his mate or kindred, he elevates and spreads out the feathers of his crest, and lo! a transformation. The whole crown becomes golden! That gleaming speck expands until it completely hides the yellow and black of the crown." May we not say with Mr. and Mrs. Grinnell that Mr. Golden-crown lifts his hat to Mrs. Golden-crown? We may learn patience and to be satisfied with nature as we find it, if we will study the life of the Golden-crown. It is always happy, always cheerful. Seemingly it flies from bough to bough as contentedly in the rain as in the sunshine and in cold as well as in warm weather. In many respects this kinglet resembles the warblers, but it is much tamer. While seeking its food it exhibits some of the characteristics of the flycatchers.

Mr. Brewster describes its song as beginning "with a succession of five or six fine, shrill, high-pitched, somewhat faltering notes, and ending with a short, rapid, rather explosive warble. The opening notes are given in a rising key, but the song falls rapidly at the end. The whole may be expressed as follows: Tzee, tzee, tzee, tzee, ti, ti, ter, ti-ti-ti-ti." Its call note is simply ti-ti uttered in a fine and well modulated voice that is scarcely audible.

The Golden-crown selects cone-bearing trees for its nest. This is usually a pensil structure and is hung from the branches at from four to fifty or more feet from the ground. It is globular in form with the entrance near the top. Mosses and dead leaves are used in its construction and it is lined with soft and fine fibers of bark and feathers.

Someone has said of a Golden-crowned Kinglet: “I often spoke to him as if he were a real person; and he appreciated my words of praise, too, without doubt, for he would come scurrying near, disporting his head so that I could catch the gleam of his amber coronal, with its golden patch for a center piece.”

THE TALKING PINE TREE

It was a chilly winter Saturday. Though the winds were cold, the sunshine was bright and warm. After dinner Jacob put on his overcoat and new red mittens and went, as he often did, with his father, who was sexton of Evergreen cemetery. While his father was busy Jacob amused himself.

He had never before noticed how bare the great trees looked. Their limbs reached out like hundreds of crooked arms between him and the blue sky. As he looked around here and there he could see a tree wearing a dark green coat. Most of them were small, but some were tall and pointed. A pretty good sized, umbrella-shaped one grew near where his father was digging a grave.

Full of boyish life and spirits he ran to it playfully shouting: "I am a squirrel hunting a nut and will climb up among your branches." But he tried in vain. The lowest limbs were so high above his head that he could not reach them.

"Never mind," said he, "I will hunt a nut on the ground."

Dropping on all fours he began to crawl around. Soon his hand came down upon something hard under the dead leaves which covered the ground. Now he thought he had really found a nut. It was roundish, with blunt spines and woody, and like no nut which he knew. Hunting a loose brick he cracked it upon a stone. Two or three little round things with gauzy wings dropped out.

This roused his curiosity. He now searched round and round for others. He spied a small branch which had broken off and dropped to the ground. As he snatched it up an end whirled round, striking his face. "How you stick!" cried he. He pulled off a mitten to feel what was so sharp. He noticed that the branch was bare, black and full of scars except at the end of each branchlet, where bunches of green sharp needles about as large as his mother's darning needles were growing.

"Why, old tree," said he, "where are your leaves?"

Now the tree heard every word which Jacob said but it could not make Jacob hear its answers.

At the tip of each branchlet was a pink bud, and near some of these was a little, tender thing about the shape of, though smaller, than the English sparrow's egg. These he could pinch into pieces. But lower down on the branchlets, among the queer needles, were others not so large nor so dry as the odd fruit which he had found on the ground. They were not so easily destroyed. He picked them off and put them in his pockets.

"You're a funny tree! Why do you not have nuts which hungry boys can eat?"

Jumping to his feet he looked up into the branches. They were all bare except for the needles growing on the branchlets. The tree was dotted with the odd nuts.

"What kind of a tree are you? You are not at all like our pretty oak or maple trees. Your branches grow nearly straight out. I should not like to live in a graveyard and look at tombstones all the time."

He hunted around for clods and dead branches which, in his efforts to throw over its crown, he threw into and through the tree.

"You'll see, Mr. Tree, some day, I'll be able to throw higher," said our cheerful Jacob.

Just then Rover came running to him and they had one of their jolly romps on the dry grass and leaves. Presently, tired out with their sport, both boy and dog dropped to sleep. Now was the pine tree's chance.

"Jacob, Jacob!" called the tree; "I am a pine tree." One of the little, green fairy spirits who made her home among the branches had cast such a spell over Jacob that now he could hear every word the tree said as plainly as when his mamma spoke.

"When you come to know me and my friends better you will love us for our youth and worth as well as for our beauty," said the pine. "See – the oaks and maples are mere dark skeletons. What you call needles are our leaves. They never all leave us at once. In our family our faithful leaves serve us for two years. When a new growth covered with fresh needles comes at the end of a branch the old

needles drop, it is true, leaving our branches full of scars. Since others never grow in these same places our larger branches are left bare; but the bunches of needles on the new growth keep us always green.

"That hard thing which you found, and which you supposed to be a nut, was a mature dry cone. In our cones we hide our seeds, which have wings, so that they fly on the wind to a good resting and growing place. The little, tender balls which you found near the young bud at the end of the branchlet is a new cone just started this year. The harder, darker growth farther down among the needles is a last year's cone.

"My home is not in this country. I was brought from a country of highlands and mountains where the Scottish people live. I am called a Scotch pine. I do not choose to live in a graveyard, but I am willing to serve man and God by doing my best wherever I chance to be. My comrades and I have been placed here by mourning friends for a token of the constant remembrances and love which are held for their friends who have passed away.

"In our native land my brothers grow to be very large, sometimes living for three or four hundred years. As we grow at the top, keeping our rounded shape, our lower branches drop off."

"Are you only useful for planting in graveyards?" asked Jacob.

"Oh, no, indeed! We furnish excellent timber, called red pine, which is of great use for fuel and in ship and house building. When our trees are cut through the bark, sap runs out. When this is strained it is called turpentine, which is used so much in medicine, by painters and by other workmen. Oil of turpentine is also made from our leaves and cones. When you have a very bad cold your mamma sometimes rubs turpentine on your chest."

"Oh, yes, I remember," said Jacob; "it has a strong smell."

"The dregs harden," continued the pine, "and are called resin. This is used in making yellow soap, ointments and plasters. Our wood is burned to make charcoal, tar and pitch. Even the soot is saved, and called lampblack.

"Charcoal is good for many things. Doctors use it. Placed in a cistern filter it purifies the water. It is burned for fuel, especially when a fire with no smoke is wanted.

"As water cannot get through tar and pitch, these are used in protecting wood from water. Hence they are put on the outside of ships, on the inside of water casks, and on roofs. They are used in making a black varnish with which people coat iron pumps and fences to keep them from rusting. Did you see the men making the hard asphalt pavement which leads to the vault?"

"Oh, yes. They had a big kettle of tar, didn't they?"

"Yes. Stick out your foot."

Jacob did as told.

"You have shining patent leather tips on your shoe toes. Ask papa to tell you how patent leather is prepared.

"Lampblack is mixed with white lead to make paint. If a little lampblack is used a gray is made. Enough can be used to make the paint black. Less makes a slate color."

"How much you can do! How useful you are!" said Jacob.

"That is not all," said the Scotch pine. "In some places my needles are made into shreds which are used in stuffing cushions. Our roots, which contain so much resin that they burn with a bright blaze, are burned for lights in cottages of the poor. Fishermen make ropes of our inner bark. Laplanders and some other peoples dry and grind our inner bark. After steeping this in water to remove the strong taste it is made into a coarse bread.

"Now," said the tree, who could see some distance, "your father has finished his digging. If you will come again my little fairies can again cast a spell so that we can talk together, and I will tell you something about my cousins. I have a large number of first cousins, second cousins, and more distant ones. Ours is one of the largest tree families."

"Indeed, I will come again."

Just then his father's footsteps among the dry leaves roused Rover, and both jumped to their feet.

"Why!" exclaimed papa; "I supposed that you two rogues had gone home."

When they reached home papa, who knew nothing of pine tree fairies, told mamma that Rover and Jacob had been playing "babes in the wood."

The next week was a stormy one and the days were growing shorter. But on Friday the clouds cleared and Jacob begged to go into the cemetery to play after school. But his mamma said it was too damp. However, on Saturday afternoon she said that he might, and he eagerly donned his overcoat and mittens.

"Good afternoon, pretty tree," he said as he and Rover came near.

As the tree said "How do you do?" it tried its best to nod its head and reach out a limb to shake hands.

The fairy had done as the tree promised, and Jacob heard. He clapped his hands in glee. Thinking that Jacob meant to play with him, Rover showed that he was ready for a frolic. But Jacob curtly said, "Get down, Rover! Listen – the pine tree is talking again."

Rover could not hear the tree, but he sat still and looked at his master in surprise.

"Good old tree," said Jacob in a gentle voice. "I could scarcely wait until today. You promised to tell me of your relations."

"Certainly, I shall be pleased to do so," said the pine, who never tired of talking of the good traits of its family and friends. "Where is the little limb you had the other day?"

"Here it is," picking it up.

"Look closely at my leaves. Did you ever notice anything peculiar about the way they grow?"

"No. Oh, I see. The needles grow in pairs. Two seem to be wrapped together at the stem end."

"That is it. I have a cousin who stands just on the other side of that great elm tree. Under it is a rustic bench. See if by standing on it you cannot reach a twig. If you can, bring it here."

Jacob did as directed.

"Now look at those needles. Are ours alike?"

"No; these are coarser, longer and darker than yours; though they grow in twos."

"Right. Run back and look at the cones."

When he returned he said: "I could not get a cone, but I can see that those are coarser and larger, too."

"How about the shape of the tree?"

"You two grow very much alike."

"That is a first cousin. Its family lives on the mountains of Austria. It is known as black pine or Austrian pine.

"Do you see that tall pine near that massive monument?"

"Where?" he asked, looking around.

"Just behind you," said Scotch pine, nodding its head in that direction.

"Oh, yes, I see now. Such a tall, straight trunk! Its crown grows in a point, making one think of a high church steeple piercing the sky."

"As its limbs are above your reach it is useless for you to try to get a branch. If you will get papa to break you a twig some day, and you examine it, you will find that its needles, which are finer than mine, are in bunches of five. See when the wind blows how gracefully her boughs bend and sway. Go there and look at the cones."

Off he went. Returning soon, he said: "The cones are not at all like yours; they are long and different in shape. The silky needles look something like a paint brush at the end of each twig."

"It is a far more beautiful tree than I, so straight and lofty. Its pointed top looks down upon all the other great trees in this cemetery. If you could go through Canada and northern United States, especially around the Great Lakes, you would see great forests of this – the white pine. As its wood

contains little resin it looks white, and is not so valuable for fuel. As it is easily nailed and worked, it is said to be a soft wood. You can whittle it with your knife which Santa brought you. Furniture, shingles, laths, boards and many other things are made of it.

"If you could tramp around the Rocky Mountains you would find another soft pine tree, popularly called the sugar pine because the burnt resin has at times been used by the Indians for sugar. Coarse cakes are made from its nut-like seeds. Its cones grow to be more than a foot long. Its leaves, too, grow in fives.

"The pine growing in the South, known as the Southern or Georgia pine, has yellow, hard wood. It is heavy and very strong. It makes fine lumber, ties, fuel, fencing and furniture. It is used in shipbuilding and for other things when a durable wood is needed. It is rich in turpentine, resin and tar. Indeed, the markets of Europe are supplied with those articles largely by the Scotch pine and those of the United States, chiefly by the Georgia pine. Because of the length of the southern pine's needles, which sometimes measure more than a foot, it is sometimes called the long-leaved pine. The leaves grow in threes. Its large cone also contains seeds, which are eaten."

One day when visiting the pine, Jacob said: "When I get big I mean to visit some of the pine forests."

"Go as soon as you can, then, my boy. In cutting pine timber men are so thoughtless and lacking in foresight and management that they are being cleared away very fast."

"Then I must try to teach them to know the pines better and to love them more for their beauty and their great usefulness. Then I am sure they will use better judgment."

"Thank you, Jacob."

Another day Jacob asked: "Have you told me of all your cousins?"

"Oh, no, indeed. I have told you of only a few of my nearest ones. There are seventy first cousins, of which thirty-five different ones are American trees. Then there is a host of more distant relatives. There are the twelve spruces, with short, sharp-pointed, four-cornered needles which grow singly all around the branches. They like cool places, and make their homes in great forests at the north or on mountains. The fir sisters and brothers have flat, blunt leaves growing on opposite sides of the branches, making them look like combs. The larches, who lose their needles in the fall; the cedars, the junipers, the arbor vitæ, the great California redwood – there are so many I can not name them all! They all belong to the cone bearing families."

Jacob, who loved the talking pine tree, spent many happy hours in its shade and learning lessons taught by it. Through it he came to know of the wonderful great trees of California; of what the straight, tall masts of ships see; of secrets known only by telegraph and telephone poles; of the sweet sounds of musical instruments; of things which props can tell of mining affairs; of the travels of railroad ties and the tragedies which occur within their sight; of the water folk with whom bridge piles neighbor; of the animals whose hides the evergreen barks help to tan; of the birds and animals who seek the shelter of these trees and feed upon their seeds and young buds; and of beautiful things with which loving hands deck the gay Christmas tree and the hosts of happy children who love it most of all trees.

Every child who will select a favorite tree and watch it with patient, loving care will also find himself helped. Although it may not be able to talk as Jacob's talking pine tree did, if he will but be faithful to its lessons it will teach him many useful facts; will prompt him to reach, like a tree, upward and outward, and to throw out from his life an influence as healthful and pure as the fragrance of the pine.

Loveday Almira Nelson.

THE KING RAIL
(*Rallus elegans.*)

The King Rail is the largest of the American true rails and is favored with a number of popular names. It is known as the Red-breasted Rail, the Marsh Hen, the Sedge Hen and the Mudhen. It frequents the fresh-water marshes of the eastern United States and is found as far north as Maine and Wisconsin and as far west as Kansas.

This fine bird very closely resembles the clapper rail which inhabits the saltwater marshes of eastern North America. The two species, however, may be easily distinguished by the difference in size and color. The clapper rail is much smaller and the upper parts are more ashy or grayish in color and the lower parts are duller and more yellowish.

Fifteen of the one hundred and eighty known species of the family Rallidæ, which includes the rails, gallinules and coots, inhabit North America.

The rails are not fitted for easy flight and find safety from an enemy by running and hiding, only taking to flight when all other means of escape have been exhausted. They not only have "a body proportioned and balanced for running, but also capable of compression to the narrowness of a wedge, in order to pass readily through the thick growths of the marshes, and also to aid them, perhaps, in their peculiar habit of walking on the bottom under the water in search of food." Their feet, because of their large size and the length of the toes, are well adapted to the soft mire and floating vegetation in which they live. With long legs and well developed muscles the rails are able to "run like very witches in their reedy mazes, and were it not for their sharp, cackling voices, their presence would scarcely be detected."

Unless approached too rudely, the female when setting on her nest will allow a very close inspection. She will seem to be as interested in the observer as he is in her. There will seem to be an expression of wonder in her face. If she is approached more closely than she likes she slips from her nest and gracefully runs through the reeds and grass and soon disappears.

The nest is usually constructed with flag stems and grasses. When the nests are built on dry ground they are usually placed in a depression in a tuft of grass and somewhat resemble the nest of the meadow lark. The nests are usually placed over water in tufts of marsh-grass or flags. Frequently the bottom of the nest is in the water and the top a few inches above it.

Mr. Silloway says: "The King Rail is said to be irritable and quarrelsome in its disposition, and it is especially overbearing toward its neighbors. The species should be named the 'queen rail,' for the female is without doubt the head of the family. Is it not she who sometimes takes possession of the homes of her meek neighbors, the gallinules? Is it not she who defends her home so spiritedly when it is threatened? Hence it seems to me that the King Rail is more king by marriage than in his own right. She lords it over the gentle-spirited mudhens with whom she dwells, and frequently saves herself the labor of making a nest and the time to lay so many eggs, by appropriating both nest and eggs of a comfortably settled gallinule. I have frequently found nests containing incubated eggs of the Florida gallinule and fresh eggs of the rail – indubitable evidence to me that the rail was the usurper of the home."

BETWEEN THE DAYLIGHT AND THE DARK

She sat in the deepening twilight awaiting the coming of her lover. The wind whispered in the rustling tree tops, but she heeded it not, though she turned her handsome head sharply when a thoughtless katydid near her sent forth one shrill note.

"He is late tonight," she murmured softly, as she gave a graceful little shake to her fluffy brown suit and settled herself anew. Then she bent her beautiful head and gently scratched her ear with her right reversible toe.

There came no sound of wings, but the branch on which she sat quivered beneath an added weight, and she rolled her round eyes affectionately toward the new comer, a great horned owl, with a welcoming gurgle, in which was a note of expectation. Her lover was a handsome fellow, with great tufts over his ears, and he had brought a "gift for his fair," though it was not a dainty box of bonbons produced from his overcoat pocket. He lifts his broad wings, bends his head, and produces from his crop a newly caught frog. His mistress nestles close, with fluttering wings and upturned beak, and receives the great dainty with an evident pleasure which delights him. He tries again. This time the convulsive effort brings forth to light a field mouse, garnished with two grasshoppers and a black cricket, which his lady receives with the pretty infantile attitudes and flutterings which all ladies think so becoming and attractive. Then they snuggle up close together, as is the way of lovers, and sit so still they might have been mistaken for a pair of stuffed owls – indeed one of them was – save for the occasional turning round of the head in that mechanical way affected by owls, for they are watchful, as all wood creatures have need to be.

"Why didst thou tarry so long, my brave?" she finally murmured, as she fondly toyed with the soft mottled feathers on his broad breast.

He lifted his feathery horns angrily at the remembrance. "The blue terror caught sight of me as I looked forth from the beautiful dark home in the dead oak tree which I have selected for thee, my beloved. It was just as the gaudy daylight was giving way to the pleasing blackness of night that I came forth, thinking all the little day flyers would have been asleep, but a belated bluejay saw me and, with lifted crest and shrill voice, raised the hue and cry. The robin left his mud daubed nest in the orchard across the road, the titmouse from his home in the knot hole of the rail fence, the nuthatch, the butcher bird and hosts of others all came, with piercing scoldings, sharp pecks and fluttering wings. I might have gone back into the darkness of our new home and so saved myself further annoyance, but, light of the world," as he rolled his eyes fondly toward her, "I wanted not the blue terror to know where thou wouldst lay thine eggs – he is an egg thief, himself, thou knowest – so I sailed away into the open, and, O, the clamor they raised. And see," showing two or three broken feathers, "what the bold blue terror has done, the strong voiced and strong winged bluejay."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.