

VARIOUS

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AN AUTUMN EVENING

In scattered plumes the floating clouds
Went drifting down the west,
Like barks that in their haven soon
Would moor and be at rest.
The Day sank down, a monarch tired,
Upon Night's sable breast.

The wind was all but hushed to sleep,
Yet now and then it stirred
A great tree's top, and whispering,
Awoke a slumbering bird,
Who half aroused, but only chirped
A song of just a word.

And in the west the rosy light
Spread out a thousand arms,
Each with a torch, whose crimson flame
Stretched o'er the peaceful farms,

And o'er the yellow corn, that lay
Unconscious of all harms.

Then changed into a waste of blue
A desert tract of air,
Where no rich clouds, like Indian flowers
Bore blossoms bright and fair;
And over all, a sense of want
And something lost was there.

– *Walter Thornbury.*

THE PINE GROSBEAK

(Pinicola enucleator.)

Ere the crossbills leave the pine woods,
Ere the grosbeaks seek the ash seeds.

— Frank Bolles, *"The Log-Cock."*

The name grosbeak, or great beak, is a common name for a number of birds that possess large, thick and strong bills which are adapted to crushing fruits and seeds. Unfortunately this name has been indiscriminately applied to the representatives of several bird families.

The true grosbeaks are related to the goldfinch, the finches, the sparrows, the buntings and the crossbills. In fact they have some of the marked characteristics of the latter birds, as neither develop the fully adult plumage for several years.

The Pine Grosbeak must be sought in the northern regions of the northern hemisphere, where the vast forests of cone bearing trees are found, or among the coniferous trees of the high altitudes of the western mountain regions of the United States. In the latter place they are not abundant. It seems to be at home and contented only in the cold, crisp air of the far north and seldom seeks a more temperate climate except when the winters are unusually severe or there is a scarcity of food in

its native haunts. It is a frequent winter visitor to the northern tier of the United States and is quite abundant, at this season, in some portions of New England. Except during the nesting season the Pine Grosbeaks are gregarious and are frequently seen in flocks of fifteen or more individuals. In the winter climate of the northern United States these flocks contain many more immature than adult birds, the younger ones seeming to be less able to withstand the severer cold of more arctic regions. Thus in this district the more brilliant plumage of the fully adult male is rarely seen, and becomes a valuable acquisition to the naturalist, for the younger birds and the females are less showy. Speaking of the beautiful male bird, some one has said, "Scarcely can the southern climes send us a more brilliant migrant than this casual visitor from the north." There is a slight variation in the plumage coloration and in the shape of the bills of the Pine Grosbeaks of widely separated regions. These variations have led ornithologists to group these birds under geographical races giving each race a varietal name.

Speaking of the Pine Grosbeaks of Siberia Mr. Seebohm says, "Almost all the forest districts are hilly and in the north, as the trees become smaller, they are also more thinly scattered over the ground and the interminable extent of wood is broken by occasional flat, open spaces and open marshes which become gray with flowers as soon as the snow melts. The scenery is much more park-like than further south and these birds are much more plentiful and more easily seen. In the large pine forests

they prefer the banks of the rivers or the outskirts of some open place and may often escape detection because of their habit of frequenting the tops of trees. Within the Arctic circle many of the trees are small and on the hilly ground they are scattered in small clumps. In places like these the Pine Grosbeaks may often be seen perched conspicuously on the top of a spruce fir, twenty or thirty feet from the ground but looking so much like the last spike of the tree as frequently to escape notice.”

The Pine Grosbeak is a retiring bird and would seem to be somewhat shy as it does not frequent the roadside or inhabited places except when forced to do so by the lack of food. This, however, is not the case, for in the forests where it makes its home it is not difficult to approach it. It will frequently alight and begin feeding within a few feet of an observer.

The song of the European form of this species is said to be “exceedingly agreeable, varied, melodious, sonorous – sometimes strong, sometimes soft.” It is also a mocker and to a limited extent will imitate the voices of other birds. Dr. Coues likens its song to that of the purple finch and says that during the late summer and winter it is “clear, sweet and flowing.” Its call note is single, sweet and plaintive not unlike that of the well known bullfinch.

Pine seeds seem to form the principal food of the Pine Grosbeak though it also feeds extensively on those of the birch, alder and related trees. At times it will descend to the ground and gather the seeds of herbaceous plants and may eat a few

insects. Dr. Dall writing of the Pine Grosbeak as he found it in Alaska, says: "I have opened the crops of a great many and always found them filled with what I for a long time supposed to be spruce buds, but on closer examination I found that they were the hearts of the poplar buds, with the scales and other external coverings carefully rejected. I have never found anything else in their crops." In those regions where the mountain ash abounds the berries of this beautiful tree form a very important part of their diet whenever it frequents such a district.

The outer wall of the home of this denizen of the forest is constructed of a framework of slender fir or pine twigs. Inside of this wall and projecting above it is placed a lining of fine roots and grass woven with a fine hairlike lichen.

The Pine Grosbeak seems to bear confinement, but when caged it is said that after the first moulting the crimson color of the plumage is replaced by a bright yellow. Mr. E. W. Nelson observed these birds in Alaska and says, "During winter, while traveling along the frozen surfaces of the water courses of the interior it is common to note a party of these birds busy among the cottonwood tops, uttering their cheerful lisping notes as they move from tree to tree. I have frequently passed a pleasant half hour on the wintry banks of the Yukon, while making a midday halt and waiting for the natives to melt the snow for our tea, listening to the chirping and fluttering of these birds as they came trooping along the edges of the snow-laden woods in small parties. They rarely paid any attention to us, but kept on their way

and were, ere long, lost to sight in the midst of the bending tree tops and silence again pervaded the dim vistas of the low woods. Beyond the faint, soft call note uttered as the birds trooped along through the forests, I never heard them make any sound.”

THE ANNUAL NOVEMBER CONFERENCE

October had gone. In north central Illinois many trees had lost all their gaily colored leaves; others were fast becoming bare. With the exception of a few goldenrod and aster blooms, the splendid autumn flowers were buried in banks of dead leaves. The sun cast daily smaller shadows. Only once in a while could the tree sparrow capture a belated beetle. The quiet of the woods was broken by the busy little Mr. Squirrel gathering his winter's nuts.

The pecking of Woodpecker Brothers & Company was busily kept up; but most of the sweet-voiced birds had gone south.

The merry voices of gay nutting parties were drowned in the rustling of dry leaves. Even Mrs. Chipmunk was startled if she heard before she saw her own Mr. Chipmunk coming toward her. The woods seemed almost lifeless.

Missing the bustling, restless life of their active summer neighbors, the birds still in the forest were beginning to feel lonesome. Some were loth to leave their homes and familiar places. Others who were touched with a desire to join the rovers were unwilling to forsake their old friends when skies were so dark and days so dreary.

Finally they agreed to call a mass meeting to see if they could

agree to all go or to all stay together.

Then arose the question of how to get word to all the birds. Although he knew that he was out of tune, cheerful yellow-breasted Mr. Meadowlark said that he would do his best at whistling through the meadows for the purpose of letting his neighbors know of the meeting. Mr. Bob White agreed that instead of always calling his own name, he would go through the fields and along the edges of the timber where he was best known, calling his comrades.

Mr. Blue Jay, Mr. Black Crow and Mr. Black-Capped Chickadee, who are always in voice, were urged to help. Mr. Crow was asked if he could not call "come" as easily as "caw." Upon making a trial he found that he could. Since he has no fear either in the fields or near the towns, he was sent to scour the country roundabout. Mr. Chickadee, who keeps a summer cottage in the thick woods, was asked to see that all the timber birds were called.

As the season was daily growing more cheerless, and as it was feared that some birds might not promptly obey the summons, the fearless, fighting Mr. Jay was told to arrest all heedless or laggard birds. As this command just suited Officer Jay, he started off in high spirits. Having no patrol wagon at his call, he took along Mr. Chickenhawk to help him manage those who must be brought by force.

Although they said that they were anxious to have all the birds present, the Woodpecker Brothers and their partner, Mr.

Nuthatch, said that they could not drop their work to roam over the state, but that they would help by pecking and pounding as noisily as they could so that the gathering birds might know in just which timber to alight.

At last the day for the meeting came. The sky was sunny, but the air was chill. It was about the middle of November and the days were growing shorter and shorter. You would be surprised to know how many different birds were present.

The great strong Mr. Bald Eagle was chosen to conduct the meeting. This he did in good style. He told the object of the meeting in a little speech: "Neighbors, friends and relations," he said, "we have come together to discuss a very important matter. Spring came with all its beauties, fresh promises of life and new chances. Warmed with renewed vigor, we began our year's work with great vim. You all know how hard every one of us has worked in building a home and rearing a family. Summer, with its plenty, has passed and our children are grown. Shall we join those of our old neighbors who have already left for other homes in the sunny southland? Or, shall we face the winter's storm and cold here? Let us hear from every one present. Which shall we do?"

As everyone waited for someone else to speak first, it was as quiet as Quaker meeting. After waiting a while, as jolly Mr. Robin is so well known and liked, Chairman Eagle called upon him. Robin replied: "My summer in Illinois has been a pleasant one. Here are many fond ties. Wife and I have had a cosy home

in which we have raised four of our five children. They are now happily flying about. We have but one sorrow. A cruel stone from a sling-shot killed our other baby.” Here Mrs. Robin cried so that he could not go on until he had pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes. Her cousins, Mrs. Thrush and Mrs. Bluebird, tried to quiet Mrs. Robin by fanning her and holding some smelling salts to her nose. Choking back a lump in his throat, Mr. Robin went on talking. “We have found strawberries, mulberries, cherries and other fruits in plenty, and have never lacked for insects that are our reliance for food. But winter with ice and snow is coming. Jack Frost has already been here and has driven away most of our bugs and worms. Our bills are not strong enough to crack nuts. Wild berries which we can eat are almost gone. Unless the kind children scatter us plenty of crumbs, if it freezes so hard that we can get no more insects, sorry as we are to leave, we must go to a warmer country. But we will go no farther than we must, and will return as soon as we can. We remember that last year in December there was a spell warm enough for bugs to creep out and we came back for a five days’ visit. We prefer to remain if we can get a living.”

This started them all to talking, and they had to be called to order. Singer Bluebird said that he, like the Robins, cannot do without his bugs and worms, and must go where he can get them or starve.

Mr. Quail, who likes to be called Bob White, said: “My dear plain little wife and my children very much prefer bugs. We are

all so fond of them that we relish even potato beetles. Yet, in winter time – unless they are covered by a deep snow, we can find grains, weed seed and other things which will keep us from starving. In that case, we can go to the poultry yard and eat with the chickens. We fear freezing most. After all the good work which we do for the farmer, he might well afford to provide us a shelter. But it is to be supposed that he does not think of it. However, we will risk staying here.”

Two chums, Mr. Crow Blackbird and Mr. Red-Winged Blackbird, who had been driven from a marshy place by Blue Jay, sat side by side on the same limb and were having fine sport making faces and winking at each other while the speeches were being made. Both can help the farmer. Mr. C. Blackbird can eat mice and the scattered corn kernels. Mr. R. W. Blackbird can pick smartweed, ragweed and other weed seeds. Yet both declared that they could not get along without insects and they did not mean to try. “Down south,” said Mr. R. W., “if insects are scarce, there are plump rice kernels which taste better than old weed seed.”

Up spoke Mr. Common Crow: “I would not be so particular. I teach my children to eat corn and mice and we can find both around the corn-crib. And we can always find a frozen apple in the orchard, or some potatoes or turnips in the garden, or a forgotten pumpkin in the field. These taste very good. If we are very hungry, we can pick up dead rabbits and birds. We will stay so as to be here when the farmer begins his spring work. We are

not afraid of his scarecrows. They never hurt us. We help the farmer so much that he will surely let us get a living around the farm. He will never miss what we eat.”

A pair of Turtle Doves on a limb of a neighboring tree softly sang, “Coo, coo, we will stay, too.”

There were several of the Woodpeckers present. The little black-and-white one with red patches on the sides of his neck, who is called Downy Woodpecker, tried to speak for the whole family. “We all must have our insects. God has given us long, strong bills so that we can peck holes into the wood in which bugs and grubs are hidden. Sometimes merely our tapping charms them so that they crawl out for us. If they do not, we can run out our long tongues and catch those beyond the reach of our bills.”

His big red-headed brother went on: “Oh, yes! we can find enough to eat. I can leave the trees for hunting places for the rest of the family. There is plenty of food good enough for me in fence posts and telegraph poles. Besides, I can eat cedar berries, nuts and other things. No need for me to go off on a tramp in search of food. Ha, ha!” chuckled he, “I have already begun to lay aside for winter. You’ll not catch me starving here. I know just where to find knot holes, cracks in railroad ties, loose pieces of bark and loose shingles on houses which hold a good supply of beech nuts and acorns. If I find an apple on the tree, I can bore into it for the seeds. Then there are choice bits to be found around the cow sheds and barns. We have no thought of going away.”

The pair of Turtle Doves nestled closer together and again

sang, "Coo, coo – we will stay, too." Everybody smiled at their loving peace of mind.

"I have already begun to hollow out a hole in a high tree for my winter home," said Downy Woodpecker.

"So have I," said the pretty Golden Winged Woodpecker, who is nicknamed High Hole; "and it is in a place that just suits me in the tip top of a very tall tree."

Mr. Nut Hatch rose to his feet. "I too hammer into cracks and holes such things as sunflower seeds, corn and nuts for winter use. Mr. Chickadee and I have agreed to work together. I hunt only on the trunks and larger limbs, leaving the smaller branches for friend Chickadee. If he can not find quite enough he knows how to hunt around houses. Children who see him only when snow is on the ground call him Snowbird and sometimes kindly throw him crumbs."

"I can eat buds of some trees and seeds, too," added Mr. Chickadee.

Just then a Northern Shrike alighted in their midst. In an instant there was a flutter of great alarm. The cool headed chairman bade everybody to sit still and he would see to it that nobody was hurt. Because of his cruelty, you know, the Shrike is often called Mr. Butcher Bird. He catches other birds which he hangs on great thorns while he tears and eats their flesh. Even the English Sparrows are afraid of him.

Chairman Eagle explained the purpose of their meeting and Mr. Shrike promised to hurt no one. Looking around he said, "I

have just come from my summer home in the north to spend the winter with you. I see gay little Winter Wren hopping around. As soon as there comes a northern snowfall heavy enough to cover the weed seeds there Mr. and Mrs. Snow Bunting will join us.”

“How glad we will be to see them; glad to see them!” chattered happy Chickadee. “We will have a jolly game of snowball. Chick-a-dee-dee-dee! Da-da-day!” And he hopped along and around a branch one of the most lighthearted creatures living.

Mr. English Sparrow wished to say something. “Our flock can always find a warm place and something – ”

Just then a hoarse voice was heard calling, “Who, who, who, who, ar-r-r-re you?” As the feathered people must ever be on the alert to protect their lives, in a second all was as quiet as the grave. Thinking that some better dressed bird only meant to make fun of him and his many wives Mr. English Sparrow flew into a passion and began to pull off his coat.

Mr. Eagle told the crowd that there was no need of a scare. “That,” said he, “is only Mr. Barred Owl in yon tree. He has been roused by our talking. Put on your coat, foolish Mr. Sparrow.”

Mr. Jay could not let slip the chance to twit his neighbor. “Ha, ha!” said he; “you had better get enough more wives to teach you how to behave yourself.”

Everyone looked around laughing. Thinking that night had come and that his friends from the next timber had come to make a call, Mr. Owl again broke out: “He-he-he-he, hi-hi-hi-hi, ha-ha-ha-ha!”

Mr. English Sparrow was vexed and ashamed, but being afraid to get into a fight he flew off.

As it was getting late in the day the chairman said that the meeting must close. "It is useless to talk longer," said he. "It is plain that our pretty Meadow Larks and other insect eating birds must move or starve. We shall be very sorry to see them leave and hope to meet them again on their return next spring. They are needed at the south. May God speed their journey.

"But some of us must remain or shirk our duty. The Turkey Buzzards and their helpers must be here to clean up the fields and groves and to clear away dead things washed ashore. If these things are not done the foul air next spring may make much sickness. Woodpeckers must keep at their work or plants will suffer next summer. Those who can eat seeds must be active or the farmers will not be able to keep down the weeds. Grouse, Jay, Wax Wing and others who can manage berries and nuts must not leave or in a few years trees and underbrush will be so thick that there will not be room for them to branch out. Even our hated Mr. English Sparrow is needed to pick up droppings in the street and waste around houses. We are all needed – each to do his own bit of work in his own place and way. Although that may not be just what we prefer, may we all do our duty just as cheerfully as man's friend, Mr. Turkey Buzzard, does his unpleasant tasks."

Loveday Almira Nelson.

THE FIELD SPARROW

(*Spizella pusilla.*)

A bubble of music floats
The slope of the hillside over;
A little wandering sparrow's notes;
And the bloom of yarrow and clover,
And the smell of sweet-fern and the bayberry leaf,
On his ripple of song are stealing;
For he is a chartered thief,
The wealth of the fields revealing.

— *Lucy Larcom, "The Field Sparrow."*

The Field Sparrow is the smallest of our sparrows and is quite easily distinguished from the other species by its reddish bill. The common name is misleading, and perhaps it would be more appropriate to call this bird the Bush Sparrow, a name by which it is frequently known. Instead of the field it seems to prefer the pasture, with its weeds and bushes. It will also frequent the shrubby thickets that follow the removal of a forest. This shy bird has a somewhat extensive range, which includes the eastern United States and Southern Canada. It passes the winter months chiefly in those states south of the Ohio river.

The Field Sparrow when frightened does not retreat to the

cover of foliage, as does the Song Sparrow, but flies to an exposed position on top of bush or low tree, where it can watch and await developments. In the fall they frequently gather in small flocks. If disturbed all will fly to the nearest bushes, and in perching will cluster close together.

The Field Sparrow is all the more interesting because of its shyness. Mr. Keyser speaks of it as "a captivating little bird, graceful of form and sweet of voice, singing his cheerful trills from early spring until far past midsummer. The song makes me think of a silver thread running through a woof of golden sunshine, carried forward by a swinging shuttle of pearl." Mr. Chapman says: "There is something winning in his appearance; he seems such a gentle, innocent, dove-like little bird. His song is in keeping with his character, being an unusually clear, plaintive whistle, sweeter to the lover of birds' songs than the voice of the most gifted songstress." It is not possible to describe the song in words, for it varies greatly. No two birds seem to have the same song and the same bird may vary its song. Locality also seems to affect its character. It is the sweetest at the going down of the sun and in the early twilight. To hear it then, in the absence of all other sounds, is indeed soul inspiring.

Its delicate nest, too, becomes the lovely character of this little bird. This small house is usually placed near the ground in a low shrub, or on the ground where it is well protected by tall grasses. The nests are not usually found near fence rows, but rather in less public places, on hillsides and nearer the center of the field.

When possible, a thorny bush is chosen. The nest is constructed of fine grasses and very fine roots loosely woven together and lined with finer grasses, hair and the delicate bark fibers.

Writing of the finding of a Field Sparrow's nest near the top of a hill, some one has said: "How 'beautiful for situation' is this tiny cottage on the hill! Here the feathered poets may sit on their leafy verandas, look down into the green valleys and compose verses on the pastoral attractions of Nature. One is almost tempted to spin a romance about the happy couple."

DISHRAG VINES

Margie was cross. It was a rainy day, and she was having to sew; two things she hated.

“I think it might rain on school days. And I wish dish-cloths had never been invented,” she exclaimed, jerking her thread into a tangle.

“You ought to move down south,” quietly said her aunt.

“Why? Don’t they have rain and dish-cloths there?”

“Yes, of course they do; and I will tell you a true story, if you will promise not to complain the least bit for the rest of the day.”

Margie promised; and, after threading a needle, her aunt began:

“When I was in Georgia, last October, I saw a queer vine growing over the porch of an old negro’s cabin. It looked like a pumpkin vine, with its great coarse leaves, and it had green, gourd-like seed pods, or fruit, hanging all over it. I asked the old colored man, who was hoeing near by, about it, and he said, in surprise: ‘Lawsy me! Didn’ you neber heerd tell ob a dishrag vine afore?’

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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