1. GREAT HORNED OWL. 2. OSPREY.
3. CHIMNEY SWALLOW. 4. BANK SWALLOW. 5. HUMMING BIRD.
Our
HOME
Birds
OUR HOME BIRDS.

BY ELLA RODMAN CHURCH.

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"Has any one seen Malcolm?"

The two little sisters looked up in surprise. Sweet, plump, white-and-pink-looking little things they were, with a soft peachiness of bloom that made one almost feel like biting into them as if they had been made of candy.

They were dear good children too; and Miss Harson, their governess, had so little trouble with them that, had it not been for Master Malcolm, "Elmridge" would have seemed almost too perfect for an earthly home. But this young gentleman fully supplied the exciting element, and displayed wonderful ingenuity in getting up surprises and alarms; not that he was at all evil-disposed, but he possessed an active body and an inquiring mind, and for the last year he had been allowed too much of his own way for his own good or for the comfort of others.
They were three motherless children, these little Kyles. Twelve months ago a heavy shadow had fallen across the household, and Clara and Edie still wore their black dresses for mamma. Mr. Kyle was busy at his law-office all day in the great city, that was only a few miles distant; and the children, under the indulgent management of "old Kitty," a devoted nurse who had taken care of their mother when she was a baby, were allowed to run wild, until their father, a sad, reserved man, suddenly decided upon a governess for them, and, with some misgivings on account of her youth, concluded to take the daughter of an old friend in that capacity.

The experiment proved to be very satisfactory to all. In a very short time after her arrival Miss Harson had disarmed the jealousy of the old nurse, who grumbled at first and declared that she looked like little more than a child herself—had overcome the shyness of the little girls, and firmly bound Master Malcolm with the chains of love and respect. She looked so slight and weak physically, but proved so strong morally, and was so gentle with all her firmness, that it was quite impossible to withstand her, and soon no one thought of questioning any of Miss Harson's edicts.

It was found, too, that the children were getting on wonderfully fast in their studies, although the young
governess did not approve of very close application for them; but what they learned under her tuition they thoroughly understood. Not very much had been attempted yet, but Miss Harson had revolved various plans in her mind, and especially for the study of natural history, when this morning's events brought matters to a crisis.

It was a delightful room in which the young teacher and her pupils were assembled on that bright spring morning, although it was called the schoolroom; and Elmridge was a delightful place. The house stood on a sort of slope that seemed to rise up like a backbone from the midst of the country about it, and there were grand elms around the mansion—trees where, judging from the sounds on summer mornings, all the birds known to fame appeared to reside; so the name of Elmridge was probably as good a one as could be found.

The house was roomy, with a grand veranda, a fine garden and conservatory; and lovely views were to be had from all the windows. The little Kyles had plenty of room to become strong and healthy children, and until their dear mother's death their own home had always seemed to them pleasanter than any other place. Their ages were six, eight, and ten, and Malcolm was the oldest.

But Miss Harson's question has not been answered
yet, though Clara had asked in surprise, "Did he not go to town with papa?"

This was not a very common event, but, as it sometimes happened, and as Malcolm had not been visible since breakfast-time, his sisters supposed that an extra holiday had been granted.

"No," replied their governess; "your papa decided not to allow any more holidays at present; and I am sure that he would not change his mind without telling me of it. I will call to Malcolm from the veranda; perhaps he did not hear the school-bell."

But Miss Harson called in vain; no Malcolm responded, and breathing for a few moments the sharp spring air, she returned to the schoolroom in a somewhat troubled frame of mind. She rather feared that something serious had happened to the truant; for, as Kitty was fond of saying, "It was just a mercy and a miracle that he didn't kill himself twenty times a day;" and with recollections of having lately seen him at work on what looked like a very large kite, but between which and herself he immediately interposed the door of the tool-house, Miss Harson began to fear that this work of art had become entangled in some very high tree, and that Malcolm was perhaps at this very moment lying helpless with a broken limb from his efforts to disentangle it.

There was just wind enough to make it a partic-
ularly favorable day for kite-flying, but presently the governess heard a great commotion outside, in which she plainly distinguished the voice of Malcolm and that of Patrick the gardener.

They approached the house, and there was evidently a scuffle going on.

"Put me down, I say!" cried the boy, angrily.
"Put me down this instant!"

"Sorra a bit of it, me jewel!" replied Patrick, who was exasperatingly calm. "Such a foine burd as ye are must go straight to the young leddy. It's plased with ye she'll be, to be sure. Arrah! stop kicking, will ye? and be aisy, now!"

Miss Harson and her two little pupils ran out on the veranda to encounter a very funny sight.

"Here is a quare burd that I'm afther bringing ye, miss," said Patrick, with a flourish. "He'd dropped, in a heap, like, on the strawberry-bed."

The bird was kicking in a most alarming manner, and looked very much like a boy with two great kite-like wings attached to his shoulders. His face was red with anger and mortification as Patrick deposited him on his feet before the young lady, who found it quite impossible to keep from smiling.

"Why, Malcolm!" she exclaimed, "what does this mean?" while Clara and Edith stared in astonishment.
"Are you hurt?" asked Miss Harson, as no answer seemed to be forthcoming.

"No'm," replied the captive, manfully ignoring an ugly bruise on his knee.

Patrick had disappeared with a parting grin at the discomfiture of the young gentleman, whom he would not have harmed for the world, but he owed him a grudge for a particularly mischievous prank of the day before.

"I think I can guess what you have been doing," continued Miss Harson, as she glanced at the strange ornaments on Malcolm's shoulders. "You have been trying to fly. You are certainly fortunate to have escaped so easily, for you might have broken your neck in the attempt. Did you not know, Malcolm, that boys were never intended to fly? They are not made for it."

"But they used to fly," was the confident answer. "Men had wings, anyway. My history says so."

The governess looked at her pupil in amazement. He was a fine, manly-looking boy, and his frank, open gaze now met hers with the utmost assurance in the strength of his position.

"And pray, what history is that, Malcolm? I am quite curious to know."

"The history of England," he replied, "where it says that 'the English army took flight before the
victorious arms of the Scotch;’ and how could they fly if they hadn’t wings?”

Miss Harson sat down on a chair and laughed very heartily.

“When I was older than you, Malcolm,” said she presently, “I used to read in the old Saxon Chronicles about King Alfred and his troubles with the Danes; and this old history used to say that ‘this winter, the army came to the town of ——, and sat down before it.’ This meant that they besieged the place, but I used to fancy them sitting in a row or circle in front of the town, and wondered what good that could do. Beginners are very apt to make mistakes, and you have been mistaken about the flying; that is all. When Patrick complained, the other day, of that cross dog in the neighborhood that flew at all the passers by, you did not suppose that the animal had wings, did you?”

“No,” was the reply, as Malcolm began to see things in a different light.

“It is a very common expression,” continued Miss Harson, “to say that people sought safety in flight, but this does not at all mean that the person referred to spread a pair of wings and mounted into the air like a bird. Let me help you off with your wings; they must be very awkward incumbrances. What are they made of? Mosquito-netting, I think, and
whalebone—rather frail materials, Malcolm, for bearing up a well-fed boy of your age."

"Well," replied the young aëronaut, half laughing himself, "I looked at a fly's wing through the magnifying-glass, and this seemed to come nearest to it."

"But you are not a fly," said the governess. "Besides, wings to be of any use must be alive—as much alive as any other part of you. Do not look so surprised, children; we must attend now to our regular lessons, but in the reading after tea I will tell you something about wings."

Once, in the course of the lessons, Malcolm burst out laughing; he suddenly thought of himself as he must have appeared when struggling in Patrick's grasp, with his very much tumbled wings and his very active feet; but Miss Harson, who understood what was passing in his mind, only smiled gently and went on with her explanations.

"I have thought of something else, Miss Harson," said Malcolm when recess had come. "When I was quite a small boy"—here the governess looked very smiling—"not more than six, I suppose, Kitty told me, one night when I went to bed, that she really believed my wings were sprouting; and that first put the idea into my head. Now, what did she mean by that if people never have wings?"

"What had you been doing?" asked Miss Harson.
“Nothing,” was the reply. “I had been good all day, and Kitty praised me ever so much.”

“That was just it, Malcolm. To be good all day was so entirely different from your usual style of conducting yourself that Kitty began to think you were getting quite angelic. The sprouting of wings, my dear child, really means living our daily life in such a way as to make us fit for the society of the blessed ones above, when

‘Christ shall give us soon to wear
Garments beautiful and fair,
White robes of glorious majesty.’

These words are from a beautiful German hymn, and I should like to have you remember them; but I have a great deal to tell you about wings, as you will find this evening.”
CHAPTER II.

WHY A BOY CANNOT FLY.

The reading hour had become quite a delightful one to the children, and Miss Harson hoped to instruct them as much in this way as in any other. Not that she was in the habit of reading to them from school-books, or talking of things that fun-loving children would call "dry;" but most children are daily puzzled by things which no one ever thinks of explaining to them, and the young governess encouraged her pupils to ask her questions, and was apt to tell them some story at this time that made the matter very clear to them, or to lead them on to think out for themselves the very things they wanted to know.

All children are interested in natural history when it is made sufficiently attractive, and Malcolm's morning exploit seemed to be the best possible introduction to the study of birds and their ways.

At length they were fairly settled, after tea, in the cheerful room, with its bright, open fire and deep window-seats cushioned with red, in which the chil-
dren particularly delighted, as "splendid" places in which to tell stories at twilight, or read them, and which was their own especial apartment for study or for play. Miss Harson looked lovingly on the little group that clustered closely about her with such confiding affection, and said with a smile, "I rather suspect, Malcolm, that your question this evening will be a very flighty one. What is it?"

"I should like to know, if you please," replied Malcolm sturdily, "why boys can't fly? I think they ought to."

"'Course they can't!" exclaimed Clara, quite contemptuously.

"We know that they can't, dear," said the governess, "but we also wish to know the reason why. So, if you will listen very carefully, I will read you something that, unless you really care to find out this reason, you may think dull. But I will make it as interesting as I can. A gentleman who has studied the subject attentively says:

"'From the earliest ages men have been so envious of the flight of birds that they have tried to imitate their feathered friends, and endeavored like them to skim at their ease through the atmosphere. But every effort has proved unavailing, and every man-bird has ignominiously failed in his attempt—some adventurers having lost their courage, some their
limbs, and some their lives. And the reason of the failure may be easily ascertained.

"'In the first place, the wings of birds are very much longer in proportion to their bodies than are the arms of men. This is seen even in short-winged birds, such as the partridge or the sparrow, while the wings of the frigate-bird or the albatross are so long that at a distance the bird appears to be all wings. Then, again, these enormous wings must require corresponding muscles to work them; so that even if we could make wings of proportionate size, and fix them on our arms, we should still be as much tied to the earth as before for want of the power to move them.

"'Again, even if we had the requisite limbs and muscles, and had been furnished with a goodly array of feathers, our efforts at flight would be unavailing. We might possibly be able to descend from a height without injury, but we should not be able to ascend, and so we should lose one of the principal objects of flight; while it would be perfectly impossible to transport ourselves through the air. The reason of our failure would lie principally in the structure of our skeleton, together with the comparative imperfection of our organs of respiration.'"

Miss Harson stopped here to ask Malcolm if he remembered what she had already told him about
respiration. He drew a long breath by way of reply, and then Clara exclaimed, "I know, Miss Harson; it's sighing."

"No, dear," was the reply, "not sighing, except that sighing is really drawing a long breath. Respiration means breathing. But our friend has not finished yet. He says, farther on:

"'The bone of a bird is of a very different texture from that of man. It is hollow, contains air instead of marrow, and is throughout of a far more porous and spongy texture than the bone of man or of quadrupeds; and this texture is retained even when the bird is not intended to fly. Into these hollow bones the air is forced from the lungs, and thus the body of the bird is rendered much lighter, bulk for bulk; and so plentiful is the supply of air through the bones that respiration can be partially carried on even when the ordinary channels are stopped.'

"Now," said Miss Harson, "we will talk a little about this, because I want you all to understand it. The same gentleman here tells a little story that explains the large words he uses. He says that a man who had gone out gunning shot a bird that fell into the water. It was not killed, but only wounded; and to put the poor little creature out of its misery, he held its head under the water until he thought it
must be quite drowned. But the bird persisted in keeping alive; and not being a fish, it was very puzzling how it could manage to breathe under water. But when the gentleman finally saw that the end of the wing-bone, which had been broken by his shot, did not get under the water, he understood in a moment that air was drawn to the bird’s lungs through this wing, and that by this means it was kept from drowning.

"The skeleton of a bird’s wing is like a human arm, if the arm is stretched out as I am stretching mine, with the fingers all close together in this way, and the thumb a little apart. The quill-feathers at the end of the wing are called ‘primary’ feathers, and ten of these continue on to the hand and fingers. Upon their arrangement depends the bird’s style of flight.

"If these feathers are long, stiff, and pointed, we know at once that the flight of the bird is swift and active. Such feathers are to be found in the swallows and humming-birds, whose powers of flight are wonderful. But if they are short, and rounded at the end, the flight is slow, and the bird seems to find it hard to fly at all.

"The second part of the arm or wing is that from the wrist to the elbow. From this part come the next set of quill-feathers, which are called the
'secondaries.' These vary in number, shape, or size: in some birds they are very prominent and distinct, while in others there appears to be no difference between the last 'primary' and the first 'secondary.'

"There is still another set of feathers called 'tertiaries,' which spring from that part of the wing between the elbow and the shoulder. These vary very much in different kinds of birds. They are much shorter than the 'primaries,' and are often merged into the little feathers that cover the outside of the wing. Sometimes they are so long that they alter the whole shape of the wing; and in the cranes, tall as they are, they make long, drooping plumes, almost reaching the ground.

"What should be the thumb of a bird has a little wing to itself called the winglet. The wing itself appears small compared with the spread of the feathers when the bird is flying; but when the wing is extended, a strong, elastic fold of skin is seen to stretch itself along each division of the wing, and to support the quills which run through it, just as pins run through the folds of the papers on which they are ranged for sale."

Miss Harson had a row of pins all ready for the children to examine, and they showed by their remarks that they were getting a very good idea of
the manner in which a bird makes its way through the air.

"And now, Malcolm," continued his governess, "we are coming to the very reason why you and I cannot enjoy the pleasures of flying. The muscles which move a bird's wings are exceedingly strong, and especially one that is much larger than the others, which pulls the wing down and strikes it against the air. This is so immensely large that if a man had a muscle of the same kind it would have to begin at his shoulders, spread over half of his breast and go down to his feet, while that part of it on his breast would need to be nearly a foot thick."

"We should look funny enough," said Malcolm, laughing; "but I must say I should like to fly, in spite of the looks. It is so provoking to think that the littlest birds can do something that I can't!"

"They can do several things that you cannot do," replied Miss Harson—"feeding on bugs and worms for instance, which I do not think you would care to imitate." Malcolm made a very wry face, and his teacher continued: "We have every reason to be satisfied with the privileges which God has given us, and we certainly should not be willing to change in all respects with any of the lower order of beings. I think you all understand now why birds can fly and we cannot. How would you like to have me
tell you about the different kinds of birds, so that you may know something of their habits when you hear them singing again next summer?"

The little Kyles all agreed that this would be very nice, and Edith, who was almost too shy to speak at all, whispered eagerly, "Please tells us about 'Cock Robin.'"

"'Robin Redbreast' was the sweetest," pleaded Clara, "for he covered the poor little children up with leaves. Won't you tell us about him, Miss Harson?"

Malcolm laughed at his little sisters' ideas of ornithology—their governess had explained to them that this is the name given to the study of birds, as zoology is to that of animals, and mineralogy to that of minerals—and when asked for his feathered favorite he proudly mentioned the eagle, the bird of America, as he is called.

"There are very many nice stories about eagles," said he.

"Suppose that we begin with the little ones," suggested Miss Harson—"the dear little, familiar birds that come to us first, and make their nests in our own trees here?"

"And live in little houses," said Clara, delightedly—"the pretty little martin-houses that papa had made on purpose for them."
“A great many grown people,” continued Miss Harson, “are quite ignorant about the little, every-day birds that make such sweet music all around us on spring and summer mornings, and build their cunning little nests with as much skill and judgment as an architect shows in planning a house, while they could talk, perhaps, of eagles and ostriches and other huge feathered creatures that always appear to me more like animals than birds. I think we shall really enjoy finding out a great many things about our own little home birds, and perhaps, when we have become well acquainted with them, we may feel like being introduced to their foreign relations. What do you say to this idea, Malcolm?’”

“I want to know about them all,” was the reply; “but won’t you throw in the eagles, please, and give us lots of stories?”

Miss Harson laughed as she agreed to throw in the eagles, although she said they were not birds to be handled with impunity; and to give them as many stories as she could possibly remember or find that had anything to do with the subject.

And this is the way in which the talks about home birds were begun.
CHAPTER III.

SPARROWS.

"I THINK," said Miss Harson, "that the best arrangement for our home birds will be to take them in the order in which they appear in the spring—that is, so far as this can be carried out."

"But we have birds all winter," said Malcolm. "I've seen them in the woods often, and around the trees here; and snow-birds, too: there are always lots of them."

"Are those our dear little birdies that we feed with crumbs?" asked Edith.

"Yes, dear," replied the governess, "those and some others; but we will leave them until we come to our regular winter birds. It will help us to remember better if we keep them distinct, according to their seasons. The birds I wish to speak of this evening come to us regularly in the spring from a warmer climate, and those that are always classed as early birds are the song-sparrow, the blue-bird, the robin, the yellow-hammer, the phœbe-bird, and the swallows. To this last family belong the martins, whose pretty
little houses are dotted around everywhere, and are frequently occupied by other birds who happen to get there first."

"I'd turn 'em out," exclaimed Malcolm, looking as quarrelsome as if he were a martin who had just been deprived of his lawful residence.

"Battles of this kind often do take place," continued Miss Harson, "for birds do not always 'in their little nests agree,' but are often very quarrelsome little creatures. We shall come to some of these difficulties by and by; just now we are on the lookout for the earliest bird. This, as people very generally seem to think, is the song-sparrow, a little bird about six inches long, with a brown back streaked with pale, dull yellow and black, a brown tail rounded at the end, flesh-colored legs, and dark-brown wings. A very unpretending little personage indeed, so far as appearance goes; but one who knows him well says:

"'It is the first singing bird in spring, taking precedence even of the pewee and the blue-bird. Its song continues occasionally during the whole summer and fall, and is sometimes heard even in the depth of winter. The notes or chant are short, but very sweet, resembling the beginning of the canary's song, and frequently repeated, generally from the branches of a bush or small tree, where it sits chanting for an
hour together. It is fond of frequenting the borders of rivers, meadows, swamps, and such-like watery places; and if wounded and unable to fly, will readily take to the water and swim with considerable rapidity.'

"This little bird makes its nest on the ground under a tuft of grass: it is made of fine dry grass, lined with horse-hair, and contains four or five bluish-white eggs, marked with numerous spots of reddish-brown; there are usually three broods of young ones in a season. The nest, however, is not always on the ground; it is sometimes found in a tree, though never very high up.

"This month of March is the very time when the early birds begin their songs; and one day last week, when I took a long walk to the butter-woman's, I heard one of these little sparrows trilling forth his sweet song from a blackberry-hedge on the roadside, and presently his little striped back appeared, and I recognized my old friend come to tell me that spring was almost here."

"Did he really say so?" asked Edith, wonderingly.

"Only in bird-language, dear, which means singing; but I understood the little song-sparrow's message as well as if he had actually spoken to me. He did not make a mistake in saying that spring was coming, although we have had a snow-storm since
then. Some one who watches the little feathered creatures very closely writes of them:

"'Many of the early birds, following the southerly winds that often prevail for a few days, and tempted by the bright sunshine of the season, have arrived from their winter haunts, and sing and chirp alternately, as if they were debating whether to remain here or return to a more genial clime. It is a remarkable instinct that prompts so many species of birds to leave their pleasant abiding-places at the South, where every agreeable condition of climate, shelter, and provision for their wants is present, and press onward into the northern regions before the rigors of winter have been subdued, and while they are still liable to perish with cold and starvation. Often with anxiety have I watched these little bewildered songsters who have so unseasonably returned, when, after commencing their morning lays as if they believed the vernal promises of dawn, they were obliged to flee into the depths of the woods to find shelter from a driving snow-storm.'

"These little birds," continued the governess, "really teach us a lesson of faith which believes that

'Beyond a frowning providence

God hides a smiling face.'

The whole sparrow family, to which this particular
bird belongs, is a very interesting one; and although the other members do not appear perhaps so early in the spring as some other birds, we may as well talk of them now while we are upon the subject of sparrows.

"The little chipping sparrow, or hair-bird (Fig. 1),

is still smaller than the song-sparrow, being only five inches and a quarter long, a mite of a creature, who performs the very funny part of waking his fellow-birds up in the morning. He sits on the ground to do this, and although if it has been a warm summer night he may have twittered all through the hours 3 *
of darkness—and I have heard him many a time when I have been awake—he is sure to strike up a particularly shrill chirp just before the first glimmer of dawn appears. This is answered by a robin, then another robin perhaps, then a blue-bird, and so on, until all the feathered songsters are carolling their morning hymn of praise.

"The color of the hair-bird is very much like that of the song-sparrow, and he gets his peculiar name from his beautifully finished little nest, which is carefully lined with the finest hair. It is generally built in a cedar bush, and has four or five light-blue eggs, with a few dots of purplish-black at the large end.

"This species of sparrow is not much of a singer, but he is a very sociable little fellow; and often builds his nest in the branches of the trees that shade our streets and gardens, gleaning up crumbs from our yards, and even our doors, to feed his more advanced young with. I have known one of these birds attend regularly every day during a whole summer while the family were at dinner under a piazza fronting the garden, and pick up the crumbs that were thrown to him. This sociable habit, which continues chiefly during the summer, is a singular characteristic. Toward the end of summer he takes to the fields and hedges until the weather becomes severe with snow, when he departs for the South.
"The field-sparrow (Fig. 2) is still another kind, though just the size of the chipping sparrow, and very much the same color, except that its bill and legs are reddish-brown. It gets here early in April, and is usually found in fields and orchards, while the other sparrows seem to prefer the hedges. They are very harmless little creatures, and live principally on the seeds of wild plants. In winter they hop around the doors and watch for the crumbs that are swept out.

"At the foot of some brier a tiny nest, lined with horse-hair and holding six thickly-speckled eggs, announces that two little field-sparrows have set up housekeeping, and all around this humble dwelling they may be heard chirping somewhat like a cricket. Large flocks of them are seen in autumn in the orchards and corn-fields hunting for their favorite seeds, but when the severe cold and the deep snows come the field-sparrows disappear.

"Then there are English sparrows, larger than
our own native species, which have been brought here very largely of late years, because they are so useful in clearing worms and other insects from the trees in our public squares; about these many interesting stories are told. Their nest-building is especially funny, and some one says:

"'While other birds must select their own accustomed spots, the similar tree or bush, the same materials, etc., the sparrow, like a bird who knows the world, is everywhere at home, and ready to establish himself wherever chance may happen to place him. If he lives remote from towns and cities and the habitations of men, a tree answers his purpose, and a comfortable nest he will build there, with the rare addition of an arched top into the bargain; which possibly he may have learned from that knowing bird the magpie. In default of a tree or a house, a chink in a rock or a hole in a wall suits him; but, after all, the nooks and eaves of buildings are his favorite resorts, and when he has his choice he will often select droll places.

"'Even amidst the carved foliage of the capital of some Corinthian column—for sparrows respect nothing—a projection of straws, with now and then a feather, announces a nest in preparation. A pair actually built a nest in the mouth of the stone lion over Northumberland House at Charing Cross.'"
"You look frightened, Clara," said her governess kindly; "it was not a real lion, you know."

"But it was such a gloomy place!" was the reply, with a shudder. "I wouldn't have built a nest there if I had been a sparrow."

"They were all in the dark," said little Edith, adding her mite of sympathy.

"It was a grand old place," said Malcolm approvingly, "for no one, you see, would ever think of looking for a nest in a lion's mouth.—But please go on, Miss Harson, and tell us about some more queer nests."

"To be in the dark, Edie," said Miss Harson, smiling, "is not so bad for birds as for some little girls I know; for the birds really like it when they are at home, which is not very much of the time. But I must tell you about the sparrows that went to sea.

"The story is that a coal-vessel from Newcastle put into Nairn in Scotland, and while there two sparrows were often seen to alight on the top of the mast. The crew were not particularly surprised at this, as sparrows were a common sight everywhere. But after putting to sea again, these same sparrows were seen following the vessel, and having reached it they took up their old post on top of the mast. Crumbs of bread were scattered on the deck to en-
tice the sparrows down; and they came to the feast fast enough, ate heartily, and then returned to their favorite masthead. When the vessel had been two days at sea, the sparrows seemed to feel quite at home, and came down from their perch to be fed as a matter of course.

"The voyage lasted several days, and on reaching the river Tyne, to which the vessel was bound, a nest was found on the mast-top with four young ones in it; and what do you suppose the crew did with their prize? Took it very carefully down, while the sparrows watched their proceedings, and set them up afresh in housekeeping in the crevice of an old ruined house on the banks of the river."

"Did the little birds like it as well there as on the mast?"

"They appeared to," was the reply, "for they went on bringing up their family as if nothing had happened."

"Is that all?" asked little Edith.

"It is all about those sparrows, dear. But I am going to tell you now about a kind little sparrow who took care of a canary-bird. A lady had a pet canary which was so noisy that she had to hang his cage outside of her window, among some trees that were trained up in front of the house.

"One morning, while the family were at breakfast,
the cage was outside, and a sparrow was seen to fly about it, then perch on the top and twitter to the bird within, between whom and itself a conversation seemed to take place. Very likely the sparrow said, 'Does she give you nice fat worms to eat?' and the canary sorrowfully answered, 'No, indeed. I don't even know what they taste like. Are they good?' 'Good!' repeats the sparrow, in scorn, 'I should think they were good. But, you poor little prisoner, you can't catch any for yourself, and I will bring you one this very minute! Dear! dear! to think that I should live to be asked by a bird if worms were good!' And away he flew.

"I do not say that he actually said all this, Clara—your eyes and Edith's are looking so very large—but he may have said it as birds talk. At any rate, he soon returned to his new acquaintance, carrying a worm in his bill, which he dropped into the cage, and then immediately flew off, as though he did not wish to be thanked.

"Day after day, just at the same hour, the sparrow visited the canary, and never came empty-handed, or, I should say, empty-billed; and very soon the two birds became so intimate that the worm was taken into the canary's bill from that of the sparrow. It was a very pretty sight, and all the neighbors soon became interested in it. Some other ladies tried the
experiment of hanging their canaries out of the window to see if the sparrow would attend to them. The kind-hearted little visitor probably thought as he saw the collection of cages, 'What! more birds without any worms? Dear! dear! what a sad state of things!' for he went to work to supply them immediately, visiting first one cage and then another. But he always went first to his oldest friend, and stayed with him the longest.

"People had to be very cautious about watching the sparrow while engaged in his charitable work; for if he saw any one near, he would instantly fly away. He kept on supplying the little prisoners with such delicacies as birds love all through the summer and into the autumn, but suddenly his visits ceased, and no one could tell whether he had been killed or had become tired of ministering to the wants of so large and grown-up a family. But whatever the reason may have been, the sparrow was seen no more.

"The quantity of caterpillars and worms devoured by these little creatures is simply marvellous. The mouths of the young ones seem to be always open for food, and it has been ascertained that they are fed no less than thirty-six times in an hour. They consume every day one-sixth as much food as the weight of their bodies, and if a man should eat in
the same proportion to his weight, he would devour twenty-five pounds a day."

"The greedy little things!" exclaimed Malcolm.

"Not greedy for birds," replied his teacher. "They cannot be judged by our standard. This constant destruction of worms and caterpillars is an instinct given them by their Creator to prevent the increase of those pests. We learn from the Holy Scriptures that the little sparrows are God's especial care, and I think that Clara can repeat to us the verse she learned last Sunday."

The little girl repeated slowly and reverently, "'Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?'"

"Two farthings," said Miss Harson, "are only the half of one cent; and this small sum is mentioned to show us how common and valueless these little creatures were; yet 'one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.' God's tender care for the smallest and most insignificant of his creatures should lead us to be very kind to all created things."
CHAPTER IV.

BLUE-BIRDS.

"Oh, Miss Harson, such a beautiful bird!" cried Clara, rushing in excitedly the next morning.

"He was all blue, and he sat down on a little branch and sang so sweetly, and then he flew away."

"And we almost caught him," added Edith regretfully.

"You might have quite caught him," said her brother, looking very wise, "if you had only put some salt on his tail."

"What good would that do?" asked Clara in astonishment. "Can't birds fly with salt on their tails?"

Malcolm laughed long and loud, but the governess said kindly, "It would do no good at all, dear; it only means that if you can get near enough to a bird to put salt on its tail, you can get near enough to catch it. But we do not want to catch the pretty birds, who come to us with such sweet tidings of spring, and make them miserable by shutting them up in cages."

"No, ma'am," replied Clara. "If I had caught
it, I meant to let it go again; but I will not even try to catch them any more."

"We are going to talk this very evening about the bird you saw," continued Miss Harson: "he is an old friend of mine, and one of our most welcome spring warblers. But just now lessons are the order of the day."

"I know the name of the bird that Clara saw this morning," said Malcolm, when they were settled again for a talk: "it was a blue-bird; Patrick says so. He has seen lots of 'em lately."

"The blue-bird is sometimes seen very early in the season," replied Miss Harson—"before the snowstorms are over; but when winter seems to return he disappears again, and waits for milder weather. About the middle of March he is again seen, accompanied by his mate, visiting the box in the garden or the hole in the old apple tree, the cradle of some generations of his ancestors. As one of the first messengers of spring, bringing the charming tidings to our very doors, he always bears his own recommendation along with him, and meets with a hearty welcome from everybody.

'When winter's cold tempests and snows are no more,
Green meadows and brown-furrowed fields reappearing,
The fishermen hauling their shad to the shore,
And cloud-cleaving geese to the lakes are a-steering—
When first the lone butterfly flits on the wing,
When red glow the maples, so fresh and so pleasing,—
Oh, then comes the blue-bird, the herald of spring,
And hails with his warblings the charms of the season.'

Some one has called him 'the bird with the earth-tinge on his breast and the sky-tinge on his back;' but the tinge on his breast is a very reddish earth; and he is said to resemble the English robin in all but his blue back and wings. The blue-bird measures nearly seven inches in length, and has remarkably full, broad wings. In pictures the bird is usually represented with wings expanded, perhaps to show them to better advantage.

"This beautiful harbinger of spring makes his appearance so suddenly that it has been well said he seems almost to have dropped out of heaven on some bright March morning, and seems at first to be a mere wandering voice in the air. Presently he is seen, sitting perhaps on a fence, and sending forth his mellow, cheerful notes, while his beautiful blue plumage shines in the sun with purple reflections, and appears to have been borrowed from the deep hue of the sky. He is one of the very handsomest of our home birds, and looks like some rare tropical visitor as he flashes among the branches of the bare trees.

"'His voice, which is one of the earliest to be heard in the spring, is associated with the early
flowers and with all pleasant vernal influences. When he first arrives he perches upon the roof of a barn or upon some leafless tree, and delivers his few and frequent notes with evident fervor, as if conscious of the pleasures that await him. A single note, pensively modulated, is one of the melodies of the summer's decline, and reminds us, like the note of the green nocturnal tree-hopper, of the ripened harvest, the fall of the leaf, and of all the joyous festivals and melancholy reminiscences of autumn.'

"The blue-bird's nest is frequently made in the hollow of an old tree, several generations building year after year in the same spot; and in these places the young ones are secure from all enemies. Five or six pale-blue eggs are found in the nest at once, and, like many other birds, there are two or three broods in a season. A whole family will sometimes be seen in the summer and autumn perched on mullein-stalks, and watching for a supply of provisions in the shape of passing insects. The young ones seem to be taking lessons from their parents, who will spy a beetle crawling on the grass at quite a distance, pounce on it with a sudden spring, and return to the mullein-stalk with their prey, singing all the while. They are very fond of spiders, and in the autumn they usually add berries to their frequent repasts.
They also have a fancy for ripe persimmons and fruits and seeds of various kinds. So you see they can keep their tables well supplied.

"The blue-bird is usually very peaceable, and particularly affectionate to his mate; and many farmers welcome him by providing 'a snug little summer-house in which he can live rent-free. For this he more than repays them by the cheerfulness of his song and the multitude of injurious insects which he daily destroys.' Once, however, there was some trouble about one of these bird-cottages that was put up somewhere in the middle of Pennsylvania. The person who tells the story says: 'Near and around the house were a number of well-grown apple trees and much shrubbery—a very fit haunt for the feathered race. About the middle of February the blue-birds came; in a short time they were very familiar, and took possession of the box: these consisted of two or three pairs. By the fifteenth of May the blue-birds had eggs, if not young. Now the martins arrived in numbers, visited the box—martins always think that all the boxes are for them—and a severe conflict ensued. The blue-birds, seemingly animated by the right of possession or for the protection of their young, were victorious. The martins regularly arrived about the middle of May for the eight following years, examined the apart-
ments of the box in the absence of the blue-birds, but were uniformly compelled to fly upon the return of the latter."

"Good for the blue-birds!" said Malcolm, approvingly, while Clara and Edith expressed their satisfaction that those naughty little martins didn't turn them out.

"There is not very much more for me to tell you about them," continued Miss Harson. "They spend the winter in a milder climate than ours, and in the autumn they utter a single plaintive note as they pass over the gorgeously-tinted woods, lingering sometimes after the trees are all stripped of their leaves, as if loath to depart from them. Wilson the ornithologist says that in the month of October, about an hour after sunrise, he has seen ten or fifteen of them descend from a great height and settle on the top of a tall tree, appearing, from their silence and sedateness, to be strangers and fatigued. After a pause of a few minutes they began to dress and arrange their plumage, and continued so employed for ten or fifteen minutes more; then, on a few warning notes being given, perhaps by the leader of the party, the whole flock remounted to a vast height, steering in a direct line for the south-west.

"Here are some lines to the blue-bird that I think very pretty:

[Poetry]
'Emblem of happiness!
Where was thy dwelling-place
When the cold wintry wind howled o'er the main?
Who from the Southern bowers,
And the sweet orange-flowers,
Called thee to visit this cold land again?

'Oh, 'twas the love of home
Urged thee again to come
Here, where thy nestlings had sported and grown;
Here was the ancient tree
Oft seen in dreams by thee
In the strange Southern lands whence thou hadst flown.

'Joy to thee, bird of love!
Here in thy native grove
Sing through the long summer day to thy mate;
Danger is far away,
Safe to thee every spray;
Love guards thy tender form, shields thee from hate!'"
CHAPTER V.

ROBINS.

The children’s interest in birds was increasing daily, and as Mr. Kyle had given their governess free access to his well-stocked library, there were plenty of books at hand that illustrated the subject with their beautifully-colored plates, and from which Miss Harson frequently read such descriptions and stories as she thought would interest her little pupils.

The books most in request at these evening talks were Audubon’s *Birds of America* and Wilson’s *American Ornithology*, with smaller ones that were often varied, as they served to furnish a striking story. The children declared that Miss Harson always picked out the very prettiest ones, and the young teacher felt quite encouraged by the success of her plan.

“We haven’t heard anything about Cock Robin yet,” said little Edith, who seemed to cling to her one acquaintance among the feathered tribe.
"I am going to tell you about robins to-night," replied Miss Harson, drawing the little girl up to her, "and you shall have a nice story, which I think you will like quite as well as that of 'Cock Robin,' who was an English bird. (Fig. 3.) How will that do?"

Edith thought it would do very well, and settled herself comfortably on her teacher's lap to listen. Malcolm had found a robin among the pictures, and pronounced him "a great fat fellow, in a dingy-brown coat and a black-and-yellow vest."

"He is not a small bird, certainly," said Miss Harson, "for he measures nine and a half inches, and generally looks in very good condition; his head and tail, you see, are black, and his back may be called an ash-color; the wings are also black, edged with a lighter shade of ash; the upper part of the breast is black streaked with white, and the lower part a dark orange. Mrs. Robin is plainer-looking than her husband, having more ash-color outside, and only a little pale orange on her breast. (Fig. 4.)

"The robin is also an early bird, but little later than the blue-bird, and often appearing almost at the same time. Even in March, we are told, while snow
yet dapples the fields and flocks of them are dispersed about, some few will mount a post or stake of the

Fig. 4.—Robin.

fence and make short and frequent attempts at their song. Early in April they are only to be seen in pairs, and deliver their notes with great earnestness from the top of some tree detached from the woods. They are, as it were, the prelude to the grand general concert that is about to burst upon us from woods, fields, and thickets. By the usual association of ideas, therefore, we listen with more pleasure to this cheerful bird than to many others possessed of
superior powers and greater variety. The English robin is said to have the sweetest song of all the feathered tribe.

"The robin is very apt to select the branch of an apple tree for its nest, which is always a large one, plastered on the inside with mud, and then lined with hay or fine grass. The five eggs are a beautiful bluish-green color, and the little ones are brought up on worms, caterpillars, and berries.

"After singing melodiously from the very beginning of dawn, in response to the 'get-up' call of the little hair-bird, until the other birds are well under way, the robin will suddenly fly down from the branch on which he was perched while singing, and begin to hunt about on the ground for his breakfast with wonderful industry. He can walk about more easily than many other birds, and has a particular fancy for the large, fat caterpillars that are also out walking at this time of day.

"The English robin stays at home all the year, and seems to enliven the winter with his bright color and sweet song. 'In that season,' says an English writer, 'it visits our dwellings, and seeks the warmest and most sheltered situations; and if one happens still to continue in the woods, it becomes the companion of the fagot-maker, cherishes itself at his fire, pecks at his bread, and flutters the whole day around him,
chirping its slender pip. But when the cold grows more severe and thick snow covers the ground, it approaches our houses, and taps at the window with its bill, as if to entreat an asylum, which is cheerfully granted. It repays the favor by the most amiable familiarity, gathering the crumbs from the table, distinguishing affectionately the people of the house, and assuming a warble, not, indeed, so rich as that of spring, but more delicate. This it retains through all the rigors of the season, to hail each day the kindness of its host and the sweetness of its retreat.'"

"How nice," said Clara, "to have dear little birds hopping around the table! I wish our robins would do so."

"Our robins do not stay here in winter, dear," replied her governess; "the winters in England are not so cold as they are in America. It is because the English robins are such very domestic birds that the stories of 'Cock Robin' and the 'Babes in the Wood—who were covered, you remember, with leaves by these little birds—came to be written. Our own robin has often been kept in a cage, and will sing very sweetly in confinement; but we cannot equal the story of a redbreast that belonged, with a host of other feathered pets, to an English gardener. The story says: 'At the head of this feath-
ered band stands a redbreast, which all but speaks in return for several years of kind treatment from its master. This bird, when called upon, will fly from the farthest part of the garden at which it can hear his voice, alight upon his hand, and at once and without any apprehension pick its meat, and then often will sit on his shoulder as he works or walks, and nestle in his bosom in well-known security. Nay, more, when the gardener comes to town, if the robin, by any chance, espies him as he departs, it gives him an escort, chirping and fluttering along the hedge before him till he reaches the toll-bar at Alloway Place; on which, or on a tree near it, Robin perches himself till his master returns. This bird attends its master when he goes to church, and waits at its station till both forenoon and afternoon services are performed; and is equally polite on market-days, when, so soon as it sees him coming, it flies to meet him, and fluttering before him, beckons him homeward all the way."

"What a funny little robin!" laughed Edith.

"Here are some funny nests," continued Miss Harrison. "The same English writer says: 'Birds, especially those which are familiar with mankind, frequently choose odd situations for building in. A robin lately began its nest in a myrtle which was placed in the hall of a house belonging to a friend
of mine in Hampshire. As the situation was considered rather an exceptionable one, the nest was removed. The bird then began to build another on the cornice of the drawing-room, but as this was also objected to for obvious reasons, it was not allowed to be completed. The robin, thus baffled in two attempts, began a third nest in a new shoe which was placed on a shelf in a dressing-room. Here it was permitted to go on with its work until the nest was completed; but as the new shoe was likely to be wanted, and as it would not be benefited by being used as a cradle for young birds, the nest was carefully taken out and deposited in an old shoe, which was put in the situation of the new one. Here what remained to be done to the nest was completed; the under part of the shoe was filled up with oak-leaves, the eggs were deposited in the nest, and in due time hatched, the windows of the room being always left a little open for the entrance and egress of the birds.

My friend informed me that it was pleasing to see the great confidence the robins placed in him. Sometimes, while he was shaving in the morning, the old birds would settle on the top of his glass, having worms in their mouths; nor did they appear in the least alarmed at his presence."

"Then, again, he says: 'I have heard of a pair of robins having built their nest in a pew of the church
of Burton-upon-Trent, and was informed that the process of incubation and feeding the young went on uninterruptedly, even when persons were in the pew during divine service. The "sweet poet of Israel" has indeed remarked the partiality of birds for the sanctuary in most beautiful strains; and many persons must have observed the redbreast in particular flitting over the heads of a congregation in our parochial churches. One of them for several successive years resorted to the church at Dudley in Staffordshire, and its warbling notes were frequently heard amidst the tones of the organ and the voices of the people. At last, its visits were discontinued, to the no small regret of many of the congregation. A few years afterward, when the organ was taken down to be cleaned, the skeleton of the redbreast was discovered in one of the pipes, its favorite station having been the summit of the instrument."

"Oh!" exclaimed Clara and Edith, with tears in their eyes for the fate of the unfortunate little robin.

"What did he want to go there for, any way?" asked Malcolm gruffly, for he wasn't going to cry, and it really was quite a moving story about finding the little skeleton.

"He probably dropped in there, and could not get out again," replied his governess; "but we are not
told how it really happened. Here is a story about an American robin, the one I promised Edie; and it is written as though related by the bird herself to a kind little girl. We will fancy an ash-colored little bird in a piping voice telling the following experience: 'You have wished for my history, sweet little miss, and deserve to be gratified. So I will tell it to you. Though it is a sad tale, it will give me pleasure to relate it if it will please you. My mother early taught me to repay all the kindness I received, and she set me an example of doing so. Besides her music, she gave her labor for the use of a snug little spot in the branches of an apple tree. I overheard the gardener saying that my mother was the best tenant his master had, for she gave him a song every morning, and helped him very much in clearing his garden of insects.

"In the dear little nest I have mentioned I was born. You may wonder at the strength of my memory, but I have a distinct recollection of the uneasiness I felt when I was in total darkness, surrounded on all sides by a smooth, hard shell. In my impatience I kept pecking harder and harder, till at length it gave way. My mother soon helped me into liberty by applying her great beak to the prison-walls which confined me. I was a little cold at first, but she covered me carefully with her wings and warm body.
My feathers grew very fast, and I was soon warm enough even when she was away.

"I did not often know what it was to be hungry, for my mother brought me a plenty of the sweetest food she could find. I soon learned to love her very much, and I always tried to please her. If little boys and girls have such a kind mother as I had, I think they are very wicked to disobey them, as I have sometimes seen them do.

"When I was nearly large enough to fly I was terribly frightened. A very great boy climbed up to the nest and took me in his hand, and gave me to his little sister, who stood on the ground. My mother flew round and round the tree, appearing to be more distressed than I had ever seen her before. This moved the little girl to pity, and she begged her brother to put me back. At first he seemed unwilling to do so, but the kind gardener soon came and ordered him to return me instantly, and never to disturb our little home again.

"The next spring I was old enough to build a nest; and my dear mate and myself were so afraid of being disturbed that we made it in a concealed spot in a thicket of bushes in a retired pasture. At length four little birds made their appearance.

"As our little ones increased in size we were promising ourselves the sweet privilege of teaching them
to fly from the nest and sing among the neighboring trees. But suddenly our hopes were blasted for ever. Two truant boys were rambling in the fields within sight of the church-spire, where we had heard the bell ring that very morning to invite them to the Sunday-school.

"'As they came near I flew in terror from the nest, and my agonized mate flew toward it at the same time. Our movements guided them to the spot, and one of them declared that he would have the young birds. With the acutest anguish we watched the robber as he carried off the darling objects of our care. Oh, how changed was the face of Nature around us! The fields and groves no longer seemed pleasant, but melancholy and gloom were spread over them. I wish these boys had stopped to consider whether the nest gave as much joy to them as its loss caused grief to us. I hope you will teach all your acquaintances to be kind to the robins, and we will repay them with our sweetest music.

"'As winter approached all the robins in the region where we lived flew away to the South. My mate and myself stayed at the North as long as we dared, in the hope that we should find our lost treasures. When we could wait no longer we started on our sad journey. Our loneliness seemed doubly distressing when we saw other robins guiding their happy broods on
their first visit. I did not envy them, kind miss, but their happiness made me more keenly feel my own loss.

"When we returned in the spring we found that my old friend the gardener had a neat little cottage of his own. "Here is the very place for us to build our nest," said I to my mate as I alighted upon an inviting spot in a cherry tree close to his chamber window. "We fared so badly when we tried to conceal our nest," he replied, "that I am half inclined to take your advice." I then told the story of the good man's kindness; and he agreed that we should be safer near his window than anywhere else.

"You can guess how we were employed for several weeks from that time. I will only say, that while busied in our pleasant occupation it was a delight to us both to give our sweetest music to our loving neighbors. After the young birds were hatched you would have been delighted to have seen my mate flying around the doors and windows, picking up insects and bringing them to the nest.

"But I come now to the saddest day of my life. My mate had gone to the edge of a little pool where insects were plenty, while I stayed to shelter our little chicks. As he returned with a worm in his mouth, I saw him alight on a fence. A moment after I was startled by a noise like thunder, and looking up again I saw him fall bleeding and fluttering to the ground."
I can never tell this part of my story without stopping a while to think of my dear mate, who will never join me again in my songs or my labors.

"'By the help of the kind gardener and his wife I reared my young ones. Just before we were ready to take our winter's journey the same boy who ran with a gun in his hand and picked up my mate when he fell, passed near the spot where I was resting a moment from my labors on the branch of a tree. I started instantly to fly away, but I was not quick enough to avoid a heavy stone which he aimed at me. It struck one of my wings and almost broke it. I was still able to fly, though with some pain, and soon started southward with my young brood. I bore the suffering from my wounded wing without complaint till we arrived in the interior of Pennsylvania. Here I stopped, and my young ones reluctantly left me to take care of myself, while they went forward with the company. For several days I found food in abundance, but when that snow-storm came I was forced to seek it near your door.

"'You now have my story, sweet child; and as we are so well acquainted, I hope you will not object to my spending the winter with you, and I will repay your kindness as well as I know how.'"

Edith pronounced the story "very pretty, and just exactly like a little robin, but very sad too."
CHAPTER VI.

SWALLOWS.

"THIS evening," said Miss Harson, "we will take the swallows—a numerous family of small and very interesting birds, to which belong our old friends the purple martins. There are barn swallows, chimney swallows (Frontispiece, Fig. 3), white-bellied swallows (Fig. 5), bank swallows or sand martins (Fig. 6; Front. Fig. 4), and purple martins.

"The swallow is remarkable for its great rapidity in flight, its wings being unusually large in proportion to its body; and for the ease with which it can turn and pounce upon a flying insect. Its very peculiar-looking cleft tail, from whence comes the name 'swallow-tailed coat,' is very long and serves as a rudder to guide its flight.

"The food of the swallow consists of insects, which are taken on the wing. For this reason, when the weather is fine and insects abroad, the swallows are constantly flying; and they are seen pursuing their prey with such ease and agility that the air seems to be their home. All smaller animals en-
BANK SWALLOW.
deavor to evade their pursuers by winding and turning; thus the lark evades the pursuit of the hawk, and in this manner the insects endeavor to evade the swallow. But this bird is admirably fitted by its Creator to pursue them through their shortest turnings. Besides a great length of wing, it is provided with a long tail, which like a rudder turns it in its most rapid motions; and thus, while it is capable of moving with the utmost swiftness, it is also capable of turning with the greatest ease and readiness.

"When the weather promises to be fair the insect
tribe feel the genial influence and make bolder flights. At such times the swallow follows them in their aërial journeys, and often rises to imperceptible heights in the pursuit. When the weather is likely to be stormy the insects feel the first notices of it; and from the swallows flying low we are often apprised of the approaching change. So you see that these little birds are a sort of barometer; and it is from watching such signs as these that many elderly people in the country get to be what is called 'weather-wise.'

"Some one speaks of our missing the swallow tribe if by any chance they should disappear from the country, because they are of real consequence to us as the destroyers of myriads of gnats, flies, and other troublesome insects. Some idea of their usefulness may be formed from the fact that they begin the business of fly-catching at three o'clock on a summer morning, and keep it up until nine in the evening. Occasionally, they stop to rest themselves and take a little 'sing.' They delight in warm and sunny situations, probably because flies are abundant there; and Shakespeare says,

'Where they do bide and build
The air is temperate.'

"'It is delightful to see them as they sail over the meadows or skim along the surface of the grassy
OUR HOME BIRDS.

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lake. Now they make a graceful circuit, and again come back, as though intending to alight in your hand. They chase each other or fly side by side as though upon a strife. If a luckless insect is in the way, he is picked up in an instant, without in the least impeding the flight or disturbing the gambols of these gay creatures.'

"The barn swallow is first on the list, being perhaps the earliest by a week or so; and our friend Wilson says of him: 'There are but few persons in the United States unacquainted with this gay, innocent, and active little bird. Indeed, the whole tribe are so distinguished from the rest of small birds by their sweeping rapidity of flight, their peculiar aërial evolutions of wing over our fields and rivers, and through our very streets, from morning to night, that the light of heaven itself, the sky, the trees, or any other common objects of Nature, are not better known than the swallows. We welcome their first appearance with delight as the faithful harbingers and companions of flowery spring and ruddy summer; and when, after a long frost-bound and boisterous winter, we hear it announced that "the swallows are come," what a train of charming ideas are associated with the simple tidings!"

"The barn swallow is seven inches long, steel-blue above and light chestnut beneath; the wings and
tail are brownish-black, with greenish shades in it, and the deeply-forked tail has on each side a single feather an inch and a half longer than the one next to it.

"Early in May it begins to build its nest, which is usually against a beam or rafter in a barn or shed. The outward part of the nest is composed of pellets of mud tempered with fine hay, and rendered more firm by the glutinous saliva of the bird; within is laid a bed of fine hay, and the lining is made of loosely-arranged feathers. The five white eggs are spotted over with reddish-brown. There are usually two broods in a season. Twenty or thirty nests may sometimes be seen in the same barn, and two or three in a cluster, where each pursues his busy avocation in the most perfect harmony.

"When the young are fledged, the parents by their actions and twitterings entice them out of the nest to exercise their wings within the barn, where they sit in rows amid the timbers of the roof or huddle closely together in cool or rainy weather for mutual warmth. At length they venture out with their parents, but, incapable of constant exercise, may now be seen on trees, bushes, or fence-rails near some pond or creek, convenient to their food, which is thrown up to them from the crops of their attentive parents.'
"In a nobleman's house in Scotland a swallow once built its nest on a bracket which was placed in a passage-way close to the kitchen-door for the purpose of holding a lamp, which had to be taken down every day to be trimmed and lighted every evening. The swallow did not seem to mind this at all, but returned to the same spot for three or four years. It then changed its residence to the inside of the wooden cover of the great house-bell, on the opposite side of the same open court. The bell was always rung several times a day to call the servants to their meals, and must have made a terrible din in the very ears of the swallow family, but they never appeared to be in the least disturbed either by that or by the rattling of the rope.

"Scarcely a barn to which these birds can find access is without them; and as they are great favorites with the public generally, they are seldom disturbed. There is an apparent glee and sportiveness among swallows; and in some of their performances they display not a little mischief. Some one watched a party of them one day who seemed to have taken it into their heads to plague a cat as she seated herself upon the top of a gate-post and appeared to be thinking deeply about some important matter. One of the swallows, approaching the cat from behind, flew close by her ear, as if to show how near it dared
to go; Puss made a dash at it with her paw, but Master or Miss Swallow soared off in safety. Almost immediately another saucy little bird whizzed by so closely as almost to touch her, and again Puss tried to seize it. About ten or a dozen went by in the same tantalizing way, and each one, as it passed in safety, seemed to set up a laugh at the disappointed cat, that sounded like the laugh of a young child when very much tickled. The whole company, succeeding one another at a distance of about three yards, formed a regular circle in the air, and played it off like a wheel at her ear for nearly an hour, not appearing in the least to notice the person who was watching them quite near. The birds enjoyed themselves thoroughly until the cat, in disgust, got down from her post and departed."

"I am so glad," said Clara with a sigh of relief, "that the old cat didn't catch any of the dear little swallows!"

"'The dear little swallows' deserved it, though," replied Malcolm. "How that cat must have been plagued!"

"The chimney swallow," continued Miss Harson, "is of a sooty-brown color, as might be expected from its contact with the inside of chimneys. It has even longer wings than the other swallows, and a peculiarly rapid, diving kind of flight. It goes on
with its constant *tsip tsip tsip, tsee tsee*, in the most hurried manner, which produces a very curious kind of noise in any chimney where it happens to reside. This swallow is only four and a half inches long, a wee little bird; and the more wet and gloomy the weather, the more active it is. It seems never to get wearied during its long day. It is said to be the earliest up in the morning and the latest out at night of all the swallows.

"The nest is built in vacant chimneys, and formed of small twigs stuck together with a glutinous substance which is secreted from a couple of little glands or bags found in its mouth. It is fastened to the side of the chimney, and has no soft lining. The old swallows, in passing up and down, make a noise something like distant thunder.

"Sometimes accidents happen to these chimney residences; after long-continued rains the glue that fastens them becomes soft, and down tumble cradles, babies, and all. If the babies are not too little, however, and the sides of the chimney not too smooth, they cling fast like squirrels, and their parents feed them until they are able to fly. It is quite funny to see them, when they get fairly out of the nest, sitting quietly on the top of a chimney and receiving in regular order the tempting morsels brought them by the parent-birds. There are generally four white
eggs in the nest of the chimney swallow, and two broods of young in a season.

"Two chimney swallows once set up housekeeping in the chimney of an old house in France that had a moving iron chimney-pot placed on it to keep it from smoking. The fireplace with which it communicated had been bricked up, so that it was quite a safe place for a nest. But every time the wind blew the old chimney-pot moved and made the most dismal creaking. The swallows must have liked this, for they built their nest there for two successive years, though often, when the wind was high, they might be seen for several minutes together trying in vain to get into the crazy old chimney-pot, that would not stand still.

"The purple martin is one of the most sociable and domestic little birds imaginable, and a great favorite everywhere. He likes to be very close to the habitations of man, whom he always seems to regard as his friend and protector. 'Wherever he comes he finds some hospitable retreat fitted up for his accommodation and that of his young, either in the projecting wooden cornice, on the top of the roof or sign-post, in the box appropriated to the blue-bird, or, if all these be wanting, in the dove-house among the pigeons. In this last case he sometimes takes possession of one quarter or tier of the premises,
in which not a pigeon dare for a moment set its foot.

"Some people have large conveniences formed for the martins, with many apartments, which are usually full-tenanted and occupied regularly every spring; and in such places particular individuals have been noted to return to the same box for several successive years. Even the solitary Indian seems to have a particular respect for this bird. The Choctaws and Chickasaws cut off all the top branches from a sapling near their cabins, leaving the prongs a foot or two in length, on each of which they hang a gourd or calabash, properly hollowed out for their convenience. On the banks of the Mississippi the negroes stick up long canes, with the same species of apartment fixed to their tops, in which the martins regularly breed.'

"The purple martin is eight inches long, of a rich, deep purplish-blue, with strong violet reflections. The wings and tail, which are brownish-black, are edged with the same purple-blue. The nest is made of willows, slender straws, hay, and feathers, and contains four white eggs.

"This species of swallow, 'like his half-cousin the king-bird, is the terror of crows, hawks, and eagles. These he attacks whenever they make their appearance, and with such vigor and rapidity that
they instantly have recourse to flight. So well known is this to the lesser birds and to the domestic poultry that as soon as they hear the martin's voice engaged in fight all is alarm and consternation. To observe with what spirit and audacity this bird dives and sweeps upon and around the hawk or the eagle is astonishing. He also bestows an occasional bastinadoing on the king-bird when he finds him too near his premises, though he will at any time instantly co-operate with him in attacking the common enemy."

"He does not, like the other swallows, live principally on flies and the smaller insects, but is fond of wasps, bees, large beetles, and particularly the kind that boys call goldsmiths.

"The purple martin is quite able to take care of himself, and any bird which attempts to encroach upon his rights is sure to have the worst of it. Some one heard a noise one morning from a couple of martins that were flying from one tree to another near his house; and on watching them he saw them make several attempts to get into a box or cage which was fixed against the house, and which they had before occupied; but they always appeared to fly from it again with the utmost dread, at the same time repeating those loud cries which first attracted the gentleman's attention."
"After a while a small wren issued from the box and perched himself on a tree near it, sending forth a shrill note that seemed to amaze the other birds. Then the martins got into the box, but came out again quite precipitately. The mite of a wren rushed after them, and actually succeeded in turning them out. This kind of thing went on all day: first one side would seem to conquer, and then the other; but the next morning, as soon as the wren left the box, the martins took possession, broke up their own nest, went to work afresh with great industry and ingenuity, and barricaded the door! Here was a dilemma for the wren, who could no longer get in. She made a brave attempt to force an entrance, but did not succeed. The poor martins could get nothing to eat, but they seemed to feel that it was now or never; and there they stayed for two whole days, defending the entrance of their dwelling, while the wren, finding that it was of no use, unwillingly departed, and left the others in peaceful possession.

"Another pair of swallows fastened an enemy in their house, as they could not get her out. Arriving at their old nest, as usual, in the spring, they found it, to their disgust, occupied by a sparrow, who kept the rightful owners at a distance by pecking at them with its strong beak whenever they attempted to dislodge it. Hopeless of ever regaining possession of
their dwelling by ordinary means, they at last hit upon a plan which at least prevented the intruder from profiting by her roguery. One morning they appeared with several other swallows, and the whole party had their mouths full of moist clay, with which, in a very short time, they plastered up the entrance-hole as thoroughly as a mason could have done it, thus punishing Mrs. Sparrow with imprisonment for life and death by starvation.

"Quarrels about houses seem to be frequent among birds; and there is a story of a pair of martins having built in the corner of a window—one of which, from a remarkable white feather in one of its wings, was known to be the same bird which had built there the year before—and had no sooner finished their nest than a strange swallow concluded to take possession of the property, and once or twice actually succeeded in driving the owners out. For a week there was constant battling, but after this the lawful proprietors were observed to be busily engaged in lessening the entrance into the nest, which in a short time was made so small that they could scarcely force themselves into it singly. When the work was finished, one of the firm always remained within with its bill sticking out, ready to receive any sudden attack. The enemy kept it up for a week longer, but at the end of that time, concluding that its
prospects were rather hopeless, it left the wary pair to the enjoyment of their dwelling.

"And now," concluded the governess, "I think that the swallows have been very thoroughly considered, and, interesting as they are, we must leave them for our other feathered friends. The Psalmist of Israel mentions this bird and the sparrow when he says, 'Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young; even thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.'"
CHAPTER VII.

OTHER EARLY BIRDS.

The bird-talks did not come regularly every evening, for sometimes things happened to prevent them, and sometimes Miss Harson thought it better to give the children a little variety, for fear that their interest might flag; but they always had two or three of them a week, and their cry was still for "birds." The season was now well into April, and, as their teacher said, the birds were crowding upon them very fast.

"After the first sparrows and blue-birds and robins have appeared," said Miss Harson, "there are several little fellows who seem clamoring for notice all at once; but to-night we will take the golden-winged wood-pecker (Fig. 7), who has almost as many names as any scion of royalty. The country boys call him 'yarup,' from his peculiar note in the spring, which is supposed to sound like this; 'high-hole,' from the height at which he makes his nest in a hole in some old tree; 'flicker,' from the flash of his golden wings;
and 'yellow-hammer,' both from his color and the strange pounding noise he makes on his old tree.

"The long, loud call with which Yellow-Hammer seems to announce his arrival when winter is over has an unmistakable sound of spring in it, reminding one, it has well been said, of the Bible words, 'the voice of the turtle is heard in the land.'

"The color of this bird is a bright golden yellow, with black and dark umber on the back, a venerable-looking iron-gray head, and a little mixture of white, bluish-gray, and deep red on the under parts. He is quite a large bird, varying from twelve to twenty
inches, and his great peculiarity is his bill, an inch and a half long, with which he manages to do a great deal of work and send terror and destruction into the ant-hills that furnish his favorite food. Mrs. Wood-pecker is duller in hue, and has no black spots on the sides of her throat.

"Early in the month of April the birds begin to prepare their nest, which is built in the hollow body or branch of a tree at a considerable height from the ground. The sagacity of this bird in discovering under a sound bark a hollow limb or trunk of a tree, and its perseverance in perforating it for the purpose of incubation, are truly surprising; the female and male alternately relieving and encouraging each other by mutual caresses, renewing their labors for several days till the object is attained and the place rendered sufficiently capacious, convenient, and secure. On this employment they are so extremely intent that they may be heard till a very late hour in the evening thumping like carpenters. I have seen an instance where they had dug first five inches straightforward, and then downward more than twice that distance, through a solid black oak. They carry in no materials for their nest, the soft chips and dust of the wood serving for this purpose. The female lays six white eggs, almost transparent, very thick at the greater end, and tapering suddenly to the other."
"The food of the golden-winged woodpecker is of various kinds, and farmers accuse him of being much too partial to Indian corn just when it is in the condition known as 'roasting ears.' He does make very frequent visits to the corn-field about this time, and the indignant farmer is frequently seen following him with his gun. He is also fond of cherries and the berries of the sour gum; but, in his estimation, the most delicate luxury of all is a young ant. His bill is admirably fitted for procuring this food; he digs up with it, as with a long sharp pickaxe, the hillocks which these insects rear with such patience and industry, and, breaking unceremoniously through the walls of their dwellings, gobbles up whole families without the slightest compunction."

"What a dreadful bird!" exclaimed Edith in disgust. "He is very pretty; but pretty as he is, I don't like him at all."

"A little girl that eats lambs and chickens needn't talk," replied Malcolm. "Don't she do that, Miss Harson?"

"Not whole ones, exactly," said the governess, pattering her little pupil's distressed face; "and it does sound dreadful to read of Mr. Woodpecker's bursting into the houses of these worthy little insects and devouring them in such a wholesale fashion.—But he is only following an instinct, dear, which God has
given him to preserve his own life; just as we kill and eat animals to preserve ours."

"He might keep to corn and berries, I should think," ventured Clara.

"So might we," was the reply, "but we appear to think that we require meat also. Besides, there is another view of the matter: ants and other insects would soon overrun everything if they had no enemies; and I am sure that I know two little girls who would raise a terrible outcry if the house and garden were full of such creatures. I think, on the whole, it will hardly do to find fault with Yellow-Hammer on account of his fancy for ants. We are told that the tongue of this woodpecker is as wonderfully arranged as his bill for demolishing small insects; as, 'like that of other woodpeckers, it is supplied with a viscid fluid secreted by two glands that lie under the ear on each side, and are at least five times larger in this species than in any other of its size: with this the tongue is continually moistened, so that every small insect it touches instantly adheres to it.'

"The woodpecker is not a domestic bird, as he lives principally in the fields and borders of the forest, and is seldom seen very near a house. Here is a description of a party of them in an old maple tree, which, the writer says, 'year after year afforded protection to a brood of yellow-hammers in its de-
cayed heart. A week or two before the nesting seemed actually to have begun three or four of these birds might be seen on almost any bright morning gambolling and courting amid its decayed branches. Sometimes you would hear only a gentle, persuasive cooing or a quiet, confidential chattering; then that loud, long call, taken up by first one then, another, as they sat about upon the naked limbs; anon, a sort of wild, rollicking laughter, intermingled with various cries, yelps, and squeals, as if some incident had excited their mirth and ridicule. Whether this social hilarity and boisterousness is in celebration of the pairing or mating ceremony, or whether it is only a sort of annual "house-warming" common among "high-holes" on resuming their summer quarters, remains undecided."

"There are several other kinds of woodpeckers, which will receive their share of notice when we come to the winter birds.

"The phœbe-bird, or pewee fly-catcher, is another of our early songsters—almost as early as the robin; and sitting on a projecting twig near some stream of water, and in the vicinity of a bridge or a cave, he will call out pe-wée, pe-wittitee pe-wée, for a whole morning, darting after insects, and returning to the same twig, frequently flirting his tail like the wag-tail, though not so rapidly."
"The notes of the pewee, like those of the bluebird, are pleasing—not for any melody they contain, but from the ideas of spring and returning verdure, with all the sweets of this lovely season, which are associated with his simple but lively ditty. Toward the middle of June he becomes nearly silent, and late in the fall gives us a few farewell and melancholy repetitions, that recall past imagery and make the decayed and withered face of Nature appear still more melancholy.'

"The phœbe-bird is six and a half inches long, and the upper parts are of a dusky olive; the wings rather darker, edged with yellowish white; the tail forked, and widening peculiarly toward the end. 'With many people in the country, the arrival of the pewee serves as a sort of almanac, reminding them that now it is time such-and-such work should be done. Whenever the pewee appears, they say, we may plant peas and beans in the open grounds, put in French beans, sow radishes, onions, and almost every kind of esculent garden seeds, without fear or danger from frosts; for although we have sometimes frosts after their first appearance for a night or two, yet not so severe as to injure the young plants.'

"The female pewee appears for the first few weeks after her arrival to be on a sort of wedding-tour, as
she is very bright and vivacious, flourishing about in the air and singing at intervals, while she catches flies in a very expert manner, and seems to be enjoying herself generally. But in a short time she retires into private life and to the cares of a household, and is seldom seen except to dart from her moss-covered nest beneath some bridge or shelving cliff.

"This same nest is beautifully made of moss, held together with mud; it is large and compact, and neatly lined with flax and horse-hair. It has been found in various queer places—on some projecting part under a bridge, in a cave, in an open well, often under a shed, in the low eaves of a cottage, and in various other nooks. There are five pure-white eggs, with two or three dots of red near the large end; and two or three broods of pewees are sometimes reared in a season."
CHAPTER VIII.

WRENS.

"W e have not finished yet with the early birds," said Miss Harson; "and conspicuous among them is our old favorite, the house wren (Fig. 8), one of the least and sauciest of all the bird tribe. This little creature is only four inches and a half long, and of a deep brown color, with crossings of black, except the under parts, which are a mixture of bluish-ash, clay-color, and white.

"The immense number of insects which this sociable little bird removes from the garden and fruit trees ought to endear him to every cultivator, even if he had nothing else to recommend him; but his notes, loud, sprightly, tremulous, and repeated every
few seconds with great animation, are extremely agreeable. Its food is composed of insects and caterpillars, and while supplying the wants of its young it destroys, on a moderate calculation, many hundreds a day, and greatly circumscribes the ravages of these vermin.'

"Wrens build large nests for such small birds, and each nest will contain from twelve to sixteen eggs. They have a curious habit of building a great many nests which are never occupied, and of beginning to build others which are left unfinished. The twigs which form the outside of a wren’s nest are short and crooked, that they may hook into each other readily; and the entrance-hole is so much shut up, to keep out snakes and cats, that it seems almost impossible for the little bird itself to get in. Inside of the nest there is usually a layer of fine dried stalks of grass, and over this one of feathers.

"The places in which these nests are found are often the funniest that can well be imagined. Wrens seem to be quite partial to the small boxes fixed on a pole that are often set up for them in the garden, because they are near the caterpillars and other food in which they delight. If they do not find these, however, they will go to housekeeping in an old hat nailed on the weather-boards, with a small hole for entrance; and if this convenience is not to be had,
almost any hole, corner, or crevice about the house, barn, or stable will answer their purpose. Nothing comes amiss to them; and once in the month of June a mower hung up his coat under a shed near a barn, and left it there for two or three days; when he came to put it on again he found one of the sleeves filled with some rubbish. On turning it out he found it to be the nest of a wren, completely finished and lined with feathers! As the man went off with his coat, the two little birds who had been thus unceremoniously turned out of house and home hovered about him for some distance with furious scoldings. Another person hung his vest on the limb of a small tree, and while he was at work in the field a pair of wrens very coolly began to build in his vest-pocket, probably thinking it a nice retired spot for a nursery. In the course of a few hours the pocket was well filled with sticks and other building materials, and the work began to look quite like a nest; but I am sorry to say that the owner of the vest did not quite agree with the little builders as to the eligibility of the site they had chosen.

"I suppose they were turned out too," said Clara, discontentedly. "What a shame!"

"It would look nice—wouldn't it?"—asked Malcolm, "to see a man going round with a lot of little
birds sticking out of his pocket! I wish they'd build in my pocket, though: I'd let 'em stay."

"Not if you needed the garment to wear, I think," replied the governess, laughing; "and wrens are so accustomed to building nests which are never used that it cannot inconvenience them very much to have one destroyed now and then. They are very saucy, too, in trying to take possession of nests that do not belong to them, and when they cannot succeed will sometimes revenge themselves by popping in and pulling out sticks, taking special care, though, to make off afterward as fast as possible. The truth is, the wren is a particularly quarrelsome little creature, attacking without hesitation birds of twice its size if they venture to build near its habitation, and generally forcing them to decamp. It has been known to drive a pair of swallows from their newly-made nest, and take immediate possession of the premises, in which the female laid her eggs and reared her young. 'Even the blue-bird, who claims an equal and sort of hereditary right to the box in the garden, when attacked by this little impertinent soon relinquishes the contest, the mild placidness of his disposition not being a match for the fiery impetuosity of his little antagonist. With those of his own species who settle and build near him he has frequent squabbles, and when their respective females are sitting each strains his
whole powers of song to excel the other. When the young are hatched the hurry and press of business leave no time for disputing; so true it is that idleness is the mother of mischief."

"The way in which the wren's tail sticks up from its short, plump body gives it a particularly saucy expression, having very much the effect of a turned-up nose; and it seems always ready to do something that it has no right to do. It seems equally at home on either side of the ocean, and in England it is as popular as the redbreast. In the West of England one often hears the rhymes—

'Whoso kills a robin or a wren
    Shall never prosper, boy nor man.'

In the South of Ireland, however, the poor little wren has an unhappy time of it. They have a legend there that a party of Irish soldiers during some war were on the point of surprising their enemies, who lay tired out and fast asleep, when a wren perched on the enemy's drum and woke the sentinels. For this unconscious misdemeanor on the part of their remote ancestor the wrens of the present day suffer at the hands of the peasantry for several weeks before Christmas. Every wren that is seen is hunted to death, and the bodies are carefully preserved until St. Stephen's Day, when they are suspended from a
decorated holly-bough and carried from house to house by the captors, who sing at the same time a song of which this is the burden:

'The wran, the wran, the king of all birds,
St. Stephen's Day was caught in the furze:
Although he is little, his family is great;
So come out, kind ladies, and give us a trate.'

To such lengths of cruelty will ignorance and superstition go!

"'This little bird has a strong antipathy to cats; for, having frequent occasion to glean among the currant-bushes and other shrubbery in the garden, those lurking enemies of the feathered race often prove fatal to him. A box fitted up in the window of the room where I slept was taken possession of by a pair of wrens. Already the nest was built and two eggs laid, when one day, the window being open as well as the room-door, the female wren, venturing too far into the room to reconnoitre, was sprung upon by Grimalkin, who had planted herself there for the purpose, and before relief could be given was destroyed. Curious to see how the survivor would demean himself, I watched him for several days. At first he sang with great vivacity for an hour or so, but, becoming uneasy, went off for half an hour; on his return he chanted again as before, went to the top
of the house, stable, and weeping willow, that she might hear him; but, seeing no appearance of her, he returned once more, visited the nest, ventured cautiously into the window, gazed about with suspicious looks, his voice sinking to a low, melancholy note as he stretched his little neck about in every direction. Returning to the box, he seemed for some minutes at a loss what to do, and soon after went off, as I thought, altogether, for I saw him no more that day.

"Toward the afternoon of the second day he again made his appearance, accompanied by a new female, who seemed exceedingly timorous and shy, and who after great hesitation entered the box; at this moment the little widower or bridegroom seemed as if he would warble out his very life with ecstasy of joy. After remaining about half a minute in, they both flew off, but returned in a few minutes, and instantly began to carry out the eggs, feathers, and some of the sticks, supplying the place of the two latter with materials of the same sort, and ultimately succeeded in raising a brood of seven young, all of which escaped in safety.'"

"That was a smart little bird," commented Malcolm.

"Wasn't it funny for him to go and find another mother for the little eggs?" asked Clara.
"But that ugly great cat!" moaned Edith. "I hope they punished her well for killing the poor little wren."

"It is the nature of cats to kill birds," replied Miss Harson, "but it must seem very dreadful when it is some particular little bird that we care about. We will turn to something pleasanter now, which is a description of the wren's singing. One of his friends says: 'About the middle of March the song of the wren is among the most frequent sounds of the country. At this season one may often hear in a garden the roundelay of a wren poured forth from the concealment of a low shrub; and immediately that it is completed a precisely similar lay bursts forth from another bush some twenty yards off. No sooner is this ended than it is answered; and so the vocal duel proceeds, the birds never interfering with each other's song, but uttering in turns the same combinations and arrangement of notes, just as if they were reading off copies of a score printed from the same type.'

"Some one else actually saw a mother-wren teaching her little brood to sing: 'A wren built her nest in a box so situated that a family had an opportunity of observing the mother-bird instructing the young ones in the art of singing peculiar to the species. She fixed herself on one side of the opening in the box, directly before her young, and began by singing over
her whole song very distinctly. One of the young then attempted to imitate her. After proceeding through a few notes, its voice broke and it lost the tune. The mother immediately recommenced where the young one had failed, and went very distinctly through with the remainder. The young bird made a second attempt, commencing where it had ceased before, and continuing the song as long as it was able; and when the note was again lost, the mother began anew where it stopped, and completed it. Then the young one resumed the tune and finished it. This done, the mother sang over the whole series of notes a second time with great precision, and a second of the young attempted to follow her. The wren pursued the same course with this as with the first, and so with the third and fourth.

"'It sometimes happened that the young one would lose the tune three, four, or more times in the same attempt; in which case the mother uniformly began where it ceased, and sang the remaining notes; and when each had completed the trial she repeated the whole strain. Sometimes two of the young commenced together. The mother observed the same conduct toward them as when one sang alone. This was repeated day after day, and several times in a day.'"

"How cunning!" exclaimed the children. "I
wish we could see a little bird teaching her young ones to sing."

"It is the people that observe who see things," replied the governess—"people who use their eyes and ears when they go about. This is what the great naturalists have done; and you cannot begin too early to watch for the beautiful sights and sounds that are constantly around you. We will all go to the woods some pleasant day and try what we can see together."

The children were delighted with this proposition, but presently they asked if there was not something more about wrens; they could not seem to get enough of these funny little creatures.

"There are several species of wrens," said Miss Harson, "but none so well known as the one I have been describing. Here is a picture of the ruby-crowned wren, which is just half an inch shorter than the house wren, and distinguished from it by being generally brighter-colored, while the back part of the head is ornamented with an oblong spot of vermilion, usually almost hid by the other plumage.

"Mr. Ruby is generally found among the maple-blossoms about the first of April, and he is also partial to peach-blossoms, apple-blossoms, and other fruit-blossoms; partly because his dainty taste revels in the tops of the sweet and slender stamina of the
flowers, and partly because he has his own plans in regard to the numerous winged insects that also have a fancy for flower-tops.

"There is also a golden-crested wren (Fig. 9), just

![Golden-crested Wren](image)

the same size and very beautiful. His color is a fine yellow-olive, diversified with a very little ash-color, black, and white. 'On his head, between two little strips of black, lies a bed of glossy golden yellow, which, being parted a little, exposes another of a bright flame-color extending over the whole upper part of the head; when the little warbler flits among the branches in pursuit of insects, he opens and shuts this golden ornament with great adroitness, which produces a striking and elegant effect.'
"It is often seen in company with the ruby-crowned wren among the maple-blossoms, and it is also very partial to evergreens. It is represented as 'an active, unsuspicious, diligent little creature, climbing and hanging occasionally among the branches, and sometimes even on the body of the tree, in search of the larvae of insects attached to the leaves and stems, and various kinds of small flies, which it frequently seizes on the wing. During the summer and early autumn it is numerous in orchards, feeding among the leaves of the apple trees, which at that season are infested with vast numbers of small black-winged insects.'

"The chirp of the golden-crested wren is feeble, not much louder than that of a mouse, but the male is said to send forth a variety of sprightly notes while his mate is sitting on her eggs. The nest is beautifully built, and usually suspended near the end of a branch, the outside tastefully covered with different mosses, generally similar to those growing upon the tree on which they build.

"Frequently, the nest is found on the branch of an evergreen, covered entirely around except a very small hole for a front-door, and the pretty little domicil of moss and lichens is warmly lined with down. There are six or eight pure-white eggs, slightly speckled with dull red."
"One attentive observer of this little wren with a golden crown says: 'It seems to frequent the oak trees in preference to all others. I have more than once seen a brood of these in a large oak in the middle of a lawn; the whole little family of which, as soon as able, were in perpetual motion, and gave great pleasure to many who viewed them. The nest of one of these has also been made in a garden on a fir tree; it was composed of moss, the opening on one side, in shape roundish; it was lined with a downy substance, fixed with small filaments.' "

"The winter wren will be noticed in his own proper time, but just now we must turn to a very merry little songster who has no intention of being overlooked."
CHAPTER IX.

THE BOBOLINK.

"I WONDER," said Miss Harson, looking around at the three expectant little faces, "if any one can guess the name of the merry little bird we are to read and talk about to-night?"

Malcolm looked very wise. "I've been thinking 'em all over," said he, "and I guess it's the bobolink."

"Oh yes," chimed in Edith, "my little book says,

'Bobolink! bobolink!
Sping, spang, spink!"

The children laughed at the little one's earnestness, and the governess smiled as she said:

"That is not very descriptive, though quite a charming little nursery rhyme. You are right, Malcolm—Bobo'lincoln has the floor to-night. He is equally at home in the Northern, Southern, Middle, and Eastern States, and his name varies according to the locality he is found in. With us, in Penn-
sylvania and the other Middle States, he is known as the reed-bird; at the South he is called the rice-bird; in the Northern and Eastern States, the bobolink. (Fig. 10.) But the latter name is a familiar one everywhere.

"This bird is seven and a half inches long; and his spring suit is black, trimmed with brownish-yellow and a little white. In June he turns entirely brownish-yellow, like his mate.

"The bobolink is the merriest, most rollicking little winged creature in existence; he is constantly flying and singing—singing as he flies, and singing, apparently, just because he cannot help it. 'The song of the male, while the female is sitting, is singular and very agreeable. Mounting and hovering on wing at a small height above the field, he chants out such a jingling medley of short, variable notes, uttered with such seeming confusion and rapidity, and continued for a considerable time, that it appears as if half a dozen birds of different kinds were all singing to-
gether. Some idea may be formed of this song by striking the high keys of a pianoforte at random singly and quickly, making as many sudden contrasts of high and low notes as possible. Many of the tones are in themselves charming, but they succeed each other so rapidly that the ear can hardly separate them. Nevertheless, the general effect is good, and when ten or twelve are all singing on the same tree the concert is singularly pleasing.'

"Audubon says: 'Their song in spring is extremely interesting, and, emitted with a volubility bordering on the burlesque, is heard from a whole party at the same time; and it becomes amusing to hear thirty or forty of them beginning one after another, as if ordered to follow in quick succession, after the first notes are given by a leader, and producing such a medley as it is impossible to describe, although it is extremely pleasant to hear. While you are listening the whole flock simultaneously ceases, which appears equally extraordinary. This curious exhibition takes place every time the flock has alighted on a tree.'

"Some one else calls the bobolink noisy and flip-pant, as 'he sings only in the open field, and often while poised on the wing, as though to be seen and known.' He is not an early bird, in the proper sense of the term, as he sings most frequently in the broad
glare of noonday, when every one is out, and seldom wastes his powers before sunrise. He seems to keep back his own notes until most of the other birds have become silent. When he does condescend to begin, he sings in a perfect ecstasy of joy, and his song is as merry as the laugh of a child. The gayest part of the day with him is the late afternoon, the hour before dewfall, when the robin and the vireo begin their evening hymn. The bobolink 'seems to be practising a cotillon on the wing' with his active movements and vocal flourishes; and no other bird can approach his truly original style. Even the mocking-bird is said to give up the attempt in despair, and refuses to sing at all when confined in a cage near a bobolink. He is an eminently sociable bird, and appears to have no liking whatever for solitude.

'A flock of merry singing-birds
Were sporting in the grove;
Some were warbling cheerily,
And some were making love.
There were Bobo'lincoln, Wado'lincoln,
Winterseeble, Conquedle—
A livelier set were never led
By tabor, pipe, or fiddle—
Crying, "Phew, shew, Wado'lincoln!
See, see, Bobo'lincoln
Down among the tickle-tops,
Hiding in the buttercups!
I know the saucy chap;
I see his shining cap
Bobbing in the clover,
There! see, see, see!"

'Oh, what a happy life they lead,
Over the hill and in the mead!
How they sing and how they play!
See, they fly away, away!
Now they gambol o'er the clearing,
Off' again, and then appearing;
Poised aloft on quivering wing,
Now they soar and now they sing:

"We must all be merry and moving;
We must all be happy and loving;
For when the midsummer is come,
And the grain has ripened its ear,
The haymakers scatter our young,
And we mourn for the rest of the year:
Then Bobo'lincoln, Wado'lincoln,
Winterseeble, haste away!"

"Oh, how pretty!" exclaimed Clara and Edith, while Malcolm declared that it sounded just like 'em; he had heard 'em say all that many a time.

"Have you, really?" asked the little sisters in admiring wonder; and then the "big brother," as he felt himself to be, laughed and looked at Miss Harson.

"Not as you would have said it, dears. The
words, you see, have been set to the bobolink's music.

"As the song tells you," continued the governess, "these birds make their nests on the ground, generally in a field of grass; for they complain,

'The haymakers scatter our young;'

and it certainly seems a very unsafe place in which to bring up a family. The outside of the nest is made of dry leaves and coarse grass, while the inside is lined with fine stalks of the same placed very close together. There are five eggs, of a bluish-white, dotted with irregular spots of dark brown.

"Unfortunately for this merry little bird, he is very good to eat, and in the early fall he gets so fat on the reeds or wild oats along the shores of the Schuylkill and Delaware that the sound of the sportsman's gun is almost constantly heard. The market-stalls are ornamented with long strings of reed-birds; and this is quite a sad sight to those who have watched the frolicsome little warblers enjoying their short lives."
CHAPTER X.

THE AMERICAN CUCKOO.

"I AM now going to tell you of a very curious bird," said Miss Harson, "and one with which you are not so well acquainted as with many of the others. This is the American cuckoo, or cow-bird, as it is frequently called, because its notes sound like the words cow, cow.

"The cow-bird is seven inches long; the male is black, with shades of glossy green in a strong light; the head and neck a silky drab, while the upper part of the breast is a dark, changeable violet. The female is brown, with lighter shades beneath. It cannot be called a singing-bird, like its English cousin, as 'it merely utters a sort of simple, cackling complaint when disturbed; and this also constitutes the expression of its pleasure at finding its companions, varying only in a more rapidly-repeated monotony.'

"It has the peculiarity, though, in common with the English cuckoo of laying its eggs in other birds' nests, both to avoid the trouble of building
for itself and of taking care of its young when hatched.”

"How very funny!" exclaimed the two little girls, while Malcolm pronounced this "A cool proceeding."

"Very cool indeed," continued their governess, "but I must tell you that the young English cuckoos are still cooler; for no sooner are they hatched than they turn the young of the bird that has hatched them out of the nest. This is because the cuckoo is always larger than the bird whose nest it selects, although the eggs are nearly the same size, and one young cuckoo quite fills a small bird's nest.

"An English writer gives an account of the whole process: 'On the 18th of June,' says he, 'I examined the nest of a hedge-sparrow, which then contained a cuckoo's egg, as well as those of its own. On inspecting it the day following the bird had hatched, but the nest then contained only a young cuckoo and one hedge-sparrow. The nest was placed so near the extremity of a hedge that I could distinctly see what was going forward in it; and, to my great astonishment, I saw the young cuckoo, though so lately hatched, in the act of turning out the young hedge-sparrow. The mode of accomplishing this was very curious. The little animal, with the assistance of its rump and wings, contrived to get the other bird upon its back, and, making a lodgment for its burden by
elevating its elbows, clambered backward with it up the side of the nest till it reached the top, where, resting for a moment, it threw off its load with a jerk, and quite disengaged it from the nest. It remained in this situation for a short time, feeling about with the extremity of its wings, as if to be convinced whether the business was properly executed, and then dropped into the nest again."

"What a wicked little bird!" exclaimed Clara in disgust, and then begging pardon very prettily when she saw that Miss Harson had not finished reading.

"With the extremities of its wings I have often seen it examine, as it were, an egg and nestling before it began its operations; and the nice sensibilities which these parts seem to possess appeared sufficiently to compensate the want of sight, which as yet it was destitute of. I afterward put in an egg, and this, by a similar process, was conveyed to the edge of the nest and thrown out. These experiments I have since repeated several times in different nests, and have always found the young cuckoo disposed to act in the same manner. In climbing up the nest it sometimes drops its burden, and thus is foiled in its endeavors; but after a little respite the work is resumed, and goes on almost incessantly till it is effected.

"The singularity of its shape is well adapted to
these purposes, for, different from other newly-hatched birds, its back, from the shoulders downward, is very broad, with a considerable hollow in the middle. This hollow seems formed by Nature for the design of giving a more secure lodgment to the egg of the hedge-sparrow or its young one when the young cuckoo is employed in removing either of them from the nest. When it is about twelve days old this cavity is quite filled up, and then the back assumes the shape of nestling birds in general.'

"So, you see, Clara, that, wicked and ungrateful as the young cuckoo appears to be, it is but following out the instinct of self-preservation, for which abundant provision has been made by the great Creator, 'who doeth all things well.'

"We will now return to our cow-bird, which has never been seen to push young birds or eggs out of the nest, but, by some strange fatality, they invariably disappear wherever the cow-bird deposits her egg. We must look into the matter a little.

"In May and June these birds are frequently seen loitering singly about solitary thickets, 'reconnoitring, no doubt, for proper nurses to whose care they may commit the hatching of their eggs and the rearing of their helpless orphans.' Among the birds which they honor with their custom are the blue-bird, which builds in a hollow tree; the chipping
sparrow, in a cedar-bush; the golden-crowned thrush, on the ground in the shape of an oven; the red-eyed fly-catcher, a neat hanging nest, suspended by the two upper edges from a small sapling or drooping branch; the yellow-bird, in the fork of an alder; the Maryland yellow-throat, on the ground at the roots of brier-bushes; the white-eyed fly-catcher, a hanging nest on the bending of a smilax-vine; and the small blue-gray fly-catcher, also a hanging nest, fastened to the slender twigs of a tree, sometimes as high as fifty or sixty feet from the ground. So that it is quite bewildering to think of the strange variety of nests in which the young cow-birds find themselves, and the wonderfully-varied scenes on which they open their infant eyes. To say nothing of the different nurses, blue, brown, and yellow, that hover over them, perhaps three or four little sisters and brothers will have as many different kinds of step-mothers.

"The English cuckoo and the American cow-bird are the only birds among the thousands of species spread over the face of the globe that ever steal their eggs into the nests made by others."

"It is awful mean," said Malcolm.

"That is probably what the cheated birds would think if they ever found out that they were cheated, but, fortunately for all parties, they never do; they seem, on the contrary, to take as much comfort in
their little changelings as if they were their own flesh and blood.

"The cow-bird never deposits more than one egg in the same nest, but this egg is always hatched before those of the nest-builder; and as the young stranger always clamors for something to eat as soon as it appears, the step-mother leaves her other eggs to pacify it, and, once interrupted in setting, seems to forget to return to it. In the course of a day or two the eggs disappear, and have occasionally been found on the ground near or below the nest. The one fledgling appears to occupy all the old bird's thoughts, and both are as well satisfied as if they lawfully belonged to each other.

"Sometimes, however, the intrusion is resented at first, although it is usually accepted in the end; and some one relates the conduct of a blue-bird who had built for three successive seasons in the cavity of a mulberry tree near his dwelling: 'One day, when the nest was nearly finished, I discovered a female cow-bird perched upon a fence-stake near it, with her eyes apparently fixed upon the spot, while the builder was busy in adjusting her nest. The moment she left it the intruder darted into it, and in five minutes returned, and sailed off to her companions with seeming delight, which she expressed by her gestures and notes. The blue-bird soon returned, and entered the
nest, but instantaneously fluttered back with much apparent hesitation, and perched upon the highest branch of the tree, uttering a rapidly-repeated note of complaint and resentment, which soon brought the male, who reciprocated her feelings by every demonstration of the most vindictive resentment. They entered the nest together, and returned several times, uttering their uninterrupted complaints for fifteen minutes. The male then darted away to the neighboring trees, as if in quest of the offender, and fell upon a cat-bird, which he chastised severely, and then turned to an innocent sparrow that was chanting its ditty in a peach tree. Notwithstanding the affront was so passionately resented, I found the blue-bird had laid an egg the next day.'"

"I wish he had caught that horrid cow-bird," said Clara. "What a shame, to punish the poor little birds who had not done anything!"

"Please tell us some more stories about the cow-bird, Miss Harson," said little Edith, "they are so funny."

"Here is a little one," replied her governess, "about a young cow-bird that was put into the same cage with a red-bird. At first the old bird looked very hard at the little one, and examined it closely with great curiosity. It soon became clamorous for food, and from that moment the red-bird seemed to
adopt it as his own, feeding it with all the care and
tenderness of the most affectionate nurse. When he
found that the grasshopper which he had brought it
was too large for it to swallow, he took the insect
from it, broke it in small portions, chewed them a
little to soften them, and with all the gentleness and
delicacy imaginable put them separately into its
mouth. He often spent several minutes in looking
at it and examining it all over, and in picking off
any particles of dirt that he observed on its plumage.
It was a very pretty sight to see him teaching and
encouraging it to eat.

"The story goes on to say: 'The cow-bird is now
six months old, is in complete plumage, and repays
the affectionate services of his foster-parent with a
frequent display of all the musical talents with which
Nature has gifted him. These, it must be confessed,
are far from being ravishing, yet for their singularity
are worthy of notice. He spreads his wings, swells
his body into a globular form, bristling every feather
in the manner of a turkey-cock, and with great seem-
ing difficulty utters a few low, spluttering notes, as
if proceeding from his belly; always, on these occa-
sions, strutting in front of the spectator with great
consequential affectation.'

"The red-bird, it seems, listened attentively to all
this splutter, as though he really thought it quite a
fine performance, although himself an excellent singer. Perhaps the harsh notes expressed, to him, the language of love and gratitude, and therefore they could not be otherwise than sweet.

"After all, the cow-bird has his useful points, for in the spring his appearance is often looked for by the farmers with some anxiety. If the horned cattle are not in good health at this season, they are supposed to be troubled with worms; and when they are followed by the cow-birds, it is considered a sure sign that they are in need of medicine. But the birds are quite as busy with the young grass as the cattle are, as they find immense quantities of the larvae of different insects, and stuff themselves with this tempting food till their crops can hold no more."
CHAPTER XI.

ORIOLES.

"I SAW a beautiful bird to-day," said Miss Har-son on the evening of a bright day in May—"the Baltimore oriole; and I want you to see how rich a picture he makes in Mr. Audubon's book."

The massive volume that lay on a table by itself, and was one of papa's choicest library treasures, was opened at the place, and all gathered around to admire the gorgeous, tropical-looking bird, who, besides his beauty, is gifted with a fine voice.

"I should like to know," said Malcolm, "why he is called the Baltimore oriole, when he lives here, for I have seen his nest. I don't believe they have any more right to him in Baltimore than we have. He's a beauty, and no mistake!"

"That is just the question," said the governess, smiling, "which I wanted you to ask, Malcolm—'Why Baltimore?' and the reason is this: This beautiful dress of black and gold—which, by the way, Mr. Oriole does not have until he has shed his feathers three times—was the livery of Lord Baltimore, the
former proprietor of Maryland. He is also called golden oriole—his English name—golden robin, hang-nest, fire-bird, and hanging-bird. He is just the length of the cow-bird, seven inches; the head throat, and upper part of the back and wings are black; the lower part of the back and the whole under parts are bright orange, deepening into vermilion on the breast; the back is also divided by a band of orange; the tail is black and orange. The plumage of the female is lighter and duller than that of her mate.—What do you think of this picture of a nest?”

“It looks like a bag,” said Clara, while Edith pronounced it a big purse.

“It certainly is very odd and very pretty,” continued Miss Harson, “and quite a wonderful piece of workmanship for birds. The oriole seems to combine in his nest warmth, convenience, and security. He generally fixes on the high, bending extremities of the branches, fastening strong strings of hemp or flax round two forked twigs; with the same materials he fabricates a strong, firm kind of cloth, not unlike the substance of a hat in its raw state; forms it into a pouch six or eight inches in depth, lining it substantially with soft substances well interwoven with the outward netting; and lastly finishes it with a layer of horse-hair; the whole being shaded from
the sun and rain by a natural pent-house or canopy of leaves.

"The birds of this species have all a common form of building, but they do not build in exactly the same manner. Great differences will be found in the style, neatness, and finishing of the nest. Some birds are much better workmen than others. So anxious is the Baltimore to procure proper materials for his nest that the women in the country must narrowly watch the linen thread that may be bleaching, and the farmer must secure his young grafts, as this bird will carry off the former, and also the strings that tie the latter, to serve his purposes in building.'

"Sometimes funny things happen in connection with these oriole nests; and once a female was seen to carry off to her nest a piece of lampwick ten or twelve feet long. This long string and many shorter ones were left hanging out for about a week before both the ends were wattled into the sides of the nest. Some little birds, who were using similar materials in their building, found these hanging ends particularly tempting, and occasionally twitched at them as they passed; this always brought out the busy builder from her work in great anger. She scolded, too, if she was watched too closely; and she was about a week altogether in making her nest. Once a person
purposely placed skeins of bright-colored zephyrs in the
way of a nest-building oriole, who eagerly seized
upon them, and wove them so skilfully into her work
that the nest when finished was the brightest and
most ornamental thing ever seen on a tree.

"A cradle thus carefully made would naturally
be watched with great solicitude; and this is always
the case. There are five white eggs, slightly tinged
with flesh-color, marked on the larger end with pur-
ple dots, and on the other parts with long, hair-like
lines, which intersect each other in all directions;
and these precious eggs are defended most valiantly
against the attacks of marauding birds. So devoted
is the mother-bird that she has been known to suffer
herself to be carried away sitting on her eggs, and to
die of starvation.

'High on yon poplar, clad in glossiest green,
The orange, black-capp'd Baltimore is seen;
The broad extended boughs still please him best;
Beneath their bending skirts he hangs his nest;
There his sweet mate, secure from every harm,
Broods o'er her spotted store, and wraps them warm;
Lists to the noontide hum of busy bees,
Her partner's merry song, the brook, the breeze;
These, day by day, the lonely hours deceive
From dewy morn to slow-descending eve.
Two weeks elapsed, behold! a helpless crew
Claim all her care, and her affection too;
On wings of love the assiduous nurses fly;
Flowers, leaves, and boughs abundant food supply:
Glad chants their guardian as abroad he goes,
And waving breezes rock them to repose.'

"The loud, animated notes of the Baltimore oriole are first heard in this region in the early part of May, and have been compared to a very loud whistle, which may be heard at a great distance, but in richness equalling the flute-stop of a fine-toned organ. Sometimes he imitates other birds who have similar voices, and sometimes, for days together, he is busy with a single strain. Occasionally he sings on the wing, but he is usually at work while singing, as though the main business of life with him were to pick up a living. He never seems to give the whole of his mind to singing, like other birds, but carefully searches every leaf and twig about him all the while for unwary flies and beetles. He is particularly fond of glossy green ones, and his clear, mellow whistle is repeated at short intervals as he gleans among the branches. When alarmed by an approach to his nest he makes a kind of rapid chirping, very different from his usual note.

"Here is a story of an oriole that became very much attached to its mistress. 'This bird,' says the lady, 'I took from the nest when very young, with three others, but being unskilled in taking care of
them, only this one lived. I taught it to feed from my mouth, and it would often alight on my finger and strike the end of it with its bill until I raised it to my mouth, when it would insert its bill and open my lips by using the upper and lower mandibles as levers, and take out whatever I might have there for it.

"In winter, spring, and autumn I kept a little cage, lined with cotton batting, for the bird to pass the night in; and toward evening it would leave its large cage and fly to this. After entering, if I did not close up the aperture with cotton, it would do so itself by pulling the cotton from the sides of the cage, until it had shut up all the openings for the cold to enter.

"I fed it with sponge-cake, and when this became dry and hard, and it wanted some softer, it would make its wants known to me by its look and note; and if I did not very soon attend to it, it would take up a piece of the hard cake, carry it to the saucer of water and drop it in, and move it about until it was sufficiently soft to be eaten.

"In very cold weather the bird would leave the cage, fly to me, run under my cape and place itself on my neck. Constantly during the day, when it was at liberty, it would perch on my finger, and draw my needle and thread from me when I was sew-
ing. At such times, if any child approached me and pulled my cape or dress a little, it would chase the offender, with its wings and tail spread, showing high resentment in its eye, which nothing would allay but the cessation of the offence.

"This bird made many journeys with me, and always appeared to be happy and contented could it be near to me, although shut up in a cage six inches long and eight or ten inches high and wide, with a green cloth covering drawn together at the top with a tape, leaving an opening for it to look out and see and receive little crumbs, etc.

"In sickness, when I have been confined to my bed, my bird would visit my pillow many times during the day, often creeping under the bed-clothes to me. At such times it always appeared distressed and low-spirited. When it wanted to bathe it would approach me with a very expressive look and shake its wings. On my return home from a call or visit it would invariably show its pleasure by a peculiar sound.'"

"What a dear little bird!" exclaimed the little girls in concert.

"Suppose I catch a young oriole, Miss Harson," proposed Malcolm, "so that we can bring it up as the lady did? It would be such fun to have it around!"
"But think of the poor little parent-birds," replied the governess, "and especially the mother, who defends her nest even with her life. We should not put them to such pain for the sake of our own pleasure?"

"No! no!" said tender-hearted little Clara and Edith, while Malcolm, boy-like, said, "I guess, after all, I don't care about having a bird poking round after me all the time."

"There is also the orchard oriole," continued Miss Harson, "which differs from the Baltimore in being duller-hued and half an inch shorter, as well as more slender. It also builds a different kind of nest, suspending it generally from the twigs of an apple tree, and making it of long, tough, flexible grass, that seems to be actually sewed through and through in a thousand directions, as if done with a needle. This curious nest is about three inches deep and four wide, and one of the stalks of dried grass, thirteen inches long, has been known to be hooked through and returned no less than thirty-four times. An old lady who saw it expressed her opinion that this bird might be taught to darn stockings. There are four bluish eggs, with a few small specks of brown on them, and some spots of dark purple.

"The orchard oriole is one of the farmer's most useful friends, being a deadly enemy to the horde of
destructive bugs and caterpillars that infest the fruit trees, preying on the leaves, blossoms, and scarcely-formed fruit. The oriole devours these wherever he finds them, but never injures the fruit, no matter how near it may be. 'I have witnessed instances,' says one of his admirers, 'where the entrance to his nest was more than half closed up by a cluster of apples, which he could have easily demolished in half a minute; but, as if holding the property of his patron sacred, or considering it as a natural bulwark to his own, he slid in and out with the greatest gentleness and caution.'

"His song is particularly gay and animated, and he is one of the most active, sprightly, and restless of birds—on the ground, on the trees, flying and carolling in his hurried manner in almost one and the same instant. His notes are shrill and lively, and, although uttered with such rapidity and seeming confusion, the ear is able to follow them distinctly. Between these he has a single note, which is very pleasant. Whenever he is protected he shows his confidence and gratitude by his numbers and familiarity.

"These birds, like the Baltimores, seem to be easily tamed, and become very affectionate. One which a gentleman reared, and kept through the winter, whistled with great clearness and vivacity
at two months old. 'It had an odd manner,' he says, 'of moving its head and neck slowly and regularly and in various directions, when intent on observing anything, without stirring its body. This motion was as slow and regular as that of a snake. When, at night, a candle was brought into the room, it became restless and evidently dissatisfied, fluttering about the cage as if seeking to get out; but when the cage was placed on the same table with the candle, it seemed extremely well pleased, fed and drank, dressed, shook and arranged its plumage, sat as close to the light as possible, and sometimes chanted a few broken, irregular notes in that situation as I sat writing or reading beside it.'

"And now," said Miss Harson, "I think that with a pretty poem, which I have just seen, we shall have finished all that I am able to find in regard to these beautiful and very interesting birds. This poem is called

THE LITTLE ORIOLES.

Underneath a great elm tree
Stepped I stealthily;
On the grass myself I laid;
An oriole's nest hung over my head:
The baby-birds were talking in their nest.
    Be quiet, dear,
    And you shall hear
All that the little baby-orioles said.
OUR HOME BIRDS.

THE ORIOLES ALL TOGETHER.
What a nestful! one, two, three,
Four, five—Winkie, Blinkie, Blee,
Binniwink, and Willawee.

WINKIE.
Five little babies in one cradle!
Here we lie!

BLINKIE.
Oh how high, oh how high,
Papa and mamma have hung our cradle!

BLEE.
Close to the sky! close to the sky!

BINNIWINK.
Oh, how we swing now
On such a little bough!
Here we go!
Up and down, and to and fro,
On the tree-top swinging so!
We'll not fear
'Way up here.
In all the world there are but four
Frightful things; there are no more.
Only two will dare come near;
Owls and snakes are all we fear;
Boys and pussies can't come here.

WILLAWEE.
How the breeze, the good little breeze,
On his way through the great elm trees,
Softly sings to us, "Lullaby, dearies!"
OUR HOME BIRDS.

WINKIE.
And shakes our little green curtains too.
Oh, there's a hole; I can see right through:
I'm glad there's a hole, and I'll tell you why:
Why, only look up there with your little eye,
And you'll see the sun shining up in the sky.
Oh, there's another!
Look, sister! look, brother!

BLINKIE.
How the breezes keep ripping
As by they are tripping!
A hole first in one place, and then in another:
Here and there, and all about,
So that the sun can peep in here, and we can peep out.

BLEE.
But where is papa gone, and dear little mother?
I'll tell you what it is, sister; I'll tell you what it is, brother:
If there is one thing tickles me more than another
(And you will agree),
It is to see,
All suddenly,
Papa, with his beautiful golden breast,
Leaning over the edge of the nest.

BINNIWINK.
But would you not rather
Now see pretty mother?
Our dear little mother has such a kind eye.
OUR HOME BIRDS.

Blee.
And so has papa; that you cannot deny.
Ah, how I do love to see,
Shining right over me,
Father's orange-colored vest
On the nest.

Binniwink.
But mother's pretty little eye,
So cunningly, so kindly,
Peeps sideways down on me.

Blee.
But then how father sits and sings,
While balanced on the bough he swings!
That is the thing of all things
  I do love to hear
  With my little ear.
Don't you, Binniwinkie, dear?
How his shining throat he swells,
When his pretty song he trills!—
  That queer song,
  That sweet song,
Sweeter, tenderer, than 'tis long.
I see it bubbling up his throat
Just before he sings it out.
Oh, it makes me laugh so,
And it makes me want to sing too.

Willawee.
Father goes cherry-gathering on every tree:
I hope he'll bring home a nice blackheart for me,
Or some kind of cherry,
Or any kind of berry,
For I'm hungry, very.
There! he's coming with a bug in his bill;
He'll give it to his Willawee, I know he will.
He has been spider-hunting on every tree,
And he has brought his game home to his Willawee!

**ALL TOGETHER.**

And here is our mother, our dear mother, too!—
Come, spread your wings over us, dear mother, do;
So, like a pretty coverlet
For your little babies' bed:
Make it dark, so we can't see,
And close, so we can't hear;
Then soon all sound asleep we'll be, mother dear."

"Isn't that pretty?" said Edith in delight. "I love those little baby orioles!"

"They must have looked so cunning," added Clara, "when they were getting tucked up!"

"And they had such nice names," continued Edith — "Winkie, and Blinkie, and—I don't know what else, but I know they sound just like dear little birds."

Miss Harson smiled at this sage conclusion, and said that as two little girls were doing something very like winking and blinking, it was time for them to think of being tucked up.
CHAPTER XII.

A BIRD WITH A BAD NAME.

The next bird-talk began with the crow.

"A poor persecuted bird," said Miss Harson, "whom no one speaks well of; yet he really has some very good points about him. We must find out this evening what they are."

"Why, doesn't he eat up all the corn and things?" asked Malcolm in surprise. "Patrick says that the crows are the plague of his life, and that he'll kill all of them he can get hold of."

"They certainly do not eat all the corn," replied the governess, "as there is usually some left for family use; and Patrick only shares the popular prejudice. Hear what a writer whom we have often heard before says of the crow (Fig. 11): 'This is perhaps the most generally known and least beloved of all our land-birds, having neither melody of song, nor beauty of plumage, nor excellence of flesh, nor civility of manners to recommend him; on the contrary, he is branded as a thief and a plunderer—a kind of black-coated vagabond, who hovers over the fields of
Crow.
the industrious, fattening on their labors, and by his voracity often blasting their expectations. Hated as he is by the farmer, watched and persecuted by almost every bearer of a gun, who all triumph in his destruction, had not Heaven bestowed on him intelligence and sagacity far beyond common, there is reason to believe that the whole tribe—in these parts, at least—would long ago have ceased to exist.’”

"Is that scare-crows?" asked Clara.

"Yes, dear," was the reply. "I know what you mean. Scare-crows are devices for driving away these birds from the corn-fields, and usually consist of the cast-off hat, coat, and trousers of the farmer, stuffed with straw and tied on a stick; and this figure sometimes answers the purpose and keeps the crows from many a good meal. But they are very sly and knowing; and country-people often say that they can smell gunpowder, because it is so difficult to get near them with a gun. They have been seen feeding in quite a flock on the ground, while one of the number was perched on a tree or some other elevation to watch for the approach of enemies. If anything suspicious appeared in sight, he would utter several sharp cries; and when the danger drew near a regular alarm would be given, followed by instant flight.

"All sorts of plans have been laid for the destruction of crows, and in some places men with guns are
constantly on the lookout for them. They are accused of being most destructive to the corn-fields for about six weeks after planting-time—of digging up the newly-planted grains, and pulling up by the roots those that have sprouted, so that the farmer has to do his planting a second time, or lose all the labor he has bestowed on the soil. But no one remembers the myriads of worms, moles, mice, caterpillars, grubs, and beetles which they have destroyed; only their pilfering propensities are borne in mind, and war to the death is waged against them. It is an added enormity that it is so very difficult to surprise them.

"This bird with the bad name is much larger than any we have been considering, being eighteen and a half inches long; his general color is a glossy blue-black, with purple reflections. His voice has been compared to the barking of a small dog, and his most charitably disposed friend could not call it musical.

"The crows make their nests about the middle of March; and at this season, and later, they may be seen all through the woods in pairs, roosting near the tree selected by each couple for their domicil. They generally choose high trees for this purpose, though sometimes the preference is given to middle-sized cedars. The nest is formed of sticks, wet moss, thin bark, mossy earth, and lined with over half a pound
of horse-hair, besides cow-hair and wool, making it, in fact, a regular spring-bed among birds’ nests. It has four pale-green eggs, thickly speckled and blotched with olive.

"These eggs are watched over with the utmost care by both parents, and while his mate is sitting the male will often make excursions of half a mile or so to see if any one is approaching. On the slightest alarm both will go off to some distance, evidently to conceal the existence of the nest where they have been sitting; and until the young are able to fly they are the most quiet of birds, for fear of drawing attention to their retreat. The crow regularly carries food to his mate while she is sitting, and occasionally relieves her of this duty; so that we have already discovered something good about him.

"One funny habit that these birds have is that, as autumn approaches, ‘the parent-crows, with their new families, forsaking their solitary lodgings, collect together, as if by previous agreement, when evening approaches. About an hour before sunset they are first observed, flying somewhat in Indian file, in one direction, at a short height above the tops of the trees, silent and steady, keeping the general curvature of the ground, continuing to pass sometimes till after sunset, so that the whole line of march would extend for many miles."
"Crows can easily be tamed, and make most amusing and even affectionate pets. In this state our unpopular bird soon learns to distinguish all the members of the family; flies toward the gate, screaming, at the approach of a stranger; learns to open a door by alighting on the latch; attends regularly at the stated hours of dinner and breakfast, which he appears punctually to recollect; is extremely noisy and loquacious; imitates the sounds of various words pretty distinctly; is a great thief and hoarder of curiosities, hiding in holes, corners, and crevices every loose article he can carry off, particularly small pieces of metal, corn, bread, and food of all kinds.'"

"What fun!" exclaimed Malcolm. "I wish we had a crow here to hide things away."

"Your puzzles and paints and tools, for instance?" asked his governess. "I am afraid my patience would be rather taxed to have my thimble perhaps, or a ring or two, or a favorite ribbon or piece of lace, snatched off in this way."

"I'm afraid," said little Edith very earnestly, "that he'd carry off my dollies after I'd put 'em to sleep.—You won't get a crow, will you, Malcolm? A little doggie is ever so much nicer!"

There was a general laugh at Edith's expense, but Miss Harson kindly assured her that her dollies
would be quite safe, while Malcolm acknowledged that he had no present intention of setting up a crow.

"A gentleman once raised a crow," continued the governess—"that is, he took it when it was very young—and by kind treatment made it so tame that it seemed quite like one of the family, and became particularly attached to its master—so much so that it knew him even after a long absence. This gentleman lived on the Delaware near Easton, and the crow was in the family for several years. But one day it disappeared, and could not be found in any of its haunts, till at length it was regretfully decided that the bird had been shot by some vagabond gunner or possibly lost its life by an accident. Killed it certainly must be in some way.

"Nearly a year after its disappearance the gentleman was standing on the river-shore one morning in company with some friends when a number of crows passed by. One of these birds left the flock, and, flying toward the party, alighted on the gentleman's shoulder, and began to gabble away with great volubility, as though delighted at meeting an old friend. After the first surprise the person thus singled out recognized his old acquaintance who had disappeared so mysteriously, and tried very cautiously to get hold of him without seeming to do so. But Master Crow
was on his guard; he had tasted the sweets of liberty, and, although he liked his old master, he liked his freedom better; and, glancing suddenly at his vanishing companions, he seemed frightened at the distance between them, and mounted into the air, never to return to his old haunts.

"Crows are found in a great many different parts of the world, and are described as being particularly impudent in the island of Ceylon. They grow to a large size there, have thick glossy plumage, and are very intelligent. 'They will fly into the breakfast-room when the family are assembled at table and snatch off a slice of bread; watch the cook in the cook-house, and when his back is turned fly off with some of the food. One attacked a piece of cake in the hand of a child six years old, and got it away from him. Another, called the "Old Soldier" because he was so daring and had lost the half of one leg when fighting, used actually to take food from a dog while he was eating. He would irritate him, and then when he barked snatch the prey, and triumphantly bear it off to a neighboring tree, where he ate it at his leisure, while the dog stood looking at him and uselessly venting his rage in loud and angry barks.'

"Extraordinary meetings of crows sometimes take place, when they will collect in great numbers at
some particular spot, as if they had all been summoned to appear. A few of the flock sit with drooping heads, and others seem as grave as judges, while others, again, are exceedingly active and noisy. In the course of an hour or so the birds disperse; and it is a common thing, after they have flown away, to find one or two left dead on the spot. These meetings will sometimes last for a couple of days before the business in hand is completed. Crows continue to arrive from all quarters during the session, and as soon as all are assembled a general noise ensues. Shortly after, the whole party fall upon one or two unfortunate individuals and put them to death; when this execution is accomplished they quietly disperse.

"I am afraid," continued Miss Harson, "that with our best efforts we shall scarcely succeed in making the crow out a very honest bird. Our own American species is said to be a near relation of the English jackdaw, one of the most thievish creatures in existence. It is very fond of hovering around the tents of hunters and campers-out, who declare that no provisions, either salt or fresh, are safe from its depredations. It is even so bold as to come into tents, and sit on the edge of the kettle when hanging on fire, and steal victuals out of the dishes. It is said to be very troublesome to hunters, frequently follow-
ing them a whole day. It will perch on a tree while the hunter is baiting his marten-traps, and as soon as his back is turned alight on the ground and eat the baits.

"Besides devouring grain and insects, crows will eat frogs, tadpoles, small fish, lizards, and shellfish. The latter they deal with in quite an original way, by carrying them to a great height and then dropping them on the rocks below to break their shells. When this is accomplished they descend for the contents. For this reason, and because of their feeding also on various aquatic insects and plants, they are usually numerous on the seashore and along the banks of large rivers.

"And now I will finish the subject of crows with a plea for birds generally that I met with lately, and which gave me a great deal of pleasure. These are good and sound words for all to remember:"

"'The swallow, swift, and nighthawk are the guardians of the atmosphere. They check the increase of insects that otherwise would overload it. Woodpeckers, creepers, and chickadees are the guardians of the trunks of trees; warblers and fly-catchers protect the foliage; blackbirds, crows, thrushes, and larks protect the surface of the soil; snipe and woodcock protect the soil under the surface. Each tribe has its respective duties to perform in the economy of Nature; and
it is an undoubted fact that if the birds were all swept off the face of the earth, man could not live upon it; vegetation would wither and die; insects would become so numerous that no living thing could withstand their attacks.

"'The plague of Western grasshoppers is supposed to be due, in part, to the thinning out of the grouse and prairie-hens that were formerly so abundant. The inestimable service done to the farmer, gardener, and florist by the birds is only becoming known by sad experience. Spare the birds and save your fruit; the little corn and fruit taken by them is more than compensated by the quantities of noxious insects they destroy.

"'The long-persecuted crow has been found by actual experiment to do far more good by the vast quantities of grubs and insects that he devours than the little harm he does in the few grains of corn he pulls up. He is one of the farmer's best friends.'"
CHAPTER XIII.

THE CROW BLACKBIRD.

"HERE," said Miss Harson, "is a picture of the purple grackle, or crow blackbird, who may be called first cousin to the crow, and is scarcely more popular than his disreputable relative. You will see that he is smaller, not more than twelve inches in length, and he is altogether a more stylish-looking bird. At first the plumage seems entirely black, but in a strong light the head, neck, and breast are of a rich, glossy steel-blue, dark violet, and silky green. There is more violet on the head and breast, and green on the back part of the neck.

"The bill of the purple grackle is admirably calculated for disposing of its food, which consists largely of Indian corn, being more than an inch long, very strong, and furnished on the inside of the upper mandible with a sharp arrangement like the stump of the broken blade of a penknife.

"This is the account given of the grackle by Wilson: 'This noted depredator is well known to every careful farmer of the Northern and Middle States.
About the twentieth of March the purple grakles visit Pennsylvania from the South, fly in loose flocks, frequent swamps and meadows, and follow in the furrows after the plough; their food at this season consists of worms, grubs, and caterpillars, of which they destroy prodigious numbers, as if to recompense the husbandman beforehand for the havoc they intend to make among his crop of Indian corn. Toward evening they retire to the nearest cedars and pine trees to roost, making a continual chattering as they fly along.

"'On the tallest of these trees they generally build their nests in company about the beginning or middle of April, sometimes ten or fifteen nests being on the same tree. One of these nests, taken from a high pine tree, is now before me. It measures full five inches in diameter within, and four in depth; is composed outwardly of mud, mixed with long stalks and roots of a knotty kind of grass, and lined with fine bent and horse-hair. The eggs are five, of a bluish-olive color, marked with large spots and straggling streaks of black and dark brown, also with others of a fainter tinge.

"'The trees where these birds build are often at no great distance from the farmhouse, and overlook the plantations. From thence they issue in all directions, and with as much confidence to make their
daily depredations among the surrounding fields as if the whole were intended for their use alone. Their chief attention, however, is directed to the Indian corn in all its progressive stages. As soon as the infant blade of this grain begins to make its appearance above ground, the grakles hail the welcome signal with screams of peculiar satisfaction, and, without waiting for a formal invitation from the proprietor, descend on the fields, and begin to pull up and regale themselves on the seed, scattering the green blades around.

"'While thus eagerly employed the vengeance of the gun sometimes overtakes them; but these disasters are soon forgotten, and

Those who live to get away
Return to steal another day.

When the young ears are in their milky state they are attacked with redoubled eagerness by the grakles and red-wings in formidable and combined bodies. They descend like a blackening, sweeping tempest on the corn, dig off the external covering of twelve or fifteen coats of leaves as dexterously as if done by the hand of man, and, having laid bare the ear, leave little behind to the farmer but the cobs and shrivelled skins that contained their favorite fare.

"'I have seen fields of corn of many acres where
more than one-half was thus ruined. Indeed, the farmers in the immediate vicinity of the rivers Delaware and Schuylkill generally allow one-fourth of this crop to the blackbirds, among whom our grackle comes in for his full share. During these depredations the gun is making great havoc among their numbers; which has no other effect on the survivors than to send them to another field or to another part of the same field.'

"This does not present the crow blackbird in a very attractive light; and it must be a pleasant sight to the farmer when, in the month of November, he sees this pest winging its way to the South. But there is little left to steal then; and agriculture would probably be more benefited if the grackle could be persuaded to reverse the order of his visits, making them in winter instead of summer.

"Here an untiring friend of birds brings up the insect question again, and says: 'As some consolation, however, to the industrious cultivator, I can assure him that, were I placed in his situation, I should hesitate whether to consider these birds most as friends or enemies, as they are particularly destructive to almost all the noxious worms, grubs, and caterpillars that infest his fields; which, were they allowed to multiply unmolested, would soon consume nine-tenths of all the productions of his labor,"
and desolate the country with the miseries of famine. Is not this another striking proof that the Deity has created nothing in vain? and that it is the duty of man, the lord of the creation, to avail himself of their usefulness, and guard against their bad effects as securely as possible, without indulging in the barbarous, and even impious, wish for their utter extermination?

"The winter home of these blackbirds is in the lower parts of Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia, where they may often be seen collected together in vast armies rather than flocks, actually darkening the air with their numbers. When they rise for flight, the noise produced is like the rolling of thunder, and their descent blackens the road and the surrounding fences. Some one who has seen them in this way, says: 'When, after a few evolutions, they descended on the skirts of the high-timbered woods, at that time destitute of leaves, they produced a most singular and striking effect; the whole of the trees, for a considerable extent, from the top to the lowest branches, seemed as if hung in mourning; their notes and screaming the mean while resembling the distant sound of a great cataract, but in more musical cadence, swelling and dying away on the ear according to the fluctuation of the breeze.'

"The purple grackle, like the crow, is easily tamed,
and will sing in confinement. It has even been taught, too, to utter some words quite distinctly; and a foreign bird of this species, which had been brought up near a hospital that happened to be in the neighborhood of a parade-ground, proved himself quite a mimic, often coughing, groaning, and moaning, as he heard the patients do, and then calling out vociferously, like the commanding officer on parade, 'Halt!' while he perfectly imitated the jingling of the ramrods. Another one would inform the questioner that its name was Charlie; and it never failed to pronounce every word in any language with which it was tried.

"It is always pleasant to hear of a cat's disappointment when she has evil intentions with regard to birds. Once this enemy of the feathered tribe was seen on the top of a paled fence eying a black-bird's nest that had been made quite near it. The poor little bird-mother, half frightened to death, and not in the least knowing what to do, flew off the nest and got almost within the cat's reach, uttering the most piteous screams of wildness and despair. Presently, her mate appeared, and at first he screamed too, and flew wildly about, often settling on the fence just in front of the cat, who, not having wings, could not spring at him for fear of losing her footing. Before long, however, the male bird sprang at the cat,
settled on her back, and pecked her head so furiously that she fell to the ground, where she was followed by the indignant blackbird, who gave her such a sound drubbing that he actually drove her away. Puss tried it once more, but with exactly the same result, and finally concluded that young blackbirds were not to be had for supper. After each battle the bird celebrated his victory with a song; and evidently believing in the wisdom of 'carrying the war into the enemy's quarters,' for several days afterward he would chase the cat about the garden whenever she left the house."

"I like that fellow," said Malcolm; "he was a bird worth knowing. His whipping the old cat was splendid!"

"I'm so glad she didn't get the little birdies!" said Edith, while Clara "hoped that Miss Harson knew something more about blackbirds."

"But, you see, we began with their being quite dreadful creatures," replied the governess with a smile, "and farmers would probably tell you that they wished the cats might get all the young ones, and old ones too. There is really very little more, though, except to say that the purple grackle and the fish-hawk are very intimate friends—so much so, indeed, that they often keep house together in quite a comical way. The fish-hawk's nest is very large—
often three or four feet wide and from four to five feet high—and the outside is built of large sticks or fagots. Among the openings of these sticks three or four pairs of crow blackbirds will often make their nests, while the fish-hawk is busy with her little family above. All goes on in the most perfect harmony; and if the hawk wishes to make a call or do some marketing, she can say to her neighbors with perfect confidence, 'Just have an eye to my little ones, will you?' while she is equally ready to perform the same service for the grakles. Each faithfully watches and protects the other's property.

"A famous living poet does not take the farmer's view of the blackbird, for he says,

'O Blackbird! sing me something well:
    While all the neighbors shoot thee round,
    I keep smooth plats of fruitful ground,
    Where thou mayest warble, eat, and dwell.'"
CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT THEY SAW IN THE WOODS.

The long talked-of day in the woods came at last, and Miss Harson called it their "Maying."

From the variety of things, however, that the children proposed taking with them, it looked a little like emigrating to a desert island; and Malcolm was asked why he did not strap a kettle on his back, gypsy-fashion, or carry materials for a tent.

First, little Edith wanted to carry her dollies, both for the pleasure of giving them an airing, and because something might happen to them in her absence; then Clara had a picture-book or two and her drawing-materials: she had read, she admitted rather bashfully, that people often sketched in the open air; but Miss Harson replied, laughing, "Not in the woods, dear, for they don't get very good views there." And Malcolm appeared laden with various contrivances for catching all the possible and impossible animals that might cross their path.

Besides all this, there was the basket of luncheon, which was quite a substantial one; for Kitty had no
idea, she said, of letting her children starve; and Miss Harson herself had one or two books, which, as she said, were really necessaries, for they were going to study birds in the open air. Last, but not least, there was Flip, an absurd-looking little Scotch terrier, who always thought it his right to know all that was going on, and to take part in it.

The young governess laughed heartily as this cavalcade presented itself, armed, as she said, with munitions of war; but every one was finally persuaded to leave all useless things behind, except that Clara and Edith were allowed a picture-book between them and a dollie apiece; and Malcolm carried a small satchel slung over his left shoulder, that appeared to be of no earthly use except to give him an air of very great importance. Miss Harson was provided with a botany-box for ferns; and it was a very merry little party, with Flip barking and getting under every one's feet, that finally issued through the great entrance-gate at Elmridge.

Kitty had sniffed a little at this democratic way of proceeding; she thought the children—including the governess in this class—had much better be taken in the carriage by Patrick to wherever they wanted to go, and have him call for them decently afterward and bring them home; but Miss Harson thought differently, and as she felt quite sure that the children
would enjoy her way more, she very quietly carried it through.

It was a charming day, so bright and warm, with everything leafing out and blooming—cherry trees covered with snow, and apple trees with rose-color, wild flowers in great heaps everywhere, and the fresh grass looking like soft green velvet. They had not very far to walk on the pleasant country road before they turned into a little lane that led to the woods; and then Miss Harson’s little flock were constantly exclaiming with delight.

It was, “Look here, Miss Harson!” or “Look there, Miss Harson!” “See that bird up there!” “Do catch that squirrel!” “Look at the flowers!” “Aren’t these ferns?” until they were all talking and laughing at once. The governess had some trouble to keep her tin box from being filled with ferns before they were well into the woods, the beautiful green sprays grew so thickly all around them; but she insisted upon waiting until their return to gather them, so that they might be all the fresher.

How they did enjoy themselves!—Malcolm racing and climbing fences, with Flip at his heels in a perfect ecstasy of barking, while the little girls frequently tumbled on the soft grass among the flowers, and picked themselves up again with laughter; and Miss Harson enjoyed their pleasure and her own in a
more quiet way. As to the birds, there seemed to be about a thousand of them on every tree, and they sang and flew and chattered as though wondering among themselves who these intruders were, and what they had come for.

"Oh, listen, listen!" cried Edith. "I hear a kittie, a dear little kittie! There, right in that bush, Miss Harson: don't you hear it?"

The governess listened for a moment, and then she replied, "It does sound very much like it, dear, but I think your kittie has wings."

"Wings!" exclaimed the little girls in amazement, while Malcolm cried out disdainfully, "An old catbird! Hallo! there he is now, with his 'me-ouw! me-ouw!'"

Clara and Edith looked eagerly, but the bird was gone. There were many more of them, however, in the woods, and every now and then they would hear that queer call. Miss Harson promised to tell them about this new feathered acquaintance whenever they were ready to rest; and having found a particularly pleasant spot at the foot of a beech tree that would accommodate them all, she placed the luncheon-basket near and spread a large shawl on the ground for the party to sit on. Then, glancing from the book in her hand to the book of Nature around and above her, she waited for her little audience to assemble.
It was not long before they gathered around her, Malcolm and Flip last; and Miss Harson began by showing them a picture in the book she held. It was a very harrowing picture indeed—a bird's nest looking so pretty and picturesque in quite a little bower of leaves, but all around the stem on which it rested a thick ugly snake had wound himself, while his head, with its wide-open, wicked-looking mouth, hung directly over the nest, in which were two eggs quite visible—perhaps he had eaten the rest—while two frightened-looking birds were perched on the edge of the nest, trying to defend their home and little ones.

"Oh!" exclaimed Clara, "isn't that dreadful? Will he eat them up, Miss Harson?"

"No, dear, not the parents," was the reply; "but he is a dreadfully voracious creature, this black snake, where birds and eggs are concerned, and one of the worst enemies the poor cat-bird has. There is a story connected with the picture, which I will give you when we come to it; but first we will study the bird a little. We shall soon discover that Edie's mistake about the kitten was a very natural one.—Hear this, Malcolm:

"'In spring or autumn, on approaching thickets of brambles, the first salutation you receive is from the cat-bird; and a stranger unacquainted with his note would instantly conclude that some vagrant or-
phan kitten had got bewildered among the briers, and wanted assistance, so exactly does the call of the bird resemble the voice of that animal. He is unsuspicious and extremely familiar, for, whether in the woods or in the garden, where he frequently builds his nest, he seldom allows you to pass without paying his respects to you in the usual way.'

"The cat-bird is about nine inches long, and a short distance off his plumage appears to be black, but it is really a very dark slate-color, the wings edged with a much lighter shade of the same, and a dark red underneath, while the tail is quite black.

"The nest is made about the beginning of May in a thicket of briers or brambles, a thorn-bush, thick vine, or the fork of a small sapling; the bird does not seem to care about hiding it, though very anxious about its safety and that of its young on the approach of any danger. The materials used are dry leaves and weeds, small twigs, and fine dry grass; the inside is lined with the fine black, fibrous roots of some plant. So you see that it is quite a carefully-made structure. There are four or five eggs, of a greenish-blue tinge, without any spots.

"The cat-bird always begins his song very early in the morning, not even waiting for the dawn, and hovers about from bush to bush with great activity
when there is scarcely light enough to see him. His notes are more singular than musical, consisting chiefly of short imitations of other birds and various sounds; and they are not always good imitations, as his tones are deficient in clearness and strength. He perseveres, however, in trying, and even seems to study certain passages like a human performer, beginning low, and then, as he succeeds better, going higher and higher. The presence of a listener within a few yards of him does not embarrass him in the least.

"Although an amiable and comparatively inoffensive bird, he is not at all popular, for no other reason, it would seem, than that it is the fashion to dislike him. People will say that 'they hate cat-birds,' and their nests and young are considered the lawful prey of destructive boys. It has been suggested, as a reason for this dislike, that there is too much similarity of tastes between the cat-bird and the farmer. 'The cat-bird is fond of large ripe, garden strawberries; so is the farmer for the good price they bring in market: the cat-bird loves the best and richest early cherries; so does the farmer, for they are sometimes the most profitable of his early fruit: the cat-bird has a particular partiality for the finest ripe, mellow pears; and these are also particular favorites with the farmer. But the cat-bird has
frequently the advantage of the farmer, by snatching off the first fruits of these delicious productions; and the farmer takes revenge by shooting him down with his gun, as he finds old hats, windmills, and scarecrows are no impediments in his way to these forbidden fruits; and nothing but this resource—the ultimatum of farmers as well as kings—can restrain his visits.'

"The writer adds, with his usual fondness for saying a good word for the persecuted: 'Perhaps, too, the common note of the cat-bird, so like the mewing of the animal whose name he bears, and who itself sustains no small share of prejudice, the homeliness of his plumage, and even his familiarity, so proverbially known to beget contempt, may also contribute to this mean, illiberal, and persecuting prejudice; but with the generous and the good, the lovers of Nature and of rural charms, the confidence which this familiar bird places in man by building in his garden, under his eye, the music of his song, and the interesting playfulness of his manners, will always be more than a recompense for the little stolen morsels he snatches.'

"The cat-bird is a devoted parent, and can scarcely be made to desert its nest. This very affection makes it more easily frightened; and a person in the woods imitating the violent chirping or squeaking of young
birds, as though they were in pain or danger, has brought at least half a dozen cat-birds flying from different quarters to the spot. 'At this time those who are disposed to play with his feelings may almost throw him into fits, his emotion and agitation are so great at the distressful cries of what he supposes to be his suffering young. Other birds are variously affected, but none show symptoms of such extreme suffering. He hurries backward and forward with hanging wings and open mouth, calling out louder and faster, and actually screaming with distress, till he appears hoarse with his exertions. He attempts no offensive means; but he bewails, he implores, in the most pathetic terms with which Nature has supplied him, and with an agony of feeling which is truly affecting. Every feathered neighbor within hearing hastens to the place to learn the cause of the alarm, peeping about with looks of consternation and sympathy. But their own parental duties and domestic concerns soon oblige each to withdraw.'

"It is only while his young are in the nest that the cat-bird can be wrought up in this manner; at any other season the most perfect imitations have no effect upon him."

"I think it is very wicked to tease the poor bird so," said Clara indignantly.
"It is, indeed," was the reply, "but too many thoughtlessly pursue their own amusement at the expense of others. A great many silly stories have been told of the fascination which the black snake possesses over the cat-bird, but these are without any foundation. It has been said that the bird has been drawn by this strange power from the secure top of a tree into the open mouth of its enemy below; but, instead of this, the cat-bird often comes off victorious from its frequent battles with the black snake, caused by the latter's strong partiality for its eggs and young. Somebody once witnessed such a battle. 'It took place,' he says, 'in a gravel-walk in the garden, near a dry wall of stone. I was within a few yards of the combatants. The bird pounced or darted upon the snake, snapping his bill; the snake would then draw himself quickly into a coil, ready for a blow; but the bird would cautiously circumvent him at a little distance, now and then running up to and snapping at him, but keeping at a sufficient distance to avoid a blow. After some minutes it became a running fight, the snake retreating; and at last he took shelter in the wall. The cat-bird had young ones in the bushes near the field of battle.'"

"I am glad the snake didn't get 'em," said little Edith.

"Now," said Miss Harson, "we are coming to the
picture, which was a much narrower escape. This nest was a particularly retired one, having been made in a small thick swamp that was closely hedged about with a perfect thicket of wild roses, brambles, and various other bushes and vines; and it was only discovered by the piercing cries of distress that came from it. These were heard by a gentleman who was listening for the songs of different birds; and fearing that some dreadful calamity was threatening the poor cat-birds, whose voices he immediately recognized, he got through the thicket with some difficulty, and soon discovered the cause of all this outcry. About three or four yards from him was the nest, beneath which a huge black snake had twisted himself in such a way that his head hung over the nest, which contained several young ones. At that very moment a bird about two-thirds grown was slowly disappearing between his expanded jaws. By slow degrees he swallowed his victim; his head flattened, his neck writhed and swelled, and two or three undulatory movements of his glistening body finished the work. Then he cautiously raised himself up, his tongue flaming from his mouth, the while curved over the nest, and with wavy, subtle motions explored the interior. I can conceive of nothing more overpoweringly terrible to an unsuspecting family of birds,' says the narrator, 'than the sudden appearance
above their domicil of the head and neck of this arch-enemy. It is enough to petrify the blood in their veins.'

"This particular snake, not appearing to find what he was looking for in the nest, came gliding down the bush or vine to a lower limb, evidently bent on capturing one of the parent-birds. These poor creatures kept up the most heart-rending cries, sometimes fluttering furiously about their pursuer, and even laying hold of his tail with their beaks and claws. At this attack the snake would double upon himself and follow his own body back; which unexpected movement seemed almost to paralyze the birds with terror, and put them within his grasp. But before his horrible jaws could close fairly upon a victim the bird would tear itself away, and, almost exhausted, just manage to get on a higher branch. The snake's imaginary powers of fascination were well tested in this instance; but the parent-birds did not seem to be in any degree fascinated; both contrived to escape him, without showing the least disposition to fall into his mouth.

"Finally, the person who witnessed this scene concluded to put an end to it by killing the snake; which was soon accomplished by aiming a large stone at his head. The cat-birds presently descended to their ruined home, and, perching on the edge of
the nest, the male piped forth a triumphant song of victory."

"I think I'll look for a black snake now," said Malcolm, starting up impetuously; "perhaps there is one in these very woods worrying some birds; and I'll kill him with a stone in the same way."

But Clara and Edith began to cry, and Miss Harson requested the young crusader to remain where he was, as to go in search of danger was one thing, while to protect the party if they were attacked was quite another. It was luncheon-time too, and Malcolm's activity was presently taking quite a different direction.

When Kitty's nicely-packed basket had been pretty well emptied, and the children were amusing themselves by scattering the fragments for the birds and squirrels, Miss Harson quietly directed their attention to a dead hemlock tree that stood near. There seemed to be a great coal of fire on one of the dark branches, and it fairly glowed as they gazed at it. Every now and then a monotonous kind of song, that sounded like chip, churr, repeated at short intervals, appeared to come from a great distance, and presently there was quite a strain of melody, not unlike that of the Baltimore oriole. Then this wonderful coal of fire spread a pair of black wings and floated away.
"Oh!" exclaimed the children under their breath, "wasn't it beautiful? What was it, Miss Harson?"

"The scarlet tanager," replied their governess, "a beautiful tropical bird who comes regularly to visit us from the far South, dressed in the richest scarlet, set off with the most jetty black. He is one of the few handsome birds, too, who can sing, the golden oriole, the scarlet tanager, and the American gold-finch all being remarkable in this respect. The tanager is a solitary bird, and not often seen—scarcely ever out of the woods, and of these he seems to prefer the high, remote ones. But once seen he is not easily forgotten.

"He comes to Pennsylvania about the first of May, and builds his nest soon after. This is very carelessly put together; stalks of broken flax and dry grass are so thinly woven that the little tanagers can see through almost any part of their dwelling. There are three dull-blue eggs, spotted with brown or purple. There is seldom more than one brood raised, and the whole family are off again for the South by the last of August.

"The scarlet tanager is six and a half inches in length, and his plumage is of a brilliant scarlet, except the wings and tail, which are a glossy black; the latter is handsomely forked, and just tipped with white. By the first of August, however, this gor-
orgeous dress is changed, in moulting, for an ugly robe of greenish-yellow, dappled with spots of scarlet; and in this shabby condition he leaves us. Mrs. Tanager is green above and yellow below, the wings and tail a rusty black, edged with green.

"The food of this bird consists of large winged insects—wasps, hornets, and humble-bees; he has also a fondness for huckleberries. 'Among all the birds that inhabit our woods, there is none that strikes the eye of a stranger, or even a native, with so much brilliancy as this. Seen among the green leaves, with the light falling strongly on his plumage, he really appears beautiful. His manners are modest, easy, and inoffensive. He commits no depredations on the property of the husbandman, but rather benefits him by the daily destruction in spring of many noxious insects; and when winter approaches he is no plundering dependant, but seeks in a distant country for that sustenance which the severity of the season denies to his industry in this. He is a striking ornament to our rural scenery, and none of the meanest of our rural songsters.'

"Scarlet tanagers are particularly watchful over their nests while the young are unfledged. If any one approaches one of these domicils, the male keeps at a distance, as if afraid of being seen, while his mate hovers about in the greatest agitation and dis-
When the young ones are able to leave the nest, the father spends much of his time in feeding them, and does not seem then to care about concealment.

"A young tanager that had just left the nest was caught one morning, and put in a cage suspended from a large pine tree, the nest of an orchard oriole, with young ones in it, being quite near the cage. It was supposed that the parent orioles would feed the little stranger, but their charity evidently began and ended at home. The plaintive cries of the poor little orphan made no impression on them; but they were heard for a long distance, for a bright flash of scarlet came darting toward the cage, and a magnificent tanager, probably the little bird's parent, tried its best to get in. Finding this impossible, it flew off only to return with food in its bill; and continued to stuff the young one until after sunset, when it took up its lodging on a higher branch of the same tree.

"Almost at dawn the scarlet tanager was busy again at its office of love; and although the orioles were offensively insolent, it persevered all through the day, and spent the second night as before. On the third or fourth day he seemed in despair at the little one's continued imprisonment, calling to him constantly to come out, and trying every means in his power to set him at liberty."
"Finally, the person who had captured the young bird could stand this no longer, but mounting a ladder opened the cage and took out the prisoner. When the old tanager saw that his beloved charge was free, he uttered the most exulting notes, while the little one chirped his satisfaction; and the two were soon wending their joyful way to the woods."

The children seemed to enjoy this account very much, and were particularly glad that they had really seen the scarlet tanager. They saw, of course, a number of other birds in the woods, and heard some very sweet songs from them, all of which Miss Harson promised to tell them about afterward. But after a little play, and considerable hunting for ferns, of which a very pretty collection was made, and some unsuccessful chases of Malcolm's after squirrels, it became time to think of going home, where they all finally arrived a little tired, but declaring that they had had a delightful day.
CHAPTER XV.

THRUNISHES.

"SOME of the sweetest notes that we heard in the woods," said Miss Harson one evening, "came from the thrushes, of which there are several kinds. The brown thrush, or thrasher (Fig. 12), as he is often called, is the largest of them all, and is a very sweet singer. He is of a bright reddish-brown, the wings crossed with two bars of white, relieved with black. The lower parts are yellowish-white, while the breast and sides under the wings are beautifully marked with long, pointed spots of black in chains. This bird is over eleven inches in length.
"He arrives in Pennsylvania when the cherry trees begin to blossom, and from the tops of hedge-rows or fruit trees he salutes the early morning with his charming song, which is loud enough to be heard half a mile off. His notes are not imitative, but entirely his own, though full of variety. He is very active, generally flying low from one thicket to another, with his long, broad tail spread out like a fan; he often hovers about brier and bramble bushes and along fences; and when his nest is approached he utters a single note or chuck.

"For this nest a thorn-bush, low cedar, thicket of briers, dogwood sapling, or cluster of vines is chosen, according to the situation, a few feet from the ground. The outside is formed of small sticks; then come layers of dry leaves, and lastly a lining of fine, fibrous roots. There are five eggs, pale blue, thickly sprinkled with reddish spots.

"The brown thrush feeds on worms scratched from the ground, caterpillars, and various kinds of berries. Beetles, too, are sure to be devoured whenever he can get them. He is accused of scratching up the hills of Indian corn in planting-time; but if this is true, it is probably done to get at an ugly, black-headed worm that would be far more injurious to the crops if suffered to remain.

"'Watch an old thrush,' says one of his friends,
'pounce down on a lawn moistened with dew and rain. At first he stands motionless, apparently thinking of nothing at all, his eye vacant or with an unmeaning gaze. Suddenly he cocks his ear on one side, makes a glancing sort of dart with his head and neck, gives perhaps one or two hops, and then stops, again listening attentively and his eye glistening with attention and animation; his beak almost touches the ground; he draws back his head as if to make a determined peck. Again he pauses; listens again; hops perhaps once or twice, scarcely moving his position, and pecks smartly on the sod; then is once more motionless as a stuffed bird. But he knows well what he is about; for, after another moment's pause, having ascertained that all is right, he pecks away with might and main, and soon draws out a fine worm, which his fine sense of hearing had informed him was not far off, and which his hops and previous peckings had attracted to the surface to escape the approach of what the poor worm thought might be his underground enemy, the mole.'

"This bird sings well in a cage, and will sometimes utter words distinctly, one having been known to say, 'My dear! my pretty dear! my pretty little dear!' as plainly as possible."

"Oh, do let us have one, Miss Harson!" cried Clara and Edith in great delight.
"We will have several," was the smiling reply, "but I think we will keep them in the woods at present;" and the little girls rather reluctantly agreed that this would be the best way.

"Somebody tells a story of the thrush's powers of reasoning which is really remarkable. This bird had been reared from the nest, and became very tame and docile. 'I frequently let him out of the cage,' says the writer, 'to give him a taste of liberty. After fluttering and dusting himself in dry sand and earth, and bathing, washing, and dressing himself, he would proceed to hunt insects, such as beetles, crickets, and other shelly tribes; but being very fond of wasps, after catching them, and knocking them about to break their wings, he would lay them down, then examine if they had a sting, and with his bill squeeze the abdomen to clear it of the reservoir of poison before he would swallow his prey.

"'When in his cage, being very fond of dry crusts of bread, if upon trial the corners of the crumbs were too hard and sharp for his throat, he would throw them up, carry and put them in his water-dish to soften; then take them out and swallow them. What could the wisest man have done better?'

"The golden-crowned thrush has not much to do with his name, as the upper part of his head is of a brownish-orange rather than gold color. He is only
six inches long, and his prevailing tint is a rich yellow-olive.

"This is also a migratory species, arriving in Pennsylvania late in April, and leaving us again in September. It is altogether an inhabitant of the woods, runs along the ground like a lark, and even along the horizontal branches, frequently moving its tail in the manner of the wagtails. It has no song, but a shrill energetic twitter formed by the rapid reiteration of two notes for a quarter of a minute at a time. It builds a snug, somewhat singular, nest on the ground in the woods, generally on a declivity facing the south. This is formed of leaves and dry grass, and lined with hair. Though sunk below the surface, it is arched over, and only a small hole left for the entrance; the eggs are four in number, sometimes five, white, irregularly spotted with reddish-brown, chiefly near the great end.

"When this bird is alarmed it escapes from the nest with great silence and rapidity, running along the ground like a mouse, as if afraid to tread too heavily on the leaves; if you stop to examine the nest, it also stops, droops its wings, flutters, and tumbles along, as if hardly able to crawl, looking back now and then to see whether you are taking notice of it. If you slowly follow, it leads you fifty or sixty yards off in a direct line from its nest, seeming at every
advance to be gaining fresh strength; and when it thinks it has decoyed you to a sufficient distance, it suddenly wheels off and disappears.

"'This kind of deception is practised by many other species of birds that build on the ground, and is sometimes so adroitly performed as actually to secure the safety of the nest and young.'

"The golden-crowned thrush is frequently complimented by the cow-bird in being selected as a desirable stepmother for her own neglected young ones, and her eggs are more frequently dropped into the thrush's nest than in that of any other bird. The faithful little nurse brings up her foundling with the greatest care, but if given to thinking must be sorely puzzled to know how four or five eggs can dwindle down to one fledgling.

"The hermit thrush (Fig. 13), so called from his solitary and retiring habits, is the sweetest songster of them all. He is seven inches long, of a plain, deep olive-brown on the upper parts, with a cream-colored breast and a throat marked with large brown, pointed spots. He is rarely seen out of the thick recesses of the woods, from whence perfect streams of melody will issue, particularly just before nightfall.

"The nest of the hermit thrush is often made on some horizontal branch, and is composed on the outside of coarse, rooty grass mixed with a fine, thread-
Fig. 13.—The Hermit Thrush.

like grass, perfectly dry, laid circularly and with great neatness. There are four eggs, of a pale greenish-blue, marked with specks and blotches of olive.

"But the most remarkable of all this family," continued Miss Harson, "is the mocking-bird." (Fig. 14.)

"'The mocking-bird!'" repeated Malcolm in astonishment. "Is the mocking-bird a thrush?"

"Yes," was the reply; "one of his names is 'mimic thrush'; and it is not too much to say that 'this celebrated and extraordinary bird, in extent and variety of vocal powers, stands unrivalled by the whole feathered songsters of this or perhaps any other country.' He is found both in North
and South America, and may be traced from New England to Brazil; but he is a somewhat shy bird in the Northern States.

"The mocking-bird is nine and a half inches long, and usually of a dark, brownish ash-color on the upper parts. The wings and tail are nearly black, and many of the feathers in these parts are tipped with white. His proper notes are very much like those of the brown thrush, but they are even sweeter, more rapid, and have greater variety.

"As to his acquired notes, there is no end to them; and he can imitate all other birds so continuously that a bystander would suppose he was listening to the whole feathered tribe at once. He really seems to enjoy displaying his powers, and often deceives the sportsman by sending him in search of birds that may not be within miles of him, but whose notes he exactly imitates; even birds themselves are frequently imposed on by this admirable mimic, and are decoyed by the fancied calls of their mates, or dive with precipitation into the depth of thickets at the scream of what they suppose to be the sparrow-hawk.

"The mocking-bird loses little of the power and energy of his song by confinement. In his domesticated state, when he commences his career of song it is impossible to stand by uninterested. He whistles
for the dog; Cæsar starts up, wags his tail, and runs to meet his master. He squeals out like a hurt chicken; and the hen hurries about with hanging wings and bristled feathers, clucking to protect the injured brood. The barking of the dog, the mewing of the cat, the creaking of a passing wheelbarrow follow with great truth and rapidity. He repeats the tune taught him by his master, though of considerable length, fully and faithfully. He runs over the quiverings of the canary and the clear whistlings of the Virginia nightingale or red-bird with such superior execution and effect that the mortified songsters feel their own inferiority, and become altogether silent; while he seems to triumph in their defeat by redoubling his exertions.

"It is thought by some that the excessive fondness of this bird for mimicry injures his own song. ‘His elevated imitations of the brown thrush are frequently interrupted by the crowing of cocks; and the warblings of the blue-bird, which he manages exquisitely, are mingled with the screaming of swallows or the cackling of hens; amidst the simple melody of the robin we are suddenly surprised by the shrill reiterations of the whip-poor-will; while the notes of the killdeer, blue jay, martin, Baltimore, and twenty others succeed with such imposing reality that we look round for the originals, and discover with aston-
ishment that the sole performer in this singular concer
cent is the admirable bird now before us.'

"A solitary thorn-bush, an almost impenetrable thicket, an orange tree, cedar or holly bush are fre-
quently selected for the nest of the mocking-bird. 'It is no great objection with him that these happen sometimes to be near the farm- or mansion-house; always ready to defend, but not over-anxious to con-
ceal, his nest, he very often builds within a small dis-
tance of the house, and not unfrequently in a pear or apple tree; rarely at a greater height than six or seven feet from the ground.'

"Dry twigs and sticks form the outside of the nest; then withered tops of weeds of the preceding year, intermixed with fine straws, hay, pieces of wool and tow; and, lastly, a thick layer of fine, fibrous roots, of a light-brown color, lines the whole. There are four or five pale-blue eggs, marked with large blotches of brown.

"The food of the mocking-bird is chiefly persim-
mons, grapes, and berries of various kinds, particu-
larly those of the English ivy. Some one says: 'We have an ancient plant adhering to the wall of the house, covering many yards of surface; this vine is very fruitful, and here many would feed and lodge during the winter, and in very severe cold weather sit on the top of the chimney to warm themselves.'"
CHAPTER XVI.

A TRIO OF BEAUTIFUL BIRDS.

The children were gathered around the great volume of Audubon to look at a bird to which Miss Harson had called their attention, and which they unhesitatingly pronounced to be a canary. Its color was a rich lemon-yellow, with black wings and tail, and it was about four and a half inches long.

"It is isn't exactly a canary, either," said Malcolm, studying it attentively; "there's too much black in the wings and tail."

"It is not a canary at all," replied the governess, "but the American goldfinch, which resembles the canary in many respects, and really belongs to the same species, as the latter is called the canary finch. The goldfinch of Britain is very much like our own, and both are fine singers.

"The goldfinches arrive early in the spring, and until they build they are seen in flocks, frequently assembling in great numbers on the same tree to bask and dress themselves in the morning sun, singing in concert for half an hour together, the confused
mingling of their notes forming a kind of harmony not at all unpleasant.'

"During the summer, goldfinches are frequently seen in the garden searching for seeds, of which they are extremely fond; and their manner of getting them from the husks, often hanging head downward while engaged in this way, is very ingenious. They have a particular fancy for thistle-seeds, and for this reason they are often called thistle-finches. The gardeners revenge themselves for their raids upon the lettuce and other marketable stuff's by catching them in trap-cages and selling them in the city markets.

"Audubon says: 'In ascending along the shores of the Mohawk River I have met more of these pretty birds in the course of a day's walk than anywhere else; and wherever a thistle was to be seen, along either bank of the New York Canal, it was ornamented with one or more goldfinches. They tear up the down and petals of the ripening flowers with ease: leaning downward upon them, they eat off the seed, and allow the down to float in the air. The remarkable plumage of the male, as well as its song, is at this season very agreeable; and so familiar are these birds that they suffer you to approach within a few yards before they leave the plant on which they are seated,'
"These birds build a very neat and delicately-formed little nest, which they fasten to the twigs of an apple tree or to the strong, branching stalks of hemp, covering it on the outside with pieces of lichen, which they find on the trees and fences; these they glue together with their saliva, and afterward line the inside with the softest downy substances they can procure. There are five eggs of a dull white, thickly marked at the greater end.

"The goldfinch is easily tamed, and has been known to live many years in a cage. The birds often undergo very cruel discipline, like the canaries, to make them perform many surprising tricks. 'One was taught to draw water for its drink from a glass, having a little chain attached to a narrow belt of soft leather fastened around its body, and another equally light chain fastened to a little bucket kept by its weight in the water until the little fellow raised it up with his bill, placed a foot upon it, and pulled again at the chain until it reached the desired fluid and drank; when, on letting go, the bucket immediately fell into the glass below. In the same manner it was obliged to draw toward its bill a little chariot filled with seeds, and in this distressing occupation was doomed to toil through a life of solitary grief, separated from its companions, who were wantoning on the wild flowers and procuring
their food in the manner which Nature had taught them.'

"These birds are said to be so fond of each other's company that a party of them soaring on the wing will alter their course at the calling of a single one perched on a tree. 'This call is uttered with much emphasis; the bird prolongs its usual note without much alteration; and as the party approaches erects its body and moves to the right and left, as if turning on a pivot, apparently pleased at showing the beauty of its plumage and elegance of its manners.'

"It is probably this very fondness for society that has caused the goldfinch to be accused of vanity; and so strong is the belief in its self-admiration that persons who keep it in confinement frequently place a small looking-glass in its cage! But the truth probably is, that the poor bird is pleased with its own reflection, because it mistakes this shadow for the presence of a companion.

"A lady once kept in a cage a goldfinch which never saw her depart but he made an effort to follow her, and welcomed her return with every mark of delight, testifying his pleasure by all sorts of winning gestures. He caressed her finger with low and joyous murmurs; but if any other finger than that of his mistress was offered, he pecked it sharply, and if hers and that of another person were put together
into the cage, he always distinguished hers, and gave it every mark of preference."

"Here is another rich-plumaged bird," continued Miss Harson, as they turned again to the pictures. "Notice the beautiful sky-blue tinge which deepens on the head to ultramarine, with a tinge of purple; while the color of the body, tail, and wings varies in some lights to the exquisite shades on the breast of the peacock. The wings and tail, you see, are black, edged with light blue. This is the indigo-bird, one of our most showy summer visitors.

"This bird is only five inches long, and builds his nest in a low bush, among rank grass, grain, or clover, suspended by two twigs, one passing up each side: and it is composed outwardly of flax and lined with fine dry grass. Sometimes its nest is found in the hollow of an apple tree. There are five blue eggs, with a blotch of purple at the great end.

"The indigo-bird is seen about gardens, fields of deep clover, the borders of woods, and roadsides, where it is frequently perched on the fences. 'In its manners it is extremely active and neat, and is a vigorous and pretty good songster. It mounts to the highest top of a large tree, and chants for half an hour at a time. Its song is not one continued strain, but a repetition of short notes, commencing loud and
rapid, and falling by almost imperceptible gradations for six or eight seconds, till they seem hardly articulate, as if the little minstrel were quite exhausted; and after a pause of half a minute, or less, it commences again as before.'

"One advantage in his song is that it is continual, and not reserved only for particular times of day or early in the season. 'Some of our birds sing only in spring, and then chiefly in the morning, being comparatively mute during the heat of noon; but the indigo-bird chants with as much animation under the meridian sun in the month of July as in the month of May, and continues his song occasionally to the middle or end of August.' He is supposed to spend the winter in Mexico.

"The summer red-bird is another tropical visitor. His color is a rich vermilion, the wings tipped with dusky brown, and he is a little over seven inches long, with a bill large in proportion to his size. 'The note of the male is a strong and sonorous whistle, resembling a loose trill or shake on the notes of a fife, frequently repeated; that of the female is rather a kind of chattering, approaching nearly to the rapid pronunciation of chick, tucky-tuck, chick, tucky-tuck, when she sees any person approaching the neighborhood of her nest. She is,
however, rarely seen, and usually mute, and scarcely to be distinguished from the color of the foliage at a distance; while the loquacity and brilliant red of the male make him very conspicuous; and when seen among the green leaves, particularly if the light falls strongly on his plumage, he has a most beautiful and elegant appearance.

"'It is worthy of remark that the females of almost all our splendid feathered birds are dressed in plain and often obscure colors, as if Providence meant to favor their personal concealment, and consequently that of their nest and young, from the depredations of birds of prey; while among the latter, such as eagles, owls, hawks, which are under no such apprehension, the females are uniformly covered with richer-colored plumage than the males.'

"The nest of the red-bird is made in the woods, usually on the horizontal branch of an evergreen, about ten or twelve feet from the ground; the materials are broken stalks of dry flax, lined with fine grass, and there are three light-blue eggs. The family leave for the South about the middle of August, after a stay of less than four months."
CHAPTER XVII.

A WINGED FLOWER.

It was a warm day in June, and Malcolm, the irrepressible, had gone butterfly-hunting, armed with a scoop-net and a large straw hat. Such beauties as he almost caught! and such a chase as they led him over fences and through briers, now poising just under his very nose, and then off again just as he made a pounce!

He was very much heated, and rather cross at his frequent disappointments; but suddenly he gave a scream of delight. The net enclosed an unexpected treasure, and he bore his prize in triumph to Miss Harson.

It was not a butterfly this time, but a humming-bird—a beautiful, sparkling little creature, scarcely larger than a humble-bee, that looked like a cluster of jewels or a winged flower. But, alas! when Malcolm displayed his prize there it lay at the bottom of the net, stiff and evidently dead, killed by the fright of being captured.

"There?" exclaimed the young hunter angrily,
"look at that, will you? It's just died out of sheer spite!"

"Poor little wee birdie!" said Miss Harson as she carefully disengaged it from the net; "it has been so frightened. It may not be quite dead."

Scarcely had these words been uttered when the small prisoner spread his wings and was off like a flash, to the intense amazement of the little group around him.

Malcolm sat down disgusted on a step of the veranda. "It's rather crushing," said he presently, "to be fooled by a humming-bird!"

Miss Harson could not help laughing at his injured tone: "That is an old trick, Malcolm, of Mr. 'Lock-of-the-Sun,' as the Indians call him, and the only defence the poor little fellow has against such formidable enemies as yourself. But he certainly did that very well; he took us all in. You look warm and tired; how many butterflies did you catch?"

"Just enough to keep the humming-birds in countenance," was the stoical reply.

"Won't you tell us about humming-birds, Miss Harson?" asked the little girls, who had been quite speechless from astonishment.

"If Malcolm does not dislike the subject too much," replied the governess, smiling. "When you come to think of it, if your captive had not
given you the slip, you would have been rather puzzled to know what to do with him."

"Of course I should have let him go," said the boy magnanimously, "after I'd had a good look at him; but he might have stayed long enough for that, after all the trouble I had in catching him."

"For which he was not in the least grateful," continued Miss Harson, "as he would much prefer being let alone. But here is our Audubon, with so many different portraits of him, and all so true to the original, that you cannot fail to become thoroughly acquainted with him. He seems to be the connecting link between birds and insects, being the least of all feathered creatures."

The children exclaimed for some time over the beauty of the pictures; it seemed as if such gorgeous tints could never be found on any living thing; but their governess assured them that it was only while the bird was living that it wore this brilliant gloss, stuffed birds being always more or less faded.

"There are many different varieties of humming-birds," she continued, "and they are found both in North and South America and the West Indies; but the specimen brought by Malcolm, and the only kind ever found in this region, is known as the ruby humming-bird. (Front Fig. 5.) He is only three and a half inches long; the whole back, upper part of the
neck, sides under the wings, tail-coverts, and two middle feathers of the tail are of a rich, golden green; the tail is forked, and, as well as the wings, of a deep brownish-purple. The lower part of the breast is dusky white, mixed with green; but what constitutes the chief ornament of this little bird is 'the splendor of the feathers of his throat, which when placed in a proper position glow with all the brilliancy of the ruby. These feathers are of singular strength and texture, lying close together, like scales, and vary, when moved before the eye, from a deep black to a fiery crimson and burning orange.'

"The tongue of this little creature has been compared to the section of a silken thread, and his bill to a fine needle. The little eyes appear like sparks of a diamond, and the feathers of the wings are so delicate as to appear transparent. The feet are so small that they can scarcely be seen at a little distance. He uses them but little, for he is constantly employed in a humming and rapid flutter, in which the agitation of his wings is so quick that they are nearly invisible. The feathers of the wings are stiff and in a state of incessant vibration; this makes the noise from which the birds derive their name.

"The humming-bird is usually represented in pictures with his bill in the mouth of a tubular flower, the trumpet-flower being an especial favorite with
him. When arrived before a thicket of these that are full blown, he poises or suspends himself on wing for the space of two or three seconds, so steadily that his wings become invisible or only like a mist; and you can plainly distinguish the pupil of his eye looking round with great quickness and circumspection; the glossy golden green of his back and the fire of his throat, dazzling in the sun, form altogether a most interesting appearance.

"When he alights, which is frequently, he always prefers the small dead twigs of a tree or bush, where he dresses and arranges his plumage with great dexterity. His only note is a single chirp—not louder than that of a small cricket or grasshopper—generally uttered while passing from flower to flower or when engaged in fight with his fellows; for when two males meet at the same bush or flower a battle instantly takes place, and the combatants ascend in the air, chirping, darting, and circling round each other, till the eye is no longer able to follow them. The conqueror, however, generally returns to the place to reap the fruits of his victory.'

"These fairy-like creatures, sometimes called the 'jewels of ornithology,' usually arrive here the last of April, and early in May they build a tiny and most perfect specimen of bird architecture. This little, thimble-like nest is about an inch around, and
as much in depth. It is not easily seen, being covered with lichens of the same style and color as those on the branch where it is fastened; and it is remarkable that these lichens are never turned the wrong way, but are placed on the nest just as they grew on the branches. These lichens are glued on with the saliva of the bird; and within this are thick matted layers of the fine wings of various flying seeds, closely laid together; and, lastly, the downy substance of the mullein and stalks of the common fern line the whole. The bottom of the nest goes around the stem of the branch, to which it closely adheres, and when seen from below it looks like a mossy knot of the tree.

"The little mother-bird builds the nest, while her partner supplies her with the necessary materials. Two exquisite little eggs, like round pearls and about the size of a pea, are jealously guarded by the small proprietors, who dart around with a humming sound if any one approaches their residence, often within a few inches of the intruder.

"The flight of the humming-bird from flower to flower greatly resembles that of a bee, but is so much more rapid that the latter appears a mere loiterer to him. He poises himself on wing while he thrusts his long, slender, tubular tongue into the flowers in search of food. He sometimes enters a room by the window, examines the bouquets of flowers, and passes out by
the opposite door or window. He has been known to take refuge in a hothouse during the cool nights of autumn, to go regularly out in the morning, and to return as regularly in the evening for several days together.'

'Then the morning dawns, and the blest sun again Lifts his red glories from the eastern main, Then through our woodbines, wet with glittering dews, The flower-fed humming-bird his round pursues; Sips, with inserted tube, the honeyed blooms, And chirps his gratitude as round he roams; While richest roses, though in crimson drest, Shrink from the splendor of his gorgeous breast. What heavenly tints in mingling radiance fly! Each rapid movement gives a different dye; Like scales of burnished gold they dazzling show— Now sink to shade, now like a furnace glow!'

"This charming little bird, however, is not exactly 'flower-fed,' as it has been proved that the juice which he scoops from the flowers with the natural pair of spoons furnished by his bill is taken more in the way of drink than food. A vast amount of spiders and other insects is required for the nourishment of this 'living gem,' and a few privileged people have been able to watch him in the very act of catching and devouring his prey.

"One of these says: 'I caught Mr. Ruby in the
very act of abstracting a small spider with the point of his long beak from the centre of one of those beautiful circular webs of the garden spider that so abound through the South. The thing was done so daintily that he did not stir the dewdrops, which, now glittering in the golden sun, revealed the gossamer tracery all diamond-hung. Our presence did not disturb him in the least, and we watched him catching spiders for half an hour; he frequently came within two feet of our faces, and we could distinctly see him pluck the little spider from the centre of its wheel where it lies, and swallow it entire.'

"Sometimes the humming-bird ventures into the spider's web in search of entangled flies, which he also devours; and it is very interesting to watch his manoeuvres. He approaches cautiously from beneath, and so enters the various labyrinths and cells, but as nice, tender flies are very dear to the heart of a large spider, he will not tamely submit to this despoiling of his larder, and Ruby has often been obliged to retreat on the very eve of a feast.

"Then he would shoot off like a sunbeam, and could only be traced by the luminous glow of his resplendent colors. The bird generally spent about ten minutes in this predatory excursion, and then alighted on a branch to rest and refresh himself, presenting to the sun his crimson star-like breast, which
then represented all the glowing fire of the ruby and surpassed in lustre the diadem of monarchs.'

"It is marvellous to see anything so diminutive with such fighting propensities as these little creatures display; and whether among themselves, or with enemies ten and twenty times their size, their voice is still for war. They have been known to attack and tease the king-bird, and even to put the eagle himself to flight by pecking at his head, and after this descend to a duel with a humble-bee, that was also vanquished.

"It is not so difficult to capture humming-birds as it is to keep them after they are captured.—There really was no personal allusion intended, Malcolm," continued Miss Harson, smiling at her pupil's comical expression; "I was merely recalling the experience of those who have tried to keep them permanently. They are such delicate little creatures that they cannot bear confinement; and I am sure you would not have liked such an end as this for your little captive: 'At my first attempt I transferred such as I succeeded in bringing alive to cages immediately on their arrival at the house; but though they did not beat themselves, they soon sank under the confinement. Suddenly they would fall to the floor of the cage, and lie motionless with closed eyes; if taken into the hand, they would perhaps seem to
revive for a few moments; then throw back the pretty head, or toss it to and fro as if in great suffering, expand the wings, open the eyes, slightly puff up the feathers of the breast, and die, usually without any convulsive struggle.'"

"I'm glad it went," said Malcolm suddenly, referring to the bird that had flown. This account was almost more than he could endure.

"The nest of a humming-bird," said Miss Harson, "was once taken when the young ones were about fifteen or twenty days old, and placed in a cage in a chamber window, to which the parent-birds came regularly every hour in the day and fed their brood. Soon they became so tame that they stayed altogether, taking up their residence from pure choice with their little ones. All four would come and perch on their master's hand, chirruping as in a state of freedom. They were fed with a fine clear paste made of biscuit, sugar, and wine. They thrust their tongues into this compound until they had had enough, and then they fluttered and chirruped about the room. It was a beautiful sight to see the tiny, brilliant creatures flying in and out as they pleased, but obeying the voice of their master whenever he called them. They lived in this way for more than six months; and just when their owner expected to see a new colony, he unfortunately forgot to tie up
their cage to the ceiling at night to preserve them from the rats, and in the morning the birds were all devoured."

"Why didn't they have cats there?" asked Clara, indignant at the sad fate of the humming-bird family.

"I am afraid that would not have mended matters much," replied her governess, "as cats are proverbially fond of birds in the way that the cannibal loves his fellow-men. To keep humming-birds for any length of time seems utterly impossible; and one who knows says: 'There is no possibility of taming birds so tender; no food could be had, by human industry, sufficiently delicate to supply the place of the nectar which they gather in their wild state. Some have been kept alive for a few weeks by syrups; but this nourishment, fine as it seems, must be gross when compared with what is commonly gathered by these little flutterers among the flowers.'

"Audubon tells us that they have a particular liking for such flowers as are shaped like a tube. The common jimson-weed, or thorn-apple, and the trumpet-flower, are most favored by their attentions, and after these the honeysuckle, the garden balsam, and the wild species that grows on the borders of ponds, rivulets, and deep ravines; but every flower, down to the wild violet, affords them a certain amount of nourishment. Their food consists prin-
cipally of insects, generally of beetles, these, together with some small flies, being often found in their stomachs. The first are procured within the flowers; the latter are generally taken on the wing. The humming-bird may therefore be looked upon as an expert fly-catcher.

"There are about one hundred different kinds of humming-birds, and the smallest is scarcely a quarter of an inch in length, being less than many of our bees. The Indian name of 'Sunbeam' or 'Lock-of-the-Sun' is most appropriate for these living jewels; and the smaller kinds are worn as ear-rings by the Indian maidens. Great quantities of them are killed in Mexico and South America for the brilliancy of their colors; and the Indians catch them by covering a twig with some sticky substance and holding this near the flower about which they are fluttering. They alight on the twig unsuspiciously, and, finding themselves unable to leave it, very soon die. 'The ancient Mexicans used this beautiful plumage to decorate their state robes, and the royal mantles, composed almost entirely of these resplendent plumes, must have presented a mass of glowing magnificence which no imperial robe of the present day could even approach, and whose refulgence the eye could scarcely support.'

"So you see that the very beauty of this insect-
like bird leads to its destruction, which is still practised at the present day, as well as that of other bright-plumaged birds, for the adornment of ladies' hats, to such a degree that it is feared these beautiful winged-flowers will soon be seen no more.

"Very beautiful collections of stuffed humming-birds have been made, embracing all the varieties, and seemingly as natural as in life. But when we know that 'each feather-fibre is charged with several tints according to the direction of the light, and thus when the bird is living each respiration causes every imaginable color to flash from every feather and fibre until the little bird appears to be bathed in resplendent living light,' we feel that the bloom of this beauty has departed with the breath that gave it life.

"Now I will read you a little poem on the humming-bird, which you may commit to memory some day and repeat to me:

'THE HUMMING-BIRD.
'The humming-bird, the humming-bird,
   So fairy-like and bright;
   It lives among the sunny flowers,
   A creature of delight.

 'In the radiant islands of the East,
   Where fragrant spices grow,
A thousand thousand humming-birds
Are glancing to and fro.

'Like living fires they flit about,
Scarce larger than a bee,
Among the dusk palmetto leaves
And through the fan-palm tree.

'And in the wild and verdant woods,
Where stately moras tower—
Where hangs from branching tree to tree
The scarlet passion-flower—

'Where, on the mighty river-banks,
La Plate or Amazon,
The cayman, like a fallen tree,
Lies basking in the sun—

'There builds her nest the humming-bird
Within the ancient wood,
Her nest of silky cotton down,
And rears her tiny brood.

'She hangs it to a slender twig,
Where waves it light and free,
As the campanero tolls his song,
And rocks the mighty tree.

'All crimson is her shining breast,
Like to the red, red rose;
Her wing the changeful green and blue
That the neck of the peacock shows.
'Thou happy, happy humming-bird!
   No winter round thee lowers,
Thou never saw'st a leafless tree,
   Nor land without sweet flowers!

'A reign of summer joyfulness
   To thee for life is given:
Thy food, the honey in the flower,
   Thy drink, the dew from heaven.'"
CHAPTER XVIII.

HAWKS.

THE Elmridge chickens were usually in a very prosperous condition, and there were such numerous broods of them that the children were constantly running to the poultry-yard to admire some fresh arrivals, that looked more like plump balls of down than anything else. But lately these living balls had been disappearing at quite a rapid rate, and Patrick complained bitterly of the hawks, which gobbled them up, he said, without so much as "by your lave." This did not sound very logical to his hearers, who could not fancy a bird of prey stopping to be polite or getting Patrick's "lave" to swallow the chickens, if he asked for it ever so much. Such vengeance, however, was vowed against the hawks, who were represented as the most utterly depraved of all the feathered tribe, that the little Kyles became curious to know what they really were like; and Miss Harson agreed to give them a bird-talk on the subject.

"It is quite a jump," said she, "from humming-
birds to hawks, but the latter are a large and interesting class of birds, and there was some danger of our forgetting them."

"Are they interesting?" asked Clara in surprise. "Patrick says they are horrid."

"They are not interesting like the humming-birds," replied her governess, "in being tiny and beautiful, and they certainly do make sad havoc among the chickens; but we shall find them well worth studying. There are several different kinds of hawks, which all have their own particular name, but the object of Patrick's indignation is known as the sparrow-hawk, from his fondness for small birds. He is ten or eleven inches long, and of a reddish-brown color, curiously streaked with black, while seven spots of black on a white ground surround the head. The lower parts are yellowish-white streaked with brown. The female is larger and handsomer than the male, as is the case among birds of prey, to which class the sparrow-hawk belongs. (Fig. 15.)

"'The habits and manners of this bird are well known. It flies rather irregularly, occasionally suspending itself in the air, hovering over a particular spot for a minute or two, and then shooting off in another direction. It perches on the top of a dead tree or pole in the middle of a field or meadow, and
as it alights shuts its long wings so suddenly that they seem instantly to disappear. It sits here in an almost perpendicular position, sometimes for an hour at a time, frequently jerking its tail, and reconnoitring the ground below in every direction for mice, lizards, and such like. It approaches the farm-house, particularly in the morning, skulking about the barnyard for mice or young chickens.

"'It frequently plunges into a thicket after small birds, as if by random, but always with a particular, and generally a fatal, aim. One day I observed a bird of this species perched on the highest top of a large poplar on the skirts of the wood, and was in the act of raising the gun to my eye when he swept down with the rapidity of an arrow into a thicket of briers about thirty yards off, where I shot him dead, and on coming up found the small field-sparrow quivering in his grasp. Both our aims had been taken in the same instant, and, unfortunately for him, both were fatal.'

"The sparrow-hawk is frequently found watching along hedge-rows for small birds; but when grasshoppers are plentiful he devotes much of his attention to them. These are varied by small snakes, mice, and lizards.

"The nest of this bird is usually built in a hollow tree where the top or a large limb has been broken
off. There are four or five eggs of a light brownish-yellow color, spotted with a darker tint.

"Many stories are told of the sparrow-hawk's audacity, which is said to exceed that of any of the hawk tribe. One of them was seen to pursue a pigeon straight through the glass of a drawing-room window, and out at the other end of the house through another window, never even slackening its speed at the rattling of the broken glass from the two windows. At another time, in the same drawing-room, a sparrow-hawk was found deliberately standing on a very large pouter pigeon lying on the floor, engaged in plucking it, having entered in pursuit of the unfortunate bird through an open window, and killed him in the room.

"A pleasanter story is told of one of these birds that became domesticated with some pigeons. When the pigeons came to feed from their master's hand—which they frequently did—the hawk would appear among them. At first, the pigeons were decidedly shy of their strange companion, but by degrees they got over their fears, and ate their food as placidly as if their natural enemy had been one of themselves. It was curious, too, to see the playfulness of the hawk and his perfect good-nature during the distribution; for he received his morsel of meat without any of that ferocity with which birds of prey usually take
their food, and merely uttered a cry of lamentation when the carver disappeared.

"He would then accompany the pigeons in their flight round the house and gardens, and perch with them on the chimney-top or roof of the mansion; and never failed to do so early in the morning, when the pigeons always took their exercise. At night he retired with them to the dove-cote; and although for some days he was the sole occupant of the place, the pigeons not approving of his society at first, he was afterward a welcome guest there, for he never disturbed them, even when the young ones, in their helpless, unfledged state, offered a strong temptation to his appetite.

"He really seemed unhappy at any separation from the pigeons, and invariably returned to the dove-cote after a few days' purposed confinement in another abode, during which he would utter most melancholy cries for deliverance; but these were changed to cries of joy on the arrival of any person with whom he was familiar.

"The sparrow-hawk is said to be easily tamed if taken when young, and becomes quite affectionate. It is also useful in driving away or destroying the small birds that injure the seeds and fruit in a garden. Audubon says: 'No bird can be more easily raised and kept than this beautiful hawk. I once
found a young male that had dropped from the nest before it was able to fly. Its cries for food attracted my notice, and I discovered it lying near a log. It was large and covered with soft white down, through which the young feathers protruded. Its little blue bill and great gray eyes made it look not unlike an owl. I took it home, named it Nero, and provided it with small birds, at which it would scramble fiercely, although yet unable to tear their flesh, in which I assisted it.

"In a few weeks it grew very beautiful, and became so voracious, requiring a great number of birds daily, that I turned it out to see how it would shift for itself. This proved a gratification to both of us; it soon hunted for grasshoppers and other insects; and on returning from my walks I now and then threw a dead bird high in air, which it never failed to receive from its stand, and toward which it launched with such quickness as sometimes to catch it before it fell to the ground.

"The little fellow attracted the notice of his brothers, brought up hard by, who, accompanied by their parents, at first gave it chase and forced it to take refuge behind one of the window-shutters, where it usually passed the night; but they soon became gentler toward it, as if forgiving its desertion.

"To the last he continued kind to me, and never
failed to return at night to his favorite resort behind the window-shutter. His courageous disposition often amused the family, as he would sail off from his stand and fall on the back of a tame duck, which, setting up a loud quack, would waddle off in great alarm with the hawk sticking to her.

"'But, as has often happened to adventurers of a similar spirit, his audacity cost him his life. A hen and her brood chanced to attract his notice, and he flew to secure one of the chickens, but met one whose parental affection inspired her with a courage greater than his own. The conflict, which was severe, ended the adventures of poor Nero.'"

"I wish Patrick could hear all that," said Clara when the account of the sparrow-hawk was finished. "I think hawks are nice, instead of being horrid."

"I am afraid you would change your mind," replied Miss Harson, "if they ate your chickens; and I am quite sure that we could not make Patrick change his. But there are more hawks to be considered yet, and among these the night-hawk is perhaps the best known. This bird makes his appearance in Pennsylvania about the last of April, and probably derives his name from his habit of flying chiefly in the evening. For this reason he is called a bat in the Southern States.

"'The night-hawk is a bird of strong and vigorous
flight, and of great volume of wing. It often visits the city, darting and squeaking over the streets at a great height, diving perpendicularly with a hollow sound resembling that produced by blowing strongly into the bunghole of an empty hogshead. I have also seen these birds sitting on chimney-tops in some of the most busy parts of the city, occasionally uttering their common note.'

"The most absurd thing about this bird is its building no nest, and yet expecting to protect its eggs. The spot fixed on for laying is sometimes an open space in the woods, frequently in a ploughed field or in the corner of a corn-field. The eggs are placed on the bare ground, and in a dry situation, where the color of the leaves, ground, stones, or other parts of the surface may resemble the general tint of the eggs, so that they will not be easily seen. There are usually two oblong eggs, of a dirty bluish-white, and marked with numerous blotches of dark olive-brown.

"Both male and female are to be found constantly in the neighborhood of this spot, but they are seldom seen together, and are almost always on separate trees. The male has a curious habit of precipitating himself, head downward, upon any one who approaches this retirement; and this is the position in which he usually has his portraits taken."
"The night-hawk seems particularly partial to wet and gloomy weather, as he is then sure to be abroad by day as well as by night, and is seen darting about in the air in all directions, making frequent short, sudden turnings, as if busily engaged in catching insects. Another peculiarity is his habit of opening his mouth to its widest stretch when wounded or captured.

"This hawk is nine and a half inches long, and its general color is a blackish-brown, sprinkled in some parts with small spots and streaks of pale cream-color and red; in other places there are bars of white and brownish-black.

"The well-known whip-poor-will is only another species of night-hawk, and gets his name from the singular sounds which he utters with such emphasis that they seem like a repetition of these words. 'The notes of this solitary bird, from the ideas which are naturally associated with them, seem like the voice of an old friend, and are listened to by almost all with great interest. At first they issue from some retired part of the woods, the glen, or mountain; in a few evenings, perhaps, we hear them from the adjoining coppice, the garden fence, the road before the door, and even from the roof of the dwelling-house, long after the family have retired to rest. Some of the more ignorant and superstitious consider this near approach as foreboding no good to the family
—nothing less than sickness, misfortune, or death to some of its members. These visits, however, so often occur without any bad consequences that this superstitious dread seems on the decline.

"The whip-poor-will is about the size of the night-hawk, and is distinguished by 'an extravagantly large mouth,' although it seems to take in nothing larger than moths, grasshoppers, ants, and such insects as frequent the bark of old rotten and decaying timber. It is also expert in darting after winged insects.

"The eggs of this bird are deposited on the ground, after the manner of the night-hawk, without the slightest appearance of a nest being visible. There are two, shaped like those of the night-hawk, but darker in color and more thickly marbled with olive.

"Some one says: 'In traversing the woods one day in the early part of June, along the brow of a rocky declivity, a whip-poor-will rose from my feet and fluttered along, sometimes prostrating herself, and beating the ground with her wings as if just expiring. Aware of her purpose, I stood still and began to examine the space immediately around me for the eggs or young, one or other of which I was certain must be near. After a long search I could find neither, and was just going to abandon the spot when I perceived somewhat like a slight mouldiness among the withered leaves, and on stooping down discovered
it to be a young whip-poor-will seemingly asleep, as its eyelids were nearly closed, or perhaps this might only be to protect its tender eyes from the glare of day. I sat down by it on the leaves, and drew it as it then appeared. It was probably not a week old. All the while I was thus engaged it neither moved its body nor opened its eyes more than half, and I left it as I found it. After I had walked about a quarter of a mile from the spot, recollecting that I had left a pencil behind, I returned and found my pencil, but the young bird was gone.'

"The whip-poor-will is often mistaken for the night-hawk, but they are said to be very different birds, and do not even associate together. The strange notes of the former become more rapid and incessant when several males meet, as though each were striving to outdo the other. They generally fly low, not more than a few feet from the ground, skimming about the house and before the door, alighting on the wood-pile or settling on the roof. Toward midnight they generally become silent, unless in clear moonlight, when they are heard with little intermission till morning. If there is a creek near, with high, steep, bushy banks, the whip-poor-wills are sure to be found there. During the day they sit in the most retired, solitary, and deep-shaded parts of the woods, generally on high ground, where they repose in silence."
"Why didn’t we see one when we went to the woods?" asked little Edith. "I wish we had."

"We did not go to any place where they would be likely to come," replied Miss Harson. "Our part of the woods was too open and cheerful for these strange birds, who, like the owls, do not see well in the daytime, and seem to prefer dark, quiet places.

"Another member of this strange family is only found in the Southern States, and bears the singular name of chuck-will’s-widow (Fig. 16), because in sound and articulation it seems plainly to express these words, pronouncing each syllable leisurely and distinctly, putting the principal emphasis on the last
word. In a still evening it may be heard at the distance of a nearly a mile, the tones of its voice being stronger and more full than those of the whip-poor-will, who utters his with much greater rapidity.'

"The fish-hawk, or osprey (Front. Fig. 2), is much larger than the other species, being fully twenty-two inches long, and is usually found on the sea-coast and along the banks of large rivers. As its name implies, it is an expert fisher, and 'subsists altogether on the finny tribes that swarm in our bays, creeks, and rivers, procuring its prey by its own active skill and industry, and seeming no further dependent on the land than as a mere resting-place, or in the usual season a spot of deposit for its nests, eggs, and young.'

"This bird is of a deep-brown color, varied with black and white, and his legs and feet are unusually large and strong, being covered with flat scales of remarkable strength and thickness, resembling, when dry, the teeth of a large rasp, particularly on the soles, and are intended, no doubt, to enable him to grasp his slippery prey with more security.

"'The first appearance of the fish-hawk in spring is welcomed by the fishermen as the happy signal of the approach of those vast shoals of herring, shad, etc. that regularly arrive on our coasts and enter our rivers in such prodigious multitudes. Two of a trade, it is said, seldom agree; the adage, however, will not
hold in the present case, for such is the respect paid to the fish-hawk, not only by this class of men generally, but by the whole neighborhood where it resides, that a person who should attempt to shoot one of them would stand a fair chance of being insulted.'

"'It is amusing to watch this bird in his fishing manoeuvres. On leaving his nest he steers directly for the water; then sails around in easy curving lines that are very graceful, sometimes turning in the air as on a pivot, without the least exertion, as he seldom moves his wings, and his legs are extended in a straight line behind. Sometimes he is gliding through the air in this easy way at a height of two hundred feet or more above the water, all the while calmly examining the surface below. Suddenly he is seen to check his course as if struck by a particular object, which he seems to survey for a few moments with such steadiness that he appears fixed in air, flapping his wings. This object, however, he abandons, or rather the fish he had in his eye has disappeared, and he is again seen sailing round as before.

"'Now he again sees something, and he descends with great rapidity, but before he touches the water he shoots off on another course, as if ashamed that a second victim has escaped him. He now sails at a short height above the surface, and by a zigzag
descent, and without seeming to dip his feet in the water, seizes a fish, which, after carrying a short distance, he probably drops or yields up to the bald eagle, and again ascends, by easy, spiral circles, to the higher regions of the air, where he glides about in all the ease and majesty of his species. At once, from this sublime aërial height, he descends like a perpendicular torrent, plunging into the sea with a loud, rushing sound, and with the certainty of a rifle.

"'In a few moments he emerges, bearing in his claws his struggling prey, which he always carries head foremost, and having risen a few feet above the surface, shakes himself as a water-spaniel would do, and directs his heavy and laborious course directly for the land. If the wind blows hard, and his nest lies in the quarter from whence it comes, it is amusing to observe with what judgment and exertion he beats to windward, not in a direct line, but making several successive tacks to gain his purpose. This will appear the more striking when we consider the size of the fish he sometimes bears along. A shad was taken from a fish-hawk who had already eaten a considerable portion of it, and the remainder weighed six pounds.'"

"I'd like to see him fishing," said Malcolm with much interest. "What queer things birds do!"
"The more we study them," replied his governess, "and animals as well, the more surprised we are at the similarity of their tastes and habits, in many respects, with those of human beings.

"The nest of the fish-hawk is usually built on the top of a dead or decaying tree, sometimes at a great height from the ground. It consists externally of large sticks, an inch and a half around and two or three feet in length, piled to the height of four or five feet and from two to three feet in breadth; these are intermixed with corn-stalks, sea-weed, pieces of wet turf in large quantities, mullein-stalks, and lined with dry sea-grass; the whole forming a mass that can be seen half a mile off, and large enough to fill a cart. There are usually three eggs, rather larger than hens' eggs, and very much the same shape. The color is nearly white, with a reddish tinge, splashed all over with dark brown.

"The fishermen are supposed to hail the appearance of this curious bird in such lines as these:

'The osprey sails above the sound;
The geese are gone, the gulls are flying;
The herring-shoals swim thick around;
The nets are launched, the boats are plying.

'She brings us fish—she brings us spring,
Good times, fair weather, warmth, and plenty,
Fine store of shad, trout, herring, ling,
Sheepshead, and drum, and old-wives dainty.

'She rears her young on yonder tree;
She leaves her faithful mate to mind 'em;
Like us, for fish she sails to sea,
And, plunging, shows us where to find 'em.'"
CHAPTER XIX.

ROYAL BIRDS.

"THIS," said Miss Harson, as she turned to the picture of a slate-colored bird with a glowing crest, "is the king-bird, or tyrant fly-catcher, though he really ought to be called bee-eater, he is so fond of those insects."

The children saw a bird about eight inches long, of a dark, slaty ash-color, the head and tail nearly black, edged with white, and the under parts pure white; the plumage on the crown was raised to show the belt of brilliant orange or flame-color that makes his appearance so striking.

"Eats bees!" repeated Clara in astonishment: "I should think they would sting him.—Don't you remember, Malcolm, when you bit into that apple in the orchard that had a bee in it, and how dreadfully your mouth felt?"

Malcolm did remember it distinctly, and decided that if he were a bird he would not get his living by eating bees.

The governess continued: "That is another accom-
plishment which birds possess and we do not: they can eat bees without getting stung; and the king-bird is not the only one that fancies this very lively food. The purple martin is also very partial to bees, and while the honey is not disturbed, the poor little honey-makers are gobbled up with frightful rapidity. The king-bird, when engaged in this business, coolly plants himself on a post of the fence or on a small tree in the garden not far from the hives, and from thence sallies on them as they pass and repass, making great havoc among them. His shrill twitter, however, so near the house, warns the inmates of what is going on, and the gun soon puts an end to his career.

"This bird first makes his appearance in this region about the last of April, coming in parties of five or six, and his nest is often built in the orchard on an apple tree not very far from the ground. It is made large and very firm and close, small twigs and the tops of withered flowers of the yarrow being woven together with tow and wool. It is lined with fine, dry, fibrous grass and horse-hair. There are five cream-colored eggs, marked with a few large spots of deep purple and small ones of light brown.

"'The name of "king," as well as "tyrant," has been bestowed on this bird for its extraordinary
behavior and the authority it assumes over all others during the time of breeding. At that season his extreme affection for his mate and for his nest and young makes him suspicious of every bird that happens to pass near his residence, so that he attacks without discrimination every intruder. In the months of May, June, and part of July his life is one continued scene of broils and battles; in which, however, he generally comes off conqueror. Hawks and crows, the bald eagle, and the great black eagle, all equally dread a rencounter with this dauntless little champion; who, as soon as he perceives one of these last approaching, launches into the air to meet him, mounts to a considerable height above him, and darts down on his back, sometimes fixing there, to the great annoyance of his sovereign, who, if no convenient retreat or resting-place be near, endeavors by various evolutions to rid himself of his merciless adversary. But the king-bird is not so easily dismounted. He teases the eagle incessantly; sweeps upon him from right to left; remounts, that he may descend on his back with the greater violence; all the while keeping up a shrill and rapid twittering, and continuing the attack sometimes for more than a mile, till he is relieved by some other of his tribe equally eager for the contest.

"There is one bird, however, which by its superior
rapidity of flight is sometimes more than a match for him; and he has often been seen to retreat before this active antagonist. This is the purple martin, one whose food and disposition are very similar to his own, but who has greatly the advantage of him on the wing in eluding all his attacks and teasing him as he pleases.

"'The red-headed woodpecker has also been seen, while clinging on a rail of the fence, to amuse himself with the violence of the king-bird, and to play bo-peep with him round the rail; while the latter, highly irritated, made every attempt, as he swept from side to side, to strike him, but in vain. All this turbulence, however, vanishes as soon as his young are able to shift for themselves, and he is then as mild and peaceable as any other bird.'

"The king-bird does not sing—he only twitters; and besides the insects mentioned he has a great fondness for blackberries. He will also, dive into the water, like a kingfisher, after small fish or aquatic insects, and then go back to his former station to plume and dry his feathers. He often takes his stand in the pasture on the top of a stake or a tall weed, near the cattle or horses while they are feeding, and makes occasional sweeps after passing insects, being especially partial to the large black gadfly, which is so especially terrifying to these
large animals. They probably regard the king-bird as one of their best friends and most desirable companions. 'His eye moves restlessly around, traces the flight of an insect for a moment or two, then that of a second, or even a third, until he perceives one to his liking, when, with a shrill sweep, he pursues it, seizes it, and returns to the same spot again to look out for more.'

"He will hover over the river, sometimes for a long time, darting after such insects as are to be found there, snatching them from the surface of the water with great dexterity, and diving about in the air like a swallow, for he possesses great powers of wing. He bathes himself by diving repeatedly into the water from the overhanging branches of some tree, where he retires again to dry and dress his plumage.

"The king-bird is very peaceful in a tame condition, and one was known to catch morsels of food in his bill before they reached the ground when thrown across the room, his long practice with insects on the wing making the necessary exertion a pleasant little excitement.

"The belted kingfisher (Fig. 17) is another bird with a royal name, who is found in different parts of the world, but may be seen in Pennsylvania from
April until the beginning of cold weather, when he leaves us for more tropical climes. He gets his name from the peculiar band of blue, mixed with light brown, which passes around the upper part of his breast."

The children admired the handsome bird, over twelve inches long, with his bluish, slate-colored back, his collar of pure white feathers, his large crested head—whence his royal title—his beautiful feathers, with their black shafts variegated with blue under the wings, and the handsome band which seemed to be worn on his breast like an order.

"This kingfisher," continued Miss Harson, "is quite a peculiar bird, and very strange stories have been told of him both in ancient and in modern times by ignorant and superstitious people. The ancients supposed him to have control over the winds and waves, and asserted that his nest was made of glue or fish-bones, and thrown at random on the surface of the water, where it floated about, now in one place and now in another. Instead of this, however, it is snugly secured from the winds and the weather in the recesses of the earth.

"'Neither is its head or its feathers believed, even by the most illiterate of our clowns or seamen, to be a charm for love, a protection against witchcraft, or
a security for fair weather. It is neither venerated, like those of the Society Isles, nor dreaded, like those of some other countries, but is considered merely as a bird that feeds on fish, is generally fat, relished by some as good eating, and is now and then seen exposed for sale in our markets.'

"'The kingfisher is said to delight in murmuring streams and falling waters; not that they may soothe his ear with their melody, but for much more practical reasons. As he feeds entirely on fish and aquatic insects, his residence is naturally placed on the banks of rivers, lakes, and creeks, and sometimes on the seashore. Amidst the roar of the cataract or over the foam of a torrent he sits perched upon an overhanging bough, glancing his piercing eye in every direction below for his scaly prey, which, with a sudden circular plunge, he sweeps from their native element and swallows in an instant. His voice, which is not unlike the twirling of a watchman's rattle, is naturally loud, harsh, and sudden, but is softened by the sound of the brawling streams and cascades among which he generally rambles. Mill-dams are particularly visited by this feathered fisher, and the sound of his pipe is as well known to the miller as the rattling of his own hopper.'

"The nest of this bird is quite a different affair from nests generally, being dug in some steep, dry
bank which affords a good prospect for fishing, and made a foot or two in depth, with an extent of four or five feet. The materials are loose grass and a few feathers; and he always leaves room for himself and Mrs. Kingfisher to turn round conveniently. The couple appear to become attached to one particular hole, as they will use it for several years in succession, and are not easily frightened from it. There are usually five pure white eggs, but some one tried the experiment of taking them away, one at a time, until he had carried off eighteen from the same nest, the hen-bird obligingly retiring to the extremity of the hole while he withdrew the egg; on returning the next day he would find that she had laid again as usual."
CHAPTER XX.

PIGEONS.

"No, Malcolm," said Miss Harson a few days after the royal birds had been disposed of, "I have not forgotten my promise about pigeons; but there is so much out-door pleasure on hand this bright summer weather that our 'talks' are not so frequent as they were in the early spring. It is quite time, though, that we made some inquiries about such particularly home birds as pigeons, of which there are many varieties.

"The stock-dove, or wild pigeon of Europe, appears to have been the ancestor of all the pigeon tribe, and when taken young this pigeon can easily be tamed. Our own tame pigeon, or house-dove, is too well known to need much description. Perhaps Malcolm will give us an account of his?"

But Malcolm replied, rather bashfully, that he had nothing to tell; they all knew that he had six pairs in the pigeon-house, which papa had let him buy with his own money; that two of them were white, one brown, and three bluish-drab; and that
Patrick said with good care there might be fifty pairs of young ones by next summer.

This did not throw very much light on the pigeon subject, to be sure, but Miss Harson accepted it with a smile, and went on to say: "Pigeons are very easy to raise, give but little trouble, and abundantly pay their keeper for their food. They are satisfied with a corner of the barn-loft to live in, though a pigeon-house or dove-cote is of course nicer; and the carpenter has certainly made Malcolm's a very tasteful affair. Some farmers think that pigeons are very destructive to have around, saying that they dig up the grain after it is planted, and eat it, thus ruining their crops. But this has been proved to be quite a slander on the poor pigeons, as they are not furnished with suitable bills for digging, and are generally acknowledged to be 'dumb,' so that they could not very well carry out any such plan as this. They will of course eat such grains as lie upon the ground, but any bird would do this; and it is only taking what would otherwise be wasted.

"A person once shot a turtle-dove and took it to a naturalist to preserve, when he asked why it had been shot. The answer was that it was coolly feeding on some freshly-sown peas; but when the naturalist opened its crop, instead of finding any such food, over a thousand seeds of weeds that are particularly
troublesome to farmers came to light, proving the innocent turtle-dove to have been a valuable friend instead of an enemy.

"There are more than twenty varieties of the domestic pigeon, and the most celebrated of these is the carrier pigeon, who was first trained to act as a flying post-office by a Turkish sultan in the twelfth century. 'At present these birds are only kept by some persons as a curiosity, much time and attention being required to train them properly. As soon as the young are fledged, a cock and a hen-bird are made as tame as possible, and accustomed to each other's society. They are then sent in an uncovered cage to the place whither they are usually to carry messages. If one of them should be lost or carried away after having been well treated for some time, it will certainly return to its mate. A small letter is written on the finest kind of thin paper, then placed lengthwise under one wing or fastened to the leg.' One of these pigeons was known to have flown seventy-two miles in two hours and a half. From the instant of its liberation its flight is directed through the clouds, at an amazing height, to its home. By a wonderful sort of instinct it darts onward in a straight line to the very spot whence it was taken; but how it can direct its flight so unerringly it seems impossible to discover.
"The wild pigeon of America (Fig. 18), which is very numerous in all parts of the country, is a beautiful bird, sixteen inches long, the head and upper
part of the neck a blue-slate color, the lower part and sides of the neck changeable gold, green, and purplish-crimson; the ground color is slate, mingled with white, pale red, black, and brown.

"The nest is made of a few dry, slender twigs, carelessly put together, and so shallow that when the young are half grown they can easily be seen from below. The eggs are pure white, but only one young one is ever said to be found at once in a single nest. Ninety or a hundred nests have been seen together in one tree, the beech tree being a favorite one with them on account of the nuts, of which they are very fond. They also like acorns, buckwheat, hempseed, Indian corn, and various kinds of berries.

"The young, when beginning to fly, confine themselves to the under part of the tall woods where there is no brush, and where nuts and acorns are abundant, 'and seem like a prodigious torrent rolling along through the woods, every one striving to be in the front. Vast numbers of them are shot while in this situation. In a few minutes they will beat all the nuts from a tree with their wings, while all is a scramble, both above and below, for the same.' These young ones are so very fat in the West and South-west that the Indians and many of the whites melt down the fat for domestic purposes, in place of butter and lard.
In these regions the pigeons move in such immense flocks that a traveller on the Ohio River happening, as he says, to go ashore one charming afternoon, stopped at a house that stood near the river, and while talking with the people within doors was suddenly struck with astonishment at a loud rushing roar, succeeded by instant darkness, which at the first moment he took for a tornado about to overwhelm the house and everything around in destruction. 'The people,' he continues, 'observing my surprise, coolly said, "It is only the pigeons;" and on running out I beheld a flock, thirty or forty yards in width, sweeping along very low between the house and the mountain or height that formed the second bank of the river. These continued passing for more than a quarter of an hour, and at length varied their bearing so as to pass over the mountain, behind which they disappeared before the rear came up.'

The Carolina pigeon, or turtle-dove (Fig. 19), is a smaller variety, measuring only twelve inches, but its dress is very much the same. In early spring 'we hear from the budding trees of the forest or the already blooming thicket the mournful call of the turtle-dove, commencing, as it were, with a low and plaintive sigh, repeated at impressive intervals of half a minute, and heard distinctly to a considerable distance through the still, balmy air of the reviving
season.' The bird has four notes, all of the saddest description, being a series of sighing, moaning, and wailing; and these melancholy sounds usually come from the deepest and most shaded parts of the woods, and are heard oftenest about noon and toward evening. But, instead of being in distress, the turtle-dove is only calling to his mate, or talking to her in tenderest accents as she sits beside him, for the mutual attachment of a pair of turtle-doves has become proverbial, and this is their way of showing it.

"They come North in March or April, and disperse over the country, being sometimes seen three and four together, but more frequently only two. A pair of them will appear in the farmer's yard before the door, the stable, barn, and other outhouses in search of food, seeming almost as familiar as the domestic pigeon. They often mix with the poultry while they are fed in the morning, visit the yard and adjoining road many times a day, and the pump, creek, horse-trough, and rills for water.
"Their flight is quick, vigorous, and always accompanied by a peculiar whistling of the wings, by which they can easily be distinguished from the wild pigeon. They fly with great swiftness, alight on trees, fences, or on the ground indiscriminately; are exceedingly fond of buckwheat, hempseed, and Indian corn; feed on the berries of the holly, the dogwood, and poke, huckleberries, partridge-berries, and the small acorns of the live oak and shrub oak. They devour large quantities of gravel, and sometimes pay a visit to the kitchen-garden for peas, for which they have a particular regard.'

"The turtle-dove builds its nest in a rough, careless sort of fashion in an evergreen, among the thick foliage of the vine, in an orchard, on the horizontal branches of an apple tree, and sometimes on the ground. A handful of small twigs are laid together anyhow, and on these are scattered some dry, fibrous roots of plants; the whole structure is nearly flat, and contains two beautiful eggs of snowy whiteness.

"I will show you now," continued the governess, "a picture representing a pair of turtle-doves, instead of one, as is generally the case, perched both on the same twig in the most confidential and loving attitude. Indeed, the male or female is so much attached to its mate that the one has been known to pine away and die of grief and hunger when the other has been killed."
An English writer describes such a case which he witnessed. 'A female turtle-dove,' he says, 'having been unfortunately killed by a spaniel in the absence of the male, the disconsolate survivor, after having searched in vain in all places where he might hope to find his mate, came and mournfully perched upon the wonted trough, waiting patiently for her to repair thither for food; but after two days of unavailing expectation he, by voluntary abstinence, pined and died on the place.'"

Clara and Edith thought this very sad indeed as they expressed their desire to have a pair of turtle-doves of their own; but Miss Harson laughingly told them that they would need an aviary to accommodate all the feathered pets they had longed to possess.
CHAPTER XXI.

EAGLES.

"I KNOW that picture," said Malcolm, looking as though he anticipated a treat. "I am so glad we have come to the eagle at last!"

"I have purposely left him," replied Miss Harson, "until we finished what may be called the summer birds, although there are many, of course, which have not been noticed at all. But my plan has been to make you acquainted with the common birds around us, those you were likely to meet in daily life; and when you are older you will find that these talks will prove a pleasant introduction to the regular study of ornithology. The eagle properly belongs to the hawk family, as he is only a large falcon or bird of prey—just as the lion, in spite of the difference in size and strength and ferocity, is only a large cat. The eagle, too, is the monarch among birds, as the lion is among animals, because of its beauty, strength, and swiftness. 'Its claims to majesty are founded on the sharpness of its claws, the swiftness of its wings, the terror of its beak, and the brightness of its eye.'"
“Can’t the eagle look straight at the sun,” asked Malcolm, “without winking?”

“So it is said,” replied his governess; “and there is a fable of his soaring to a great height in order to enjoy a gaze at the sun in all his unclouded brilliancy; this arose, probably, from another ancient belief, which is thus stated: ‘Before its young are as yet fledged the eagle compels them to gaze at the rays of the sun, and if it observes one to wink or show a watery eye, it casts it from the nest as a degenerate offspring; if, on the contrary, it preserves a steady gaze, it is saved from this hard fate and brought up.’

“The eagle has been an historical bird and the emblem of strength and power from the earliest ages. We read in the Bible of the Roman eagles, which means that the Romans bore them on their standards as the national emblem; so, you see, Malcolm, that we are not the first in making this selection. It has always been a very popular one, and ‘all nations, from the ancients to the present day, have displayed a great predilection for the eagle. It is used as the national emblem, as the appropriate ornament for the national flag, and as the stamp for the national coin.’

‘The poor bird is really very badly treated,’ continues the writer of the above: ‘it is seldom represented in its true form or its true colors.
Some nations blacken it; some cut it down the middle and spread it abroad; some flatten it; while others combine the operations, and further insult the royal bird by placing a round crown on its long head, hang a chain round its neck, and weary its claws with a sceptre. America certainly takes the eagle as it is, and keeps it as the national emblem uncrowned, unsceptred, unsplit, unblacked, and unflattened.

"Good for America!" enthusiastically cried Malcolm, who evidently felt that he had a personal share in the king of birds.

"The eagle," continued Miss Harson, "has always been an object of reverence among savage nations, and especially among the North American Indians, whose warriors wear eagles' plumes on their heads, each plume representing a slain enemy. The Araucanian Indians actually worship this bird, considering it as a kind of demigod presiding over the welfare of their nation. They think it a happy omen to meet an eagle if it is seen on the right hand. These savages have the same ideas of the eagle as were held by the ancient Romans, who called it the 'bird of Jove,' looking upon it as his special messenger, and representing it as grasping the thunderbolt in its claws, in token of its ready swiftness and obedience.
"The white-headed, or bald, eagle is the most beautiful one of his tribe, and the one who figures as the adopted emblem of our country. The term 'bald' is absurd enough, as his head is thickly covered with feathers; it has probably been applied because the head is white, while the rest of his plumage is dark. This powerful bird measures no less than three feet in length and seven feet from wing to wing; the color of his plumage is a deep, dark brown, each feather tipped with pale brown, except the head, neck, and tail, which are white when the bird is three years old. The beak and talons are sharp and strongly curved, the edge of the beak being as sharp as the blade of a knife. It is straight until within a short distance of the tip, when it suddenly and sharply curves downward. 'The power of the eagle in pursuit of its prey is terrific. It seems to hurl itself like a cannon-ball upon the doomed creature, and often strikes it dead before it reaches the ground. This is accomplished by the force of its projection concentrating itself on the talons, and especially on the hinder claw. Before the terrific power of this claw bones are fractured, although defended by feathers, the body is ripped up, and life extinguished, although the prey is flying away in the same direction as its pursuer.'

"The nest of this eagle is usually seen on a very large and lofty tree, generally a pine or cypress stand-
ing in a swamp and almost impossible of ascent. The nest is large and clumsily constructed, and, instead of being rebuilt, is added to every year until it becomes a black, prominent mass that is visible at quite a distance. It is made of large sticks, sods, earthy rubbish, hay, and moss. Not more than two or three eggs are found at once, and the young are said to hatch at different times.

"The bald eagle is said to have a strong attachment for its young, providing so abundantly for them that quantities of fish and other food will lie scattered around the tree containing the nest, causing an odor that prevents one from approaching within several hundred yards of it. A large dead pine tree, on which was a bald eagle's nest with young in it, was on fire more than halfway up, and the flames rapidly ascending, when the mother-bird darted in and around them until her plumage was so much injured she could scarcely make her escape, while even then she several times tried to get back and rescue her little ones.

"In the Song of Moses the inspired writer says: 'As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him.' It has been said, in reference to these beautiful words, that the parent-bird teaches the young to fly by drop-
ping them, when half fledged, from her wings, and that when the breeze is proving too strong for them, and their little pinions begin to flag and waver amid the resistance of the air, she swoops underneath them, having indeed never lost sight of them for an instant, and receives them again upon her own person, and sails on with them majestically as before. How beautifully this expresses God's loving care for us!

"The voice of the eagle is a rough, sharp, ear-piercing cry, well calculated to strike terror into the hearts of smaller birds, and suited to the wild scenery amid which it loves to dwell. It is said to live sixty, eighty, and even one hundred years.

"This destructive bird carries off immense quantities of hares, rabbits, and grouse to feed its young, and even foxes and lambs have been seen in its larder. The eagle, however, does not always reap the reward of its industry; and one which built its nest within the reach of man used to act as an involuntary purveyor to a neighboring family. The bird, for example, would bring home a hare, put it in the nest, and go off for another. Then a man would come and take away the hare. The eagle, on coming home, deposits some other animal, and finding, as he supposes, that the young ones have already finished the hare, goes away again in search of more
prey. The man then makes another visit, and takes whatever he finds in the nest."

"That eagle really went to market, then, for a family," said Malcolm in high glee. "What fun it must have been to the man to see him coming every time with something in his beak!"

"Yes," replied Miss Harson, "but the fun was doubtless all on his side, for the poor eagle was badly cheated. Another one had a curious adventure with a cat, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that the cat had a curious adventure with an eagle. This bird is very fond of hares, and does not often make such mistakes, but the eagle in question happened to pounce on a cat, thinking all the time that he had caught a fine hare, and carried it off to the nest as a tempting meal for the eaglets. The old bird then went back, as usual, to look for more food, the cat being left half senseless from fright. After panting there for a while, she recovered herself and began to take in the situation, which was by no means so bad as she supposed, the terrible monster with its dreadful claws and beak having entirely disappeared, while just at hand were two or three plump birds that stared at her in a particularly helpless way. The result was that the cat, who was put there to be eaten, devoured one of the eaglets, and then made her escape before the old bird returned."
"Poor Pussie!" said Edith commiseratingly: "I am so glad that she got away!"

"But she needn't have eaten a little bird," suggested Clara, who had no sympathy with the fondness of cats for feathers.

"Perhaps," said her governess, "when I tell you what another eagle did you may think it a good thing that there should be one less in the world. This bird was evidently disposed to vary its usual food; and although the affair happened so long ago that the child, if living, is more than grown up, it took place in our neighboring State of New Jersey. 'A woman, who happened to be weeding in the garden, had set her child down near to amuse itself while she was at work, when a sudden and extraordinary rushing sound and a scream from her child alarmed her, and starting up she beheld the infant thrown down and dragged some few feet, and a large bald eagle bearing off a fragment of its frock, which, being the only part seized and giving way, providentially saved the life of the infant.'"

"Oh," exclaimed Malcolm in great excitement, "wouldn't I have been mad, though, if it had been Edie? I would have shot the hateful eagle right through the heart."

To be sure, his weapon was only a pop-gun, and it is not likely that the eagle would have noticed it;
but the little fellow was just as brave and just as much in earnest as if he had handled his papa's Minie rifle, and his sisters looked upon him with great pride and affection as their valiant knight and champion.

"The bald eagle is fond of fish, but he likes better to steal the booty of other birds than to catch it for himself. The fish-hawk is one of his most frequent victims in this respect; and this is the way he manages it: 'Perched on the limb of some gigantic tree that commands a wide view of the neighboring shore and ocean, he seems calmly to overlook the motions of all the feathered tribes that disport themselves below, until high over all the others hovers a bird that attracts his immediate attention. By his wide curvature of wing and sudden suspension in air he knows him to be the fish-hawk settling over some devoted victim of the deep. His eye kindles at the sight, and, balancing himself with half-opened wings on the branch, he watches the result. Down, rapid as an arrow from heaven, descends the distant object of his attention, the roar of its wings reaching the ear as it disappears in the deep, making the surges foam around. At this moment the eager looks of the eagle are all ardor, and levelling his neck for flight he sees the fish-hawk once more emerge, struggling with his prey and mounting in the air with screams of ex-
ultation. These are the signal for our hero, who, launching into the air, instantly gives chase, and soon gains on the fish-hawk; each exerts his utmost to mount above the other, displaying in these rencounters the most elegant and sublime aërial evolutions. The unencumbered eagle rapidly advances, and is just on the point of reaching his opponent, when, with a sudden scream, probably of despair and honest execration, the latter drops his fish; the eagle, poising himself for a moment, as if to take a more certain aim, descends like a whirlwind, snatches it in his grasp ere it reaches the water, and bears his ill-gotten booty silently away to the woods.'"

"What a mean fellow!" said Malcolm contumeliously.

"It does seem mean enough," was the reply, "when we consider the eagle's great strength and unusual ability to procure food for himself. He is not always victorious, however, for several hawks will frequently unite to attack him, and even succeed in driving him away from a neighborhood; but a single hawk will seldom attempt its own defence. When the eagle is forced inland, he will go in search of young pigs, which he often destroys in great numbers.

"The little humming-bird attacks the eagle singly, and comes off conqueror too. It is an amusing thing
SEA EAGLE.
to see it measuring its tiny form against the powerful weapons of its foe in all the confidence of its insignificance. The eagle might as well try to catch a sunbeam as a humming-bird; and the little creature knows this well. A pair of humming-birds will attack an eagle without the least scruple, and a solitary ruby-throat has been seen deliberately seated on the head of an eagle, pecking out the feathers, so that he would soon have deserved the term of 'bald-head,' and scattering them in a stream behind the tormented bird, who, with screams of terror and agony, dashed through the air in the vain hope of shaking off its puny foe. The sparrow-hawk also succeeds in worrying the king of birds, because it is quicker on the wing; so we see that the power of this fierce and strong bird is often subdued by very insignificant antagonists.

"The sea-eagle (Fig. 20) is frequently seen in company with the bald eagle, whom it very much resembles, except that there is more white in the plumage. It builds its nest on the loftiest oaks or on some rocky crag edging a wild and desolate shore; it is very broad and contains two large eggs, that are quite round, very heavy, and of a dirty shade of white.

"A great many eagles are seen in the neighborhood of Niagara Falls, often in the thick column of
smoke or spray that rises from the gulf into which the Horseshoe Fall descends; and these majestic birds sail about, sometimes losing themselves in the thick column, and then reappearing in another place, with an ease and elegance of motion that show an utter absence of all fear.

'High o'er the watery uproar silent seen,
Sailing sedate in majesty serene,
Now midst the pillared spray sublimely lost,
And now emerging, down the Rapids tossed,
Glides the bald eagle, gazing calm and slow
O'er all the horrors of the scene below.'

"The sea-eagle is said to hunt at night as well as during the day, and besides fish it feeds on chickens, birds, hares, and other animals. It is also said to catch fish during the night, and that the noise of its plunging into the water is heard at a great distance. But it is more probable that the poor osprey does the plunging, while the sea-eagle profits by it; for, like its relative of the white head, this bird is a freebooter and a pirate, and is usually fed by the industry of others.

"The eagle is especially a bird of the Bible, being frequently mentioned in the pages of Holy Writ, and as such should have a particular interest for us. The patriarch Job says: 'Doth the eagle mount up at thy
command, and make her nest on high? She dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place. From thence she seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off.' In the ancient hieroglyphics of the Christian Church the eagle always represents the evangelist John, 'because like an eagle,' says the early Christian writer Jerome, 'he ascends to the very throne of God, and says, In the beginning was the Word.' It is for this reason that in many churches the desk from which the Holy Scriptures are read is made in the form of an eagle."

"I like that last part so much, Miss Harson!" said Clara timidly as she and little Edith gathered closer to their governess.

"I like it all," said Malcolm, "and I think you've done the eagles splendidly. Couldn't you think of something more, though, if you tried?"

"Probably I could, dear," was the smiling reply, "but I do not wish to try. A great many more things might be said about eagles, but I have no intention of exhausting the subject, for I hope that you will read for yourselves by and by. Besides, we have other birds to consider."

Two dear little birds were soon lodged in a soft nest up stairs, and two pairs of arms clung about the young governess's neck in a loving good-night kiss.
"NOTICE," said Miss Harson, "what a particularly pretty shape this little bird has, and how very neat and clean he looks. It is the cedar-bird, one of the dearest little feathered friends that the cold weather spares us. You see the curious horn on his head, which gives him such a comical sort of expression—a sort of knowing look, one may say: he can lower and contract this so closely to the head and neck that it cannot be seen at all.

"The plumage of these little birds is remarkably soft and silky, of a dark fawn-color, deepest on the back and brightest on the front; the lower part of the breast is yellow, and there are two whitish stripes on the wings near the body, while the tail has a mixture of black and light blue, and is tipped for half an inch with rich yellow. But the oddest parts of its plumage are the red sealing-wax tips on most of the secondary feathers of the wings, which seem to be intended for preserving the ends from being broken and worn away by the almost continual fluttering
of the bird among thick branches of the cedar. The young birds do not have these sealing-wax tips until the autumn of their second year.

"The cedar-bird is seven inches long, and one of the most quiet of birds, making only a feeble lisping sound, chiefly as it rises or alights. So that the name of 'chatterer,' which has been given to it, seems particularly inappropriate.

"In some parts of the country it is called crown-bird, from the pointed crest which adds so much to the elegance of its appearance; and in other places cherry-bird, from its fondness for that fruit. It also feeds on ripe persimmons, small winter grapes, bird-cherries, and a great variety of other fruits and berries. 'The birds appear to be berry-eaters, at least during winter. Those of Europe have generally been observed to feed on the fruit of the mountain ash; and one or two killed in Pennsylvania were literally crammed with holly-berries.' Audubon says: 'The appetite of the cedar-bird is of so extraordinary a nature as to prompt it to devour every fruit or berry that comes in its way. In this manner they gorge themselves to such excess as sometimes to be unable to fly, and suffer themselves to be taken by the hand; and I have seen some which, though wounded and confined in a cage, have eaten apples until suffocation deprived them of life.'"
"I am sorry they are so greedy," said Clara, quite mournfully, "this one in the picture looks so soft and pretty."

"It is difficult to believe it," replied her governess, "but when such men as Audubon and Wilson, who spent much of their time in observing the habits of birds, assert anything as a fact, it cannot very well be doubted. Wilson says that in October they feed on the berries of the sour gum and red cedar, of which last they are immoderately fond; and thirty or forty may sometimes be seen fluttering among the branches of one small cedar tree, plucking off the berries.

"But worse than this: when the early cherries appear the cedar-birds, with unerring judgment, select the best and ripest of the fruit. 'Nor are they easily intimidated by the presence of Mr. Scarecrow, for I have seen a flock deliberately feasting on the fruit of a loaded cherry tree while on the same tree one of these guardian angels—and a very formidable one too—stretched his stiffened arms and displayed his dangling legs with all the pomposity of authority.'

"It does not seem to avail them that, 'to pay the gardener in advance for the small portion of his crop which they intend to appropriate to their own use, they now begin to rid his trees of those destruc-
tive enemies which infest them, the small caterpillars and other insects; these constituting as yet their only food. For hours at a time they may be seen feeding on the despoiling canker-worms which infest our fruit trees and elms. After feeding they sit dressing their feathers in little clusters of five or six in number.'

"These little birds are noted for the gentleness of their disposition, their innocence of character, extreme sociability, love of freedom, and a constant desire of wandering. They fly in compact bodies of from twenty to fifty, and usually alight so close together on the same tree that one-half are frequently shot down at a time. Their very affection for each other is thus the cause of their ruin.

"There is something unusually pretty and touching in the manners of the cedar-birds among themselves; for although they are represented as being so fond of eating, they are as polite as the best-bred people about appropriating a scarce dainty. They have been seen sitting in their favorite row, fairly touching each other in their friendliness, and watching perhaps for insects, when one of the party would make a successful snatch at an unwary fly or pounce perhaps on some unsuspecting worm, and instead of swallowing it offer the choice morsel to his next neighbor. Neither could he bring himself to dispose of the only refreshment, but politely urged it upon
the bird on the other side of him; and he in turn passed it to the next, until it actually went the entire round, and finally returned to its original proprietor. Perhaps by this time some one else had caught something.

"Some one says that these birds make excellent fly-catchers, spending much of their time in pursuit of winged insects; this is not, however, managed with the vivacity or suddenness of true fly-catchers, but with a kind of listlessness. They start from the branches and give chase to the insects, ascending after them for a few yards, or move horizontally toward them; and as soon as the prey is secured return to the spot, where they continue watching with slow motions of the head. This amusement is carried on during the evening, and longer at the approach of autumn, when the berries become scarce."

"The nest of the cedar-bird is quite large, and is often found on the forked branch of an apple tree about twelve feet from the ground. Outside and at the bottom there is a mass of coarse, dry stalks of grass, and the inside is lined with very fine stalks of the same material. There are three or four eggs, of a dingy bluish-white, thick at the large end, and tapering suddenly to a very narrow point at the other; they are marked with small, irregular spots
of various shades of black, and the large end has a
dull purple tinge, marked also with touches of pur-
ple and black.

"'It is a singular fact that the cedar-bird, although
one of the earliest of our visitors, is probably the
last to commence the important business of incub-
bation, thousands of young birds of other species
having left their nests before it has begun to build.
They seem also to have less regard for the safety of
their young than most birds, as the nest is placed in
a low horizontal branch of an apple tree; and when
approached the bird flies off without any manifesta-
tion of concern.'

"I am sorry to say that the young cedar-birds
in their nest sometimes seem to be much neglected
and to be left in want of food; and one of them
cried so loud and plaintively to a Baltimore bird on
the same tree that he began to feed it. Another is
mentioned who frequented the front of a house in
quest of honeysuckle-berries, and at length, on re-
ceiving food—being probably abandoned by his rov-
ing parents—threw himself wholly on the owner's
protection. Being at large day and night, he regu-
larly attended the dinner-table for his portion of
fruit at dessert, and remained steadfast in his affec-
tion for his protector until killed by an accident,
being unfortunately trodden under foot."
"Oh!" gasped the little girls, "wasn't that dreadful? And cedar-birds are not nice, after all, if they go off and leave their little ones—are they, Miss Harson?"

"They are very pretty, though," observed Malcolm, turning to the picture again.
CHAPTER XXIII.

OWLS.

"OWLS! owls!" screamed the children in delight as they looked at the pictures. "Oh, Miss Harson, how funny they look! Are you going to tell us about them this evening?"

"That is my intention," was the smiling reply, "and I seem likely to have quite an animated audience. But there are said to be fifty different kinds of owls, and we can only attempt a few of them. In some particulars they are all alike, but they vary in size, color, and places of residence. They belong to the falcon or hawk family; and so completely are they birds of night that they are especially formed for this purpose, and are generally acknowledged as emblems of darkness and the works of darkness. The owl has been called the 'bird of Minerva' from its look of intense wisdom, as the eagle is called the 'bird of Jove' from his great strength and power. He frequents barns, old buildings, the towers of churches, hollow trees, and similar localities, prefer-
ring to place his habitation in darkness, as the light of day offends his eyes.

"This bird is really a feathered and winged cat, and you will see the strong resemblance in this picture of the long-eared owl. Both live principally upon mice, both are noiseless in their movements, and both have facilities for seeing in the dark."

"Then it ought to be called the cat-bird," said Malcolm; "and it looks ever so much more like a cat than the real cat-bird does."

"The real cat-bird does not look in the least like a cat," replied his governess, "and is only so named because of its peculiar cry. Do you not remember that when we were in the woods Edie mistook the call of this bird for the cry of a deserted kitten, as older people have done before her?

"But let us return to our owls. Wilson says: 'On contemplating the grave and antiquated figure of this night-wanderer, so destitute of everything like gracefulness of shape, I can scarcely refrain from smiling at the conceit of the ludicrous appearance this bird must have made had Nature bestowed on it the powers of song, and given it the faculty of warbling out sprightly airs while robed in such a solemn exterior. But the great God of Nature hath in his wisdom assigned to this class of birds a more unsocial and less noble, though perhaps not less use-
ful, disposition by assimilating them, not only in form of countenance, but in voice, manners, and appetite, to some particular beasts of prey, excluding them from the enjoyment of the gay sunshine of day, and giving them little more than the few solitary hours of morning and evening twilight to procure their food, while all the tuneful tribes, a few excepted, are wrapped in silence and repose. That their true character, however, should not be concealed from those weaker animals on whom they feed, he has stamped their countenance with strong traits of their murderer, the cat; and birds in this respect are perhaps better physiognomists than men.'

"The flight of owls is very curious and beautiful, and on fine moonlight nights, when they are usually out in great force, they seem as if they were wafted among the shadows of the trees, appearing suddenly at one moment, and disappearing as mysteriously the next. No sound of wings gives notice of their approach, and they might pass within a couple of yards of a person without attracting attention. They fly rather slowly, which is probably to guard them against injury from objects against which they might strike themselves; and they scarcely seem to have any definite object when on the wing, but appear to be blown about by the breeze as purposeless as a bunch of thistledown; to which, indeed, they bear
no small resemblance on a dusky night, though this description applies only to the white owl, which is not very common with us.

"Their noiseless flight seems also intended to prevent the mice from hearing the approach of their destroyer; for the mouse is a night animal too, and goes abroad looking for a breakfast just at the time when the owl wants his. Very often the mouse furnishes a breakfast instead of finding one. Mistakes as to who shall eat and who shall be eaten sometimes occur, as the following story will show: 'Some time since one of my servants brought me an owl which he had captured. It was a fine, vigorous bird. I placed it on a side table, where it sat with the solemnity of a judge; but a cat that happened to be in the room eyed his lordship with no sort of reverence, and watching her opportunity when she thought he was wrapped in his intensest day-dream, she sprang on the table, and seizing the breast of the dignified bird, was about to devour him; but with surprising activity he instantly liberated himself from the claws of his antagonist, and rising into the air a few feet darted down rapidly on the back of the astonished cat, who ran round the room in an agony, with her assailant riding triumphantly upon her back and pinching her severely with claws and beak.'"

It made a funny picture, and the children all ac-
knowledged that Mistress Puss had only got her just deserts.

"In order to permit it to use these claws and beak on its prey with full effect," continued Miss Harson, "the owl is furnished, as you see, with a pair of huge eyes; so that if the mouse were to put to the owl the question that Little Red Ridinghood so innocently put to the wicked wolf, 'Why have you such great eyes?' the answer and result would be exactly the same, 'To see you the better, my dear,' followed by immediate proof. Round the eyes is a large radiating circle, or shallow funnel, of feathers, the use of which is said to be to collect the rays of light and throw them upon the eye; which is a very necessary arrangement for dark nights.

"An owl that was kept in a room for some time is described as keeping its eyelids half shut, 'or slowly and alternately opening and shutting, as if suffering from the glare of day; but no sooner was the sun set than its whole appearance became lively and animated; its full and globular eyes shone like those of a cat; and it often lowered its head in the manner of a cock preparing to fight, moving it from side to side, and also vertically, as if reconnoitring you with great sharpness. In flying through the room it shifted from place to place with the silence of a spirit, the plumage of its wings being so extremely fine and soft.
as to occasion little or no friction with the air—a wise provision of Nature bestowed on the whole genus to enable them, without giving alarm, to seize their prey in the night. For an hour or two in the evening and about break of day it flew about with great rapidity. When angry it snapped its bill repeatedly with violence, and so loud as to be heard in the adjoining room, swelling out its eyes to their full dimensions, and lowering its head as above described. It swallowed its food hastily in large mouthfuls, and never was observed to drink.'

"The barred owl is one of our most common species, and it is especially numerous in winter among the woods that border the meadows of the Schuylkill and Delaware. It is often seen flying during the day, and when the weather is cloudy it is as noisy as during the night. This bird is over sixteen inches long, and takes its name from the alternate bands or bars of pale and dark brown on its wings; its upper parts are light brown, marked with transverse spots of white. The tail also has six broad bars of brown, and as many narrow ones of white.

"The nest of this bird is sometimes found in the crotch of a white oak among thick foliage. It is rudely made, outwardly of sticks mixed with dry grass and leaves, and lined with smaller twigs. The young, when curled up in one of these rough nests,
have the appearance from below of a cat asleep. The eggs are nearly as large as those of a young pullet, but round and perfectly white.

"'On approaching one of these birds, its gesticulations are seen to be of a very extraordinary nature. Its position, which is generally erect, is immediately changed. It lowers its head and inclines its body to watch the motions of the person beneath; throws forward the lateral feathers of its head, which thus has the appearance of being surrounded by a broad ruff; looks toward him as if half blind, and moves its head to and fro in so extraordinary a manner as almost to induce a person to fancy that part dislocated from its body. It follows all the motions of the intruder with its eyes, and, should it suspect any treacherous intention, flies off to a short distance, alighting with its back to the person, and immediately turning about with a single jump to recommence its scrutiny.'"

"I shouldn't like to be stared at in that way by an owl," observed Malcolm; and Miss Harson quite agreed with him.

"These birds seem to need spectacles in the daytime," she continued, "judging from the funny mistakes they make; and Audubon speaks of seeing one alight on the back of a cow, which it left so suddenly when the animal moved as to show that it had evi-
dently mistaken the object on which it perched for something else.

"Another owl, which comes to us from the North in November and leaves us again in April, is the short-eared owl, which is said to be a particularly good mouser. For this reason it is called in some places the mouse-hawk. It does not fly, like other owls, in search of prey, but sits quietly on the stump of a tree, just like a cat, watching for mice. It flies frequently by day, and in dark, cloudy weather takes short flights. When sitting and looking sharply around for mice it erects the two slight feathers that take the place of horns, which are then very conspicuous, but at other times would not be noticed. This owl is fifteen inches long, the upper part dark brown, each feather deeply bordered with light yellowish-brown; the tail is longer than in other birds of this kind, and has alternate bands of dark brown and ochre-yellow. The breast and lower parts are yellowish, with streaks of dark brown that have the effect of the black tufts in ermine. Altogether, quite a pretty bird for an owl.

"Then there is the little owl, which is quite common with us, but does not ramble much in the daytime. This species is only seven and a half inches in length, of an olive-brown color, spotted and barred with white. It is usually found in the neighborhood
of the seashore, among woods and swamps of pine trees. If it is disturbed it will fly a short way, and then take shelter again from the light. At the approach of twilight it is all activity, being a noted and dexterous mouser. It builds its nest in pines, generally halfway up the tree, and lays two white eggs.

"The great horned owl (Frontispiece, Fig. 1) is also called the eagle owl, and is quite a formidable object, being no less than twenty inches in length, with horns three inches long that consist of twelve or fourteen feathers. He is of the usual brown color, marked with transverse bars mixed with white, with a rounded tail extending about an inch beyond the tips of the wings.

"Wilson says: 'This noted and formidable owl is found in almost every quarter of the United States. His favorite residence, however, is in the dark solitudes of deep swamps covered with a growth of gigantic timber; and here, as soon as evening draws on and mankind retire to rest, he sends forth such sounds as seem scarcely to belong to this world, startling the solitary pilgrim as he slumbers by his forest-fire and "making night hideous."' Along the mountainous shores of the Ohio and amidst the deep forests of Indiana alone and reposing in the woods, this ghostly watchman has frequently warned me of the approach
of morning, and amused me with his singular exclamations, sometimes sweeping down and around my fire, uttering a loud and sudden waugh-o! waugh-o! sufficient to have alarmed a whole garrison. He has other nocturnal solos no less melodious, one of which very strikingly resembles the half-suppressed screams of a person suffocating or throttled, and cannot fail of being exceedingly entertaining to a lonely, benighted traveller in the midst of an Indian wilderness.'

"The noise they make must be very dismal. I do not wonder that men are scared by it. This book says: 'Far away in the deep forests the traveller has sometimes paused to rest and to cook his supper gipsy-fashion on a stick and by a fire lighted of dry leaves and twigs.

"'The fire burns brightly, and throws a ruddy light on the trees around. He and his companions are glad to stretch and to partake of the repast. No sound is heard of bird or animal, and scarcely a leaf stirs. But all at once, close to their ears, there breaks out a succession of unearthly shrieks, mixed with wild laughter. It is as if some person were strangled in their very presence.

"'Perhaps a minute after a large dark object sweeps round the fire, still uttering discordant sounds. He is the great horned owl that was sitting close by,
though the travellers did not see him. The agreeable odor of the food roused him, and he came out to see if he might share the feast.

"'These deep and boundless forests are the home he loves. His voice renders him an object of dread, there is something so unearthly about it.'"

"Patrick says he doesn't want to hear any owls hooting around here," said Malcolm; "he says it's a very bad sign."

"A sign that the chickens are in danger perhaps," replied Miss Harson, "and certainly that the mice are; but this, I think, is the worst. This owl preys on young rabbits, squirrels, rats, mice, partridges, and small birds of various kinds. It has been often known to prowl about the farm-house and carry off chickens from their roost. 'A very large one, wing-broken while on a foraging excursion of this kind, was kept about the house for several days, and at length disappeared, no one knew how. Almost every day after this hens and chickens also disappeared, one by one, in an unaccountable manner, till in eight or ten days very few were left remaining. The fox, the mink, and weasel were alternately the reputed authors of the mischief, until one morning the old lady herself, rising before day to bake, in passing toward the oven surprised her late prisoner, the owl, regaling himself on the body of a newly-killed hen.
The thief instantly made for his hole under the house, from whence the enraged matron soon dislodged him with the brush-handle, and without mercy despatched him. In this snug retreat were found the greater part of the feathers and many large fragments of her whole family of chickens.'

"I have seen an account of one that was caught and kept in a cage. Of course, he could not do any mischief, as he might have done had he been left to fly about the house. The story says: 'He became very troublesome by barking like a dog. The master of the house could not sleep for the constant yelp, yelp, of the supposed cur, and a large Newfoundland dog was so deceived that he kept barking in reply. At last the gentleman got up and took his stick, and sallied forth to drive away the intruder. But no dog was to be seen, and he at last traced the yelping sound to the cage of the owl.'"

Malcolm thought it was fine fun for the owl to play them such a trick, but the little girls were very decided in their opinion that it was a very mean trick to rouse up the dog and the master by such a noise.

"The great horned owl usually builds in the month of May. The nest is generally placed in the fork of a tall tree, and is made of sticks piled in considerable quantities, lined with dry leaves and a
few feathers. Sometimes it selects a hollow tree, and then very few materials are taken in. There are four large eggs, almost round and pure white. In one of these nests, after the young had flown, were found the head and bones of two chickens, the legs and head of the golden-winged woodpecker, and part of the wings and feathers of several other birds.

"This owl, you see, is very careful of its young. Once one of them gave a remarkable proof of this. 'There was an owl's nest near to a gentleman's house, and one day the servants caught a young bird that was unable to fly, and put it in a hen-coop. The next day a dead partridge was found lying close by the coop that had been brought in the night. The next morning some other little animal or bird was found. This went on for a fortnight. The gentleman and his servants watched to see who had provided for the wants of the little captive, and there was no doubt but the parent-birds had done it.'

"And now, Malcolm," continued the governess, "here is something that you may remember, if you like, to tell Patrick: 'Ignorance and superstition, in all ages and in all countries, listen to the voice of the owl, and even contemplate its physiognomy, with feelings of disgust and a kind of fearful awe. The priests or conjurors among some of our Indian na-
tions have taken advantage of the reverential horror for this bird, and have adopted the great horned owl, the subject of the present account, as the symbol or emblem of their office. Among the Creeks the junior priests or students constantly wear a white mantle, and have a great owl-skin cased and stuffed very ingeniously, so well executed as almost to appear like the living bird, having large, sparkling glass beads or buttons fixed in the head for eyes. This emblem of wisdom and divination they wear sometimes as a crest on the top of the head; at other times the image sits on the arm or is borne on the hand.'

"These concluding words are the best of all: 'With all the gloomy habits and ungracious tones of the owl, there is nothing in this bird supernatural or mysterious, or more than that of a simple bird of prey formed for feeding by night, like many other animals, and of reposing by day. The harshness of its voice, occasioned by the width and capacity of its throat, may be intended by Heaven as an alarm and warning to the birds and animals on which it preys to secure themselves from danger.'

"The white or barn owl (Fig. 21) is seldom seen here, except during very severe winters. The multitudes of old ruined castles, towers, monasteries, and cathedrals that are to be found in the Old World are the chosen haunts of this well-known species. Its
Our Home Birds.

BARN OWL.
savage cries at night give, with vulgar minds, a cast of supernatural horror to those venerable, mouldering piles of antiquity.' This owl is said, when asleep, to make a blowing noise like a man snoring. It is about fourteen inches long.

"Here is a piece of poetry about the owl, with which we will close up our talk:

"'THE OWL.

'Pray thee, Owl, what art thou doing,
With that dolefullest tu-whoo-ing?
Dark the night is, dark and dreary,
Never a little star shines cheery;
Wild north winds come up the hollow,
And the pelting rain doth follow;
And the trees, the tempest braving,
To and fro are wildly waving.
Every living thing is creeping
To its den, and silence keeping,
Saving thou, the night hallooing
With thy dissmallest tu-whoo-ing.

'Naught I see, so black the night is,
Black the storm, too, in its might is;
But I know there lies the forest,
Peril ever there the sorest,
Where the wild deer-stealers wander;
And the ruin lieth yonder,
Splintered tower and crumbling column
All among the yew trees solemn,
Where the toad and lizard clamber
Into many an ancient chamber,
And below, the black rocks under,
Like the muttering, coming thunder,
Lowly muttering, rolling ever,
Passes on the fordless river:—
Yet I see the black night only
Covering all, so deep and lonely.

'Prithee, Owl, what art thou saying,
So terrific and dismay ing?
Dost thou speak of loss and ruin,
In that ominous tu-whoo-ing?
While the tempest yet was stiller,
Homeward rode the kindly miller.
With his drench'd meal-sacks o'er him,
And his little son before him;
Dripping wet, yet loud in laughter,
Rode the jolly hunters after;
And sore wet, and blown, and wildern,
Went a huddling group of children,
And each, through the tempest's pother.
Got home safely to its mother;
And ere afternoon was far on,
Up the mountain spurred the baron.
How can evil then betide 'em?
In their houses warm they hide 'em;
In his chimney-corner smoking,
Sits the miller, spite thy croaking;
And the children, snug and cosy,
In their beds sleep warm and rosy,
And the baron, with his lady,
Plays at chess sedate and steady.

'Hoot away, then, if it cheer thee,
Only I and darkness hear thee.
Trusting Heaven, we'll fear no ruin,
Spite thy ominous tu-whoo-ing.'
CHAPTER XXIV.

BROWN CREEPER AND HIS FRIENDS.

"WHAT a funny little bird!" exclaimed Clara, "climbing up the tree as if he hadn't any wings! Why, he looks almost like a turtle, Miss Harson, except his sharp bill.—Look, Edie!"

Edith laughed too over the picture of the brown creeper (Fig. 22), and Malcolm declared that he had never seen such a bird as that.

"You will have to go to the woods to find him," said Miss Harson, "and then look carefully, perhaps, before you happen to see him. Some one has written of this bird: 'A retired inhabitant of the woods and groves, and not in any way conspicuous for voice or plumage, it passes its days with us, attracting scarcely any notice or attention. Its small size and the manner in which it procures its food both tend to secrete it from sight. In these pursuits its actions are more like those of a
mouse than of a bird, darting like a great moth from tree to tree, uttering a faint trilling sound as it fixes on their boles, running round them in a spiral direction, when, with repeated wriggles having gained the summit, it darts to the base of another and commences again.’”

“Well, I should think,” said Malcolm, “that it had better act more like a bird, if it is one. If I could fly, I wouldn’t be crawling around in that fashion.”

“All birds cannot fly alike,” replied the governess, “and the flying powers of the brown creeper are evidently limited. It is only five inches long, and the upper part of the head is of a deep brownish-black, and the back brown, both being streaked with white; the light, drab-colored tail is quite as long as the body, and the bill is half an inch long, tapering to a point.

“The nest is built in the hollow trunk or branch of a tree, but as this bird is not provided with any conveniences for digging, he always selects a tree that has been shivered or had a branch broken off, or where squirrels or woodpeckers have already made a hole for him. There are seven eggs of a dull brown, marked with small dots of reddish-yellow and streaks of dark brown, which seems to be the favorite color of the creepers. It is quite funny to see the great caution with which the young ones take their first views of the world, creeping about
like human babies for a long time before they venture to try their wings.

"Beetles and wood-bugs and any insects found on trees furnish the brown creeper with food, and in spite of its very quiet appearance it is an extremely active and restless little bird. In winter it associates with the small spotted woodpecker, nuthatch, titmouse, and such-like; and it very wisely follows in their wake, and gleans up such insects as their stronger bills expose and frighten from their hiding-places, for its own bill will scarcely make an impression even on decayed wood, and is only useful for holes and among scales of bark.

"This little procession is thus described: 'Of the titmouse there are generally present the individuals of a whole family, and seldom more than one or two of the others. As the party advances through the woods from tree to tree, our little gleaner seems to observe a good deal of regularity in his proceedings; for I have almost always observed that he alights on the body near the root of the tree, and directs his course with great nimbleness upward to the higher branches, sometimes spirally, often in a direct line, moving rapidly and uniformly along with his tail bent to the tree, and not in the hopping manner of the woodpecker, whom he far surpasses in climbing, running along the lower side of the horizontal
branches with surprising ease. If any person be near when he alights, he is sure to keep the opposite side of the tree, moving round as he moves, so as to prevent him from getting more than a transient glimpse of him.

"The best method of outwitting him, if you are alone, is as soon as he alights and disappears behind the trunk to take your stand behind an adjoining one, and keep a sharp lookout twenty or thirty feet up the body of the tree he is on; for he generally mounts very regularly to a considerable height, examining the whole way as he advances. In a minute or two, hearing all still, he will make his appearance on one side or other of the tree, and give you an opportunity of observing him."

"We will now consider some of the brown creeper's friends," continued Miss Harson; "and first comes the titmouse or chickadee (Fig. 23), who has the advantage of the brown creeper in length by about half an inch, and is also much plumper in body. Look at this fat little fellow on the twig!"

He was duly admired, with his bright eye and ac-
tive expression, as though just ready for a spring; and the governess continued: "This is the black-capped titmouse, so called from the color on the upper part of his head and neck; the rest of the body is a kind of brownish slate-color, except the breast and body, which are yellowish-white, and the wings are edged with white. 'The males have a variety of very sprightly notes, which cannot indeed be called a song, but rather a lively, frequently-repeated, and often-varied twitter. They are most usually seen during the fall and winter, when they leave the depths of the woods and approach nearer to the scenes of cultivation. At such seasons they abound among evergreens, feeding on the seeds of the pine tree; they are also fond of sunflower-seeds, and associate in parties of six, eight, or more, attended by the two species of nuthatch, the crested titmouse, brown creeper, and small spotted woodpecker; the whole forming a very nimble and restless company whose food, manners, and disposition are pretty much alike.'

"This company, it seems, will go through the woods from tree to tree, tumbling, chattering, and hanging from the extremities of the branches, as though out for 'a regular good time,' but keeping a sharp lookout around the roots of the leaves, buds, and crevices of the bark for insects and their larvae.
They also frequently visit the orchards, particularly in the autumn, and examine the sides of the barn and barnyard with the same intention, trees in such places being generally full of insects.

"Of the 'manners and disposition' of the chickadees nothing very favorable can be said, as they often fight violently with each other, and are known to attack young and sickly birds that are not able to defend themselves; and their blows are said to be always aimed at the skull. Wilson says: 'Being in the woods one day, I followed a bird for some time, the singularity of whose notes surprised me. Having shot him off from the top of a very tall tree, I found it to be the black-headed titmouse, with a long and deep indentation in the cranium, the skull having been evidently, at some former time, driven in and fractured, but was now perfectly healed. Whether or not the change of voice could be owing to this circumstance I cannot pretend to decide.'

"The chickadee builds its nest in a hole, sometimes with great labor dug out by itself and oftener choosing the deserted residence of a squirrel or woodpecker. There are six white eggs, marked with very small specks of red.

"With such a large family he is very busy through the whole day in capturing vast quantities of cater-
pillars, flies, and grubs. It has been calculated that a single pair of these birds destroy on the average not less than five hundred of these pests daily; a labor which could hardly be surpassed by a man, even if he gave his whole time to the task. Moreover, the man could not be as successful at so small a cost; for, setting aside the value of his time and the amount of a laborer's daily wages, he could not reach the denser and loftier twigs on which the caterpillars revel, and which the titmouse can traverse with perfect ease. No man can investigate a tree, and clear it of the insect hosts that constantly beleaguer it, without doing some damage to the buds and young leaves by his rough handling; whereas the chickadee trips along the branches, peeps under every leaf, swings himself round upon his perch, spies out every insect, and secures it with a peck so rapid that it is hardly perceptible.

"In some observations made on the habits of this and some other birds in Paris, it was found that the titmouse destroys, at the lowest computation, over two hundred thousand eggs alone of noxious insects in the course of a year. That one small bird is thus able to accomplish so much good in destroying these myriads of vermin is an appeal to the good sense of the farmer, for the protection of the whole class, that should not be slighted."
"The crested titmouse is rather larger, measuring six inches, and has a high, pointed, almost upright crest, which gives it a quaint look and is rather ornamental. The upper parts are of the same color as those of the chickadee, but the front is black with a reddish tinge, and the sides under the wings are reddish-orange. The tail is a little forked, and of the same color above as the back.

"This species of titmouse is 'more noisy, more musical, and more suspicious, though rather less active, than the other. It is nevertheless a sprightly bird, possessing a remarkable variety in the tones of its voice, at one time not much louder than the squeaking of a mouse, and a moment after whistling aloud and clearly, as if calling a dog, and continuing this dog-call through the woods for half an hour at a time. It possesses considerable strength in the muscles of its neck, and is almost perpetually digging into acorns, nuts, crevices, and rotten parts of the bark after the larvae of insects.

"The nest and eggs are the same as those of the black-capped titmouse; and in the month of July the whole family hunt together, the parents keeping up a continual chatter, as if haranguing and directing their inexperienced brood. 'During winter they roost in holes of trees or walls, eaves of thatched houses, or hay and corn-ricks. When not in holes
they remain suspended with the back downward or outward."

"The white-breasted nuthatch is about the same size, measuring five inches and a half; and its general color is a light blue or lead, the tail being of lead-color, black and white mixed. The name 'nuthatch' has been bestowed on this family of birds from their supposed practice of breaking nuts by repeated hatchings or hammerings with their bills. It is also said that they are accustomed to lay up a large store of nuts for the winter.

"'The white-breasted nuthatch is common almost everywhere in the woods of North America, and may be known at a distance by the notes "quank! quank!" frequently repeated as he moves upward and down, in spiral circles, around the body and larger branches of the tree, probing behind the thin scaly bark of the white oak, and shelling off considerable pieces of it in his search after spiders, ants, insects, and their larvæ. He rests and roosts with his head downward, and appears to possess a degree of curiosity not common to many birds, frequently descending very silently within a few feet of the root of the tree where you happen to stand, stopping head downward, stretching out his neck in a horizontal position, as if to reconnoitre your appearance, and after several minutes of silent observation, wheeling round, he
again mounts with fresh activity, piping his unisons as before.

"'Strongly attached to his native forests, he seldom forsakes them, and amidst the rigors of the severest winter weather his note is still heard in the bleak and leafless woods and among the howling branches. Sometimes the rain, freezing as it falls, encloses every twig, and even the trunk of the tree, in a hard, transparent coat or shell of ice. On these occasions I have observed his anxiety and dissatisfaction at being with difficulty able to make his way along the smooth surface; at these times generally abandoning the trees, gleaning about the stables, around the house, mixing among the fowls, entering the barn, and examining the beams and rafters and every place where he may pick up a subsistence.'

"This bird builds its nest in the hole of a tree, in a hollow rail in the fence, and sometimes in the wooden cornice under the eaves, and there are five eggs of a dull white, spotted with brown at the large end. 'The male is extremely attentive to the female while sitting, supplying her regularly with sustenance, stopping frequently at the mouth of the hole, calling and offering her what he has brought in the most endearing manner. Sometimes he seems to stop merely to inquire how she is, and to lighten
the tedious moments with his soothing chatter. He seldom rambles far from the spot, and when danger appears, regardless of his own safety, he flies instantly to alarm her. When both are feeding on the trunk of the same tree or of adjoining ones, he is perpetually calling on her, and from the momentary pause he makes it is plain that he feels pleased to hear her reply.'"
CHAPTER XXV.

WOODPECKERS.

"These are quite a numerous family," said Miss Harson, "and are all to be found in our woods through the winter, but the golden-winged woodpecker seems, with his cheery notes, to belong more particularly to the season of spring.

"The red-headed woodpecker is probably as well known as any bird in America, and his red, white, black, and steel-blue plumage is frequently seen in the orchards and corn-fields and along the fences where he is so fond of hovering. 'Wherever there is a tree or trees of the wild cherry covered with ripe fruit, there you see him busy among the branches; and in passing orchards you may easily know where to find the earliest, sweetest apples by observing those trees on or near which the red-headed woodpecker is skulking, for he is so excellent a connoisseur in fruit that wherever an apple or pear is found broached by him, it is sure to be among the ripest and best-flavored; when alarmed he seizes a capital one by
sticking his open bill deep into it, and bears it off to the woods.'

"This bird is named from the deep scarlet hue of his head-feathers; the upper part of the body is black and steel-blue, and the lower part white from the breast down. It is nine and a half inches long.

"The nests of all woodpeckers are alike—holes dug with their long sharp bills in the trunks or limbs of trees. The red-headed woodpecker is very shy about his nest, being careful in visiting it not to be noticed. This precaution is not taken in the depth of the woods, where the prying eye of man is not supposed to enter; but there there is a deadly foe against whose depredations neither the height of the tree nor the depth of the cavity is the least security. This is the poor cat-bird's terror, the hateful black snake, 'who frequently glides up the trunk of the tree, and like a skulking savage enters the woodpecker's peaceful apartment, devours the eggs or helpless young in spite of the cries and flutterings of the parents, and, if the place is large enough, coils himself up in the spot they occupied, where he will sometimes remain for several days.'

"This," continued Miss Harson, "might be a warning, I should think, to heartless boys: 'The eager schoolboy, after hazarding his neck to reach the
woodpecker's hole, at the triumphant moment when he thinks the nestlings his own, and strips his arm, launching it down into the cavity and grasping what he conceives to be the callow young, starts with horror at the sight of a hideous snake, and almost drops from his giddy pinnacle, retreating down the tree with terror and precipitation. Several adventures of this kind have come to my knowledge; and one of them was attended with serious consequences, where both snake and boy fell to the ground, and a broken thigh and long confinement cured the adventurer completely of his ambition for robbing woodpeckers' nests."

"Don't you think that boy deserved his fall, Miss Harson?" asked Malcolm.

"I think he did," replied his governess, "although a broken thigh is a very severe punishment. But the cruelty and meanness of robbing poor helpless birds of their young can scarcely be too strongly punished.

"Toward autumn, we are told, this bird often approaches the barn or farmhouse, and raps on the shingles and weather-boards; he is of a gay and frolicsome disposition, and half a dozen of the fraternity are frequently seen diving and vociferating around the high, dead limbs of some large tree, pursuing and playing with each other, and amus-
ing the passers-by with their gambols. Their note or cry is shrill and lively, and so much resembles that of a species of tree-frog which frequents the same tree that it is often difficult to tell one from the other.

"The downy woodpecker is the smallest of the family, being only six inches and three-quarters long. He takes his name from his loose, downy feathers, which are black on the back, divided by a strip of white; the wings are black, spotted with white; and these two colors prevail all over him, relieved by a strip of deep scarlet on the back of his head.

"This little woodpecker is the friend and associate of the brown creeper and titmouse, but he is not on such good terms with the house wren, who takes an inconvenient fancy to his nest. When Downy and his wife have spent a week or so in boring a nice hole for their nursery, this wren, who also builds in the hollow of a tree, but who has neither the necessary tools nor the strength to dig out such an apartment for herself, attacks them with violence, and generally succeeds in driving them off.

"Some one saw a pair of these woodpeckers, after beginning in a cherry tree within a few yards of the house, and making considerable progress, turned out by a wren. 'The former began again on a pear tree
in the garden, fifteen or twenty yards off, where, after digging out a most complete apartment, and one egg being laid, they were once more assaulted by the same impertinent intruder, and finally forced to abandon the place.'

"'The principal characteristics of this little bird are diligence, familiarity, perseverance, and a strength and energy in the head and muscles of the neck which are truly astonishing. Mounted on the infested branch of an old apple tree, where insects have lodged their corroding and destructive brood in crevices between the bark and wood, he labors sometimes for half an hour incessantly at the same spot before he has succeeded in dislodging and destroying them. At these times you may walk up pretty close to the tree, and even stand immediately below it within five or six feet of the bird, without in the least embarrassing him; the strokes of his bill are distinctly heard several hundred yards off; and I have known him to be at work for several hours together on the same tree.'

"The largest of the woodpeckers is the ivory-billed, which measures twenty inches; its general color is black, with a gloss of green when exposed to a strong light; the front of the head is black, but the other part is a beautiful red, spotted at the bottom with white. The beak, which is an inch wide at the base,
is of the color and consistency of ivory, very strong and elegantly fluted.

"'The strength of this woodpecker is such,' says one well acquainted with him, 'that I have seen it detach pieces of bark seven or eight inches in length at a single blow of its powerful bill, and, by beginning at the top branch of a dead tree, tear off the bark to an extent of twenty or thirty feet in the course of a few hours, leaping forward with its body in an upright position, tossing its head to the right and left, or leaning it against the bark to ascertain the precise spot where the grubs were concealed, and immediately after renewing its blows with fresh vigor, all the while sounding its loud notes as if highly delighted.'

"The California woodpecker has some very remarkable attractions. It is one of the most handsome of the family, and is very provident for the future, laying by food for the winter when its search for insects must cease. A writer on California says: 'In stripping off the bark of this tree, I observed it to be perforated with holes, larger than those which a musket-ball would make, shaped with the most accurate precision, as if bored under the guidance of a rule and compass, and many of them filled most neatly with acorns. Earlier in the season I had remarked such holes in most of all the soft timber, but
imagining that they were caused by wood-insects, I did not stop to examine or inquire; but now finding them studded with acorns, firmly fixed in, which I knew could not have been driven there by the wind, I sought for an explanation, which was practically given me by Captain S—pointing out a flock of woodpeckers busily and noisily employed in the provident task of securing the winter's provision. For it appears that this sagacious bird is not all the time thriftlessly engaged in 'tapping the hollow beech tree' for the mere idle purpose of empty sound, but spends its summer season in picking these holes, in which it lays its store of food for the winter, where the elements can neither affect nor place it beyond their reach; and it is regarded as a sure omen that the snowy period is approaching when these birds commence stowing away their acorns, which otherwise might be covered by its fall. I have frequently paused from my chopping to watch them in the neighborhood, with the acorns in their bills, half clawing, half flying around the tree, and have admired the adroitness with which they tried it at different holes until they found one of its exact calibre, when, inserting the pointed end, they tapped it home most artistically with the beak, and flew down for another.

"'But the natural instinct of this bird is even more
remarkable in the choice of the nuts, which are invariably found to be sound, whereas it is an utter impossibility, in selecting them for roasting, to pick up a batch that will not have a large portion of them unfit for use, the most smooth and polished frequently containing a large grub generated within. Even the wily Digger Indian, with all his craft and experience, is unable to arrive at anything like an unerring selection, while in a large bagful that we took from the bark of our log there was not one containing the slightest germ of decay.'

"There are other species of woodpeckers," said Miss Harson in conclusion, "but none that are so well known as these; and I think we shall all know a woodpecker now if we see or hear one."

Malcolm was quite sure that he should, and expressed the intention of going to the woods very soon to look for that lively procession consisting of Downy, Titmouse and family, Nuthatch, and Brown Creeper.
"That is the beautifullest bird we have seen yet," exclaimed Clara enthusiastically.

It was the blue jay, who seems to light up our bare winter woods with a piece of rich blue sky, and whose constant screaming and chattering makes the neighborhood appear very lively indeed.

"There is quite a great deal of him too," said Miss Harson, "as he is eleven inches long; and you see how handsomely his head is ornamented with a crest of light-blue feathers. The neck has a pointed collar of black, which contrasts beautifully with the pure white of the breast; the wings are deep and light blue mingled, and are quite in demand as ornaments: they are also barred with black and tipped with white; the long, elegant tail is colored in the same manner.

"The blue jay (Fig. 24) is an almost universal inhabitant of the woods, frequenting the thickest settlements as well as the deepest recesses of the forest, where his squalling voice often alarms the
deer, to the disappointment and mortification of the hunter. In the charming season of spring, when every thicket pours forth harmony, the part performed by the jay always catches the ear. He appears to be among his fellow-musicians what the trumpeter is in a band, some of his notes having no distant resemblance to the tones of that instrument. These he has the faculty of changing through a great variety of modulations according to the particular humor he happens to be in. When disposed for ridicule, there is scarce a bird whose peculiarities of song he cannot tune his notes to.'

"When this bird discovers any one approaching as he nestles among the thick branches of some favorite tree, he sets up a sudden and vehement outcry, flying off and screaming with all his might, as if he called the whole feathered tribe of the neighborhood to witness some outrageous injury he had received. Some of his calls have been compared to the repeated screakings of an ungreased wheelbarrow. 'All these he accompanies with various nods, jerks, and other gesticulations, for which the whole tribe of jays are so remarkable.'"

"Isn't he like the mocking-bird?" asked Malcolm.

"Very much like him in his powers of imitation," was the reply, "but he really belongs to the crow family, his species being Corvus cristatus, and in
confinement he displays many of the traits which distinguish his relative the magpie. One that was brought up in a family at the South 'had all the tricks and loquacity of a parrot; pilfered everything he could conveniently carry off, and hid them in holes and crevices; answered to his name with great sociability when called on; could articulate a number of words pretty distinctly; and when he heard an uncommon noise or loud talking seemed impatient to contribute his share to the general festivity—as he probably thought it—by a display of all the oratorical powers he was possessed of.'

"He is represented as not only bold and vociferous, but possessing quite a talent for mimicry, which sometimes gets him into trouble; as 'he seems to enjoy great satisfaction in mocking and teasing other birds, particularly the little hawk, imitating his cry whenever he sees him, and squealing out as if caught; this soon brings a number of his own tribe around him, who all join in the frolic, darting about the hawk, and feigning the cries of a bird sorely wounded and already under the clutches of its devourer, while others lie concealed in bushes, ready to second their associates in the attack. But this ludicrous farce often terminates tragically. The hawk, singling out one of the most insolent and provoking, sweeps upon him in an unguarded moment, and offers him up a
sacrifice to his hunger and resentment. In an instant the tune is changed; all their buffoonery vanishes, and loud and incessant screams proclaim their disaster."

"I should think the jay would be afraid to try that very often," observed Malcolm.

"One would think so," replied the governess, "but it seems that 'the blue jays have a particular antipathy to this bird, and frequently insult it by following and imitating its notes so exactly as to deceive even those well acquainted with both. In return for all this abuse the hawk contents itself with now and then feasting on the plumpest of its persecutors, who are therefore in perpetual dread of him; yet, through some strange infatuation or from fear that if they lose sight of him he may attack them unawares, the sparrow-hawk no sooner appears than the alarm is given and the whole posse of jays follows.'"

"What silly birds they must be!" commented Clara.

"They certainly do appear to be rather empty-headed, like most chatterers, and sometimes show malice besides. Of all birds, the blue jay is said to be the most bitter enemy to the owl. 'No sooner has he discovered the retreat of one of these than he summons the whole feathered fraternity to his assistance, who surround the glimmering solitaire
and attack him from all sides, raising such a shout as may be heard in a still day more than half a mile off. When in my hunting excursions I have passed near this scene of tumult, I have imagined to myself that I heard the insulting party venting their respective charges with all the virulence of a Billingsgate mob; the owl meanwhile returning every compliment with a broad, goggling stare. The war becomes louder and louder, and the owl, at length forced to betake himself to flight, is followed by his whole train of persecutors until driven beyond the boundaries of their jurisdiction.'

"The jay's favorite food is chestnuts, acorns, and Indian corn. He occasionally feeds on bugs and caterpillars, and sometimes pays a plundering visit to the orchard, cherry-rows, and potato-patch, and has been known, in times of scarcity, to venture into the barn through openings between the weatherboards. 'In these cases he is extremely active and silent, and if surprised in the fact makes his escape with precipitation, but without noise, as if conscious of his criminality.'

"He does not disdain, too, to sneak through the woods on a tour of destruction, and among the thickets and hedgerows, 'plundering every nest he can find of its eggs, tearing up the callow young by
piecemeal, and spreading alarm and sorrow around him. The cries of the distressed parents soon bring together a number of interested spectators—for birds in such circumstances seem truly to sympathize with each other—and he is sometimes attacked with such spirit as to be under the necessity of making a speedy retreat.'

"It is pleasant," continued Miss Harson, "to read something at last in favor of this mischievously-disposed bird; and some one writes that 'the jay is one of the most useful agents in the economy of Nature for disseminating forest trees and other hard-seeded vegetables on which they feed. Their chief employment during the autumnal season is foraging to supply their winter stores. In performing this necessary duty they drop abundance of seed in their flight over fields, hedges, and by fences, where they alight to deposit them in the post-holes and other suitable places. It is remarkable what numbers of young trees rise up in fields and pastures after a wet winter and spring. These birds alone are able in a few years' time to replant all the cleared lands.'

"The blue jay builds a large nest, usually in the cedar, but sometimes on an apple tree—forms the outside of sticks and lines it with dry, fibrous roots. It is concealed as much as possible; and the male partner is particularly careful not to draw the atten-
tion of enemies to his mate; hence he can seldom be seen or heard near the place. There are five eggs of a dull olive hue, spotted with brown.

"Here is a little story that displays our handsome chatterbox in a more amiable light than usual. The writer says: 'A blue jay which I have kept for some time, and with whom I am on terms of familiarity, is in reality a very notable example of mildness of disposition and sociability of manners. An accident in the woods first put me in possession of this bird while in full plumage and in high health and spirits. I carried him home with me, and put him into a cage already occupied by a golden-winged woodpecker, where he was saluted with such rudeness, and received such a drubbing from the lord of the manor for entering his premises, that, to save his life, I was obliged to take him out again.

"I then put him into another cage, where the only tenant was a female oriole. She also put on airs of alarm, as if she considered herself endangered and insulted by the intrusion; the jay, meanwhile, sat mute and motionless on the bottom of the cage, either dubious of his own situation or willing to allow time for the fears of his neighbor to subside. Accordingly, in a few minutes, after displaying various threatening gestures, she began to make her approaches, but with great circumspection and readi-
ness for retreat. Seeing, however, the jay begin to pick up some crumbs of broken chestnuts in a humble and peaceable way, she also descended and began to do the same, but at the slightest motion of her new guest wheeled round and put herself on the defensive.

""All this ceremonious jealousy vanished before evening, and they now roost together, feed and play together, in perfect harmony and good humor. When the jay goes to drink his messmate very impudently jumps into the saucer to wash herself, throwing the water in showers over her companion, who bears it all patiently, venturing now and then to take a sip between every splash, without betraying the smallest token of irritation. On the contrary, he seems to take pleasure in his little fellow-prisoner, allowing her to pick, which she does very gently, about his whiskers, and to clear his claws from the minute fragments of chestnuts which happen to adhere to them.

""This attachment on the one part and mild condescension on the other may perhaps be partly the effect of mutual misfortunes—which are found not only to knit mankind, but many species of inferior animals, more closely together—and shows that the disposition of the blue jay may be humanized and rendered susceptible of affectionate impressions, even
for those birds which, in a state of Nature, he would have no hesitation in making a meal of."

The children expressed a desire to see two such feathered friends together, which made Miss Harson smile and recommend the aviary again. But little Edith didn't approve of the blue jay for eating the eggs and the poor little birds out of their nests, and declared that he was just as wicked as the black snake.
CHAPTER XXVII.

SOME LITTLE WINTER VISITORS.

"MISS HARSON," asked Malcolm rather dubiously one evening, "are there any birds left now?"

"A few," was the reply; "we have nearly exhausted our stock, at least of those birds about which I intended to talk to you at present; but we must not forget two or three little winter friends that I think we should miss sadly."

"The little snow-birds!" cried Clara and Edith. "Please tell us about them, Miss Harson, we love to watch them so on cold mornings."

"We have the snow-bird and the snow-bunting," said their governess. "The snow-bird is about six inches long, and wears a very neat little suit of slate-color and brown, with a pure white vest. The tail, as you see in the picture, is a darker slate-color and a little forked; the outside feather on each side is white.

"These little birds are to be found everywhere, and they come to us from colder regions about the last of October. 'At first they are most generally
seen on the borders of woods, among the falling and decayed leaves, in loose flocks of thirty and forty together, always taking to the trees when disturbed. As the weather sets in colder they approach nearer the farmhouse and villages, and on the appearance of what is usually called falling weather assemble in larger flocks, and seem doubly diligent in searching for food. This increased activity is generally a sure prognostic of a storm.

"'When deep snows cover the ground they become almost half domesticated. They collect about the barn, stables, and other outhouses, spread over the yard, and even round the steps of the door, not only in the country and villages, but in the heart of our large cities, crowding around the threshold early in the morning, gleaning up the crumbs, appearing very lively and familiar.'

"Somebody else says: 'We cannot help loving the snow-birds, they are so neighborly, calling upon us at our doorsteps, as well as keeping company with us in the leafless forest-paths. It does us good to have our little cousins of the woods, who do not know our alphabet, come and ask us in their own language for such small favors as we can bestow upon them.'

"The snow-bird is supposed to sing:

'Because in all weathers I'm happy and free,
They call me the Winter King, Pee-dee-dee!'"
"Here is a pretty little poem that I am sure you will like:

'When winter winds are blowing,
And clouds are full of snow,
There comes a flock of little birds
A-flying to and fro;
About the withered garden,
Around the naked field,
In any wayside shrub or tree
That may a berry yield,
You'll see them flitting, flitting,
And hear their merry song:
The scattered crumbs of summer's feast
Feed winter birdlings long.

'But when the snow-drifts cover
The garden and the field,
When all the shrubs are cased in ice,
And every brook is sealed,
Then come the little snow-birds
As beggars to your door;
They pick up every tiny crumb,
With eager chirps for more.
Like wandering musicians,
They 'neath the windows sing;
All winter long they stroll about,
And leave us in the spring.

'Off to the land of icebergs,
To islands cold and drear,
They fly before the summer comes
To frolic with us here.
Give them a hearty welcome;
It surely were not good
That they who sing in winter-time
Should ever lack for food.'"

"We'll give them as much as ever they can eat here," said the children in great delight with these verses. "May we feed them every day when the snow comes, Miss Harson?"

Their kind governess promised that they should, and she continued: "The nests of these little birds are made in colder regions than ours, and they are said to be placed quite carelessly on the ground or among the grass, several of them being sometimes found quite near together.

"The snow-bunting is often called the white snow-bird, to distinguish it from the other, and the colder the weather the whiter its plumage becomes."

"But this one in the picture," said Malcolm, "has a black and a brown back."

"Yes," was the reply, "but his head and breast are snowy white, which makes a very pretty contrast. It is sometimes called 'snowflake,' because of the pure whiteness of its head and breast and the greater part of the wings; and some of these birds are said to be
entirely white. Their plumage varies according to age and season. They come to us early in December or with the first heavy snow. 'They fly in close, compact bodies, driving about most in a high wind, sometimes alighting near the doors, but seldom sitting long, being a roving, restless bird. They are universally considered as the harbingers of severe cold weather.'

"The nest of the snow-bunting can scarcely be found nearer than Greenland, where it is said to be made in the fissures of the rocks or mountains, of grass on the outside, feathers in the middle, and the down of the Arctic fox for a lining—a very comfortable little retreat—and in it are laid five white eggs, spotted with brown. These birds are said to sing very sweetly near their nests.

"Snow-buntings are found even in the dreadful climate of Spitzbergen; and the wonder is what they can get to eat there where nothing but mosses will grow. Where such things are to be found they live largely on the seeds of water-plants and some very small kinds of shellfish.

"The little winter wren, which is only three and a half inches long, is frequently seen in cold weather 'on the banks of creeks, old roots, decayed logs, small bushes, and rushes near watery places; he even ap-
proaches the farmhouse, rambles about the wood-pile, and creeps among the openings like a mouse. With tail erect—which is his constant habit—mounted on some projecting point or pinnacle, he sings with great animation. Even in the yards, gardens, and outhouses of the city he appears familiar and quite at home.'

"This little bird is brown, like his relatives, mixed with black and white. He comes to us in October with the snow-birds, and usually stays all winter.

"The tree-sparrow is frequently seen in flocks with the snow-birds, and generally makes his appearance here in November. He is six and a half inches long, and the upper part of his head is a bright reddish-brown; the neck and breast are a pale ash-color; the back is very prettily streaked with pale drab, bright bay, and black.

"This sparrow is said to frequent sheltered hollows, thickets, and hedgerows near springs of water, and to have a low, warbling note that can scarcely be heard at the distance of twenty or thirty yards. There is scarcely a more common bird, however, to be seen on the roadside than this same sparrow, and I think you would like to hear where I saw a colony of them last winter."

"Indeed we would, Miss Harson!" cried the children simultaneously.
"I was in the country, and one day in the depth of winter I heard a wonderful commotion, in the way of twittering and flying, that could only proceed from birds of some kind, but, though I gazed from the window in all directions, not a bird could I see. I looked first on the roof of a part of the building that stretched just below me on the left, but nothing was to be seen there; I gazed up into the tall trees around the house, but not a bird was visible on the naked branches; I stared down at the ground, but with no better success. Meanwhile, the noise was going on in my very ears; there was chattering, scolding, chirruping, twittering, and every sound that a large assembly of little birds could possibly make, yet never a feather could I see anywhere. What was to be done about it? Things certainly looked very queer. Just beneath my window there was an evergreen honeysuckle, so trained that it formed a tall narrow bower that would have made a charming 'baby-house,' with room inside for plenty of dolls and furniture. You see, it did not rest against the wall, but occupied nearly the whole of a small round bed. My eyes happened to rest upon it, and saw first one little brown head and then another—some popping out, and some popping in; and such a flying up and down inside! The honeysuckle was like a great roomy cage which they could leave whenever they
pleased, and some union-housekeeping arrangement had probably been entered into.

"They were a regular colony of sparrows who had taken possession of this snug winter residence; and I never saw a busier or happier collection of birds. After this I looked for them every day, and when I did not see them I was very sure to hear them. So, you see, I had a private aviary close to my window."

"I wish we had honeysuckle full of sparrows," said Clara, "so that Edie and I could see them every day."

"They'll learn to come here if we feed 'em—won't they, Miss Harson?" asked Malcolm.

When they were assured of this the little Kyles almost began wishing for snow in August, that they might have the pleasure of feeding the birds. But the season did not hurry on any faster.

"Listen," said Miss Harson, "and I will read you a very pretty account of providing for these little winter-guests in Norway. After relating the various preparations for Christmas, it says: 'Even the birds are to have their share of the Christmas joy. As soon as the church-bells have "rung in the feast," at five o'clock in the afternoon of Christmas Eve the father of the house takes his richest sheaf of oats or barley and attaches it to the end of a pole, which is nailed to the gable of the barn or storehouse. The
mother and children stand by, enjoying the sight of the happy birds fluttering around the sheaf, while the father will perhaps quote the passage about God's care even for the sparrow, wherefore it is right that the sparrow too should rejoice on the day when Christ was born.'"
"MISS HARSON," said Clara when they were looking over "the bird-book," as they called it, again, "that was so nice about the little sparrows and snow-birds! Can't you tell us some more about them?"

"Not about them, dear," replied her governess, "but I think we can find one or two more winter birds that have not yet been talked about. How do you like the looks of this one?"

"He has a poor little dead bird in his claws," said Malcolm, "and he looks ugly."

"He certainly is ferocious for a bird of his size," said Miss Harson, "being scarcely larger than a robin. He is called the American shrike, or butcher-bird, which is certainly a very ugly name; and here is a very good description that I have just read of him: 'But against one persecutor no concealment of natural color or artful device prevails, and the brains of the pretty songsters, so full of wit to avoid other enemies and provide for each day's need, are his choice repast. This dainty tyrant wears an over-
coat of bluish-ash, trimmed with black and white; a vest of white, marked with fine, wavy, transverse lines; white knee-breeches and black stockings. His eyes are dark and piercing; his nose Napoleonic; his forehead high and white; his moustache as heavy and black as that of any cavalier in Spain.

"'This Mephistopheles among birds is a ruffian truly, yet with a polish and courage without bravado which commend him. Being an outlaw in the avian kingdom, he can only maintain himself by adroitness and force, but has such singular impetuosity, prudence, and fortitude that he is not only able to keep himself and his retainers in health and wealth and happiness, but to gratify his bloodthirsty love of revenge by killing numberless innocents without mercy. Thus he has struck terror to the heart of every feathered inhabitant of the January woods.

"'Like Cæsar, he knows and joyously endures hunger and cold and thirst. Is it biting, freezing weather and blinding snow? Little cares he; he can then the more easily surprise his benumbed prey. Is it a warm, sap-starting, inviting day? He is at the festival of the birds, a fatal intruder into many a happy circle. His favorite perch is the high rider of some lonely fence, where he waits quietly till a luckless field-mouse creeps out and he is able to pounce upon it, or an incautious sparrow or kinglet
dashes past, unconscious of the watchful foe, who
seizes him like a flash of lightning.

"'Having felled his quarry with a single blow,
he returns to his fence-post and eats the brains—
rarely more—or perhaps does not taste a single bill-
ful, but impales the body upon a thorn or hangs it
in an angle of the fence, as a butcher suspends his
quarters of beef. It used to be thought this mur-
derer thus impaled nine captives and no more; so
he was christened "nine-killer;" the bookmen labelled
him Collurio borealis; we know him as the butcher-
bird. He is the Arctic brother of the shrikes, and
the boldest, bravest, noblest, and wickedest of his
savage race.'"

"What a dreadful bird!" exclaimed Clara. "I
should run away if I saw one."

"For fear of his hanging you on a thorn?" laughed
Malcolm. "Why, you are ever so many times as
large as he is."

"He is only dangerous, dear, to the poor little
birds," said her governess kindly, "though he will
attack even the hawk or eagle in defence of his
young; and all the birds respect him for his cour-
age and resolution, and much prefer not having any
contest with him. He is particularly fond of grass-
hoppers, and sometimes several of these insects will
be found killed and stuck on the thorns of some bush
or tree. Various reasons have been given for this strange habit of the butcher-bird; some people think it is only the usual custom of birds of prey, who are in the habit of carrying off surplus food and storing it for future need, while crows, jays, magpies, and others hide theirs at random in holes and crevices, where they forget it or never find it again; but the shrike sticks his on thorns and bushes, where it shrivels in the sun and becomes as useless as if lost.

"The Germans called this bird 'nine-killer,' because they believed that it killed and stuck just nine grasshoppers a day, and that it did this simply for the pleasure of it, without caring to eat the insects. But it has been proved that it does eat them, and also quantities of large black spiders.

"As the snows of winter approach, the butcher-bird comes down from the mountainous forests to the more cultivated parts of the country, and disappears again early in April. In the deepest forests he builds a large, compact nest in the upright fork of a small tree, using grass and whitish moss for the outside, and lining it warmly with feathers. There are six brownish eggs, marked at the large end with spots and streaks of red.

"The cross-bill (Fig. 25) is another curious winter bird, and it looks in the picture as though it were
deformed. But this very awkward-looking bill is only ‘a striking proof of the wisdom and kind superintending care of the Great Creator.’ The food of the cross-bill consists largely of the seeds of the pine-cone, and his queer bill is better adapted for getting these seeds from the husks that enclose them than any other arrangement that could have been made.

"This bird is rather less than six inches long, and is said to change color according to its age. It begins with olive-yellow, mixed with
ash; then turns to bright greenish-yellow, mixed with spots of dusky olive; the second year the yellow plumage has become light red, and the wings and tail are brownish-black, edged with yellow.

"The cross-bills are thickest in pine forests, where they get their food; 'they appear in large flocks, feeding on the seeds of the hemlock and white pine; have a loud, sharp, and not unmusical note; chatter as they fly; alight during the prevalence of deep snows before the door of the hunter and around the house, picking off the clay with which the logs are plastered, and settling on the roof of the cabin when disturbed, being so tame as to descend the next moment and feed as before. When kept in a cage they have many of the habits of the parrot, often climbing along the wires and using their feet to grasp the cones while taking out the seeds.'

"In the swamps, where the beautiful coral berries of the black alder gem the bare twigs in November, are to be seen flocks of the pine-finch, a little bird that is very fond of eating the seeds out of these bright-hued berries. As the weather grows colder the flocks become larger, and as many as two to three hundred have been seen together in an avenue of pine trees. They are so tame that you can walk within a few yards of the spot where a company of
them are sitting. They flutter among the branches, frequently hanging by the cones, and uttering a note almost exactly like that of the goldfinch. The pinefinch is only four inches long, and has a great deal of yellow in his plumage, mixed with black and brown.

"The winter falcon or hawk picks up a living by catching frogs, and, 'that he may pursue his profession with full effect, takes up his winter residence almost entirely among our meadows and marshes. He sometimes stuffs himself so enormously with these reptiles that the prominency of his craw makes a large bunch, and he appears to fly with difficulty.'

"This hawk is twenty inches long, has a white breast, marked with long drops of brown, and the rest of its plumage is brown, black, and white, with a mixture of brownish-orange. It makes its nest in the top of a tall tree, and forms a bulky mass of dry sticks and Spanish moss, lined with withered grass and fibrous roots arranged in a circular manner. There are four or five pale-blue eggs, faintly blotched with brownish-red at the small end. 'It is a remarkably silent bird, often spending the greater part of the day without uttering its notes more than once or twice, which it does just before it alights to watch
with great patience and perseverance for the appearance of its prey. Its haunts are the extensive meadows and marshes which occur along our rivers. There it pounces with a rapid motion on the frogs, which it either devours on the spot or carries to the perch or the top of the haystack on which it previously stood. The cry of the winter hawk is clear and prolonged, and resembles the syllables *kay-o*.

"This hawk," continued Miss Harson, "is said to possess the traits of the true falcon, that in old times played so prominent a part in the hunting-excursions of kings and nobles, and was taught to catch game for its owners. The custom of carrying a hawk on the wrist was confined to men of high distinction, and it was a saying among the Welsh, 'You may know a gentleman by his hawk, horse, and greyhound.' I have a story here of a falcon that belonged to a king of Persia, which I think you will not object to hear."

The children laughed at the idea of their "objecting," and settled themselves for the narrative with an air of great enjoyment.

"'Once upon a time a king of Persia went out hawking, carrying his favorite falcon on his wrist. A deer started up, and the king let fly his bird, which pursued the deer and brought it to the ground. The king, being eager in the chase, outstripped all
his attendants and courtiers, and at the death of the deer found himself alone.

"'He took the falcon again upon his wrist, and, remounting his horse, began to search for water, for the chase had been a very severe one, and he was exceedingly heated and thirsty. At last he discovered at the foot of a mountain a stream of water that came trickling down among the rocks. So he took out of his quiver a little cup, and with some trouble filled it at the spring, for the water dropped very slowly. By patiently waiting, however, he filled the cup and raised it to his lips. Just as his hand was raising the cup the hawk clapped its wings and upset the contents. The king was vexed at the interruption, but, thinking it an accident, he again applied the cup to the gently trickling stream, refilled it, and again raised it to his lips. A second time the falcon shook its pinions and threw the water out of the cup. The king was so angry with the bird that he dashed it to the ground in his rage and killed it on the spot.

"'Just then one of his attendants came up, and the king, giving him the cup, desired him to wipe it clean and bring him some of the water. But he was so very thirsty that he had not patience to wait for the filling of the cup drop by drop, and directed the servant to climb up the rocks and fill it at the
spring itself. The servant obeyed his master, and when he had reached the top of the rock he discovered there a crystal spring at which he filled the cup. But a little lower down he caught sight of a huge serpent lying dead, with its head resting in the course of the stream, and polluting the water with the poisonous foam that issued from its jaws.

"He presented the cup, and told his master of his discovery. The king was much affected by the thought that he had in his blind rage destroyed the faithful bird who had endeavored to save his master from ill even at the risk, and finally at the cost, of his own life.'

"The story then goes on at some length to say that the incident had a happy effect on the king, who, being an irresponsible despot, had too often committed terrible severities when enraged. But ever after the adventure of the falcon and the snake he was accustomed to check his anger by reflecting on the consequences to which it had formerly led."

"I like that story," said Malcolm, "but I wouldn't have liked to feel as that king did when he heard about the snake."

"It is a lesson to us all," replied his governess, "for acts committed in anger are almost always unjust ones."
CHAPTER XXIX.

THE END.

"HAVE you found any more birds, Miss Harson?" asked her little pupils one evening with great interest. "We thought we'd had the last of 'em."

"The last of the home birds, I think," was the reply, "but I found to-day something about nest-building that I felt sure you would like to hear: it is called 'A Legend of the Magpie.'"

"Magpies are very funny, aren't they?" asked Malcolm. "Don't we have them here?"

"Only in the western part of the country," replied Miss Harson; "so that I did not think it necessary to include it in our home birds. It is particularly an English bird, and when we come to study the birds of other countries we shall have a great deal to say about it. Besides its talking powers and its wonderful instinct, the most remarkable thing in connection with it is its nest, which is built in the strongest manner of hawthorn branches, with the thorns sticking outward, and a regular can-
opy of the same material above. There is no getting through this barricade, and the opening is just large enough for the owners to pass in and out. Here is a picture of this strange nest.

"And now we will let Mr. Magpie tell his own story, remembering that in ornithology he is *Corvus pica*, which will account for the title of 'Professor Pica' bestowed upon him here. Nidification, as I have told you, is the art of nest-building.

"It appears that once upon a time he was the acknowledged professor of nidification for the Ornithological University, and to his lectures the other birds resorted, in order to take lessons in that science. Professor Pica belonged to the practical and experimental school of philosophy, and therefore was accustomed to receive his classes among the branches of a fine tall pine tree, having previously conveyed to his theatre an amply supply of building materials.

"There were present at one of these meetings the rook, the jackdaw, the blackbird, the thrush, and other gentlemen, all professing their willingness to learn, but some, I regret to say, rather conceited.

"'Now, gentlemen,' said the professor, 'you must remember that there is a right and wrong way of doing everything, and that unless you begin at the beginning you will be tolerably certain to manage
your nests in the wrong way. The first object is to find a good, strong, forked branch, and upon that you lay your foundation by placing two sticks across each other, thus.'

"'Any one might have known that!' said the jackdaw.

"Taking no notice of the interruption, the professor proceeded: 'On these cross-sticks you then place seven or eight others, interweaving them, as you see me doing, until you have a solid floor on which you can jump without throwing it down, so.'

"'I shall not stop any longer to listen to this nonsense,' said the jackdaw; 'I knew all that long ago.'

"The starling coincided with him, and the two went off together, thinking themselves uncommonly wise.

"'Now,' resumed the professor, 'comes a neat piece of workmanship; and remember to watch me carefully while I show you how it is done. You take some slender twigs this time, and insinuate them among the rough ends of your platform, and then, working one into the other, you raise the sides of the nest, or when you are married and come to have a family your children will tumble over as soon as they begin to walk; and what will their mothers say then?"
"At this point the auditors were very attentive, for the idea of being henpecked was not agreeable.

"'The next thing to be done,' proceeded Dr. Pica, 'is to weave a little moss, or hay, or anything of a similar character, so as to make a soft bed for the eggs to lie upon. For, gentlemen, you may not be aware that the calcareous envelope of eggs is of a highly brittle character.'

"'I could have told you that,' said the rook, and straightway went off to dinner in a field, where he was seen by two scientific gentlemen, one of whom said that he ought to be killed for injuring the crops, while the other contended that he ought to be protected as a friend to the farmer, as he only ate the grains that were infested with worms. But I do not think that the rook was much the better for the discussion, as the latter gentleman shot him, in order to prove, by dissection of his crop, that he ought to be protected.

"By this time Dr. Pica was beginning to lose his temper at these desertions, but the report of the scientific gentleman's gun restored his equanimity, and he went on with his lecture:

"'At this stage I would recommend the use of a little clay, which might be nicely kneaded and spread; and then some wool or feathers can be
worked into it when wet, so that they will be fixed there when dry.'

"'I did that myself only yesterday,' said the blackbird.

"'I won't stand this any longer!' screamed the professor in a towering rage. 'Get along with you for a set of conceited hobbledehoys, who have only just got your first tail-coats, and pretend to understand nidification as well as your teachers!'

"And he drove them away in wrath. That is the reason why the other birds can only build half nests, and the jackdaw and starling cannot build a respectable nest at all.

"The wren, the dipper, and the bottle-tit, however, called on him the next day, and after making their apologies were admitted to private lessons."

The little audience expressed themselves very much pleased with this legend, although sorry that the talks about home birds were ended. They did not doubt, however, that their governess had other pleasant things in store for them.

"Come and see some snow-birds," said Miss Har-son one cold afternoon in December; and the children all ran at the invitation, wondering how large the flock would be.
There were just six of them—snow-white pigeons they looked like—on the end of the veranda-railing, some with spread wings, and some with folded ones. Malcolm and his sisters tiptoed up to them very softly—how white they were, and pretty!—but presently they laughed out.

"Well," said their governess, laughing too, "are they not snow-birds?"

They certainly were, as they were made of snow; and they looked so very natural too. The children were quite as much pleased as if they had been real, and they asked eagerly, "How did you ever think of it, Miss Harson?"

"This is what made me think of it," she replied as they followed her into the house; and she read them this pretty little poem:

"THE FLOCK OF DOVES.

"The world was like a wilderness
   Of soft and downy snow;
The trees were plumed with feathery flakes,
   And the ground was white below.

"Came the little mother out to the gate
   To watch for her children three:
Her hood was red as a poppy-flower,
   And rosy and young was she.

"She took the snow in her cunning hands,
   As waiting she stood alone,"
And lo! in a moment, beneath her touch,
A fair white dove had grown.

"A flock she wrought, and on the fence
Set them in bright array,
With folded wings, or pinions spread
Ready to fly away.

"And then she hid by the pine tree tall,
For the children's tones rang sweet
As home from school, through the drifts so light,
They sped with merry feet.

"'Oh, Nannie, Nannie! see the fence
Alive with doves so white!'\n'Oh hush! don't frighten them away!'\nThey whisper with delight.

"They crept so soft, they crept so still,
The wondrous sight to see:
The little mother pushed the gate,
And laughed out joyfully.

"She clasped them close, she kissed their cheeks
And lips so sweet and red.
'The birds are only made of snow:
You are my doves,' she said."

THE END.