

SOME DIFFERENCES BETWEEN WESTERN AND EASTERN BIRDS.

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WHEN the primitive prairie becomes reclaimed from a state of nature by the pioneer and farmer, the fauna and flora undergo a very marked change. Many plants and animals disappear, and new ones take their places. The buffalo, elk and antelope retire before the advancing line of civilization, and are seldom found within the settlement; the deer, wolf and turkey gradually disappear as the country becomes populated, and are finally exterminated. Many species of *Compositæ* and other plants, found in great profusion on the unbroken prairie, become scarcer and scarcer, as the sod is broken up and cultivated, and at last disappear altogether. With the birds, the changes are rapid and numerous; some species are quickly exterminated, and others previously unknown, become abundant. So rapid is the progress of settlement in some portions of the west, that these changes become very marked from their suddenness. Local lists of the avi-fauna of eastern Iowa and Minnesota, taken twelve or fifteen years ago, would differ very materially from those of the same localities to-day; and these lists would differ both in the species, and in their comparative and actual abundance. Even the habits of the birds undergo considerable modification, as it will appear in the following pages.

Every one in the Eastern States is familiar with the song sparrow, that little brown minstrel that comes even before the blue-bird to tell us that spring is at hand. He is our earliest bird; a sort of ambassador from the feathered court, sent on by those princes royal of song, the thrushes and grosbeaks, to herald their approach. On some bright sunny day in February, when the chill of the air is somewhat softened by the returning sun, and the woods are vocal with the cry of the downy woodpecker, you hear him first,—a brisk, ringing strain, full of joy and hope, that speaks of warm days to come, and whispers promises of violets and anemones. If you wish for a nearer acquaintance, he is not a bit afraid, but sings as unconcernedly, although you may be watching him a few yards off, as though you were a mile away. In fact, he is semi-

domestic in the early days of his coming, and hovers about the house and garden, tame and familiar, a willing dependent upon your bounty, picking up the crumbs about the door-steps, and repaying you a thousand fold, every morning and evening; and, having taken up his abode with you, he likes it well enough to stay all spring, summer, and fall, always the same, cheerful, familiar and musical.

Very different, indeed, is the song sparrow of the transmississippi states. In March, the ornithologist who rambles over the prairies and along the wooded water-courses of southern Iowa, notices a small, brown bird, flitting among the hazel copses, shy, restless and timid, eluding his observation so carefully, that, if he is unaware of its nature, he will frequently be obliged to shoot it before he can identify it. Then to his surprise, he finds it to be the song sparrow. For a few weeks, he meets in his daily walks, the same shy apparition, though never very frequently, until in April it disappears. Perhaps, once or twice, on an unusually lovely morning, he may catch the familiar song that used to delight him in early March amid the hills of New England; but to hear it even once he must be very fortunate. During summer he may rarely meet the bird in the thickets on the edge of the timber, or even catch him, towards the approach of autumn, reconnoitring in some garden; but only rarely, — until in September and October, they come back again in greatly increased numbers, more tame and familiar than in the spring, and now he begins to recognize some resemblance to the song sparrow of the Eastern States.

Where have they been all summer? In Minnesota — the greater part of them at least. The brush prairies, the thicket in the river valleys, and the shrubbery that surrounds the lakes of western and central Minnesota, are the summer resort of the song sparrow. Here, hundreds build their nests and raise their young, — shy and timid as ever, but no longer silent. The ornithologist just from the east, is astonished to find in the song sparrow, the wildness that marks the meadow-lark and flicker, in New York or Massachusetts, although the notes and habits are otherwise precisely similar.

Yet it takes only a short time for the song sparrow to find out that he has nothing to fear from men, but that on the contrary, it is safer and pleasanter to live in their company than without it. When a region has been settled for a few years, small birds of all

kinds begin to increase in a very marked degree. In the older settlements in Minnesota the song sparrow has already taken up his abode, and though something of his original shyness remains, yet it is rapidly wearing off, and he is becoming the same familiar, confiding bird as in the east. As we progress toward the frontiers, we find him becoming shyer and wilder, till in the wilderness he exhibits almost the wildness and timidity of a wild-duck.

What has been said of the song sparrow, is equally true of the bluebird and robin. In Iowa, some of these birds breed in the timber near the streams, but the greater number pass quickly over the prairies, and find more congenial haunts amid the woods of central and northern Minnesota. The pine barrens seem exactly suited to the robin; here he raises his brood undisturbed; and, amid the dead and decaying poplars and tamaracks that cover miles upon miles of the surface of northern Minnesota, the bluebird nests in great numbers. But very different are they from the robin and bluebird of the east. They fly from your approach afar off; they shun you as the hawk and crow do in New England; and though they have the appearance and voice of old friends, you cannot help feeling that they are old friends become estranged. But as the country becomes settled, like the song sparrow, they soon perceive the advantage of dwelling in civilized society, and are not slow in acting upon it. In some portions of Iowa and Minnesota, these three birds are as domestic as in New York or Pennsylvania.

Thus, the robin, bluebird, song sparrow, and some others of our birds, before the prairies were settled, passed the breeding season in the northern woods of Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota; but as the wilderness becomes civilized, and groves of trees are planted upon the prairie, they take up their abode among the habitations of men, and become residents of regions, where before they were merely transient visitors.

But if some birds are more timid in the newly settled parts of the prairies, with others it is precisely the reverse. In the town in which I write — a city of five or six thousand inhabitants of southern Iowa, — blue jays are as common in the trees lining the streets as vireos among the elms of New Haven; crow blackbirds breed as familiarly in the gardens as chipping sparrows; while at almost any hour of the day, wild pigeons and doves may be seen gleaning in the busiest streets. On the upper Mississippi, near

St. Cloud, I have seen crows so tame that I walked within thirty feet of them with a gun on my shoulder, without alarming them in the least. The meadow-lark is as tame as the bluebird in the east, and sings familiarly from the roofs of houses in the villages, and the marbled godwit will let you walk up within twenty or thirty yards without seeming aware of your presence. In the woods of Minnesota, far beyond the settlements, I have found hawks, *Buteo borealis* and *Falco sparverius*, scarcely more concerned at my presence within fifty feet, than the robin or bluebird in the Eastern States. But birds are quick to learn; the mallard and the prairie hen soon discover that it is dangerous to let a man approach within fifty yards, while the wild goose is very discriminating as to the range of buck-shot and rifle-bullet. It is surprising to see how soon birds learn this lesson. I knew a certain cornfield situated at the edge of a large wood in a recently settled part of Minnesota. Here the blue jays from all the country round were wont to forage, coming in scores every morning and evening. Undisturbed at first, they grew so bold as to remain quietly at work within twenty or thirty feet of a passer-by; till finding that they were destroying a considerable portion of his crop, the farmer commenced shooting them, killing them by the dozen for the first few days. In two weeks, the blue jays were so wild when in that field, that it was difficult to get within gunshot of them; while in the woods, half a mile away, they were as tame as ever; and while before they were very noisy and garrulous when in the cornfield, now they never uttered a sound from the time they entered it till they left it again. It took the blue jays only a fortnight to comprehend the situation.

It is easy to see why some birds, as the hawk and crow, should be tamer in the frontier settlements than in the older parts of the country. Not being hunted as game and having few or no enemies, it is not strange that they should have the boldness and confidence which is the result of a sense of security and freedom from danger. On the other hand, it is equally apparent that such small birds as the sparrows, thrushes and finches, continually persecuted by their natural enemies, should learn to be distrustful, and shun the approach of everything from which danger might be apprehended. But in course of time, the larger birds being destroyed as pests or for amusement become, in time, shy and suspicious; while the smaller, protected in a degree and less subject to the attacks of their former enemies, grow tame and familiar.

Some birds, however, seem but little affected by the settlement of the country. The baywinged bunting, for instance, is scarcely more abundant in eastern Iowa than on the unbroken prairies in the western part of the state, nor are his habits different. The greater number breed among the pines of Minnesota, very few remaining in any part of Iowa during summer.

Some species increase rapidly on the first settlement of the country; and then decrease again. Of this class are the prairie hen and mallard. They find abundance of food in the corn and wheat fields; while the population is sparse and larger game so abundant, they are hunted very little; but as the population increases, they are gradually thinned out and become in some cases exterminated. Other birds, as the quail, are wholly unknown beyond the frontier; and only appear after the country has been settled a short time. Still others, woodland species, appear in regions where they were never known before, as groves of trees are planted, and thick woods spring up on the prairies, as soon as the ravages of the fires are checked. Thus, some species are introduced and some exterminated by the settlement of the country, while the numbers of almost all are more or less affected.

The same changes have taken place in the Eastern States, and are still going on there, but so slowly as to be imperceptible. Here in Iowa, on the contrary, they are so rapid as to attract the attention of the most careless observer.

The breeding habits of birds undergo considerable modification on the settlement of the country. In the wilds of Minnesota, I never saw the nest of the robin elsewhere than in the tops of the tallest Norway pines. The crow, in similar localities, often builds on low bushes. The chipping sparrow nests in the same places, and in company with the grass finch. The chimney swallow breeds in hollow trees; the wrens in the decaying trees in the windfalls. The larger birds, hawks and crows, take but little pains to conceal their nests. So far as my observations went, I think that the robin, bluebird and some other small birds, breed a little later in the season than in the settled regions, though I may be mistaken.

The real influence of man upon animals and especially on birds is scarcely yet appreciated. When the subject comes to be more thoroughly understood we shall find that not only are they governed in their range and numbers through his agency, but that even their natures and mental characteristics are changed as well.