

THE ROCKWOOD REVIEW

THE BUTCHER BIRD.

How many of you have an intelligent idea of the number and variety of common birds that are to be seen in an afternoon's walk in the summer time? How many are aware that even in the winter some of our feathered friends, or as a grumbler in the *Globe* a short time since facetiously named them, "our feathered enemies," are with us. To find the winter residents one must ordinarily go into the deepswamps, or thick woods, where the birds stay, unless deep snows force them to seek for food near the houses.

A winter seldom passes without bringing many birds to our door, and nearly every season the Butcher Bird is to be found in the grounds at Rockwood. Since the advent of the English Sparrow, the Butcher Bird has been regular in his winter visits, and if the "Sparrow haters" would cultivate the acquaintance of Mr. Shrike, they might succeed in keeping down the numbers of the poor little "Jacobs."

Those of you who have not seen a Shrike, may be able to discover his identity by his resemblance to the Mocking Bird. It is the old story of the wolf in sheep's clothing. The resemblance between the two birds is so striking that, in localities where both are common, an error is frequently made by careless observers, who attribute the incomparable song of the Mocking Bird to the disreputable Shrike. After all he has his good points, but like some of his human counterparts prefers having his little jokes made as ghastly as possible. He has a fondness for grasshoppers and beetles, and when he has had enough spikes others on thorns. He has favorite bushes, and unfortunately does not always rest satisfied with insects. In the winter time especially, it is his practice to capture small birds, and these he

will hang up in true butcher fashion, running the thorn through the throat, or possibly jamming the bird in a crotch. I have seen both methods followed. Not long ago I heard a flock of English Sparrows making an unusual disturbance in the pinery, and as the noise indicated something serious in the Sparrow household, I investigated the trouble. It was too late to prevent mischief, as a pair of Shrikes had just killed one of the flock. When the butcher birds saw me, they immediately made off with their prey, the male bird carrying the sparrow in his claws. I believe an unusual method for the Shrike to adopt, although John Burroughs mentions having seen it followed on at least one occasion. I gave chase, and the Shrike could not carry the sparrow more than one hundred and fifty yards, but when tired crowded his victim's neck into the crotch of a lilac tree. I took the sparrow out of the bush, and laid it on the snow, while I adjusted my snow shoe. The shrikes were hungry, and so annoyed at my interference, that with the utmost audacity they swooped down and carried off their prize from beneath my nose. It meant the murder of more sparrows to interfere, so the birds were not disturbed again.

I have seen a Shrike select the plumpest sparrow in a flock, and deliberately fly a few inches above the victim, until the frightened Britisher discovered that death was the penalty demanded from the sparrow that boasted of being well fed.

The Shrike does not always have things his own way, and a few winters ago I saw one having a rough experience with a Blue Jay—a warrior of no mean order. The Shrike had discovered this, and was putting into practice the modern version of a very old saw: "He who fights and runs away, will live to fight another day."