



DEVOTED TO TEMPERANCE, SCIENCE, EDUCATION, AND AGRICULTURE.

VOLUME XVI., No. 9.

MONTREAL & NEW YORK, MAY 2, 1881.

SEMI-MONTHLY, 30 CTS. per An., Post-Paid.

A GROUP OF BIRDS.

When this number of the MESSENGER reaches those of its subscribers in Canada and the most northerly States they will be waiting anxiously for the presence of their feathered friends who visit them only in the summer. It is not probable that they have seen a kingfisher like the one pictured here which represents the European variety. The branch of the family seen in America is known as the belted kingfisher, from a band across its breast. It has a long crest and in other respects differs from its European cousins. Its flight is rapid, and it often stops suddenly like a sparrow hawk, and hovers over the water, darting headlong after its prey, which it carries to the nearest stump of a tree and swallows instantly. It follows the course of rivers even to the cascades of their sources, and its presence near a stream is good evidence to the angler that there fish are abundant. It is fond of resorting to mill ponds, where the stillness of the water enables it easily to detect its prey. Its nests are made in holes dug horizontally in a bank to the depth of from four to six feet, the entrance being just large enough to admit a bird, and the end rounded like an oven.

The goat-sucker or nightjar, which sits along, not across, the trunk of the tree, is a peculiar looking bird, and more like the swallow than any other. The family are characterized by a short, very broad, depressed bill, with an immense gape extending beneath the eyes and rendered larger by numerous bristles for arresting their insect prey; the eyes are very large, and easily dazzled by the full light of day; the tarsi are short and weak, the toes long, the hind toe closely united to the base of the inner; the plumage is soft, enabling them to fly without noise. In the sombre colors and texture of the feathers, in the large head and eyes and nocturnal habits, they resemble the owls, but zoologically they come nearest to the swift family. The name goat-sucker is derived from the Latinized Greek appellative *caprimulgus*, which originated in the idea that they suck the mammae of goats; the French call these birds *engoulevents*, or wind swallows, and *crapauds volants*, or flying toads, probably on account of the great capacity of the mouth. Like the owls, they hide themselves by day, coming out toward sunset, and pursuing insects on the wing with great rapidity during the twilight; they make no nests, deposit their eggs on the bare ground or in slight concavities; they are found in all parts of the world, but most abundantly in South America.

The martin, swift and swallow are all very much alike. It is not long since the swifts were classed amongst the swallows, but modern ornithologists mark them as a separate

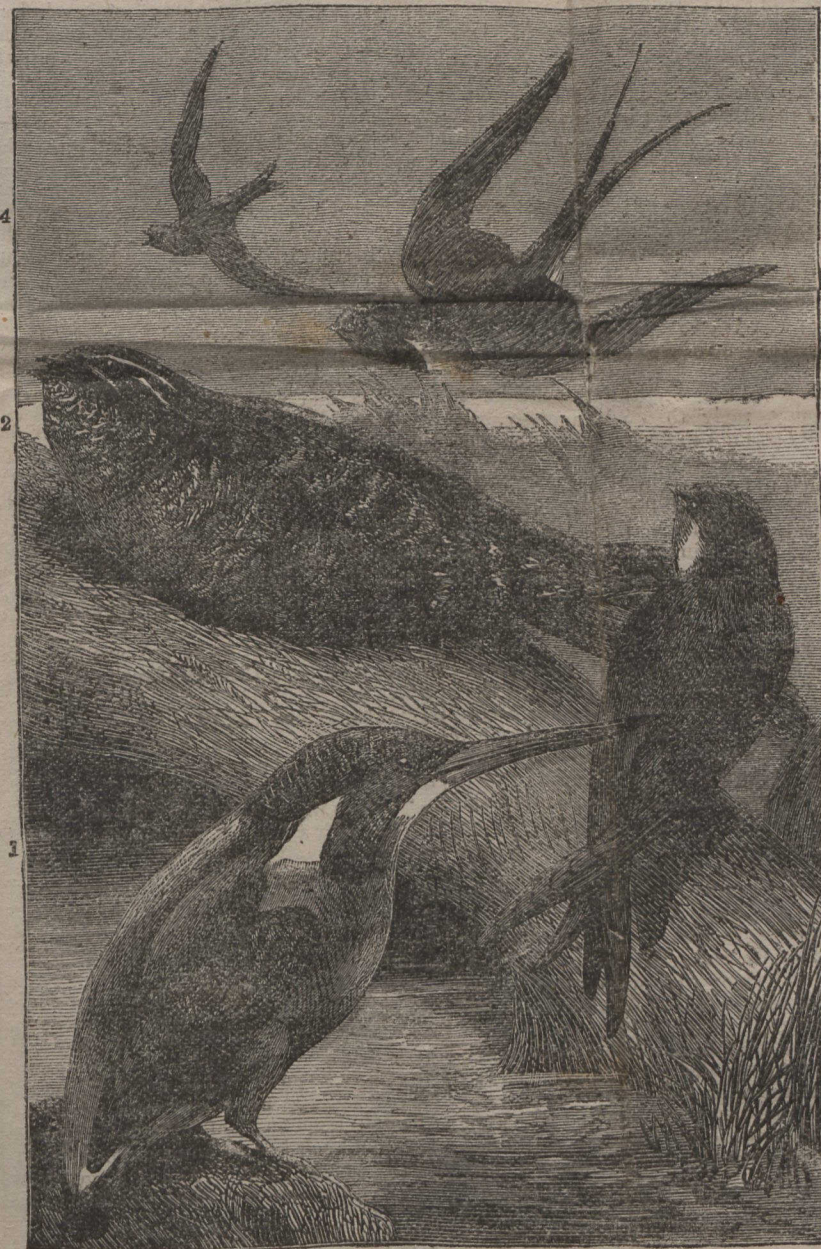
family coming near the humming bird. The swifts, according to their name, are swift and graceful flyers and feed exclusively on insects which they capture on the wing. The American swift, or chimney swallow, like all of its kind, naturally make their nests in hollow trees, but in the neighborhood of man build in such chimneys as are not used in

der; there are sometimes two hundred in a single chimney.

There are more than fifty varieties of the genuine swallow, which are generally remarkable for their great powers of flight. Their food consists of insects, which they take on the wing, usually in the neighborhood of water, with remarkable skill and

on the wing than any other bird, even feeding their young in the air; their sight is very acute, they fly low in damp weather, where the insects are most abundant, and are thence supposed to foretell rain.

The martins, which are distributed over North America, from the regularity of their movements have a place amongst the "harbingers of spring." They appear in Louisiana early in February in large flocks, in the Middle States from the middle of March to the 10th of April, in New England about the 25th of April, and further north at a later period, departing for the south again about the 20th of August in immense flocks, and all at once at the dawn of some calm morning. The flight is graceful, easy and swift; they are expert in catching their insect prey, in bathing and drinking while on the wing, and in performing aerial evolutions to the annoyance of their bird enemies. They are very bold and do not hesitate to attack crows and hawks, which from their superior powers of flight they drive away; even the fierce little king bird (sometimes called field martin), with similar fighting propensities, has to yield to the strong and swift martin; they perch easily upon trees, and, notwithstanding the shortness of their legs, walk well upon the ground. From their attacking cats, dogs, and all flying marauders of the farm yard, they are great favorites, and are provided with elevated boxes for rearing their young in most towns of the United States. They are much attached to their breeding places, and return to the same year after year. In the absence of a box they build in any crevice or hole in a tree. The nest is made of leaves, twigs, grasses, feathers and other soft materials, and generally contains from four to six pure white eggs. Many pairs breed in the same box in perfect harmony; two broods are generally reared in a season; the males assist in incubation. The food consists of wasps, bees, beetles, and other insects, though they seldom seize the honey bee.



1. Kingfisher. 2. Nightjar. 3. Martin. 4. Swift. 5. Swallow.

A GROUP OF BIRDS.

summer for fires; the nest is made of twigs snapped off from a dead tree during flight; fastened together by viscid saliva, without soft lining, and is generally placed from five to eight feet from the entrance. They pass in and out the chimney with great rapidity, making a whirring sound like distant thun-

der; they drink on the wing, sweeping along the surface of the water, and often wash themselves by a sudden plunge. They fly at the rate of a mile a minute in their ordinary evolutions, but are rather awkward on the ground from the length of the wings and the shortness of the legs; they live more

"To HIM," said the dying Jacob, "shall the gathering of the people be." "To Him," said the evangelical prophet, "shall men come." He is the centre of all attractions, because he is the only source of relief. To whom, in all our ignorance, should we go but to Him Who hath the words of eternal life? To whom, in all our guilt and weakness, should we go but to Him in Whom we have righteousness and strength? To whom, in all our dangers and misery, but to Him Who is the hope of Israel, the Saviour thereof in the time of trouble? To Him shall all flesh come.—*W. Jay.*

MUCH as we dislike to admit our defects, we find it better to know and guard against than to ignore them.