

Our spruce partridge began to lose intelligence in proportion to the lack of effort in obtaining food. It is a great regulation, or law, or provision, as we prefer to call it, one or the other, that organs and faculties left unused shrivel into vestiges and finally may disappear altogether. With no exercise of their brains, beyond shifting from branch to branch of limitless areas of spruce, and keeping an eye now and then aloft for hawks and glancing below for prowling beasts, they were seized upon by degrading agencies that have swept from this world great varieties of creatures that have left but the fossil evidence of their existence, and have pushed other forms of life into the domain of parasites. "Let him who stands take heed lest he fall," is not only morally and spiritually true, but applies to all mental faculties, and bodily structures of men and lower creatures. "It is easy to go to hell," is an ancient maxim of the pagan world that found its counterpart in the authoritative dictum of the "broad road of destruction and the straight and narrow way of life," and both of them expressed the facility of going down hill to degradation when the proper balance was lost through some yielding to blandishments that ever promised more than they gave of satisfaction, and veiled the inevitable results in the pleasures of the present moment. Thus nature relentlessly searches for unsound fibres, and weeds out of her plentiful products the defective individuals, and "God scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

It is very easy to see the evidences of "the spiritual law in the natural world"—it simply appears in different phases in altered circumstances. A saint falls from grace, and a bird by a degrading habit falls from a higher to a lower grade of intelligence. It is gravitation against which the ant sets his muscles as he tugs his grain of sand up his burrow, and it is the same force that thrusts the greyhounds of the sea from their launching ways, and determines the orbits of all the myriad millions of suns. But for this wide sweep of universal unity natural history would not be worth consideration, and we might well help ourselves to as much as we could eat, and as many feathers we cared to stick in our hats, and rest content with our ignorance. Unless we can transmute in the alembic of the mind the knowledge we gain in these fields of research into such high values that admit of use in the loftier realms of human advancement, then all our collecting, and measuring, and comparing, and classifying is but little better than childish diversion.

To identify on sight a spruce partridge and know

its scientific name and a few other items about it, is but the merest introduction to its least interesting aspects that lie upon the outside; says Emerson,

If I knew

The rare and virtuous roots, which in these woods
Draw untold juices from the common earth,
Untold, unknown, and I could surely spell
Their fragrance, and their chemistry apply
By sweet affinities to human flesh,
O, that were much, and I could be a part
Of the round day, related to the sun
And planted world, and full executor
Of their imperfect functions.—

The old men studied magic in the flowers,
And human fortunes in astronomy,
And an omnipotence in chemistry,
Preferring things to names, for these were men,
Were unitarians of the united world.

If the species of Canadian grouse now under consideration had suddenly come into existence as a pair of adult birds appearing as a response to a divine fiat, then we may fairly conclude that they were considerably perched on a spruce tree with a reasonable appetite for the food that was to be theirs, and also that of all their descendants. In that current view of the matter, among the uninstructed, we have in our present generation of them exactly the same bird in form, and habits, and disposition, as the original pair. If that were the truth, then neither science, nor philosophy, would be occupied with them; but if these creatures have a pedigree stretching across the geologic ages into the reptilian forms of life, and beyond through other lines of ancestry to the first living cell, then they are invested with a significance that stimulates curiosity, invites interest and research, where science will find problems worthy her aims, and philosophy discover the trend of great truths to amply reward her considerations.

With this view of creation as an ever-changing panorama, we are led to ask what is the origin of instincts, what the cause of peculiar structures, and what are the reasons for singular habits? We approach these features as soluble problems and not sealed mysteries, problems that may occupy our minds in worthy ways, and furnish the slender trails that, ever widening with investigation, open at last in broad highways where "the highest mounted mind" may try his mental sinews on questions of transcendent interest.

If it had been my intention to write about the exact dimensions, colors, and pretty ways of the Canadian grouse, then these considerations are a wide departure from my theme; but I have rather