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## The Freedom of the Fields.

(Edward B. Clark, in 'The Presbyterian Banner'.)

In winter, after a heavy storm, when the fields stretch away white and glistening and the fir boughs bend with their fleecy burden, how often do we hear people say: 'The world is shrouded in snow!' The word shrouded is used because the winter time and white snow are associated



THE CHICKADEE.

in the mind with death. People are altogether too much given to the thought that because ice holds the tumbling creek in check, and the top rails of the fence are covered, that there is nothing living in nature's fields and woodlands.

It needs but the screwing of one's courage up to the point of leaving the blazing birch logs on a cold January morning to break a foot-pathway through the meadow and along the edge of the timber, to prove that this winter death is but an outward semblance, and that there is pulsing life everywhere. Those of us who know the summer-time robin, oriole and bluebird, and who love them and feel an interest in their lives, will be glad on some March morning to meet and scrape acquaintance with some strange bird visitors from the north, who are as happy and as jolly, apparently, with the thermometer at zero, as are their summer cousins when the wild roses are budding, and the dandelions are donning their feathery caps.

It is just at this cold winter season that the bird-lover, if he have within tramping distance of his home a grove of cone-bearing trees, may meet one of the most beautiful birds of which we know, and about whose life there clings a tender legend connected with the dying Saviour. The bird is the American crossbill, and comes to us every winter in considerable numbers from its summer home and nesting place in the great pine forests of the far north. It is likely that the sweet twittering notes of the birds will be heard before they themselves are discovered, as they hide within the evergreen covering of the spruces and the pines. The crossbill's call is like the tinkling of a bell, and

when a large flock of the birds is assembled, and in tune, the music that they make sounds like the jingling bells of a jolly sleighride party.

The father crossbill wears a handsome suit of red and olive brown. His close-fitting cap is perhaps the brightest part of his attire. Madam Crossbill, in her general color, looks very much like the leaves among which she spends much of her time. Both the birds are gymnasts of a high order. They will cling to a light branch and sway backward and forward with their heads pointing earthward. They take, with apparent ease, any position which will enable them to get at their food, which is the shell-encased seed lying at the base of the scales of the cones. Pick a pine cone some day, and, after you have examined it thoroughly, you will think that it must be an exceedingly difficult task for a bird to crack the tough scale and expose the seed. If you have looked carefully at the pine cone first, you will be able to account at once, when you meet the crossbill, for its peculiarly shaped beak. As a matter of fact, when a person who has never read of the crossbill, first sees it he thinks its beak a deformity. The upper and lower parts, mandibles they are called, are crossed one over the other. Throw your middle finger over the forefinger, as far as you can, and you will get



THE DOWNY WOODPECKER.

a fair idea of the appearance of the bird's bill. Its construction enables its owner to twist the seed from the pine cone as readily as a boy could do it with a pair of tweezers.

Longfellow has put into poetry a translation of a German legend about the crossbill. The story is that the birds, out of pity for the dying Saviour, tried with their little beaks to draw the cruel nails that held his hands to the cross. In its struggle to do the act of kindness, its beak became crossed, and its feathers were dyed with the Saviour's blood. Dying, he recognized the bird's act, and decreed that in testimony thereof it should bear the



EVENING GROSBEAK.

mark of the crossed beak and the red dye in its feathers until his coming again.

Let those who are brave enough to attempt the winter's tramp search well the same trees in which the crossbills abound, and see if they cannot find a still more gorgeously dressed northern visitor, the evening grosbeak. This fellow is indeed a beauty. His body is a brilliant yellow, his tail is jet black, while his wings are sharply contrasted black and white. The grosbeak is much of a wanderer. You may see him twenty times in a single season, and then miss him altogether for some years. He looks more like a visitor from the tropics than from the regions of ice and snow, and from his cheery call you would think that he never knows what it is to lack for all the comforts of life. Even the English sparrow, accustomed as he is at all times to the presence of man and his work, is not tamer than this handsomely garbed winter grosbeak. He will let you approach almost within arm's length of him, and will not for a moment give over his pleasant task of seed-eating. He will eye you occasionally a little inquiringly as if he would ask: 'Do you not know that it is rude to stare at a person who is dining?' He will soon forgive you, however, for your impertinence, and will give a call that is a sort of confiding chuckle.

An hour spent with a flock of evening grosbeaks teaches one a lesson. The bird always looks on the bright side of things, no matter how the clouds may lower, nor how the wind may blow, and if he finds that his favorite box-elder tree restaurant has a bare cupboard he will fly cheerfully to some humbler inn, with poorer fare, and say a tuneful grace before beginning his meal.