

A BIRD IN THE BUSH.

[By W. A. D. LEES.—Read February 1890.]

The old saw about a bird in the hand, like many another old saw, needs some filing down to make it cut true. Applied literally to birds, it may appeal by its aptness to the sportsman or the working ornithologist, but to one who does not aspire to the honours of either position, but is a simple lover of birds in their native haunts, its truth will not be so apparent. I shall not stop to discuss the question of man's inherent right to slay his fellow-creatures at pleasure, or even of the expediency of so doing for useful purposes, scientific or gastronomic. I merely wish to record, in passing, my humble opinion that there is much unnecessary slaughter of birds by amateur ornithologists and others; and then to show, by a few anecdotes of bird ways from personal observation, that not a little of interest, and perhaps something of value, may be learned of the habits of these interesting creatures, without the aid of a gun. If in so doing I am fortunate enough to enlist in the ranks of the observers one recruit who has hitherto held aloof, through his aversion to killing, I shall be satisfied that I am not altogether on the wrong track. It is just about two years since I began to observe birds with any care, and when I tell you that at that time I knew barely fifty species and of many of these I had very hazy ideas, though I had lived in their midst for twenty-five years, you will be inclined to ask me where I kept my eyes all that time. It is a question I have asked myself a thousand times, but as yet I have received no answer.

One of my first finds was a flock of Pine Siskins, which I surprised feeding in a clump of cedars in February. It was a beautiful still, bright day, an ideal day for a snowshoe tramp, which I had been enjoying to the full, when I reached this bit of cedar swamp and stopped to reconnoitre. I had not waited long when I heard the contented trilling chirp of the feeding birds, and followed the sound till I came upon them busily picking out and devouring the seeds of the cedar and scattering the husks broadcast upon the snow. I immediately levelled my double-barrelled fowling piece (a field glass) upon them, and as this did not seem to disturb them in the least, I gradually moved towards