

Canadian Natural History.

The Crow.

(Corvus.)

THESE birds are found in almost every quarter of the globe. Over twenty species are described, some of which remain stationary, while others migrate from place to place with the changes of the seasons. In the present article we have illustrated, and propose briefly to describe two of these numerous species.

THE AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus Americanus*, Audubon) was first separated from the European species by the distinguished ornithologist whose name is associated with it; and there can be no question but that the two species are entirely distinct.

The Crow is so well known to even that mythical person, "every schoolboy," that it requires no description. Generally and most unjustly persecuted, almost every man, and certainly every boy feels that he has rendered an important service to agriculture by the slaughter of one of these wary, black birds. Thousands are mercilessly killed every year by the use of guns, traps, poisoned grain, and by the ruthless hands of young urchins who rifle the nests, and Herod-like slaughter the innocents in their infancy.

It is impossible to deny that the bird is at times unavoidably somewhat of a brigand. When pressed by hunger, the instinct of self-preservation goads the bird to commit an occasional theft, and even sometimes to devour the young of other birds. We grant further that our black friend with the hoarse "Caw, Caw," at times, pulls up a considerable number of green corn blades that he digs up potato "sets" and scatters the fragments of the disintegrated bulb about the ground in a somewhat slovenly and provoking manner; and that further he not unfrequently bores a turnip so full of holes that it pines away and decays. But what then of our feathered friend must live somehow, and in spite of his occasional and necessitous villainies he is yet the most useful and beneficial friend to agriculture that the farmer knows. Hear the Crow's counsel. If he roots up the corn, it is not so much to de-

vour the young blade as it is to extinguish that terrible pest of the farmer—the wire-worm—and other destructive insect pests, which lurk at the roots of young plants and infallibly sap their vitality. In like manner, potato "sets" are attacked by numerous insect enemies, and it is to destroy these that the long, hard beak of our 'cute friend is transformed, for the time being, into a "Potato-digging-Machine." He also occasionally roots

Again, how industriously the Crow gathers up the worms and grubs exposed by the plough. In this important and valuable service to the whole community, the keen eye and ready bill of this useful bird is employed from morning till night. Some faint perception of the extent and character of the bird's operations may be gathered from the following extract from Mr. Simeon's "Stray notes on Fishing and Natural History."

"I was walking one day," says that agreeable writer "with a gentleman on his home farm, when we observed the grass on about an acre of meadow land to be so completely rooted up and scarified that he took it for granted it had been done under the bailiff's direction to clear it from moss, and on arriving at the farm, enquired whether such was not the case. The answer was, however, 'Oh no, sir, we have not been at work there at all; it's the Crows done all that.' The mistake was a very natural one, for though I have often seen places where grass has been pulled up by Crows, yet I never saw such clean and wholesale work done by them as on this occasion. It could not apparently have been executed more systematically or perfectly by the most elaborate 'scarifier'."

that Crowskill and Ransome could turn out. On examining the spot afterwards, I found that the object of the rooks, researches had doubtless been a small white grub, numbers of which still remained in the ground a short distance below the surface. In the following spring I noticed that the part of the field where this had taken place was densely covered with cowslips, much more so than the rest of it. Possibly the roots of these plants may have been the

proper food for the grubs, and therefore selected by the parent insect as receptacles for her eggs."

The American Cyclopædia further adds on the usefulness of this bird: "Though the Crow pulls up a few seeds of the germinating corn, his services to the agriculturist far outweigh his depredations; he daily devours insects, grubs, and worms, which but for him would devastate whole fields of young corn; he destroys innumerable mice, moles, and other small quadrupeds, every one of which commits ten times the mischief he does; he will eat snakes, frogs, lizards and other small reptiles, and also fruits, and vegetables."

