

THE LAND WE LIVE IN.

had struck with the claw of the heel, driving it home to the hilt, and causing instant death, and the second bird must also have been struck in the same manner, as it seemed perfectly dead the moment the merlin began to bear it towards the log. I did not disturb him in the least, and very quietly watched him with my glasses. He tore the ribs open, and swallowed the heart and lungs, the first morsels, then plucked the breast and in a very short time had the flesh completely stripped off the breast bone. He certainly was not two minutes engaged in this way and then he left the remainder of the carcass, and stepped daintily aside, and with his beak very carefully picked every atom of blood and an odd feather or two from each talon in turn. He was a plucky little chap and I could not help admiring his brilliant attack, and rapidity of action. The two pigeons were killed as if shot with a bullet. Had I not seen it myself, it is not likely I should have implicitly accepted the testimony of a third party, the hawk and myself in the present case being the witnesses, and actors, and judges in the entire matter.

After cleaning his beak, which he did partly with one foot, and rubbing it on the log, as we have seen fowls do in a barn yard, he rose up and flew within ten yards of me, and in the most companionable manner settled on a stump not twenty yards from where I was seated.

Would it not have been worse than murder to injure the gallant little hawk? I would have been a heartless ruffian to dream of such a crime.

Full of curiosity, and a long day before me, I sat still, truly admiring my pretty little neighbor. Strange to say I did not see a hen bird around me. They seemed to have vanished, and the ground seemed to be rather quieter than earlier in the morning.

In looking over the wide expanse of bush before me, hawks of various kinds were seen gliding about or hovering here and there marking some unfortunate pigeon as its prey.

I was casting my glasses over the true tops when to my astonishment, I saw an adult golden eagle seated on the tall, dead pine limb, mentioned before, and a couple of bald eagles on one of the dead elms. Whilst watching the pigeon hawk, the others had taken their places.

With the lorgnette I could count every feather on either of them, the golden feathers on the back of his neck proved that *Aquila Chrysaetus* was in his prime. I could see his fierce eye as he turned his head from one side to the other. The bald eagles were also adult, as the heads and tails were pure white. They are pruning their wings and arranging the feathers on their backs or breasts.

But see all three birds suddenly look up to something in the sky above them, and the glasses are speedily searching for what it may be. Away up, up in the blue ether, like a speck not bigger than a fly some bird is sailing, hovering around. It is an immense height in the air, certainly a mile or more. Suddenly the wings close, and it drops down, as if a falling star gliding through the air, till near the pine tree, when the broadwings are spread again, and circling once or twice round, it alights beside her mate on the pine. You can

tell that it is the hen, for she seems half as big again as the male, who had stooped down first for rest, I would not have missed such a sight for the value of a thousand pigeons.

How many people, especially scientific observers, have seen such a noble spectacle. It was the only time I ever did, and never expect to see its like again. It has been the amusement of some people to call these noble birds all sorts of indifferent and queer names. Well let them. It evidently seems to me these same people are vulgar theorists at best, for if they had ever seen the free sweep of wing, the proud gaze of the eye that looks unblanching at the sun, and sees him soaring majestically till he seems a mere atom, a speck away above the clouds, he cannot but be filled with admiration at the grace of motion, and the power of flight.

I looked long and lovingly at these beautiful birds, and at the natural grace and ease of their contour and *tout ensemble*. But other eyes had seen them as well as mine. I looked round at the daring little falcon beside me. He was standing erect with his eyes distended, then with a vicious cry which I cannot describe, he mounted up, up, up, fully a hundred yards, and flew directly at the golden eagles. Can I believe my eyes! There he is hovering above them for a moment, then as they both eye him askance, they spread their wings and the little daring falcon struck the hen eagle, and made two or three feathers fly from her back. Surely this is impudence personified. And now he attacks the other bird and sends several feathers floating on the air. The two big birds as if in disgust, rise up-up-up and then moving directly north, were soon beyond the field of the lorgnette. The falcon quietly skimmed back to his place beside me, and after resting for a few minutes, skimmed away over the field, and I saw him no more.

Had I not absolutely witnessed this myself, I should have conceived that it was neither probable nor possible, much less have believed it, had I not absolutely seen it, with my own eyes.

In the mean time the two bald heads sat demurely, and I seemed to be almost able to stroke their grey backs, and snowy white heads, as the glasses brought them to my hand. They were both in repose. How gentle they look. The female has her head on her shoulder, the yellow beak nestled among the feathers, and her mate with his on his breast.

Suddenly he stretches his neck for a moment, then expands his wings, and the female looks round spasmodically. I see it as I write, as if looking through my glasses.

Alas! too late! too late. Some feathers float on the air. She quivers for a moment and falls headlong among the branches of a beech tree, breaking the force of her descent, and is quickly lost from my view. Then the sharp report of a gun is heard near the root of that tree.

What a pity, I thought to myself. What need to kill the bald eagle, a bird that lives only on fish.

Rising from my seat I went home, and had my breakfast. Could it be possible that time had gone by so rapidly. It was nearly eight o'clock.

Taking my gun, Dash and myself wandered into the bush. I had put the dozen of dressed birds into the pot with all the *et ceteras* necessary, and left them to simmer slowly. I took my road along the border of the stream, and was not long in securing a number of birds, I had wandered I suppose half a mile or so. As the bag was becoming heavy, I left the contents at the root of a large dead black birch, and sat down for a smoke.

Scarcely a hen was to be seen on the nest, but their places were taken by the entire gentlemen persuasion of the community. Thus, it struck me at once that enormous mass that had passed over me in the grey light of morning, was composed of the hens alone, and so it proved, and subsequent observations satisfied me.

There was a dead cedar with a lot of bare branches some hundred yards further down, and pigeons seemed to alight on it in numbers. Thither I bent my steps, and found it was at the head of a large beaver meadow, and that there were several trees, within easy range of a center spot, all dead, and the green twigs gone. Numbers of birds were seated on them either peacefully, or twittering, or those that had just arrived doing their best, with fluttering wings and the perpetually repeated "Coo, coo, coo," to push the occupants from their places, by alighting either on them, or jamming themselves down between them. It was a strange sight, and showed the custom of the birds, to congregate in heaps. I was preparing a blind to screen myself from view, when the report of a gun at the other end of this meadow, about a hundred yards off, frightened the pigeons on which I had had evil designs. I remained quietly however in my hide. Some person that I thought I knew, came slowly along, seemingly weary and tired. He was making up the stream, and I could not suppress a grin, as the well known countenance of our M.P.P. opened to my view. "This is a nice affair truly," he growled. "The devil must have cut the end off this creek or I should have got there long ago," and he was passing me within twenty paces.

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