



# *A Florida Sketch-Book*

by Bradford Torrey



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## **Chapter 6: On the Upper St. John's**

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The city of Sanford is a beautiful and interesting place, I hope, to those who live in it. To the Florida tourist it is important as lying at the head of steamboat navigation on the St. John's River, which here expands into a lake—Lake Monroe—some five miles in width, with Sanford on one side, and Enterprise on the other; or, as a waggish traveler once expressed it, with Enterprise on the north, and Sanford and enterprise on the south.

Walking naturalists and lovers of things natural have their own point of view, individual, unconventional, whimsical, if you please,—very different, at all events, from that of clearer-witted and more serious-minded men; and the inhabitants of Sanford will doubtless take it as a compliment, and be amused rather than annoyed, when I confess that I found their city a discouragement, a widespread desolation of houses and shops. If there is a pleasant country road leading out of it in any direction, I was unlucky enough to miss it. My melancholy condition was hit off before my eyes in a parable, as it were, by a crowd of young fellows, black and white, whom I found one afternoon in a sand-lot just outside the city, engaged in what was intended for a game of baseball. They were doing their best,—certainly they made noise enough; but circumstances were against them. When the ball came to the ground, from no matter what height or with what impetus, it fell dead in the sand; if it had been made of solid rubber, it could not have rebounded. “Base-running” was little better than base-walking. “Sliding” was safe, but, by the same token, impossible. Worse yet, at every “foul strike” or “wild throw” the ball was lost, and the barefooted fielders had to pick their way painfully about in the outlying saw-palmetto scrub till they found it. I had never seen our “national game” played under conditions so untoward. None but true patriots would have the heart to try it, I thought, and I meditated writing to Washington, where the quadrennial purification of the civil service was just then in progress,—under a new broom,—to secure, if possible, a few bits of recognition (“plums” is the technical term, I believe) for men so



deserving. The first baseman certainly, who had oftenest to wade into the scrub, should have received a consulate, at the very least. Yet they were a merry crew, those national gamblers. Their patriotism was of the noblest type,—the unconscious. They had no thought of being heroes, nor dreamed of bounties or pensions. They quarreled with the umpire, of course, but not with Fate; and I hope I profited by their example. My errand in Sanford was to see something of the river in its narrower and better part; and having done that, I did not regret what otherwise might have seemed a profitless week.

First, however, I walked about the city. Here, as already at St. Augustine, and afterward at Tallahassee, I found the mocking-birds in free song. They are birds of the town. And the same is true of the loggerhead shrikes, a pair of which had built a nest in a small water-oak at the edge of the sidewalk, on a street corner, just beyond the reach of passers-by. In the roadside trees—all freshly planted, like the city—were myrtle warblers, prairie warblers, and blue yellowbacks, the two latter in song. Once, after a shower, I watched a myrtle bird bathing on a branch among the wet leaves. The street gutters were running with sulphur water, but he had waited for rain. I commended his taste, being myself one of those to whom water and brimstone is a combination as malodorous as it seems unscriptural. Noisy boat-tailed grackles, or “jackdaws,” were plentiful about the lakeside, monstrously long in the tail, and almost as large as the fish crows, which were often there with them. Over the broad lake swept purple martins and white-breasted swallows, and nearer the shore fed peacefully a few pied-billed grebes, or dabchicks, birds that I had seen only two or three times before, and at which I looked more than once before I made out what they were. They had every appearance of passing a winter of content. At the tops of three or four stakes, which stood above the water at wide intervals,—and at long distances from the shore,—sat commonly as many cormorants, here, as everywhere, with plenty of idle time upon their hands. On the other side of the city were orange groves, large, well kept, thrifty looking; the fruit still on the trees (March 20, or thereabouts), or lying in heaps underneath, ready for the boxes. One man’s house, I remember, was surrounded by a fence overrun with Cherokee rosebushes, a full quarter of a mile of white blossoms.

My best botanical stroll was along one of the railroads (Sanford is a “railway centre,” so called), through a dreary sand waste. Here I picked a goodly number of novelties, including what looked like a beautiful pink chicory, only the plant itself was much prettier (*Lygodesmia*); a very curious sensitive-leaved plant (*Schrankia*), densely beset throughout with curved prickles, and bearing globes of tiny pink-purple flowers; a calopogon, quite as



pretty as our *Northern pulchellus*; a clematis (Baldwinii), which looked more like a bluebell than a clematis till I commenced pulling it to pieces; and a great profusion of one of the smaller papaws, or custard-apples, a low shrub, just then full of large, odd-shaped, creamy-white, heavy-scented blossoms. I was carrying a sprig of it in my hand when I met a negro. "What is this?" I asked.

"I dunno, sir."

"Isn't it papaw?"

"No, sir, that ain't papaw;" and then, as if he had just remembered something, he added, "That's dog banana."

Often than anywhere else I resorted to the shore of the lake,—to the one small part of it, that is to say, which was at the same time easily reached and comparatively unfrequented. There—going one day farther than usual—I found myself in the borderland of a cypress swamp. On one side was the lake, but between me and it were cypress-trees; and on the other side was the swamp itself, a dense wood growing in stagnant black water covered here and there with duckweed or some similar growth: a frightful place it seemed, the very abode of snakes and everything evil. Stories of slaves hiding in cypress swamps came into my mind. It must have been cruel treatment that drove them to it! Buzzards flew about my head, and looked at me. "He has come here to die," I imagined them saying among themselves. "No one comes here for anything else. Wait a little, and we will pick his bones." They perched near by, and, not to lose time, employed the interval in drying their wings, for the night had been showery. Once in a while one of them shifted his perch with an ominous rustle. They were waiting for me, and were becoming impatient. "He is long about it," one said to another; and I did not wonder. The place seemed one from which none who entered it could ever go out; and there was no going farther in without plunging into that horrible mire. I stood still, and looked and listened. Some strange noise, "bird or devil," came from the depths of the wood. A flock of grackles settled in a tall cypress, and for a time made the place loud. How still it was after they were gone! I could hardly withdraw my gaze from the green water full of slimy black roots and branches, any one of which might suddenly lift its head and open its deadly white mouth! Once a fish-hawk fell to screaming farther down the lake. I had seen him the day before, standing on the rim of his huge nest in the top of a tree, and uttering the same cries. All about me gigantic cypresses, every one swollen enormously at the base, rose straight and branchless into the air. Dead trees, one might have said,—light-colored, apparently with no bark to cover them; but if I glanced up, I saw that each bore



at the top a scanty head of branches just now putting forth fresh green leaves, while long funereal streamers of dark Spanish moss hung thickly from every bough.

I am not sure how long I could have stayed in such a spot, if I had not been able to look now and then through the branches of the under-woods out upon the sunny lake. Swallows innumerable were playing over the water, many of them soaring so high as to be all but invisible. Wise and happy birds, lovers of sunlight and air. They would never be found in a cypress swamp. Along the shore, in a weedy shallow, the peaceful dabchicks were feeding. Far off on a post toward the middle of the lake stood a cormorant. But I could not keep my eyes long at once in that direction. The dismal swamp had me under its spell, and meanwhile the patient buzzards looked at me. "It is almost time," they said; "the fever will do its work,"—and I began to believe it. It was too bad to come away; the stupid town offered no attraction; but it seemed perilous to remain. Perhaps I could not come away. I would try it and see. It was amazing that I could; and no sooner was I out in the sunshine than I wished I had stayed where I was; for having once left the place, I was never likely to find it again. The way was plain enough, to be sure, and my feet would no doubt serve me. But the feet cannot do the mind's part, and it is a sad fact, one of the saddest in life, that sensations cannot be repeated.

With the fascination of the swamp still upon me, I heard somewhere in the distance a musical voice, and soon came in sight of a garden where a middle-aged negro was hoeing,—hoeing and singing: a wild, minor, endless kind of tune; a hymn, as seemed likely from a word caught here and there; a true piece of natural melody, as artless as any bird's. I walked slowly to get more of it, and the happy-sad singer minded me not, but kept on with his hoe and his song. Potatoes or corn, whatever his crop may have been,—I did not notice, or, if I did, I have forgotten,—it should have prospered under his hand.

Farther along, in the highway,—a sandy track, with wastes of scrub on either side,—boy of eight or nine, armed with a double-barreled gun, was lingering about a patch of dwarf oaks and palmettos. "Haven't got that rabbit yet, eh?" said I. (I had passed him there on my way out, and he had told me what he was after.)

"No, sir," he answered.

"I don't believe there's any rabbit there."

"Yes, there is, sir; I saw one a little while ago, but he got away before I could get pretty near."

"Good!" I thought. "Here is a grammarian. Not one boy in ten in this country but



would have said 'I seen.'" A scholar like this was worth talking with. "Are there many rabbits here?" I asked.

"Yes, sir, there's a good deal."

And so, by easy mental stages, I was clear of the swamp and back in the town,—saved from the horrible, and delivered to the commonplace and the dreary.

My best days in Sanford were two that I spent on the river above the lake. A youthful boatman, expert alike with the oar and the gun, served me faithfully and well, impossible as it was for him to enter fully into the spirit of a man who wanted to look at birds, but not to kill them. I think he had never before seen a customer of that breed. First he rowed me up the "creek," under promise to show me alligators, moccasins, and no lack of birds, including the especially desired purple gallinule. The snakes were somehow missing (a loss not irreparable), and so were the purple gallinules; for them, the boy thought, it was still rather early in the season, although he had killed one a few days before, and for proof had brought me a wing. But as we were skirting along the shore I suddenly called "Hist!" An alligator lay on the bank just before us. The boy turned his head, and instantly was all excitement. It was a big fellow, he said,—one of three big ones that inhabited the creek. He would get him this time. "Are you sure?" I asked.

"Oh yes, I'll blow the top of his head off." He was loaded for gallinules, and I, being no sportsman, and never having seen an alligator before, was some shades less confident. But it was his game, and I left him to his way. He pulled the boat noiselessly against the bank in the shelter of tall reeds, put down the oars, with which he could almost have touched the alligator, and took up his gun. At that moment the creature got wind of us, and slipped incontinently into the water, not a little to my relief. One live alligator is worth a dozen dead ones, to my thinking. He showed his back above the surface of the stream for a moment shortly afterward, and then disappeared for good.

Ornithologically, the creek was a disappointment. We pushed into one bay after another, among the dense "bonnets,"—huge leaves of the common yellow pond lily,—but found nothing that I had not seen before. Here and there a Florida gallinule put up its head among the leaves, or took flight as we pressed too closely upon it; but I saw them to no advantage, and with a single exception they were dumb. One bird, as it dashed into the rushes, uttered two or three cries that sounded familiar. The Florida gallinule is in general pretty silent, I think; but he has a noisy season; then he is indeed noisy enough. A swamp containing a single pair might be supposed to be populous with barn-yard fowls, the fellow keeps up such



a clatter: now loud and terror-stricken, “like a hen whose head is just going to be cut off,” as a friend once expressed it; then soft and full of content, as if the aforesaid hen had laid an egg ten minutes before, and were still felicitating herself upon the achievement. It was vexatious that here, in the very home of Florida gallinules, I should see and hear less of them than I had more than once done in Massachusetts, where they are esteemed a pretty choice rarity, and where, in spite of what I suppose must be called exceptional good luck, my acquaintance with them had been limited to perhaps half a dozen birds. But in affairs of this kind a direct chase is seldom the best rewarded. At one point the boatman pulled up to a thicket of small willows, bidding me be prepared to see birds in enormous numbers; but we found only a small company of night herons—evidently breeding there—and a green heron. The latter my boy shot before I knew what he was doing. He took my reproof in good part, protesting that he had had only a glimpse of the bird, and had taken it for a possible gallinule. In the course of the trip we saw, besides the species already named, great blue and little blue herons, pied-billed grebes, coots, cormorants, a flock of small sandpipers (on the wing), buzzards, vultures, fish-hawks, and innumerable red-winged blackbirds.

Three days afterward we went up the river. At the upper end of the lake were many white-billed coots (*Fulica americana*); so many that we did our best to count them as they rose, flock after flock, dragging their feet over the water behind them with a multitudinous splashing noise. There were a thousand, at least. They had an air of being not so very shy, but they were nobody’s fools. “See there!” my boy would exclaim, as a hundred or two of them dashed past the boat; “see how they keep just out of range!”

We were hardly on the river itself before he fell into a state of something like frenzy at the sight of an otter swimming before us, showing its head, and then diving. He made after it in hot haste, and fired I know not how many times, but all for nothing. He had killed several before now, he said, but had never been obliged to chase one in this fashion. Perhaps there was a Jonah in the ship; for though I sympathized with the boy, I sympathized also, and still more warmly, with the otter. It acted as if life were dear to it, and for aught I knew it had as good a right to live as either the boy or I. No such qualms disturbed me a few minutes later, when, as the boat was grazing the reeds, I espied just ahead a snake lying in wait among them. I gave the alarm, and the boy looked round. “Yes,” he said, “a big one, a moccasin,—a cotton-mouth; but I’ll fix him.” He pulled a stroke or two nearer, then lifted his oar and brought it down splash; but the reeds broke the blow, and the moccasin slipped into the water, apparently unharmed. That was a case for powder and shot. Florida people



have a poor opinion of a man who meets a venomous snake, no matter where, without doing his best to kill it. How strong the feeling is my boatman gave me proof within ten minutes after his failure with the cotton-mouth. He had pulled out into the middle of the river, when I noticed a beautiful snake, short and rather stout, lying coiled on the water. Whether it was an optical illusion I cannot say, but it seemed to me that the creature lay entirely above the surface,—as if it had been an inflated skin rather than a live snake. We passed close by it, but it made no offer to move, only darting out its tongue as the boat slipped past. I spoke to the boy, who at once ceased rowing.

“I think I must go back and kill that fellow,” he said.

“Why so?” I asked, with surprise, for I had looked upon it simply as a curiosity.

“Oh, I don’t like to see it live. It’s the poisonousest snake there is.”

As he spoke he turned the boat: but the snake saved him further trouble, for just then it uncoiled and swam directly toward us, as if it meant to come aboard. “Oh, you’re coming this way, are you?” said the boy sarcastically. “Well, come on!” The snake came on, and when it got well within range he took up his fishing-rod (with hooks at the end for drawing game out of the reeds and bonnets), and the next moment the snake lay dead upon the water. He slipped the end of the pole under it and slung it ashore. “There! How do you like that?” said he, and he headed the boat upstream again. It was a “copper-bellied moccasin,” he declared, whatever that may be, and was worse than a rattlesnake.

On the river, as in the creek, we were continually exploring bays and inlets, each with its promising patch of bonnets. Nearly every such place contained at least one Florida gallinule; but where were the “purples,” about which we kept talking,—the “royal purples,” concerning whose beauty my boy was so eloquent?

“They are not common yet,” he would say. “By and by they will be as thick as Floridas are now.”

“But don’t they stay here all winter?”

“No, sir; not the purples.”

“Are you certain about that?”

“Oh yes, sir. I have hunted this river too much. They couldn’t be here in the winter without my knowing it.”

I wondered whether he could be right, or partly right, notwithstanding the book statements to the contrary. I notice that Mr. Chapman, writing of his experiences with this bird at Gainesville, says, “None were seen until May 25, when, in a part of the lake before



unvisited,—a mass of floating islands and ‘bonnets,’—I found them not uncommon.” The boy’s assertions may be worth recording, at any rate.

In one place he fired suddenly, and as he put down the gun he exclaimed, “There! I’ll bet I’ve shot a bird you never saw before. It had a bill as long as that,” with one finger laid crosswise upon another. He hauled the prize into the boat, and sure enough, it was a novelty,—a king rail, new to both of us. We had gone a little farther, and were passing a prairie, on which were pools of water where the boy said he had often seen large flocks of white ibises feeding (there were none there now, alas, though we crept up with all cautiousness to peep over the bank), when all at once I descried some sharp-winged, strange-looking bird over our heads. It showed sidewise at the moment, but an instant later it turned, and I saw its long forked tail, and almost in the same breath its white head. A fork-tailed kite! and purple gallinules were for the time forgotten. It was performing the most graceful evolutions, swooping half-way to the earth from a great height, and then sweeping upward again. Another minute, and I saw a second bird, farther away. I watched the nearer one till it faded from sight, soaring and swooping by turns,—its long, scissors-shaped tail all the while fully spread,—but never coming down, as its habit is said to be, to skim over the surface of the water. There is nothing more beautiful on wings, I believe: a large hawk, with a swallow’s grace of form, color, and motion. I saw it once more (four birds) over the St. Mark’s River, and counted the sight one of the chief rewards of my Southern winter.

At noon we rested and ate our luncheon in the shade of three or four tall palmetto-trees standing by themselves on a broad prairie, a place brightened by beds of blue iris and stretches of golden senecio,—homelike as well as pretty, both of them. Then we set out again. The day was intensely hot (March 24), and my oarsman was more than half sick with a sudden cold. I begged him to take things easily, but he soon experienced an almost miraculous renewal of his forces. In one of the first of our after-dinner bonnet patches, he seized his gun, fired, and began to shout, “A purple! A purple!” He drew the bird in, as proud as a prince. “There, sir!” he said; “didn’t I tell you it was handsome? It has every color there is.” And indeed it was handsome, worthy to be called the “Sultana;” with the most exquisite iridescent bluish-purple plumage, the legs yellow, or greenish-yellow (a point by which it may be distinguished from the Florida gallinule, as the bird flies from you), the bill red tipped with pale green, and the shield (on the forehead, like a continuation of the upper mandible) light blue, of a peculiar shade, “just as if it had been painted.” From that moment the boy was a new creature. Again and again he spoke of his altered feelings. He could pull the boat now anywhere I wanted to

go. He was perfectly fresh, he declared, although I thought he had already done a pretty good day's work under that scorching sun. I had not imagined how deeply his heart was set upon showing me the bird I was after. It made me twice as glad to see it, dead though it was.

Within an hour, on our way homeward, we came upon another. It sprang out of the lily pads, and sped toward the tall grass of the shore. "Look! Look! A purple!" the boy cried. "See his yellow legs!" Instinctively he raised his gun, but I said "No." It would be inexcusable to shoot a second one; and besides, we were at that moment approaching a bird about which I felt a stronger curiosity,—a snake-bird, or water-turkey, sitting in a willow shrub at the further end of the bay.

"Pull me as near it as it will let us come," I said. "I want to see as much of it as possible." At every rod or two I stopped the boat and put up my glasses, till we were within perhaps sixty feet of the bird. Then it took wing, but instead of flying away went sweeping about us. On getting round to the willows again it made as if it would alight, uttering at the same time some faint ejaculations, like "Ah! Ah! Ah!" but it kept on for a second sweep of the circle. Then it perched in its old place, but faced us a little less directly, so that I could see the beautiful silver tracery of its wings, like the finest of embroidery, as I thought. After we had eyed it for some minutes we suddenly perceived a second bird, ten feet or so from it, in full sight. Where it came from, or how it got there, I have no idea. Our first bird kept his bill parted, as if in distress; a peculiar action, which probably had some connection with the other bird's presence, although the two paid no attention to each other so far as we could make out. When we had watched them as long as we pleased, I told the boy to pull the boat forward till they rose. We got within thirty feet, I think. At that point they took flight, and, side by side, went soaring into the air, now flapping their wings, now scaling in unison. It was beautiful to see. As they sat in the willows and gazed about, their long necks were sometimes twisted like corkscrews,—or so they looked, at all events.

The water-turkey is one of the very oddest of birds. I am not likely to forget the impression made upon me by the first one I saw. It was standing on a prostrate log, but rose, as I drew near, and, to my surprise, mounted to a prodigious elevation, where for a long time it remained, sailing round and round with all the grace of a hen-hawk or an eagle. Its neck and head were tenuous almost beyond belief,—like a knitting-needle, I kept repeating to myself. Its tail, too, shaped like a narrow wedge, was unconscionably long; and as the bird showed against the sky, I could think of nothing but an animated sign of addition. A better man—the Emperor Constantine, shall we say?—might have seen in it a nobler symbol.



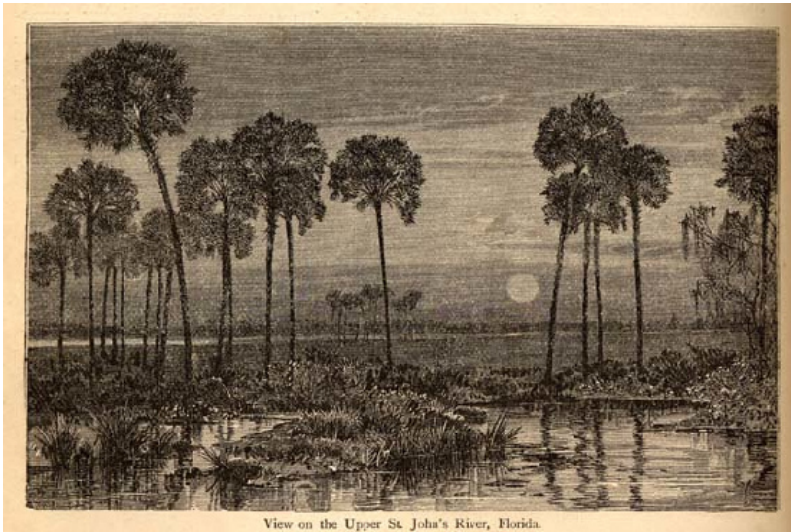
While we were loitering down the river, later in the afternoon, an eagle made its appearance far overhead, the first one of the day. The boy, for some reason, refused to believe that it was an eagle. Nothing but a sight of its white head and tail through the glass could convince him. (The perfectly square set of the wings as the bird sails is a pretty strong mark, at no matter what distance.) Presently an osprey, not far from us, with a fish in his claws, set up a violent screaming. "It is because he has caught a fish," said the boy; "he is calling his mate."

"No," said I, "it is because the eagle is after him. Wait a bit." In fact, the eagle was already in pursuit, and the hawk, as he always does, had begun struggling upward with all his might. That is the fish-hawk's way of appealing to Heaven against his oppressor. He was safe for that time. Three negroes, shad-fishers, were just beyond us (we had seen them there in the morning, wading about the river setting their nets), and at the sight of them and of us, I have no doubt, the eagle turned away. The boy was not peculiar in his notion about the osprey's scream. Some one else had told me that the bird always screamed after catching a fish. But I knew better, having seen him catch a hundred, more or less, without uttering a sound. The safe rule, in such cases, is to listen to all you hear, and believe it—after you have verified it for yourself.

It was while we were discussing this question, I think, that the boy opened his heart to me about my methods of study. He had looked through the glass now and then, and of course had been astonished at its power. "Why," he said finally, "I never had any idea it could be so much fun just to look at birds in the way you do!" I liked the turn of his phrase. It seemed to say, "Yes, I begin to see through it. We are in the same boat. This that you call study is only another kind of sport." I could have shaken hands with him but that he had the oars. Who does not love to be flattered by an ingenuous boy?

All in all, the day had been one to be remembered. In addition to the birds already named—three of them new to me—we had seen great blue herons, little blue herons, Louisiana herons, night herons, cormorants, pied-billed grebes, kingfishers, red-winged blackbirds, boat-tailed grackles, redpoll and myrtle warblers, savanna sparrows, tree swallows, purple martins, a few meadow larks, and the ubiquitous turkey buzzard. The boat-tails abounded along the river banks, and, with their tameness and their ridiculous outcries, kept us amused whenever there was nothing else to absorb our attention. The prairie lands through which the river meanders proved to be surprisingly dry and passable (the water being unusually low, the boy said), with many cattle pastured upon them. Here we found the savanna sparrows;





View on the Upper St. John's River, Florida.

here, too, the meadow larks were singing.

It was a hard pull across the rough lake against the wind (a dangerous sheet of water for flat-bottomed rowboats, I was told afterward), but the boy was equal to it, protesting that he didn't feel tired a bit, now we had got the "purples;" and if he did not catch the fever from drinking some quarts of river water (a big bottle of coffee having proved to be only

a drop in the bucket), against my urgent remonstrances and his own judgment, I am sure he looks back upon the labor as on the whole well spent. He was going North in the spring, he told me. May joy be with him wherever he is!

The next morning I took the steamer down the river to Blue Spring, a distance of some thirty miles, on my way back to New Smyrna, to a place where there were accessible woods, a beach, and, not least, a daily sea breeze. The river in that part of its course is comfortably narrow,—a great advantage,—winding through cypress swamps, hammock woods, stretches of prairie, and in one place a pine barren; an interesting and in many ways beautiful country, but so unwholesome looking as to lose much of its attractiveness. Three or four large alligators lay sunning themselves in the most obliging manner upon the banks, here one and there one, to the vociferous delight of the passengers, who ran from one side of the deck to the other, as the captain shouted and pointed. One, he told us, was thirteen feet long, the largest in the river. Each appeared to have its own well-worn sunning-spot, and all, I believe, kept their places, as if the passing of the big steamer—almost too big for the river at some of the sharper turns—had come to seem a commonplace event. Herons in the usual variety were present, with ospreys, an eagle, kingfishers, ground doves, Carolina doves, blackbirds (red-wings and boat-tails), tree swallows, purple martins, and a single wild turkey, the first one I had ever seen. It was near the bank of the river, on a bushy prairie, fully exposed, and crouched as the steamer passed. For a Massachusetts ornithologist the mere sight of such a bird was enough to make a pretty good Thanksgiving Day. Blue yellow-backed warblers



were singing here and there, and I retain a particular remembrance of one bluebird that warbled to us from the pine-woods. The captain told me, somewhat to my surprise, that he had seen two flocks of paroquets during the winter (they had been very abundant along the river within his time, he said), but for me there was no such fortune. One bird, soaring in company with a buzzard at a most extraordinary height straight over the river, greatly excited my curiosity. The captain declared that it must be a great blue heron; but he had never seen one thus engaged, nor, so far as I can learn, has any one else ever done so. Its upper parts seemed to be mostly white, and I can only surmise that it may have been a sandhill crane, a bird which is said to have such a habit.

As I left the boat I had a little experience of the seamy side of Southern travel; nothing to be angry about, perhaps, but annoying, nevertheless, on a hot day. I surrendered my check to the purser of the boat, and the deck hands put my trunk upon the landing at Blue Spring. But there was no one there to receive it, and the station was locked. We had missed the noon train, with which we were advertised to connect, by so many hours that I had ceased to think about it. Finally, a negro, one of several who were fishing thereabouts, advised me to go “up to the house,” which he pointed out behind some woods, and see the agent. This I did, and the agent, in turn, advised me to walk up the track to the “Junction,” and be sure to tell the conductor, when the evening train arrived, as it probably would do some hours later, that I had a trunk at the landing. Otherwise the train would not run down to the river, and my baggage would lie there till Monday. He would go down presently and put it under cover. Happily, he fulfilled his promise, for it was already beginning to thunder, and soon it rained in torrents, with a cold wind that made the hot weather all at once a thing of the past.

It was a long wait in the dreary little station; or rather it would have been, had not the tedium of it been relieved by the presence of a newly married couple, whose honeymoon was just then at the full. Their delight in each other was exuberant, effervescent, beatific,—what shall I say?—quite beyond veiling or restraint. At first I bestowed upon them sidewise and cornerwise glances only, hiding bashfully behind my spectacles, as it were, and pretending to see nothing; but I soon perceived that I was to them of no more consequence than a fly on the wall. If they saw me, which sometimes seemed doubtful,—for love is blind,—they evidently thought me too sensible, or too old, to mind a little billing and cooing. And they were right in their opinion. What was I in Florida for, if not for the study of natural history? And truly, I have seldom seen, even among birds, a pair less sophisticated, less cabined and confined by that disastrous knowledge of good and evil which is commonly understood to



have resulted from the eating of forbidden fruit, and which among prudish people goes by the name of modesty. It was refreshing. Charles Lamb himself would have enjoyed it, and, I should hope, would have added some qualifying footnotes to a certain unamiable essay of his concerning the behavior of married people.

