A Florida Sketch-Book

by Bradford Torrey

Chapter 10: Walks About Tallahassee

I arrived at Tallahassee, from Jacksonville, late in the afternoon, after a hot and dusty ride of more than eight hours. The distance is only a hundred and sixty odd miles, I believe; but with some bright exceptions, Southern railroads, like Southern men, seem to be under the climate, and schedule time is more or less a formality.

For the first two thirds of the way the country is flat and barren. Happily, I sat within earshot of an amateur political economist, who, like myself, was journeying to the State capital. By birth and education he was a New York State man, I heard him say; an old abolitionist, who had voted for Birney, Fremont, and all their successors down to Hayes—the only vote he was ever ashamed of. Now he was a "greenbacker." The country was going to the dogs, and all because the government did not furnish money enough. The people would find it out some time, he guessed. He talked as a bird sings—for his own pleasure. But I was pleased, too. His was an amiable enthusiasm, quite exempt, as it seemed, from all that bitterness, which an exclusive possession of the truth so commonly engenders. He was greatly in earnest; he knew he was right; but he could still see the comical side of things; he still had a sense of the ludicrous; and in that lay his salvation. For a sense of the ludicrous is the best of mental antiseptics; it, if anything, will keep our perishable human nature sweet, and save it from the madhouse. His discourse was punctuated throughout with quiet laughter. Thus, when he said, "I call it the late Republican party," it was with a chuckle so good-natured, so free from acidity and self-conceit, that only a pretty stiff partisan could have taken offense. Even his predictions of impending national ruin were delivered with numberless merry quips and twinkles. Many good Republicans and good Democrats (the adjective is used in its political sense) might have envied him his sunny temper, joined, as it was, to a good stock of native shrewdness. For something in his eye made it plain that, with all his other qualities, our merry greenbacker was a reasonably competent hand at a bargain;

so that I was not in the least surprised when his seat-mate told me afterward, in a tone of much respect, that the "Colonel" owned a very comfortable property at St. Augustine. But his best possession, I still thought, was his humor and his own generous appreciation of it. To enjoy one's own jokes is to have a pretty safe insurance against inward adversity.

Happily, I say, this good-humored talker sat within hearing. Happily, too, it was now—April 4—the height of the season for flowering dogwood, pink azalea, fringe-bushes, Cherokee roses, and water lilies. All these had blossomed abundantly, and mile after mile the wilderness and the solitary place were glad for them. Here and there, also, I caught flying glimpses of some plant bearing a long upright raceme of creamy-white flowers. It might be a white lupine, I thought, till at one of our stops between stations it happened to be growing within reach. Then I guessed it to be a Baptisia, which guess was afterward confirmed—to my regret; for the flowers lost at once all their attractiveness. So ineffaceable (oftenest for good, but this time for ill) is an early impression upon the least honorably esteemed of the five senses! As a boy, it was one of my tasks to keep down with a scythe the weeds and bushes in a rocky, thin-soiled cattle pasture. In that task,—which, at the best, was a little too much like work—my most troublesome enemy was the common wild indigo (*Baptisia tinctoria*), partly from the wicked pertinacity with which it sprang up again after every mowing, but especially from the fact that the cut or bruised stalk exhaled what in my nostrils was a most abominable odor. Other people do not find it so offensive, I suspect, but to me it was, and is, ten times worse than the more pungent but comparatively salubrious perfume which a certain handsome little black-and-white quadruped—handsome, but impolite—is given to scattering upon the nocturnal breeze in moments of extreme perturbation.

Somewhere beyond the Suwanee River (at which I looked as long as it remained in sight—and thought of Christine Nilsson) there came a sudden change in the aspect of the country, coincident with a change in the nature of the soil, from white sand to red clay; a change indescribably exhilarating to a New Englander who had been living, if only for two months, in a country without hills. How good it was to see the land rising, though never so gently, as it stretched away toward the horizon! My spirits rose with it. By and by we passed extensive hillside plantations, on which little groups of negroes, men and women, were at work. I seemed to see the old South of which I had read and dreamed, a South not in the least like anything to be found in the wilds of southern and eastern Florida; a land of cotton, and, better still, a land of Southern people, instead of Northern tourists and settlers. And when we stopped at a thrifty-looking village, with neat, homelike houses, open grounds, and

lordly shade-trees, I found myself saying under my breath, "Now, then, we are getting back into God's country."

As for Tallahassee itself, it was exactly what I had hoped to find it: a typical Southern town; not a camp in the woods, nor an old city metamorphosed into a fashionable winter resort; a place untainted by "Northern enterprise," whose inhabitants were unmistakably at home, and whose houses, many of them, at least, had no appearance of being for sale. It is compactly built on a hill,—the state capitol crowning the top,—down the pretty steep sides of which run roads into the open country all about. The roads, too, are not so sandy but that it is comparatively comfortable to walk in them—a blessing which the pedestrian sorely misses in the towns of lower Florida: at St. Augustine, for example, where, as soon as one leaves the streets of the city itself, walking and carriage-riding alike become burdensome and, for any considerable distance, all but impossible. Here at Tallahassee, it was plain, I should not be kept indoors for want of invitations from without.

I arrived, as I have said, rather late in the afternoon; so late that I did nothing more than ramble a little about the city, noting by the way the advent of the chimney swifts, which I had not found elsewhere, and returning to my lodgings with a handful of "banana-shrub" blossoms,—smelling wonderfully like their name,—which a good woman had insisted upon giving me when I stopped beside the fence to ask her the name of the bush. It was my first, but by no means my last, experience of the floral generosity of Tallahassee people.

The next morning I woke betimes, and to my astonishment found the city enveloped in a dense fog. The hotel clerk, an old resident, to whom I went in my perplexity, was as much surprised as his questioner. He did not know what it could mean, he was sure; it was very unusual; but he thought it did not indicate foul weather. For a man so slightly acquainted with such phenomena, he proved to be a remarkably good prophet; for though, during my fortnight's stay, there must have been at least eight foggy mornings, every day was sunny, and not a drop of rain fell.

That first bright forenoon is still a bright memory. For one thing, the mocking-birds outsang themselves till I felt, and wrote, that I had never heard mocking-birds before. That they really did surpass their brethren of St. Augustine and Sanford would perhaps be too much to assert, but so it seemed; and I was pleased, some months afterward, to come upon a confirmatory judgment by Mr. Maurice Thompson, who, if any one, must be competent to speak.

"If I were going to risk the reputation of our country on the singing of a mocking-bird

against a European nightingale," says Mr. Thompson, "I should choose my champion from the hill-country in the neighborhood of Tallahassee, or from the environs of Mobile... I have found no birds elsewhere to compare with those in that belt of country about thirty miles wide, stretching from Live Oak in Florida, by way of Tallahassee, to some miles west of Mobile."

I had gone down the hill past some negro cabins, into a small, straggling wood, and through the wood to a gate which let me into a plantation lane. It was the fairest of summer forenoons (to me, I mean; by the almanac it was only the 5th of April), and one of the fairest of quiet landscapes: broad fields rising gently to the horizon, and before me, winding upward, a grassy lane open on one side, and bordered on the other by a deep red gulch and a zigzag fence, along which grew vines, shrubs, and tall trees. The tender and varied tints of the new leaves, the lively green of the young grain, the dark ploughed fields, the red earth of the wayside—I can see them yet, with all that Florida sunshine on them. In the bushes by the fence-row were a pair of cardinal grosbeaks, the male whistling divinely, quite unabashed by the volubility of a mocking-bird who balanced himself on the treetop overhead,

"Superb and sole, upon a plumed spray,"

and seemed determined to show a Yankee stranger what mocking-birds could really do when they set out. He did his work well; the love notes of the flicker could not have been improved by the flicker himself; but, right or wrong, I could not help feeling that the cardinal struck a truer and deeper note; while both together did not hinder me from hearing the faint songs of grasshopper sparrows rising from the ground on either side of the lane. It was a fine contrast: the mocker flooding the air from the topmost bough, and the sparrows whispering their few almost inaudible notes out of the grass. Yes, and at the self-same moment the eye also had its contrast; for a marsh hawk was skimming over the field, while up in the sky soared a pair of hen-hawks.

In the wood, composed of large trees, both hard wood and pine, I had found a group of three summer tanagers, two males and one female,—the usual proportion with birds generally, one may almost say, in the pairing season. The female was the first of her sex that I had seen, and I remarked with pleasure the comparative brightness of her dress. Among tanagers, as among negroes, red and yellow are esteemed a pretty good match. At this point, too, in a cluster of pines, I caught a new song—faint and listless, like the indigo-bird's, I thought; and at the word I started forward eagerly. Here, doubtless, was the indigo-bird's southern congener, the nonpareil, or painted bunting, a beauty which I had begun to fear

I was to miss. I had recognized my first tanager from afar, ten days before, his voice and theme were so like his Northern relative's; but this time I was too hasty. My listless singer was not the nonpareil, nor even a finch of any kind, but a yellow-throated warbler. For a month I had seen birds of his species almost daily, but always in hard wood trees, and silent. Henceforth, as long as I remained in Florida, they were invariably in pines,—their summer quarters,—and in free song. Their plumage is of the neatest and most exquisite; few, even among warblers, surpass them in that regard: black and white (reminding one of the black-and-white creeper, which they resemble also in their feeding habits), with a splendid yellow gorget. Myrtle warblers (yellow-rumps) were still here (the peninsula is alive with them in the winter), and a ruby-crowned kinglet mingled its lovely voice with the simple trills of pine warblers, while out of a dense low treetop some invisible singer was pouring a stream of fine-spun melody. It should have been a house wren, I thought (another was singing close by), only its tune was several times too long.

At least four of my longer excursions into the surrounding country (long, not intrinsically, but by reason of the heat) were made with a view to possible ivory-billed woodpeckers. Just out of the town northward, beyond what appeared to be the court end of Marion Street, the principal business street of the city, I had accosted a gentleman in a dooryard in front of a long, low, vine-covered, romantic-looking house. He was evidently at home, and not so busy as to make an interruption probably intrusive. I inquired the name of a tree, I believe. At all events, I engaged him in conversation, and found him most agreeable—an Ohio gentleman, a man of science, who had been in the South long enough to have acquired large measures of Southern *insouciance* (there are times when a French word has a politer sound than any English equivalent), which takes life as made for something better than worry and pleasanter than hard work. He had seen ivory-bills, he said, and thought I might be equally fortunate if I would visit a certain swamp, about which he would tell me, or, better still, if I would go out to Lake Bradford.

First, because it was nearer, I went to the swamp, taking an early breakfast and setting forth in a fog that was almost a mist, to make as much of the distance as possible before the sun came out. My course lay westward, some four miles, along the railway track, which, thanks to somebody, is provided with a comfortable footpath of hard clay covering the sleepers midway between the rails. If all railroads were thus furnished they might be recommended as among the best of routes for walking naturalists, since they go straight through the wild country. This one carried me by turns through woodland and cultivated field, upland and

swamp, pine land and hammock; and, happily, my expectations of the ivory-bill were not lively enough to quicken my steps or render me heedless of things along the way.

Here I was equally surprised and delighted by the sight of yellow jessamine still in flower more than a month after I had seen the end of its brief season, only a hundred miles further south. So great, apparently, is the difference between the peninsula and this Tallahassee hill-country, which by its physical geography seems rather to be a part of Georgia than of Florida. Here, too, the pink azalea was at its prettiest, and the flowering dogwood, also, true queen of the woods in Florida as in Massachusetts. The fringe-bush, likewise, stood here and there in solitary state, and thorn-bushes flourished in bewildering variety.

Nearer the track were the omnipresent blackberry vines, some patches of which are especially remembered for their bright rosy flowers.

Out of the dense vegetation of a swamp came the cries of Florida gallinules, and then, of a sudden, I caught, or seemed to catch, the sweet kurwee whistle of a Carolina rail. Instinctively I turned my ear for its repetition, and by so doing admitted to myself that I was not certain of what I had heard, although the sora's call is familiar, and the bird was reasonably near. I had been taken unawares, and every ornithologist knows how hard it is to be sure of one's self in such a case. He knows, too, how uncertain he feels of any brother observer who in a similar case seems troubled by no distrust of his own senses. The whistle, whatever it had been, was not repeated, and I lost my only opportunity of adding the sora's name to my Florida catalogue—a loss, fortunately, of no consequence to any but myself, since the bird is well known as a winter visitor to the State.

Further along, a great blue heron was stalking about the edge of a marshy pool, and further still, in a woody swamp, stood three little blue herons, one of them in white plumage. In the drier and more open parts of the way cardinals, mocking-birds, and thrashers were singing, ground doves were cooing, quails were prophesying, and loggerhead shrikes sat, trim and silent, on the telegraph wire. In the pine lands were plenty of brown-headed nuthatches, full, as always, of friendly gossip; two red-shouldered hawks, for whom life seemed to wear a more serious aspect; three Maryland yellow throats; a pair of bluebirds, rare enough now to be twice welcome; a black-and-white creeper, and a yellow redpoll warbler. In the same pine woods, too, there was much good music: house wrens, Carolina wrens, red-eyed and white-eyed vireos, pine warblers, yellow-throated warblers, blue yellowbacks, red-eyed chewinks, and, twice welcome, like the bluebirds, a Carolina chickadee.

A little beyond this point, in a cut through a low sand bank, I found two pairs of rough-

winged swallows, and stopped for some time to stare at them, being myself, meanwhile, a gazing-stock for two or three negroes lounging about the door of a cabin not far away. It is a happy chance when a man's time is doubly improved. Two of the birds—the first ones I had ever seen, to be sure of them—perched directly before me on the wire, one facing me, the other with his back turned. It was kindly done; and then, as if still further to gratify my curiosity, they visited a hole in the bank. A second hole was doubtless the property of the other pair. Living alternately in heaven and in a hole in the ground, they wore the livery of the earth.

"They are not fair to outward view as many swallows be," I said to myself. But I was not the less glad to see them.

I should have been gladder for a sight of the big woodpecker, whose reputed dwelling-place lay not far ahead. But, though I waited and listened, and went through the swamp, and beyond it, I heard no strange shout, nor saw any strange bird; and toward noon, just as the sun brushed away the fog, I left the railway track for a carriage by-way which, I felt sure, must somehow bring me back to the city. And so it did, past here and there a house, till I came to the main road, and then to the Murat estate, and was again on familiar ground.

Two mornings afterward I made another early and foggy start, this time for Lake Bradford. My instructions were to follow the railway for a mile or so beyond the station, and then take a road bearing away sharply to the left. This I did, making sure I was on the right road by inquiring of the first man I saw—a negro at work before his cabin. I had gone perhaps half a mile further when a white man, on his way after a load of wood, as I judged, drove up behind me. "Won't you ride?" he asked. "You are going to Lake Bradford, I believe, and I am going a piece in the same direction." I jumped up behind (the wagon consisting of two long planks fastened to the two axles), thankful, but not without a little bewilderment. The good-hearted negro, it appeared, had asked the man to look out for me; and he, on his part, seemed glad to do a kindness as well as to find company. We jolted along, chatting at arm's length, as it were, about this and that. He knew nothing of the ivory-bill; but wild turkeys—oh, yes, he had seen a flock of eight, as well as he could count, not long before, crossing the road in the very woods through which I was going. As for snakes, they were plenty enough, he guessed. One of his horses was bitten while ploughing, and died in half an hour. (A Florida man who cannot tell at least one snake story may be set down as having land to sell.) He thought it a pretty good jaunt to the lake, and the road wasn't any too plain, though no doubt I should get there; but I began to perceive that a white man who traveled such distances on foot in

that country was more of a rara avis than any woodpecker.

Our roads diverged after a while, and my own soon ran into a wood with an undergrowth of saw palmetto. This was the place for the ivory-bill, and as at the swamp two days before, so now I stopped and listened, and then stopped and listened again. The Fates were still against me. There was neither woodpecker nor turkey, and I pushed on, mostly through pine woods—full of birds, but nothing new—till I came out at the lake. Here, beside an idle sawmill and heaps of sawdust, I was greeted by a solitary negro, well along in years, who demanded, in a tone of almost comical astonishment, where in the world I had come from. I told him from Tallahassee, and he seemed so taken aback that I began to think I must look uncommonly like an invalid, a "Northern consumptive," perhaps. Otherwise, why should a walk of six miles, or something less, be treated as such a marvel? However, the negro and I were soon on the friendliest of terms, talking of the old times, the war, the prospects of the colored people (the younger ones were fast going to the bad, he thought), while I stood looking out over the lake, a pretty sheet of water, surrounded mostly by cypress woods, but disfigured for the present by the doings of lumbermen. What interested me most (such is the fate of the devotee) was a single barn swallow, the first and only one that I saw on my Southern trip.

On my way back to the city, after much fatherly advice about the road on the part of the negro, who seemed to feel that I ran the greatest risk of getting lost, I made two more additions to my Florida catalogue—the wood duck and the yellow-billed cuckoo, the latter unexpectedly early (April 11), since Mr. Chapman had recorded it as arriving at Gainesville at a date sixteen days later than this.

I did not repeat my visit to Lake Bradford; but, not to give up the ivory-bill too easily,—and because I must walk somewhere,—I went again as far as the palmetto scrub. This time, though I still missed the woodpecker, I was fortunate enough to come upon a turkey. In the thickest part of the wood, as I turned a corner, there she stood before me in the middle of the road. She ran along the horse-track for perhaps a rod, and then disappeared among the palmetto leaves.

Meanwhile, two or three days before, while returning from St. Mark's, whither I had gone for a day on the river, I had noticed from the car window a swamp, or baygall, which looked so promising that I went the very next morning to see what it would yield. I had taken it for a cypress swamp, but it proved to be composed mainly of oaks; very tall but rather slender trees, heavily draped with hanging moss and standing in black water. Among

them were the swollen stumps, three or four feet high, of larger trees which had been felled. I pushed in through the surrounding shrubbery and bay-trees, and waited for some time, leaning against one of the larger trunks and listening to the noises, of which the air of the swamp was full. Great-crested flycatchers, two Acadian flycatchers, a multitude of blue yellow-backed warblers, and what I supposed to be some loud-voiced frogs were especially conspicuous in the concert; but a Carolina wren, a cardinal, a red-eyed vireo, and a blue-gray gnatcatcher, the last with the merest thread of a voice, contributed their share to the medley, and once a chickadee struck up his sweet and gentle strain in the very depths of the swamp—like an angel singing in hell.

My walk on the railway, that wonderful St. Mark's branch (I could never have imagined the possibility of running trains over so crazy a track), took me through the choicest of bird country. The bushes were alive, and the air rang with music. In the midst of the chorus I suddenly caught somewhere before me what I had no doubt was the song of a purple finch, a bird that I had not yet seen in Florida. I quickened my steps, and to my delight the singer proved to be a blue grosbeak. I had caught a glimpse of one two days before, as I have described in another chapter, but with no opportunity for a final identification. Here, as it soon turned out, there were at least four birds, all males, and all singing; chasing each other about after the most persistent fashion, in a piece of close shrubbery with tall trees interspersed, and acting—the four of them—just as two birds are often seen to do when contending for the possession of a building site. At a first hearing the song seems not so long sustained as the purple finch's commonly is, but exceedingly like it in voice and manner, though not equal to it, I should be inclined to say, in either respect. The birds made frequent use of a monosyllabic call, corresponding to the calls of the purple finch and the rose-breasted grosbeak, but readily distinguishable from both. I was greatly pleased to see them, and thought them extremely handsome, with their dark blue plumage set off by wing patches of rich chestnut.

ON THE THOMASVILLE ROAD, NEAR TALLAHASSEE

A little farther, and I was saluted by the saucy cry of my first Florida chat. The fellow had chosen just such a tangled thicket as he favors in Massachusetts, and whistled and kept out of sight after the most approved manner of his kind. On the other side of the track a white-eyed vireo was asserting himself, as he had been

doing since the day I reached St. Augustine; but though he seems a pretty clever substitute for the chat in the chat's absence, his light is quickly put out when the clown himself steps into the ring. Ground doves cooed, cardinals whistled, and mocking-birds sang and mocked by turns. Orchard orioles, no unworthy companions of mocking-birds and cardinals, sang here and there from a low treetop, especially in the vicinity of houses. To judge from what I saw, they are among the most characteristic of Tallahassee birds,—as numerous as Baltimore orioles are in Massachusetts towns, and frequenting much the same kind of places. In one day's walk I counted twenty-five. Elegantly dressed as they are,—and elegance is better than brilliancy, perhaps, even in a bird,—they seem to be thoroughly democratic. It was a pleasure to see them so fond of cabin door-yards.

Of the other birds along the St. Mark's railway, let it be enough to mention white-throated and white-crowned sparrows, red-eyed chewinks (the white-eye was not found in the Tallahassee region), a red-bellied woodpecker, two red-shouldered hawks, shrikes, kingbirds, yellow-throated warblers, Maryland yellow-throats, pine warblers, palm warblers,—which in spite of their name seek their summer homes north of the United States,—myrtle warblers, now grown scarce, house wrens, summer tanagers, and quails. The last-named birds, by the way, I had expected to find known as "partridges" at the South, but as a matter of fact I heard that name applied to them only once. On the St. Augustine road, before breakfast, I met an old negro setting out for his day's work behind a pair of oxen. "Taking some good exercise?" he asked, by way of a neighborly greeting; and, not to be less neighborly than he, I responded with some remark about a big shot-gun which occupied a conspicuous place in his cart. "Oh," he said, "game is plenty out where we are going, about eight miles, and I take the gun along."

"What kind of game?"

"Well, sir, we may sometimes find a partridge." I smiled at the anti-climax, but was glad to hear Bob White honored for once with his Southern title.

A good many of my jaunts took me past the gallinule swamp before mentioned, and almost always I stopped and went near. It was worth while to hear the poultry cries of the gallinules if nothing more; and often several of the birds would be seen swimming about among the big white lilies and the green tussocks. Once I discovered one of them sitting upright on a stake,—a precarious seat, off which he soon tumbled awkwardly into the water. At another time, on the same stake, sat some dark, strange-looking object. The opera-glass showed it at once to be a large bird sitting with its back toward me, and holding its wings

uplifted in the familiar heraldic, *e-pluribus-unum* attitude of our American spread-eagle; but even then it was some seconds before I recognized it as an anhinga,—water turkey,—though it was a male in full nuptial garb. I drew nearer and nearer, and meanwhile it turned squarely about,—a slow and ticklish operation,—so that its back was presented to the sun; as if it had dried one side of its wings and tail,—for the latter, too, was fully spread,—and now would dry the other. There for some time it sat preening its feathers, with monstrous twistings and untwistings of its snaky neck. If the chat is a clown, the water turkey would make its fortune as a contortionist. Finally it rose, circled about till it got well aloft, and then, setting its wings, sailed away southward and vanished, leaving me in a state of wonder as to where it had come from, and whether it was often to be seen in such a place—perfectly open, close beside the highway, and not far from houses. I did not expect ever to see another, but the next morning, on my way up the railroad to pay a second visit to the ivory-bill's swamp, I looked up by chance,—a brown thrush was singing on the telegraph wire,—and saw two anhingas soaring overhead, their silvery wings glistening in the sun as they wheeled. I kept my glass on them till the distance swallowed them up.

Of one long forenoon's ramble I retain particular remembrance, not on account of any birds, but for a half hour of pleasant human intercourse. I went out of the city by an untried road, hoping to find some trace of migrating birds, especially of certain warblers, the prospect of whose acquaintance was one of the lesser considerations which had brought me so far from home. No such trace appeared, however, nor, in my fortnight's stay in Tallahassee, in almost the height of the migratory season, did I, so far as I could tell, see a single passenger bird of any sort. Some species arrived from the South—cuckoos and orioles, for example; others, no doubt, took their departure for the North; but to the best of my knowledge not one passed through. It was a strange contrast to what is witnessed everywhere in New England. By some other route swarms of birds must at that moment have been entering the United States from Mexico and beyond; but unless my observation was at fault,— and I am assured that sharper eyes than mine have had a similar experience,—their line of march did not bring them into the Florida hill-country. My morning's road not only showed me no birds, but led me nowhere, and, growing discouraged, I turned back till I came to a lane leading off to the left at right angles. This I followed so far that it seemed wise, if possible, to make my way back to the city without retracing my steps. Not to spend my strength for naught, however (the noonday sun having always to be treated with respect), I made for a solitary house in the distance. Another lane ran past it. That, perhaps, would answer my purpose. I entered

the yard, all ablaze with roses, and in response to my knock a gentleman appeared upon the doorstep. Yes, he said, the lane would carry me straight to the Meridian road (so I think he called it), and thence into the city. "Past Dr. H.'s?" I asked.

"Yes." And then I knew where I was.

First, however, I must let my new acquaintance show me his garden. His name was G., he said. Most likely I had heard of him, for the legislature was just then having a good deal to say about his sheep, in connection with some proposed dog-law. Did I like roses? As he talked he cut one after another, naming each as he put it into my hand. Then I must look at his Japanese persimmon trees, and many other things. Here was a pretty shrub. Perhaps I could tell what it was by crushing and smelling a leaf? No; it was something familiar; I sniffed, and looked foolish, and after all he had to tell me its name—camphor. So we went the rounds of the garden,—frightening a mocking-bird off her nest in an orange-tree,—till my hands were full. It is too bad I have forgotten how many pecan-trees he had planted, and how many sheep he kept. A well-regulated memory would have held fast to such figures: mine is certain only that there were four eggs in the mocking-bird's nest. Mr. G. was a man of enterprise, at any rate; a match for any Yankee, although he had come to Florida not from Yankeeland, but from northern Georgia. I hope all his crops are still thriving, especially his white roses and his Marshal Niels.

In the lane, after skirting some pleasant woods, which I meant to visit again, but found no opportunity, I was suddenly assaulted by a pair of brown thrashers, half beside themselves after their manner because of my approach to their nest. How close my approach was I cannot say; but it must be confessed that I played upon their fears to the utmost of my ability, wishing to see as many of their neighbors as the disturbance would bring together. Several other thrashers, a catbird, and two house wrens appeared (all these, since "blood is thicker than water," may have felt some special cousinly solicitude, for aught I know), with a ruby-crowned kinglet and a field sparrow.

In the valley, near a little pond, as I came out into the Meridian road, a solitary vireo was singing, in the very spot where one had been heard six days before. Was it the same bird? I asked myself. And was it settled for the summer? Such an explanation seemed the more likely because I had found no solitary vireo anywhere else about the city, though the species had been common earlier in the season in eastern and southern Florida, where I had seen my last one—at New Smyrna—March 26.

At this same dip in the Meridian road, on a previous visit, I had experienced one of the

pleasantest of my Tallahassee sensations. The morning was one of those when every bird is in tune. By the road side I had just passed Carolina wrens, house wrens, a chipper, a field sparrow, two thrashers, an abundance of chewinks, two orchard orioles, several tanagers, a flock of quail, and mocking-birds and cardinals uncounted. In a pine wood near by, a wood pewee, a pine warbler, a yellow-throated warbler, and a pine-wood sparrow were singing—a most peculiarly select and modest chorus. Just at the lowest point in the valley I stopped to listen to a song which I did not recognize, but which, by and by, I settled upon as probably the work of a freakish prairie warbler. At that moment, as if to confirm my conjecture,—which in the retrospect becomes almost ridiculous,—a prairie warbler hopped into sight on an outer twig of the water-oak out of which the music had proceeded. Still something said, "Are you sure?" and I stepped inside the fence. There on the ground were two or three white-crowned sparrows, and in an instant the truth of the case flashed upon me. I remembered the saying of a friend, that the song of the white-crown had reminded him of the vesper sparrow and the black-throated green warbler. That was my bird; and I listened again, though I could no longer be said to feel in doubt. A long time I waited. Again and again the birds sang, and at last I discovered one of them perched at the top of the oak, tossing back his head and warbling—a white-crowned sparrow: the one regular Massachusetts migrant which I had often seen, but had never heard utter a sound.

The strain opens with smooth, sweet notes almost exactly like the introductory syllables of the vesper sparrow. Then the tone changes, and the remainder of the song is in something like the pleasingly hoarse voice of a prairie warbler, or a black-throated green. It is soft and very pretty; not so perfect a piece of art as the vesper sparrow's tune,—few bird-songs are,—but taking for its very oddity, and at the same time tender and sweet. More than one writer has described it as resembling the song of the white-throat. Even Minot, who in general was the most painstaking and accurate of observers, as he is one of the most interesting of our systematic writers, says that the two songs are "almost exactly" alike. There could be no better example of the fallibility which attaches, and in the nature of the case must attach, to all writing upon such subjects. The two songs have about as much in common as those of the hermit thrush and the brown thrasher, or those of the song sparrow and the chipper. In other words, they have nothing in common. Probably in Minot's case, as in so many others of a similar nature, the simple explanation is that when he thought he was listening to one bird he was really listening to another.

The Tallahassee road to which I had oftenest resorted, to which, now, from far

Massachusetts, I oftenest look back, the St. Augustine road, so called, I have spoken of elsewhere. Thither, after packing my trunk on the morning of the 18th, I betook myself for a farewell stroll. My holiday was done. For the last time, perhaps, I listened to the mocking-bird and the cardinal, as by and by, when the grand holiday is over, I shall listen to my last wood thrush and my last bluebird. But what then? Florida fields are still bright, and neither mocking-bird nor cardinal knows aught of my absence. And so it will be.

"When you and I behind the Veil are past, Oh, but the long, long while the World shall last."

None the less, it is good to have lived our day and taken our peep at the mighty show. Ten thousand things we may have fretted ourselves about, uselessly or worse. But to have lived in the sun, to have loved natural beauty, to have felt the majesty of trees, to have enjoyed the sweetness of flowers and the music of birds,—so much, at least, is not vanity nor vexation of spirit.