Our City Birds. — No. IV.

Up-town Birds.

By Edgar A. Mearns.

Before leaving Central Park birds, I should add a word respecting the Fox Sparrow's possible residence there throughout the winter. As noted in the first article, we found ~~them~~ it still abundant about the middle of December ~~last~~. My last visit to the Park was on the 13th of ~~last~~ February; then a number of Fox Sparrows were feeding with the Cardinal Grosbeaks and White-throated Sparrows, at the end of the lake, where the Swans, Geese, Gulls, and other ^{domesticated} Water-fowl are kept during winter. They appeared to know the lay of the land pretty well, and, possibly, may have spent the winter there; severe as it has been. I have not ventured ~~to~~ to visit that spot in winter, and, therefore, cannot say whether these birds wintered there or not; but it would be interesting to ascertain the residence of this species, in winter.

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so far north, for the occurrence would be unique. On the occasion of this last walk in the Park we saw several fine Gray Squirrels, wild Rabbits, and plenty of traces of the Common Mole (Scalops aquaticus) for mammals; and of birds we noted fourteen species: among them was one Robin, seen at the head of the Loch, among the sumach bushes (Rhus typhina); and there was a flock of Snow Buntings on the plain south of the Pool.

Portions of the upper part of New York Island are covered with trees, and there are growths of briars and bushes as dense and wild as in ^{any} uncultivated regions. The extreme north end of Manhattan is still covered with woods and rocks, and as attractive in its natural beauty as when Oloffe the dreamer, weary from the fatigues of a momentous voyage, lay himself down upon the green turf of Manna-hatta, and saw in prophetic vision the smoke arising from the pipe of the good St. Nicholas, lit at

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the camp fire, ascending into the air and spreading like a cloud overhead, and fancied that the great volume of smoke assumed a variety of marvellous forms, where in dim obscurity he saw shadowed out palaces and domes and lofty spires, all of which lasted but a moment, and then faded away. When Cloffe Van Kortlandt awoke from his sleep, and related his dream to his companions, interpreting it that it was the will of St. Nicholas that they should settle down and build a city here; and that the smoke of the pipe was a type how vast would be the extent of the city, inasmuch as the volumes of its smoke would spread over a wide extent of country. Though the dream of Cloffe the sage has come to be a fact, through the tasteful judgment of the owners, this end of the most populous island in the world is still clothed in sylvan loveliness. I should like to visit it in spring and summer, for I know that many of our songsters, and some rare ones too, make its shades resound with woodland choruses.

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When Canal street was the extreme verge of civilization on the North, and the young city bucks hunted Ruffed Grouse and Wild Turkeys on the opposite end of the Island, a great deal might have been written about our insular avifauna; for the major part of all our Eastern species must then have inhabited, at different seasons, our now populous Island. Indeed we may as well wander, in imagination, farther back in the history of the past, and view New York with the eyes of our Dutch progenitors on that memorable voyage whose incidents history relates, so important in the Earth's history, because of the wondrous result of that dream of the valiant Dutch navigator, who sailed his fleet away from the green shores of ancient Pavonia, and left behind the tri weathercocks of Communipaw in search of cite ~~at~~ for a new settlement. Following in the wake of a school of fat and jolly porpoises that rolled and tumbled along, turning up their sleek sides to the sun, and sporting

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and the sounds and sights are those of thrifty labor, and of busy commerce, instead of those of natural animation.

On January 14th, a cold, windy afternoon, I walked a long way up on the western side of the Island, scarcely expecting to see any bird life; but, at about 86th street, I came upon a flock of thirty, or thereabouts, White Snowbirds (Plectrophanes nivalis). At first they appeared very gentle, but suddenly flew away down the river, uttering a shivering metallic twitter, that always calls to my mind pictures of the icebergs and endless expanse of snow and ice found in ^{their} ~~the~~ northern home. They were feeding on the seeds of the hog-weed (Ambrosia artemisiifolia). A little further along five Shore Larks (Eremophila alpestris) were ~~seen~~ ^{found}, the only ones I have seen on the Island. Becoming alarmed, they flew in curving lines far out over the Hudson, upon which the afternoon sun was falling, lighting up the floating ice,

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gilding
and ~~shedding~~ the wings of the Sea Gulls. Still further on a number of Crows and a White-headed Eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus) were floating on some large fields of ice, upon which the setting sun shed a golden radiance. A few additional birds, such as Snowbirds and Sparrows were seen on the shore.

Another afternoon, in March, was spent in exploring the eastern side of the Island, along Harlem River. Swamps, woodlands^{al}, and bushy fields were found in abundance. Above High Bridge, a Red Squirrel (Sciurus hudsonius) ran down a tree and into an old stone-wall. Nests of Catbirds and Yellow-breasted Chats were seen in blackberry and cat-brier tangles; but, though Snowbirds, Sparrows, Chickadees, Creepers, Kinglets, Nuthatches and Crows were plentiful, no birds besides those already mentioned as occurring in Central Park were observed until I reached a promontory where Sherman's Creek breaks the line of the

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river-bank, and a large marsh, a likely place for Snipes, is situated. There, as I stood viewing the country around and watching the dark, sharply-defined shadows of the Gulls that were flying over the river, themselves scarcely visible from lack of contrast with the water, whose surface mirrored the white clouds overhead, a little Owl, the Acadian (*Nyctale acadica*), ~~had~~ flew from the shadow beneath the ledge on which I was standing, and alighted on a tree, where it only remained a minute, and then sought ~~refuge~~ to hide once more at the foot of the cliff, among the red cedars. Skirting the border of the marsh, I soon found myself on Broadway, near the north end of the island. ~~At~~

Audubon Park was then visited, a more delightful spot than which could scarcely be discovered. It was once the residence of Audubon.

One quiet Sabbath day I strolled into

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Trinity Churchyard, attracted by its pleasant appearance, and the desire to visit the tomb of ~~Audubon~~ John James Audubon, the ornithologist. Fine ~~shade~~ forest trees grow there in abundance, and among them a number of handsome evergreens — our native hemlock* (Abies canadensis). Crossing the bridge over the boulevard, leaving the cemetery, and following a winding walk down the gentle slope to the Hudson, ~~across~~ ^{along} which runs the railroad. Last of all, on the left, was the Audubon vault. Carved upon plain granite.

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above the marble slab at the entrance, is simply
AUDUBON.

A wreath and cross of our mountain laurel (Kalmia) hung upon the marble, showing that the dead were not forgotten. Just behind the vault I picked up a Hair-bird's nest, which winter winds had dislodged from the tree overhead. In a chest-nut tree, behind and to the right, was described the domicile of the Red-eyed Vireo (Vireo olivaceus); to the left of it a Robin's nest rested on the forked branch of a slender oak; and towards the opposite side of the Chureyard were seen two nests of the Baltimore Oriole (Icterus galbula), in some superb tulip trees. Here, close to the home where he lived for many years, in the shade of forest trees in which the birds build nests, and sing love-songs in spring-time, beside the river so dear to him, and away from the noise and bustle of the city, which he always preferred to shun, lies the sacred dust of America's great naturalist, the splendid Audubon. As I sat upon a mossy

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stump, making a hasty sketch of the tomb, the Nuthatches and Chickadees were making merry in the trees about me, Red Squirrels were chattering in the neighboring Audubon Park, Snowbirds twittered as they passed, and Song Sparrows were singing cheerily all around. A mellow warble, strong and joyous, came from skyward, and, a moment later, a pair of Bluebirds descended to a tree top, "the sky color of their backs and the earth color of their breasts" being an appropriate covering for hearts as true as ever beat in birds' breasts — and where can you find truer? Two hemlocks, before and behind the grave, had scattered their ripe cones about them, and many little evergreens had essayed to grow among the wood plants that sprang up in the pleasantly neglected grass; and acorns and chestnuts were also starting out on a precarious existence. Some Pigeons were cooing on the railroad, and picking up grain which had fallen from the ~~cars~~ cars. On the Hudson, a single craft was in sight,

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her sails flapping idly in the breeze that barely sufficed to rustle the ^{dry} leaves on the white-oaks. During winter, Eagles may sometimes be seen afloat on the ice or even alighting on the shore, and Water-fowl occasionally pass on whistling pinions. The Gulls were soaring airily about, uttering their peculiar note. In the opposite corner of the churchyard a red cow was tied, and stood placidly chewing the cud. When I approached she looked wistfully towards me, and seemed grateful when I stopped and scratched her curly head, and stroked her long, shaggy winter coat. ~~The~~ When leaving the cemetery, a Red Squirrel was surprised while on a nutting expedition to terra firma, and sought refuge beneath a tomb-stone; but, answering my call, two bright eyes quickly ^{here} appeared at the entrance of the hole. Near the churchyard gate, in an American elm tree, is another Robin's nest.