

## ALONG THE HILLSBOROUGH.

WHEREVER a walker lives, he finds sooner or later one favorite road. So it was with me at New Smyrna, where I lived for three weeks. I had gone there for the sake of the river, and my first impulse was to take the road that runs southerly along its bank. At the time I thought it the most beautiful road I had found in Florida, nor have I seen any great cause since to alter that opinion. With many pleasant windings (beautiful roads are never straight, nor unnecessarily wide, which is perhaps the reason why our rural authorities devote themselves so madly to the work of straightening and widening), — with many pleasant windings, I say,

“The grace of God made manifest in curves,” it follows the edge of the hammock, having the river on one side, and the forest on the other. It was afternoon when I first saw it. Then it is shaded from the sun, while the river and its opposite bank have on them a light more beautiful than can be described or imagined; a light — with reverence for the poet of nature be it spoken — a light that never was *except* on sea or land. The poet's dream was never equal to it.

In a flat country stretches of water are doubly welcome. They take the place of hills, and give the eye what it craves, — distance; which softens angles, conceals details, and heightens colors, — in short, makes a picture. So, as I loitered along the south road, I never tired of looking across the river to the long wooded island, and over that to the line of sand-hills that marked the eastern rim of the East Peninsula, beyond which was the Atlantic. The white crests of the hills made the sharper points of the horizon line. Elsewhere clumps of nearer pine-trees intervened, while here and there a tall palmetto stood, or seemed to stand, on the highest and

farthest ridge looking seaward. But particulars mattered little. The blue water, the pale, changeable grayish-green of the low island woods, the deeper green of the pines, the unnamable hues of the sky, the sunshine that flooded it all, — these were beauty enough; beauty all the more keenly enjoyed because for much of the way it was seen only by glimpses, through vistas of palmetto and live-oak. Sometimes the road came quite out of the woods, as it rounded a turn of the hammock. Then I stopped to gaze long at the scene. Elsewhere I pushed through the hedge at favorable points, and sat, or stood, looking up and down the river. A favorite seat was the prow of an old rowboat, which lay, falling to pieces, high and dry upon the sand. It had made its last cruise, but I found it still useful.

The river is shallow. At low tide sand-bars and oyster-beds occupy much of its breadth; and even when it looked full, a great blue heron would very likely be wading in the middle of it. That was a sight to which I had grown accustomed in Florida, where this bird, familiarly known as “the major,” is apparently ubiquitous. Too big to be easily hidden, it is also, as a general thing, too wary to be approached within gunshot. I am not sure that I ever came within sight of one, no matter how suddenly or how far away, that it did not give evidence of having seen me first. Long legs, long wings, a long bill — and long sight and long patience: such is the tall bird's dowry. Good and useful qualities, all of them. Long may they avail to put off the day of their owner's extermination.

The major is scarcely a bird of which you can make a pet in your mind, as you may of the chickadee, for instance, or the bluebird, or the hermit thrush.

He does not lend himself naturally to such imaginary endearments. But it is pleasant to have him on one's daily beat. I should count it one compensation for having to live in Florida instead of in Massachusetts (but I might require a good many others) that I should see him a hundred times as often. In walking down the river road I seldom saw less than half a dozen; not together (the major, like fishermen in general, is of an unsocial turn), but here one and there one, — on a sand-bar far out in the river, or in some shallow bay, or on the submerged edge of an oyster-flat. Wherever he was, he always looked as if he might be going to do something presently; even now, perhaps, the matter was on his mind; but at this moment — well, there are times when a heron's strength is to stand still. Certainly he seemed in no danger of overeating. A cracker told me that the major made an excellent dish if killed on the full of the moon. I wondered at that qualification, but my informant explained himself. The bird, he said, feeds mostly at night, and fares best with the moon to help him. If the reader would dine off roast blue heron, therefore, as I hope I never shall, let him mind the lunar phases. But think of the gastronomic ups and downs of a bird that is fat and lean by turns twelve times a year! Possibly my informant overstated the case; but in any event I would trust the major to bear himself like a philosopher. If there is any one of God's creatures that can wait for what he wants, it must be the great blue heron.

I have spoken of his caution. If he was patrolling a shallow on one side of an oyster-bar, — at the rate, let us say, of two steps a minute, — and took it into his head (an inappropriate phrase, as conveying an idea of something like suddenness) to try the water on the other side, he did not spread his wings, as a matter of course, and fly over. First he put up his head — an operation

that makes another bird of him — and looked in all directions. How could he tell what enemy might be lying in wait? And having alighted on the other side (his manner of alighting is one of his prettiest characteristics), he did not at once draw in his neck till his bill protruded on a level with his body, and resume his labors, but first he looked once more all about him. It was a good *habit* to do that, anyhow, and he meant to run no risks. If "the race of birds was created out of innocent, light-minded men, whose thoughts were directed toward heaven," according to the word of Plato, then *Ardea herodias* must long ago have fallen from grace. I imagine his state of mind to be always like that of our pilgrim fathers in times of Indian massacres. When they went after the cows or to hoe the corn, they took their guns with them, and turned no corner without a sharp lookout against ambush. No doubt such a condition of affairs has this advantage, that it makes ennui impossible. There is always something to live for, if it be only to avoid getting killed.

After this manner did the Hillsborough River majors all behave themselves until my very last walk beside it. Then I found the exception, — the exception which is as good as inevitable in the case of any bird, if the observation be carried far enough. He (or she; there was no telling which it was) stood on the sandy beach, a splendid creature in full nuptial garb, two black plumes nodding jauntily from its crown, and masses of soft elongated feathers draping its back and lower neck. Nearer and nearer I approached, till I must have been within a hundred feet; but it stood as if on dress parade, exulting to be looked at. Let us hope it never carried itself thus gayly when the wrong man came along.

Near the major — not keeping him company, but feeding in the same shallows and along the same oyster-bars —

were constantly to be seen two smaller relatives of his, the little blue heron and the Louisiana. The former is what is called a dichromatic species; some of the birds are blue, and others white. On the Hillsborough, it seemed to me that white specimens predominated; but possibly that was because they were so much more conspicuous. Sunlight favors the white feather; no other color shows so quickly or so far. If you are on the beach and catch sight of a bird far out at sea, — a gull or a tern, a gannet or a loon, — it is invariably the white parts that are seen first. And so the little white heron might stand never so closely against the grass or the bushes on the further shore of the river, and the eye could not miss him. If he had been a blue one, at that distance, ten to one he would have escaped me. Besides, I was more on the alert for white ones, because I was always hoping to find one of them with black legs. In other words, I was looking for the little white egret, a bird concerning which, thanks to the murderous work of plume-hunters, — thanks, also, to those good women who pay for having the work done, — I must confess that I went to Florida and came home again without certainly seeing it.

The heron with which I found myself especially taken was the Louisiana; a bird of about the same size as the little blue, but with an air of daintiness and lightness that is quite its own, and quite indescribable. When it rose upon the wing, indeed, it seemed almost *too* light, almost unsteady, as if it lacked ballast, like a butterfly. It was the most numerous bird of its tribe along the river, I think, and, with one exception, the most approachable. That exception was the green heron, which frequented the flats along the village front, and might well have been mistaken for a domesticated bird; letting you walk across a plank directly over its head while it squatted upon the mud, and when dis-

turbed flying into a fig-tree before the hotel piazza, just as the dear little ground doves were in the habit of doing. To me, who had hitherto seen the green heron in the wildest of places, this tameness was an astonishing sight. It would be hard to say which surprised me more, the New Smyrna green herons or the St. Augustine sparrow-hawks, — which latter treated me very much as I am accustomed to being treated by village-bred robins in Massachusetts.

The Louisiana heron was my favorite, as I say, but incomparably the handsomest member of the family (I speak of such as I saw) was the great white egret. In truth, the epithet "handsome" seems almost a vulgarism as applied to a creature so superb, so utterly and transcendently splendid. I saw it — in a way to be sure of it — only once. Then, on an island in the Hillsborough, two birds stood in the dead tops of low shrubby trees, fully exposed in the most favorable of lights, their long dorsal trains drooping behind them and swaying gently in the wind. I had never seen anything so magnificent. And when I returned, two or three hours afterward, from a jaunt up the beach to Mosquito Inlet, there they still were, as if they had not stirred in all that time. The reader should understand that this egret is between four and five feet in length, and measures nearly five feet from wing tip to wing tip, and that its plumage throughout is of spotless white. It is pitiful to think how constantly a bird of that size and color must be in danger of its life.

Happily, the lawmakers of the State have done something of recent years for the protection of such defenseless beauties. Happily, too, shooting from the river boats is no longer permitted, — on the regular lines, that is. I myself saw a young gentleman stand on the deck of an excursion steamer, with a rifle, and do his worst to kill or maim every living thing that came in sight, from a

spotted sandpiper to a turkey buzzard ! I call him a "gentleman ;" he was in gentle company, and the fact that he chewed gum industriously would, I fear, hardly invalidate his claim to that title. The narrow river wound in and out between low, densely wooded banks, and the beauty of the shifting scene was enough almost to take one's breath away ; but the crack of the rifle was not the less frequent on that account. Perhaps the sportsman was a Southerner, to whom river scenery of that enchanting kind was an old story. More likely he was a Northerner, one of the men who thank Heaven they are "not sentimental."

In my rambles up and down the river road I saw few water birds beside the herons. Two or three solitary cormorants would be shooting back and forth at a furious rate, or swimming in mid-stream ; and sometimes a few spotted sandpipers and killdeer plovers were feeding along the shore. Once in a great while a single gull or tern made its appearance, — just often enough to keep me wondering why they were not there oftener, — and one day a water turkey went suddenly over my head and dropped into the river on the farther side of the island. I was glad to see this interesting creature for once in salt water ; for the Hillsborough, like the Halifax and the Indian rivers, is a river in name only, — a river by brevet, — being, in fact, a salt-water lagoon or sound between the mainland and the eastern peninsula.

Fish-hawks were always in sight, and bald eagles were seldom absent altogether. Sometimes an eagle stood perched on a dead tree on the island. Oftener I heard a scream, and looked up to see one sailing far overhead, or chasing an osprey. On one such occasion, when the hawk seemed to be making a losing fight, a third bird suddenly intervened, and the eagle, as I thought, was driven away. "Good for the brother-

hood of fish-hawks !" I exclaimed. But at that moment I put my glass on the new-comer ; and behold, he was not a hawk, but another eagle. Meanwhile the hawk had disappeared with his fish, and I was left to ponder the mystery.

As for the wood, the edge of the hammock, through which the road passes, there were no birds in it. It was one of those places (I fancy every bird-gazer must have had experience of such) where it is a waste of time to seek them. I could walk down the road for two miles and back again, and then sit in my room at the hotel for fifteen minutes, and see more wood birds, and more kinds of them, in one small live-oak before the window than I had seen in the whole four miles ; and that not once and by accident, but again and again. In affairs of this kind it is useless to contend. The spot looks favorable, you say, and nobody can deny it ; there must be birds there, plenty of them ; your missing them to-day was a matter of chance ; you will try again. And you try again — and again — and yet again. But in the end you have to acknowledge that, for some reason unknown to you, the birds have agreed to give that place the go-by.

One bird, it is true, I found in this hammock, and not elsewhere : a single oven bird, which, with one Northern water thrush and one Louisiana water thrush, completed my set of Florida *Seiuri*. Besides him I recall one hermit thrush, a few cedar birds, a house wren, chattering at a great rate among the "bootjacks" (leaf-stalks) of an overturned palmetto-tree, with an occasional mocking-bird, cardinal grosbeak, prairie warbler, yellow redpoll, myrtle bird, ruby-crowned kinglet, phoebe, and flicker. In short, there were no birds at all, except now and then an accidental straggler of a kind that could be found almost anywhere else in indefinite numbers.

And as it was not the presence of

birds that made the river road attractive, so neither was it any unwonted display of blossoms. Beside a similar road along the bank of the Halifax, in Daytona, grew multitudes of violets, and goodly patches of purple verbena (garden plants gone wild, perhaps), and a fine profusion of spiderwort, — a pretty flower, the bluest of the blue, thrice welcome to me as having been one of the treasures of the very first garden of which I have any remembrance. “Indigo plant,” we called it then. There, however, on the way from New Smyrna to Hawks Park, I recall no violets, nor any verbena or spiderwort. Yellow wood sorrel (*oxalis*) was there, of course, as it was everywhere. It dotted the grass in Florida very much as five-fingers do in Massachusetts, I sometimes thought. And the creeping, round-leaved *houstonia* was there, with a superfluity of a weedy blue sage (*Salvia lyrata*). There, also, as in Daytona, I found a strikingly handsome tufted plant, a highly varnished evergreen, which I persisted in taking for a fern — the sterile fronds — in spite of repeated failures to find it described by Dr. Chapman under that head, until at last an excellent woman came to my help with the information that it was “coontie,” famous as a plant out of which the Southern people made bread in war time. This confession of botanical amateurishness and incompetency will be taken, I hope, as rather to my credit than otherwise; but it would be morally worthless if I did not add the story of another plant, which, in this New Smyrna hammock, I frequently noticed hanging in loose bunches, like blades of flaccid deep green grass, from the trunks of cabbage palmettos. The tufts were always out of reach, and I gave them no particular thought; and it was not until I got home to Massachusetts, and then almost by accident, that I learned what they were. They, it turned out, were ferns (*Vittaria*), and my discomfiture was complete.

This comparative dearth of birds and flowers was not in all respects a disadvantage. On the contrary, to a naturalist blessed now and then with a supernaturalistic mood, it made the place, on occasion, a welcome retreat. Thus, one afternoon, as I remember, I had been reading Keats, the only book I had brought with me, — not counting manuals, of course, which come under another head, — and by and by started once more for the pine lands by the way of the cotton-shed hammock, “to see what I could see.” But poetry had spoiled me just then for anything like scientific research, and as I waded through the ankle-deep sand I said to myself all at once, “No, no! What do I care for another new bird? I want to see the beauty of the world.” With that I faced about, and, taking a side track, made as directly as possible for the river road. There I should have a mind at ease, with no unfamiliar, tantalizing bird note to set my curiosity on edge, nor any sand through which to be picking my steps.

The river road is paved with oyster-shells. If any reader thinks that statement prosaic or unimportant, then he has never lived in southern Florida. In that part of the world all new-comers have to take walking-lessons; unless, indeed, they have already served an apprenticeship on Cape Cod, or in some other place equally arenarious. My lesson I got at second hand, and on a Sunday. It was at New Smyrna, in the village. Two women were behind me, on their way home from church, and one of them was complaining of the sand, to which she was not yet used. “Yes,” said the other, “I found it pretty hard walking at first, but I learned after a while that the best way is to set the heel down hard, as hard as you can; then the sand does n’t give under you so much, and you get along more comfortably.” I wonder whether she noticed, just in front of her, a man who began

forthwith to bury his boot heel at every step?

In such a country (the soil is said to be good for orange-trees, but they do not have to walk) roads of powdered shell are veritable luxuries, and land agents are quite right in laying all stress upon them as inducements to possible settlers. If the author of the Apocalypse had been raised in Florida, we should never have had the streets of the New Jerusalem paved with gold. His idea of heaven would have been different from that; more personal and home-felt, we may be certain.

The river road, then, as I have said, and am glad to say again, was shell-paved. And well it might be; for the hammock, along the edge of which it meandered, seemed, in some places at least, to be little more than a pile of oyster-shells, on which soil had somehow been deposited, and over which a forest was growing. Florida Indians have left an evil memory. I heard a philanthropic visitor lamenting that she had talked with many of the people about them, and had yet to hear a single word said in their favor. Somebody might have been good enough to say that, with all their faults, they had given to eastern Florida a few hills, such as they are, and at present are supplying it, indirectly, with comfortable highways. How they must have feasted, to leave such heaps of shells behind them! They came to the coast on purpose, we may suppose. Well, the redmen are gone, but the oyster-beds remain; and if winter refugees continue to pour in this direction, as doubtless they will, they too will eat a "heap" of oysters (it is easy to see how the vulgar Southern use of that word may have originated), and in the course of time, probably, the shores of the Halifax and the Hillsborough will be a fine mountainous country! And then, if this ancient, nineteenth-century prediction is remembered, the highest peak of the range will perhaps be named in a way which

the innate modesty of the prophet restrains him from specifying with greater particularity.

Meanwhile it is long to wait, and tourists and residents alike must find what comfort they can in the lesser hills which, thanks to the good appetite of their predecessors, are already theirs. For my own part, there is one such eminence of which I cherish the most grateful recollections. It stands (or stood; the road-makers had begun carting it away) at a bend in the road just south of one of the Turnbull canals. I climbed it often (it can hardly be less than fifteen or twenty feet above the level of the sea), and spent more than one pleasant hour upon its grassy summit. Northward was New Smyrna, a village in the woods, and farther away towered the lighthouse of Mosquito Inlet. Along the eastern sky stretched the long line of the peninsula sand-hills, between the white crests of which could be seen the rude cottages of Coronado beach. To the south and west was the forest, and in front, at my feet, lay the river with its woody islands. Many times have I climbed a mountain and felt myself abundantly repaid by an off-look less beautiful. This was the spot to which I turned when I had been reading Keats, and wanted to see the beauty of the world. Here were a grassy seat, the shadow of orange-trees, and a wide prospect. In Florida, I found no better place in which a man who wished to be both a naturalist and a nature-lover, who felt himself heir to a double inheritance,

"The clear eye's moiety and the dear heart's part,"

could for the time sit still and be happy.

The orange-trees yielded other things beside shadow, though perhaps nothing better than that. They were resplendent with fruit, and on my earlier visits were also in bloom. One did not need to climb the hill to learn the fact. For an out-of-door sweetness it would be hard, I think,

to improve upon the scent of orange blossoms. As for the oranges themselves, they seemed to be in little demand, large and handsome as they were. Southern people in general, I fancy, look upon wild fruit of this kind as not exactly edible. I remember asking two colored men in Tallahassee whether the oranges still hanging conspicuously from a tree just over the wall (a sight not so very common in that part of the State) were sweet or sour. I have forgotten just what they said, but I remember how they *looked*. I meant the inquiry as a mild bit of humor, but to them it was a thousandfold better than that: it was wit ineffable. What Shakespeare said about the prosperity of a jest was never more strikingly exemplified. In New Smyrna, with orange groves on every hand, the wild fruit went begging with natives and tourists alike; so that I feel a little hesitancy about confessing my own relish for it, lest I should be accused of affectation. Not that I devoured wild oranges by the dozen, or in place of sweet ones, — one sour orange goes a good way, as the common saying is; but I ate them, nevertheless, or rather drank them, and found them, in a thirsty hour, decidedly refreshing.

The unusual coldness of the past season (Florida winters, from what I heard about them, must have fallen of late into a queer habit of being regularly exceptional) had made it difficult to buy sweet oranges that were not dry and "punk-y"<sup>1</sup> toward the stem; but the hardier wild fruit had weathered the frost, and was so juicy that, as I say, you did not so much eat one as drink it. As for the taste, it was a wholesome bitter-sour, as if a lemon had been flavored with qui-

<sup>1</sup> I have heard this useful word all my life, and now am surprised to find it wanting in the dictionaries.

<sup>2</sup> I speak as if I had accepted my own study of the manual as conclusive. I did for the time being, but while writing this paragraph I bethought myself that I might be in error, after all. I referred the question, therefore,

to a friend, a botanist of authority. "No wonder the red cedars of Florida puzzled you," he replied. "No one would suppose at first that they were of the same species as our New England savins. The habit is entirely different; but botanists have found no characters by which to separate them, and you are safe in considering them as *Juniperus Virginiana*."

nine; not quite so sour as a lemon, perhaps, nor *quite* so bitter as Peruvian bark, but, as it were, an agreeable compromise between the two. When I drank one, I not only quenched my thirst, but felt that I had taken an infallible prophylactic against the malarial fever. Better still, I had surprised myself. For one who had felt a lifelong distaste, unsocial and almost unmanly, for the bitter drinks which humanity in general esteems so essential to its health and comfort, I was developing new and unexpected capabilities; than which few things can be more encouraging as years increase upon a man's head, and the world seems to be closing in about him.

Later in the season, on this same shell mound, I might have regaled myself with fresh figs. Here, at any rate, was a thrifty-looking fig-tree, though its crop, if it bore one, would perhaps not have waited my coming so patiently as the oranges had done. Here, too, was a red cedar; and to me, who, in my ignorance, had always thought of this tough little evergreen as especially at home on my own bleak and stony hillsides, it seemed an incongruous trio, — fig-tree, orange-tree, and savin. In truth, the cedars of Florida were one of my liveliest surprises. At first I refused to believe that they were red cedars, so strangely exuberant were they, so disdainful of the set, cone-shaped, Noah's-ark pattern on which I had been used to seeing red cedars built. And when at last a study of the Flora compelled me to admit their identity,<sup>2</sup> I turned about and protested that I had never seen red cedars before. One, in St. Augustine, near San Marco Avenue, I had the curiosity to measure. The girth of the trunk at the smallest

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place was six feet five inches, and the spread of the branches was not less than fifty feet.

The stroller in this road suffered few distractions. The houses, two or three to the mile, stood well back in the woods, with little or no cleared land about them. Picnic establishments they seemed to a Northern eye, rather than permanent dwellings. At one point in the hammock, a rude camp was occupied by a group of rough-looking men and several small children, who seemed to be getting on as best they could—none too well, to judge from appearances—with-out feminine ministrations. What they were there for I never made out. They fished, I think, but whether by way of amusement or as a serious occupation I did not learn. Perhaps, like the Indians of old, they had come to the river for the oyster season. They might have done worse. They never paid the slightest attention to me, nor once gave me any decent excuse for engaging them in talk. The best thing I remember about them was a tableau caught in passing. A “norther” had descended upon us unexpectedly (Florida is not a whit behind the rest of the world in sudden changes of temperature), and while hastening homeward, toward nightfall, hugging myself to keep warm, I saw, in the woods, this group of campers disposed about a lively blaze.

Let us be thankful, say I, that memory is so little the servant of the will. Chance impressions of this kind, unforeseen, involuntary, and inexplicable, make one of the chief delights of traveling, or rather of having traveled. In the present case, indeed, the permanence of the impression is perhaps not altogether beyond the reach of a plausible conjecture. We have not always lived in houses; and if we love the sight of a fire out of doors,—a camp-fire, that is to say, as we all do,—so that the burning of a brush-heap in a neighbor's yard will draw us to the window, the feel-

ing is but part of an ancestral inheritance. We have come by it honestly, as the phrase is. And so I need not scruple to set down another reminiscence of the same kind,—an early morning street scene, of no importance in itself, in the village of New Smyrna. It may have been on the morning next after the “norther” just mentioned. I cannot say. We had two or three such touches of winter in early March; none of them at all distressing, be it said, to persons in ordinary health. One night water froze,—“as thick as a silver dollar,”—and orange growers were alarmed for the next season's crop, the trees being just ready to blossom. Some men kept fires burning in their orchards overnight; a pretty spectacle, I should think, especially where the fruit was still un-gathered. On one of these frosty mornings, then, I saw a solitary horseman, not “wending his way,” but warming his hands over a fire that he had built for that purpose in the village street. One might live and die in a New England village without seeing such a sight. A Yankee would have betaken himself to the corner grocery. But here, though that “adjunct of civilization” was directly across the way, most likely it had never had a stove in it. The sun would give warmth enough in an hour,—by nine o'clock one would probably be glad of a sunshade; but the man was chilly after his ride; it was still a bit early to go about the business that had brought him into town: what more natural than to hitch his horse, get together a few sticks, and kindle a blaze? What an insane idea it would have seemed to him that a passing stranger might remember him and his fire three months afterward, and think them worth talking about in print! But then, as was long ago said, it is the fate of some men to have greatness thrust upon them.

This main street of the village, by the way, with its hotels and shops, was no other than my river road itself, in



its more civilized estate, as I now remember with a sense of surprise. In my mind the two had never any connection. It was in this thoroughfare that one saw now and then a group of cavaliers strolling about under broad-brimmed hats, with big spurs at their heels, accosting passers-by with hearty familiarity, first names and hand-shakes, while their horses stood hitched to the branches of roadside trees, — a typical Southern picture. Here, on a Sunday afternoon, were two young fellows who had brought to town a mother coon and three young ones, hoping to find a purchaser. The guests at the hotels manifested no eagerness for such pets, but the colored bell-boys and waiters gathered about, and after a little good-humored dickering bought the entire lot, box and all, for a dollar and a half; first having pulled the little ones out between the slats — not without some risk to both parties — to look at them and pass them round. The venders walked off with grins of ill-concealed triumph. The Fates had been kind to them, and they had three silver half-dollars in their pockets. I heard one of them say something about giving part of the money to a third man who had told them where the nest was; but his companion would listen to no such folly. "He would n't come with us," he said, "and we won't tell him a damned thing." I fear there was nothing distinctively Southern about *that*.

Here, too, in the heart of the town, was a magnificent cluster of live-oaks, worth coming to Florida to see; far-spreading, full of ferns and air plants, and heavy with hanging moss. Day after day I went out to admire them. Under them was a neglected orange grove, and in one of the orange-trees, amid the glossy foliage, appeared my first summer tanager. It was a royal setting, and the splendid vermilion-red bird was worthy of it. Among the oaks I walked in the evening, listening to the

strange low chant of the chuck-will's-widow, — a name which the owner himself pronounces with a rest after the first syllable. Once, for two or three days, the trees were amazingly full of blue yellow-backed warblers. Numbers of them, a dozen at least, could be heard singing at once directly over one's head, running up the scale not one after another, but literally in unison. Here the tufted titmouse, the very soul of monotony, piped and piped and piped, as if his diapason stop were pulled out and stuck, and could not be pushed in again. He is an odd genius. With plenty of notes, he wearies you almost to distraction, harping on one string for half an hour together. He is the one Southern bird that I should perhaps be sorry to see common in Massachusetts; but that "perhaps" is a large word. Many yellow-throated warblers, silent as yet, were commonly in the live-oaks, and innumerable myrtle birds, also silent, with prairie warblers, black-and-white creepers, solitary vireos, an occasional chickadee, and many more. It was a birdy spot; and just across the way, on the shrubby island, were red-winged blackbirds, who piqued my curiosity by adding to the familiar *conkaree* a final syllable, — the Florida termination, I called it, — which made me wonder whether, as has been the case with so many other Florida birds, they might not turn out to be a distinct race, worthy of a name (*Agelaius phœniceus something-or-other*) as well as of a local habitation. I suggest the question to those whose business it is to be learned in such matters.

The tall grass about the borders of the island was alive with clapper rails. Before I rose in the morning I heard them crying in full chorus; and now and then during the day something would happen, and all at once they would break out with one sharp volley, and then instantly all would be silent again. Theirs is an apt name, — *Rallus crepitans*.

Once I watched two of them in the act of crepitating, and ever after that, when the sudden uproar burst forth, I seemed to see the reeds full of birds, each with his bill pointing skyward, bearing his part in the salvo. So far as I could perceive, they had nothing to fear from human enemies. They ran about the mud on the edge of the grass, especially in the morning, looking like half-grown pullets. Their specialty was crab-fishing, at which they were highly expert, plunging into the water up to the depth of their legs, and handling and swallowing pretty large specimens with surprising dexterity. I was greatly pleased with them, as well as with their local name, "everybody's chickens."

Once I feared we had heard the last of them. On a day following a sudden fall of the mercury, a gale from the north set in at noon, with thunder and lightning, hail, and torrents of rain. The river was quickly lashed into foam, and the gale drove the ocean into it through the inlet, till the shrubbery of the rails' island barely showed above the breakers. The street was deep under water, and fears were entertained for the new bridge and the road to the beach. All night the gale continued, and all the next day till late in the afternoon; and when the river should have been at low tide, the island was still flooded. Gravitation was overmatched for the time being. And where were the rails, I asked myself. They could swim, no doubt, when put to it, but it seemed impossible that they could survive so fierce an inundation. Well, the wind ceased, the tide went out at last; and behold, the rails were in full cry, not a voice missing! How they had managed it was beyond my ken.

Another island, farther out than that of the rails (but the rails, like the long-billed marsh wrens, appeared to be pre-

sent in force all up and down the river, in suitable places), was occupied nightly as a crow-roost. Judged by the morning clamor, which, like that of the rails, I heard from my bed, its population must have been enormous. One evening I happened to come up the street just in time to see the hinder part of the procession — some hundreds of birds — flying across the river. They came from the direction of the pine lands in larger and smaller squads, and with but a moderate amount of noise moved straight to their destination. All but one of them so moved, that is to say. The performance of that one exception was a mystery. He rose high in the air, over the river, and remained soaring all by himself, acting sometimes as if he were catching insects, till the flight had passed, even to the last scattering detachments. What could be the meaning of his odd behavior? Some momentary caprice had taken him, perhaps. Or was he, as I could not help asking, some duly appointed officer of the day, — grand marshal, if you please, — with a commission to see all hands in before retiring himself? He waited, at any rate, till the final stragglers had passed; then he came down out of the air and followed them. I meant to watch the ingathering a second time, to see whether this feature of it would be repeated, but I was never there at the right moment. One cannot do everything.

Now, alas, Florida seems very far off. I am never likely to walk again under those New Smyrna live-oaks, nor to see again all that beauty of the Hillsborough. And yet, in a truer and better sense of the word, I do see it, and shall. What a heavenly light falls at this moment on the river and the island woods! Perhaps we must come back to Wordsworth, after all, —

"The light that never was, on sea or land."

*Bradford Torrey.*