

"He would like to see you presently when his arm is set," said Ducaine. "He made me promise to keep you away, Miss Carstairs, until the doctors had done with him."

Mary gave a little cry of distress. An hour later, she was admitted to Harry's room. "Are you much hurt, dear?" she said, as she sat down on the bed, and her brother took her little hand in his own great brown one.

Harry laughed at the idea. "Ducaine's a good fellow, Mary," he said, "but the sooner your marriage takes place the better for me. I shan't have to look after him for you."

Mary blushed. "If you are well enough I should like to—to speak to you about my marriage," she said.

"Of course I'm well enough. Then he got it over before the horse bolted?"

"No, he didn't, Harry."

"Look here, Mary," Harry protested. "You'll have to make up your mind soon. I discovered

something about Deane this afternoon. The poor chap's madly in love with you."

"I—I made a discovery, too, this afternoon, Harry."

"What is it?" he said resignedly. "Doctor says I mustn't be 'worrised,' but I think I can stand this. I wonder you didn't choose Deane, Mary."

"Do you?" she asked demurely. Then she let go his hand, and put her lips to his ear. "You—you great goose, Harry. Now, don't faint. You're—you're quite ready?"

"Go on," he said resignedly. "My pulse is a hundred and ten, but that's only a detail. Most people die when it's just over a hundred. It will either kill or cure me. Fire away!"

"Don't laugh, Harry," she said; "I'm so hap—hap—happy."

"Pulse one hundred and forty-five," said Harry, solemnly; "another moment's suspense will be fatal."

"It *is* Julian after all," she said. And then she wept, in the manner of women whose hearts are full of happiness.



"NOTHING BUT SPARROWS AND BLACKBIRDS."



"HAVE you many birds in your neighbourhood?"

"No; nothing but sparrows and blackbirds."

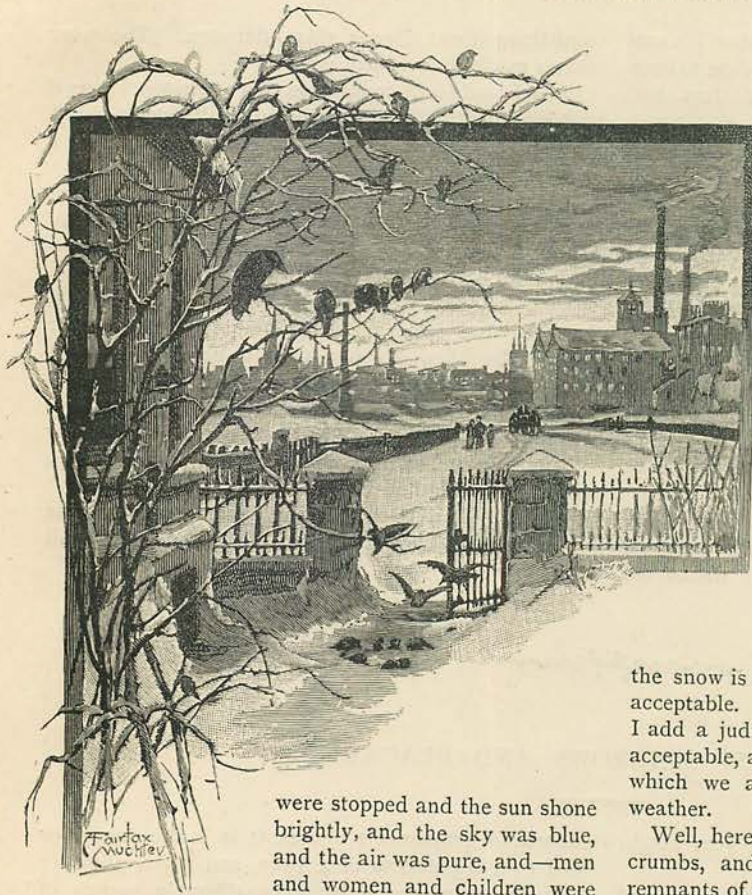
This was a question once asked, and an answer received, from a person found sitting on a stile in a leafy lane in the Midlands, with whom I had casually entered into conversation. The question was suggested by our surroundings. The air was overflowing with the songs of birds and the hum of insects, for it was the glorious early summer-time. Trees and hedges, the thick growth of herbage in the ditch, and the broad border of grass that stretched to the waggon-wheel ruts were all full of movement and life.



It is now winter, and I have been for some months a resident in the very neighbourhood referred to in the above scrap of conversation. Though my chance acquaintance of that summer day's stroll spoke in perfect good faith, his words suggested in their very matter hesitancy of belief, for blackbirds are not such frequenters of human habitations, such lovers of human society, as to be found along with the sparrows in localities from which other birds have been driven by the activity and noise, the bricks and mortar, of men. They are birds of a rather retiring disposition, have something of the awkwardness of shy persons; and though they do indeed build in the grounds at-

tached to gentlemen's houses, it is in the country or well on the outskirts of a town, and where they are kept in countenance by a considerable variety of feathered fellow creatures. "Nothing but sparrows and blackbirds" did not commend itself to belief as a true account of the case; but I have found that in this part of the country the name "blackbird" is commonly given to the starling. It was this bird that my acquaintance meant, though at the time I did not know or even suspect it. "Starlings and sparrows" is a more congruous combination, for both these birds enjoy an hereditary right to human service. Has it not been handed down in their traditional lore that men have been created and taught the art of architecture for the express purpose of providing spouts and gutters in which the sparrows may build their nests, and chimneys to make up for a deficiency of hollow trees in providing a like convenience for the starlings?

Even where I live—which, fortunately for me, as a lover of the country, is a little outside the town—a not too curious observer might be excused for seeing nothing but sparrows and starlings. These he would see on the roofs and in the fields around, and probably these only. We are proud of our factory chimneys, and complacently watch the black smoke issuing from them that tells of busy industry. When some satisfactory method of consuming it has been invented and commends itself to the manufacturing mind, we shall be glad to see an abatement of "the smoke nuisance." But we desire no return of the terrible days of the cotton famine, when all the mills



BREAKFAST-TIME.

were stopped and the sun shone brightly, and the sky was blue, and the air was pure, and—men and women and children were starving! No; we glory in these tall chimneys and their dusky plumes streaming in the

air. At the same time, we do not claim for them any special beauty, nor do we deny a pollution of the atmosphere. But worse than the smoke, though less obvious to the eye, are the fumes of certain chemical works. The evidence of their deadly power is to be seen in the gradual dying of our trees and in the hopeless colour of our grass.

But the sparrow takes no exception to such things as these. He rather shares the pride of his human friend in his restless industry, though he continues to associate with him at some cost to his personal appearance—for the sooty little bird that frequents the streets of a Lancashire town is blackened almost out of all likeness to his brother of a Kentish or Sussex homestead. The starling, too, stands by us, even though we build factories and defile the atmosphere. The fields around my house afford him exercise and, presumably, food, for he spends a good deal of his time in them, while my chimneys are one of the selected spots for the establishment of his nurseries, as I discovered to my inconvenience more than once last summer when a bird of full size, but evidently not of mature judgment, came down into the room, bringing with him soot and confusion that I could well have spared.

But it is winter now. The frost has sealed the

ground, and the snow has followed. "Only sparrows and blackbirds." Truly we have nothing to compare with the feathered wealth of the Midland woods, but in the little enclosure before my window—which some of my friends kindly call a garden—I am proving to-day how inadequate an account of our bird life is that answer. The snow is swept away from the path, and a generous gift of bread-crumbs scattered on it out of regard for the conventionalism of such charity. For have not bread-crumbs been the staple eleemosynary dole for bird dependents since the ancient "time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary?" And who am I that I should turn reformer, and know better than my fathers? Besides, bread-crumbs are cleanly and easy things to collect from the breakfast table, and when

the snow is on the ground prove not altogether unacceptable. But while thus paying tribute to custom, I add a judicious supply of suet, as being yet more acceptable, and as affording that oleaginous element which we are taught is so expedient in the cold weather.

Well, here are indeed the sparrows, discussing the crumbs, and here are the starlings, settling in the remnants of what was once a strong quickset hedge around a garden, and is now a decimated rank of hawthorn bushes guarding a discouraged grass-plot. They have soon found out the suet fixed in the forks of the twigs, and their neat sharp beaks are promptly busy. But here is a visitor. I should know that movement, yet who can recognise in that grimy ball of feathers the little blue-tit that ought to be sporting a uniform of blues and greens and yellows? Nevertheless, it is he. And he has not come far. His appearance testifies that he has been living for at least some time in a smoke-charged air. What has he lived on all the summer? Insects do not abound; the crevices in which he would seek them are choked with soot. And what does he live on in these winter days? Surely his struggle for existence has been a fierce one! But he is happy just now, as he toys with a morsel in the pathway, then slips into the hawthorns to investigate what is wedged between their branches and fixed upon their thorns. And now here comes a robin, with a confident carriage that a gamecock might envy. Neither sparrow nor starling expect an apology from him for hopping into the very centre of their circle—taking the head of the table, as one might call it. In striking contrast with his bold, cavalier-like attitude is the gentle, ladylike movement, full of grace, though free from all timidity, of the little hedge-sparrow, which we are constantly being told is not a sparrow at all, and ought not to be called such, but which most assuredly will be called such till an alter-



native name can be found that slips more trippingly off the tongue than the suggested "hedge - accen-tor."

A sudden disturbance among the smaller birds! It is a rook — nay, a couple, one on the little dwarfed elm in the corner, the other on the fence. They mean no

harm, but their bulk is an offence to robins, sparrows, and birds of their size. One of them is now appropriating a store I wedged into the fork of a dead tree stump with a special thought of his necessities, for when I was distributing my benefaction I noticed him—or his fellow—intently watching me at a distance of less than twenty yards. In agricultural counties, where there is much arable land, and where the rook is shot at, and, when shot, hung by one leg to swing ignominiously and warningly in the field, he is a shy bird. In such localities it would be vain to provide for his coming into your garden within six yards of your window. But I had already discovered how much less suspicious is the Lancashire rook, and thought it not unlikely he would come. And I am not disappointed. He has come, and his brother with him, although the manner of the brother is not altogether free from nervousness. He does little more than parade the fence, and watch the bolder birds enjoying the food spread below.

And now the number of the starlings is increasing, and among them is a strange-looking bird. His movements are not those of a starling, who walks—having learned the art, perhaps, from the rook—and bettered the instruction, for he certainly has a more respectable gait than the larger bird. But this strange bird hops, and that none too well; yet he has the form and colour and almost the size of a starling, though

coming short a little in this last particular. Poor bird! He is a starling, truly, but he has lost a leg. How, it were idle to surmise: clearly there are troubles and accidents in starling households. But among the new comers is a yet more pitiful object—a poor, blackened, and obviously feeble, thrush. His feathers are all puffed out as though to keep the cold air at as great a distance from his body as possible, and his legs seem to lack the strength to keep his body off the ground. He flops along in sad contrast with the lively spring that we see in the summer days when he is busy on the garden lawn worm-pulling. The sparrows make way for him as he clumsily, helplessly flops, as I have called it, in among them. They cannot surely be moved by fear of such a creature; let us believe that they respect his wretchedness. They are Sir Philip Sidneys, who say, "Thy necessity is greater than ours."

And now he goes up on to the branch of the tree overhead, and sits there "all of a heap." I rejoice that he has had a meal—a good one—though, from his looks, I fear relief has come too late. Privation has already done its work, and next spring will miss his song. Let him rest while he may, however, undisturbed. But I have to go into town, and so must, perforce, disturb him by opening the door and passing under the bare bough on which he sits. With the indifference of despair, he sits on and takes no notice. On my return—in about an hour's time—he is still there. And now his mate is on the ground, and, to my surprise, there is a blackbird come to join the number of my friends; not a starling this, passing himself off for the songster, but a true blackbird—"the ousel cock so black of hue"—the merle—*turdus merula*. He flies away as I come in at the gate, but I am glad to see, as I look from the window a little later, that he has returned.

Clearly this smoke-poisoned district possesses feathers of more varied hue than all suspect, though it does its best to disguise the variety in a smoky uniformity of colour. In my summer rambles in the neighbourhood I had found that, notwithstanding all unfavourable circumstances, "sparrows and blackbirds" did not sum up all its bird wealth, and now, to-day, a little outdoor relief is demonstrating the same fact at my own doorstep. If the frost continues there will be further proof to-morrow.

ALFRED J. BAMFORD.

