

BIRDS OF PASSAGE.

BY W. S. HARWOOD.

“YE auld scamp! an’ wad ye be killin’ the wee one?”

The big lake steamer was plowing her way through the blue waters of old Superior, and it was the captain who was speaking out so angrily.

I was standing on the upper deck near the wheel-house when I heard him cry out, an unusual thing for this taciturn Scotch captain. I had been on other voyages with him, and had seen him in fierce storms and under annoying circumstances of various kinds, but I had never seen him so aroused before.

And the ire of the good captain, strange as it may seem, was all due to his tenderness. A wide-winged brown hawk had swooped down to the deck and was trying to kill a tiny bird which had come on board for safety. The captain drove off the hungry hawk, and gave the little wanderer protection.

We were not more than a dozen miles from shore, and a flock of these tiny birds had been following the boat for an hour. They had taken up their position alongside the extreme bow of the steamer, where the spray sometimes dashed over them, for the wind was high. They seemed tireless as with graceful, rhythmic leaps and bounds they kept pace with the swift boat. Still, now and then some poor little fellow, too tired to fly farther and unwilling to alight on board, would drop suddenly and be engulfed in the icy waters. If we had been going south instead of north, the whole flock would have been seen perched on the rigging or hiding away in secluded places about the decks. It was late in the season, and we were headed northward, and the birds knew it. It was time for them to be on their way to the warm South, and they knew we were going away from that sunny region. Had the captain turned our boat’s prow about and headed the steamer for the South, it would not have taken them long

to have discovered the change in course. They knew it was high time for them to be sailing southward, and yet they were too far from land for them to venture to leave the companionship of the boat, and the South they longed for was too far away across the great lake for them to make the passage a-wing.

It is quite wonderful what instinct — or possibly we ought to call it sagacity — these little birds show in cases of this kind.

One day from the deck of the same steamer a gentleman shot eleven of these fierce brown hawks. They were attracted to the boat by the flocks of tiny birds following the steamer.

Many odd bird incidents happen on the Great Lakes. Some of the land-birds have great endurance, even if tiny in size; but when the boat to which they have come for a friendly visit steams out into the broad lake, scores of miles from shore, the birds often become tired out with long flying, and then they will settle themselves down in out-of-the-way nooks and wait for the steamer to come again within flying distance of land.

The birds then become very tame. They will alight on the deck, run and hop along in and out among the steamer-chairs, perch on the gay canvas canopy above the heads of the passengers, and pass so close to you that you would think they had been accustomed to people all their lives long. If you wish, you may approach to within a foot or two of the bright-eyed little fellows. They will eye you sharply or shyly, as the mood seems to come over them. There is a great fascination in approaching so close to birds wild from the great pine forests of the wooded shores. They are like wild animals, who, in the presence of great danger, are not afraid of man, but are the rather calmed by his presence.

I have several times seen a bird alight on the open book in the hands of a lady reading on

the deck, and you need not be surprised if one of them puts his tiny feet lightly down upon your shoulder when you are sitting quietly in some sheltered place.

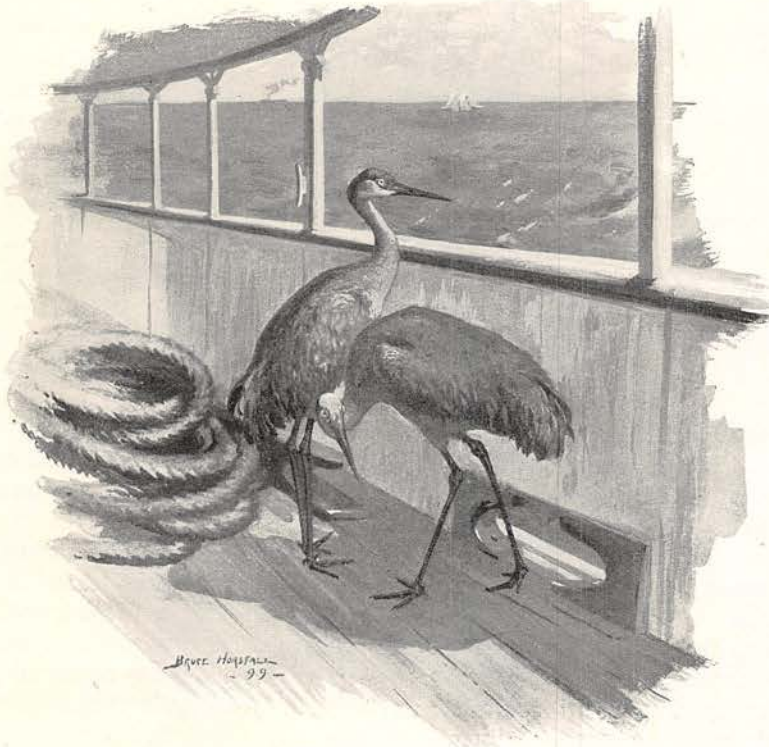
A dainty little fellow dressed in brown and green flew directly into the captain's arms one

tain came back to the boat after an hour or so on land, he found his little pet overcome by the heat of the cabin, and all his tender care did not bring it back to life. The captain is a bluff man, not given to many words, and the last man in the world to show any unnecessary sentiment, but his voice was soft and low as he told me how sorry he was when the "wee thing" could breathe no more.

One day this same captain saw two long-legged cranes away aft on the lower deck, near the capstan, trying to hide themselves under a ledge near the rail. Birds of many kinds are passengers on the lake boats, but this was the first time he had ever seen such distinguished travelers from the feathery realm as these two giant cranes. So he thought he would capture both of them alive, since they seemed so tame. They made no attempt to fly away as he approached them, but looked hopelessly at him.

Spreading out his arms for fear they might take a notion, after all, to try and escape, he was closing slowly in upon them, when suddenly he gave a spring forward. Just as he did so the boat, as sometimes is its wont, gave an ugly lurch, and the captain slipped. He is a heavy man, and as he fell upon the deck in a most undignified heap for the captain of a big steamer, by accident he landed full on one of the cranes, crushing it. He captured the other one alive, however.

The cabin-boys and the waiters in the dining-rooms take great delight in the company of the birds. One day one of the boys on the boat on which I was traveling found a brownish, black-eyed bird on the hurricane-deck, and



"TWO GIANT CRANES, DISTINGUISHED TRAVELERS FROM THE FEATHERY REALM."

day, and he caught it in his hand. He took it into his cabin, and it became very tame. It would eat little crumbs of bread and dead flies from the captain's hand, and no long-caged canary with a line of ancestors bred to captivity would have sat any more contentedly on his shoulder.

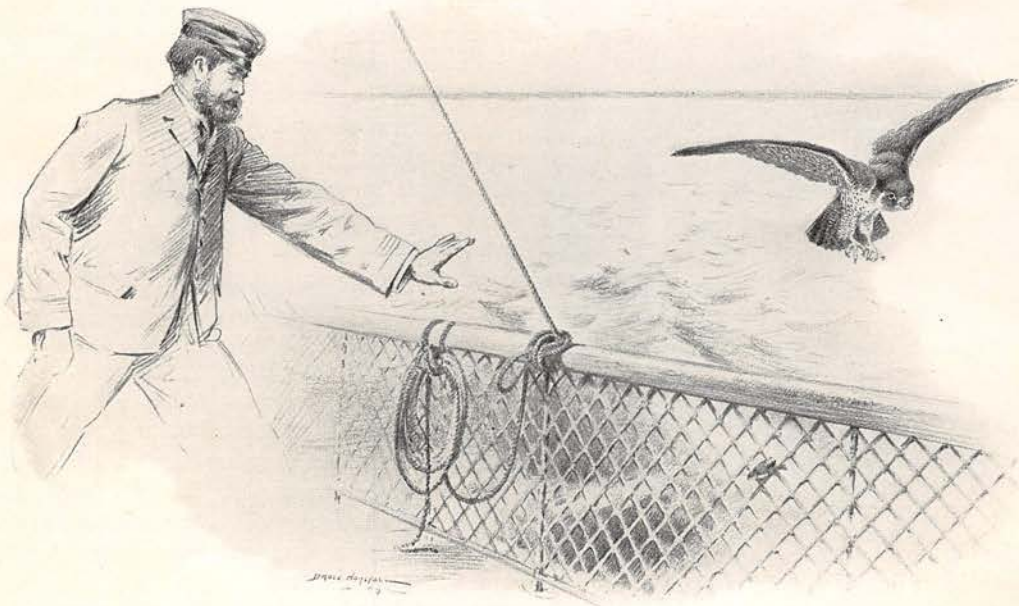
When the captain reached port, after a two-days sailing, he left the bird in his cabin, with the curtains drawn for safe-keeping. He feared, if he left it on the deck, seeing land, it would escape, and that would have pained him, for he had become deeply attached to the defenseless thing.

It had been very cold on the lakes, even though it was midsummer, but when port was reached it was excessively hot. When the cap-

offered it a crumb. Shyly the bird crept up toward the boy and picked the crumb from the deck. More crumbs followed, and then a dead fly. That fly completely won the bird's affection, and you never saw two more devoted friends than the boy and the bird all the rest of the voyage. As soon as the bird had a taste of the fly it followed the boy down into the cabin, where he caught and fed other flies to the bird until it had dined to satiety. All the bird's timidity and fear vanished, and from that hour they were fast friends.

Terrible storms of hail sometimes come up quite unexpectedly on the Great Lakes, especially on Lake Superior, the coldest of all the noble chain. When these hail-storms are raging it is as much as one's life is worth to be out on the deck unprotected. In such storms as these the snowy-winged gulls that follow the ships so tirelessly mile upon mile are struck down by the hundred and fall into the water to die.

By the far north shore of this lake there is a green island which the Indians long ago named Spirit Island. You may see it easily from the steamer any clear summer day. Thousands upon thousands of gulls make their home upon this island. At some seasons of the year there are so many of them that they fairly make paths in the grasses down near the edge of the lake. The Indians, though they should know better because of their wonderful woodcraft and their knowledge of the habits of birds and animals, have believed for hundreds of years, so their traditions tell, that these paths are formed by the spirits of the dead, and they will never, under any circumstances, visit this island. The tradition has become a truth to them, and even the present-day Indians who live in the region will never disembark on this mysterious shore, but will reverently and awesomely guide their canoes away from the pine-clad place and leave it to the "spirits" and to the beautiful white gulls.



"THE CAPTAIN DROVE OFF THE HUNGRY HAWK, AND GAVE THE LITTLE WANDERER PROTECTION."