nuptial hues. By the middle of April the last of the leucostictes has disappeared.

Hepburn's Leucosticte can easily be distinguished from the Gray-crowned by the greater amount of gray upon the head of the former, the color frequently marking the entire head above the lower part of the ears. In the flocks that visit us, the proportion is about one Hepburn's to six or eight Gray-crowned. In habits the one is a counter-part of the other.

THE BEST PLACE OF ALL.

An Amateur's Experience.

MISS REBECCA M. LEETE.

Some three or four years ago my friend and I were returning on a late September day from a drive in the country. It was already growing dusk as we crossed a little valley before entering town, but from the dry reeds by the brook a belated bird—black and white with flashes of crimson—rose and swept over us, far out into the sky.

We followed him with longing eyes until he was lost in the distance and then vowed that when spring came again we would begin to study birds, never dreaming, in our ignorance, that we might have begun at once.

I recalled the fact that I possessed a fine copy of the Pennsylvania Bird Book and a battered pair of field glasses cherished until that moment as a relic of the Civil War only. We were never satisfied as to the identity of our bird and it seems to me now as if it were the spirit of all the birds and, soaring out into the twilight, it had left behind an undying joy in the study of nature and her children.

The following April found us a-field, and we learned many of our common birds which aforetime had been strangers.

May brought such an invasion of warblers into our garden as has not since been equalled or even approached, so our beginning was unusually favorable, although we took it as a matter of course and believed it was merely an affair of the blind receiving sight.

By the next year we were finding out little by little that it was not necessary to go abroad in the land to see most birds, for only two blocks from us lay the entrance to the Best Place of All. That the best things in life are usually close at hand, experience has gently taught me. I do not dispute that others discovered this truth long ago, but I claim the right to reiterate it since it is mine by right of discovery.

If I were to take you to our favorite haunt we would saunter over to the next street and pause—but merely for a moment to undo the gate—before a small pasture in which four or five cows, more or less amicable, may be found browsing in summer. It is both an ordinary scene and a clumsy gate, but just beyond lies the pathway to much joy and content.

Once upon a time a man of wealth thought to have a country home here, so he cut a road down the bank and through the valley beyond, terracing a slope here and there and setting out grape vines. Why he abandoned his plan I do not know—accepting the blessing without inquiry. A grassy carpet covers the terraced banks from which the vines have mostly disappeared, and over the pathway once destined for a drive vines and shrubs arch lovingly.

The man who made this foot-path way has gone to his long rest and it matters little to the loiterers in the valley who pays the taxes, enough that it is ours. Mr. Bradford Torrey, it is true, pays cheerfully and even joyfully the taxes on his bit of woodland, and Mr. Burroughs, I believe, owns land in the vicinity of Slabsides, but I question if they own their land any more truly than we, ours.

But we have not yet gone down the hill. That tree at the left is a wild crab-apple. We used to drive three miles

every spring to see one in blossom—and found it at our door. That little bush that arches over the path held a Red-eyed Vireo's nest that we might have touched by putting out our hand when we passed, but the secret was faithfully kept until autumn.

The grape-vines at our right which run riot over the bushes are forever associated in my mind with a concert of Ruby-crowned Kinglets one April morning. It was not only the first time I had seen the kinglet at close range, but also the first view of that wonderful dazzling ruby-cap, and when the discovery was made that the loud ringing warble came from his tiny throat, it was, indeed, a red-letter day. And so I might attach some reminiscence to every tree and shrub along the way.

Down the hill and across the brook lies a large clump of witch hazel; in the marsh beyond it amid willows and sweet fern and spice bushes, the Maryland Yellow-throat loves to sing his *witch-ity, witch-ity, witch-ity, witch,* disclosing his own name, I suspect, for who ever found him where he pretended to be? The sly rascal can stay nearer one and yet remain hidden than any other bird I know, and for his nest —but I still have hopes.

Around the bend you enter the woodland and the brook glides into a trout pond. The walk is dim and woodsy now, and we name it Thrush Alley, for in migration time the Hermit and the Veery flit before us in their silent, dignified way, and the Wood Thrush remains to build.

In the pond the Kingfisher pays no attention to the signs regarding the wayward fisherman but springs his rattle as if he were a patrol. Sandpipers love to teeter on the mossy logs, Bitterns pay it frequent visits; and once in August two magnificent Blue Herons remained in full view with perfect placidity until some noisy people, who came along the dam, offended them—regardless of the law of the forest—by much pointing and babbling. On either hand the partridge berry covers the ground with glossy green and embroiders it with beautiful, sweet scented, starry flowers in June. Down by

the pond grow some pale green orchids which happily the High School students have not yet found. Here in these wild grape vines and hemlocks five disconsolate Robins spend the winter. Down on the point we watched a Redstart build her nest in a young maple, but alas! 'Satan came also,' for one day beside the two tiny white eggs—one broken—lay a larger one.

A Cardinal—rare at any time—regarded us doubtfully one winter day from that tree yonder, while at this bend in the path we have seen more warblers than in any other one place. The bird-books told us of the shyness of the Black-burning Warbler, how he invariably chose to disport himself in the tops of high trees where one must view him with strained eyes and aching neck if at all. In company with Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, Parulas, Myrtle, Chestnut-sided, and Bay-breasted Warblers, they flitted about close to the ground not more than ten feet away. Some girls came laughing and chattering up the path and in a few moments the brilliant company had quite vanished.

Instead of descending this steep bank and crossing the spring that runs into the pond and harbors the earliest water-cress, let us go around on the right. The bank in May is purple with violets which grow among clumps of Christmas fern. At the left we watched a pair of Chickadees excavate a nest in a small stump about eight feet from the pathway, where they reared a family of seven and, although they were in plain sight and made no secret of their domestic affairs so far as we could see, I never knew of any but the initiated who were aware of it, and believe no harm ever came to them while there.

In this same place a Fox Sparrow, in company with a Winter Wren, loved to scratch in the dry leaves, and we often watched him before he went on his northward journey. One April morning before he left he sang an exquisite song, —the very spirit of the woods.

The pond is artificial, but not obtrusively so, since immense willows grow on the dam. And now we take the

path past it up through an avenue of ancient hemlocks to the top of the hill. Here and in the more open slope beyond, thrushes, White-throats, and White-crowns, love to linger during migration, and the Hooded Warbler builds somewhere near. Further on is still another pond,—willow ramparted. Sitting under these trees one July day to escape a shower, we looked down below and saw six Phoebes sitting in a solemn row on a branch with a seventh near engaged in serving lunch. The whole family at once and at dinner! You remember what Thoreau said? "What you seek in vain for half your life, one day you come full upon all the family at dinner." Those words have come to me again and again. I well recall a brief glimpse of a Rose-breasted Grosbeak a mile and a half from here; a peculiar favor to have seen it we then though, but the next spring we could go down in our valley any time during a fort-night and hear a flock of them singing.

Last winter it came time for us to take our weekly German lesson, but the snow fell thickly, swiftly, almost in masses, and while we waited dismayed at the prospect of wading through it, behold! the Herr Prediger beaming in upon us saying he thought he would practice the Golden Rule—surely a noble idea—,and as we stumbled along in a strange tongue, some one idly glanced out of the window and lo! the snow had ceased and six Evening Grosbeaks were feasting upon a young maple directly in front of the house upon the street. They remained an hour perhaps, our first and only view of them, and not one of the ten or twelve people who passed saw them.

Last spring an Oven-bird remained near the house for several days quite fearlessly, while White-throats have foraged at our very door. In fact, in our lot alone—less than half an acre—sixty different species have been identified, eighty-five species have been seen in the ravine, while undoubtedly twenty-five species nest there.

Most of our acquaintances view us with amused tolerance at the best, and no doubt regard our pastime as a mild

species of insanity. "How much better" (I suspect them of thinking) "are five o'clock teas," but now and then we find a kindred spirit generally a *boy*.

A boy it was who, after reading Mrs. Eckstorm's admirable Woodpecker-book this winter, told me that a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker had a row of holes around their apple tree and he had been seen several times.

I regret to say, I doubted his accuracy of observation. A Sapsucker here in winter when Mr. Chapman and the Pennsylvania bird book said they wintered from Virginia south? A few days later the boy was vindicated, for the Sapsucker, bent on investigating the nuthatches activity, followed him up and perched just above the suet a few feet from the kitchen window, without, however, discovering the source of supplies. I wondered if the sly fellow had not stolen many a lunch the nuthatches had stowed away for future use.

According to the suggestion of the Wilson Bulletin, New Year's day was set aside for a walk, and it was as bright and beautiful a day as could be imagined. Unfortunately we erred as we sometimes do and made ourselves think we could see more birds elsewhere than in our usual haunt. One of our boys, inspired by the offer in the Wilson Bulletin, was to go with us, but was too late and being wrongly instructed, went where we should have gone—to the Best Place of all. We returned without having seen a bird while our boy saw a flock of Goldfinches, a Blue Jay, a Partridge Juncos, and a Nuthatch.

So I believe, for the person who has little time, to know one favorable spot well is better that much going to and fro upon the earth, though that is also good and even necessary for a variety of species.

I know a beautiful valley with precipitous cliffs where the Bald Eagle soars and builds, a woods upon whose edge a little Scandinavian boy has a garden of yellow lady-slippers, *(Cypripedium parviflorum)*, which he transplanted and keeps free from grass, prompted only by his love of the beautiful. The maiden-hair fern and the purple-fringed orchis grow

rankest in still another woods. *Cypripedium acaule* and wintergreen take us southwest and rhododendrons twenty miles southeast. The upland meadows for Bobolinks and Meadowlarks, the cliffs for hawk and eagle, the woods to the south for Oven-bird and Chewink, the lake to the north for duck and Bank Swallow. But for the greatest variety and abundance, all the year round, just around the corner lies the Best Place of all.

THE MOTACILLIDÆ OF GERMANY.

W. F. HENNINGER.

This family, represented in the A. O. U. Check-List by the genera Motacilla, Budytes, and Anthus, is almost entirely palæartic, stragglers only of these genera visiting us in North America. Setting aside the accidental visitors of this family in Germany, I had the good fortune to become acquainted with the two species of Motacilla, the one of Budytes and three of the four of Anthus during my eight years' stay in Europe. It may be of some interest to the readers of the BULLETIN to hear more of these birds than the short notes of our manuals and check-lists are able to give, and so I describe them as I saw them in their favorite haunts.

The White and Yellow Wagtails are both described in our North American Manuals. The third species, the "Mountain Wagtail" (*Motacilla sulphurea*), has the upper parts ash-gray, tinged with olive on head and crissum; general appearance of wings brownish, lores blackish-gray, throat deep black, lower parts lemon-yellow.

One of the first birds that greeted me, when I reached the broad pasture-lands of Holland in 1885, after crossing the Atlantic, was the merry wagtail. As the big steamer