

"Our Winter Visitors"

The Present Truth – December 22, 1898

E. J. Waggoner

The little birds that built their nests here in the spring, and cheered and charmed us through the summer with their sweet joyous songs, have many of them left us now that the cold winter weather has come. The swallows, the nightingales, and many others have flown away to the warm and sunny south of Europe, to Africa and Asia. The insects upon which they feed have vanished, the fruit trees and bushes are bare, and they could not find enough food here now; and besides this they could not live through the cold and snow of our English winter.

So God guides these tender little birds over land and sea, to sunny lands where the summer is just beginning when ours is ending; where they will find an abundance of food and bright sunshine, and live happily until the time comes for them to come back to their old home. So you see that their lives are one long summer. God teaches them just when to leave us; He makes them "know their appointed times;" and it is by His wisdom that they fly, "and stretch their wings toward the south."

There are a few birds that stay with us all through the year, like the familiar little sparrow and the bold robin-redbreast, which when the other birds have left us are driven by cold and hunger nearer to us than before, coming to our windows to be fed, and even sometimes into our houses to find shelter.

But there are other little visitors now in our parks and gardens, woods and fields. Let us see where these come from.

You know that our days are long in the summer and short in the winter, and as we go farther and farther north the summer days grow longer and longer and the winter days shorter and shorter, until right up at the North Pole the summer is one long day when the sun never sets, and the winter is one long night when the sun never rises.

Think of a night lasting five or six months, nothing but darkness; and how cold it must be when not a ray of sunshine reaches the earth through all that time! Everything freezes; the snow falls like a white blanket to cover the land, and all nature goes to sleep during the long, long night.

Of course the birds would all die if they should stay up there, and so God teaches them to fly away towards the south, and many of them come to us for the winter, and take the place of those, which have gone from us to warmer lands. They reach us in the autumn about the time that the summer birds are leaving.

After staying with us through the cold winter, when there is not much food for them, and the country looks most dreary, they fly away in the spring just when the trees are bursting into leaf and blossom, the flowers springing up, and everything looks so beautiful, inviting them to stay. What call it is that tempts them to leave us at this most pleasant season, when our little summer visitors are joyfully returning to build their nests in their old homes? What leads them to fly away towards the cold and snowy north, away up into the Arctic Circle, to build their nests and bring up their young ones?

If we could fly with them and see where they go, and why, I think we should not wonder that they wanted to go.

A BIRD PARADISE

When at last the sun rises and the day dawns again after the long Arctic night, the snow melts very quickly, the summer comes suddenly, and immediately the birds appear in swarms. By thousands and millions they come from all parts, just as soon as it is possible for them to live there again. You will wonder what they all possibly feed on, when the ground has been covered with snow for so long, and nothing has been able to grow in the intense cold. But God has thought about them and prepared for them. He has provided a great store of their favourite food all ready for them to eat just as soon as they arrive.

In the far North there are great quantities of cranberry, crowberry and other fruit-bearing bushes. The continual sunshine of the Arctic summer (for remember that the sun does not set for months) makes these bushes bear a great deal of fruit. But almost as soon as it is ripe, and before the birds have time to gather it, the snow begins to fall, and covers it all up.

Underneath the snow, which keeps all the air away from it, it is perfectly preserved, and kept quite fresh and sweet, without any sign of decay. So you see that directly the snow melts, there is a rich feast of "preserved fruits" all ready for the millions of birds which come such long distances to have a share in it.

And, then, too, the sun ever shining brings to life such swarms of insects that the air is filled with them, and the insect-eating birds can get an abundance of food just by opening their mouths. No wonder the birds swarm here to make their homes and bring up their young ones in this land of peace and plenty.

What a delightful bird paradise it must be where there is constant sunshine, swarms of insects, stores of fruit waiting to be gathered, and no one to disturb or molest them. God, who has provided this delightful summer home for them, teaches them where to find it, just when to set out for it, how to reach it, and when to leave.

As you "behold the birds" as Jesus has told us to do, think of these things, and what beautiful lessons they teach us of our Heavenly Father's love and care. "They have neither storehouse nor barn; yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them." [see [Luke 12:24](#)]
Sometimes He feeds them by putting it into the hearts of kind people to give them food in the cold weather. This is one way in which you may help Him to take care of them.