



Location of the Media Grackle Roost.

The Media Grackle Roost

BY SANFORD OMENSETTER

THE Purple Grackle, or Crow Blackbird (*Quiscalus quiscula*), is our most punctual spring migrant. Observations during twenty years have invariably found it in Delaware county by March 1st. Essentially a social species, this trait is nowhere better set forth than in the habit, outside the nesting season, of assembling in vast flocks to pass the night.

For a number of years Media and vicinity have held special attractions in the way of roosting-places for the Grackles. Some two decades ago, especially toward the western gate, where the imperial *Paulownias*, "born to the purple," stood file-leaders to rows of stately maples, the Court House Square re-echoed nightly with their not unmusical chatter. As neighbors, great numbers of the Chimney Swift (*Chætura pelagica*) roosted in the recesses of a large, unused chimney on the Court House. But a storm came and crushed the maples so badly that most of them had to be removed, and a capstone was placed upon the chimney, so that both sets of lodgers reluctantly took their leave. The Swifts scattered through the town and the Grackles frequented Rowland's wood and the woodland along Kirk's Lane, on the hillside west of Media.

Just previous to this, Third street in Media had been continued westward across the valley which until the early 70's contained the borough water-works, and the grading turned Broomall's Run, an unpretentious stream, into a lake of several acres' extent. On the eastern side of the lake and stream the old "Camp Meeting Woods," principally chestnut, was wrought up for commercial purposes. For several years this cleared area was a fine harbor for rabbits, but as the chestnut sprouts grew apace, the discerning Grackles came each year in larger hordes until, of late years, in the autumn, they might be num-

bered by tens of thousands. Their daily arrival and departure have become a feature of our borough life.

None so soon to waken as our feathered foragers : even while the stars stand sentinel at the gates of the summer morn, all is bustle in the colony. Upon their sallying forth, quiet reigns until, toward sunset, when the long platoons wend their way from different feeding-grounds toward Media. Ever and anon a detachment will suddenly dive and resume flight at a lower level, while before repairing for final rest a number frequent the headwaters of the lake, bathing or drinking, and chattering as if exchanging gossip of the day.

Why this locality should have been selected for roosting purposes remains an open problem. The presence, in years past, of a goodly array of coniferous trees, a half-mile distant, in Media Cemetery, may have had some bearing. As such trees grew scarcer, and the progeny reared in their branches became more numerous, lack of lodgings may have brought a dispersion and final abandonment of that secure retreat.

The Pennsylvania Legislature, by Act of April 22nd, 1905, removed the Grackle from the list of hitherto protected species and classed it among the game birds, with an open season from September 1st to the first day of January following. The increased activity of gunners has led the greater number of the birds to desert their accustomed haunts and pre-empt safer quarters in the evergreens and taller trees in the western part of the town. From these the southward passage was taken on November 1st, and but few stragglers have since been seen.

Of sombre plumage, songless, detested by the farmer, a pilferer of the nests of other birds—still we feel we cannot do without the Grackle. His arrival tells us that winter has been passed, and is a prophecy of the halycon days to follow.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES.

The number of birds frequenting the Grackle roost at Media has been very much smaller this autumn than usual. The repeal of the law protecting the Grackle has had a very demoralizing effect.

For sometime after the birds began flocking to their accus-

tomed place, scarcely a morning or evening passed when they were not startled by the report of a gun. A few feathers here and there in the woods would seem to indicate that some of the birds, at least, must have lost their lives.

A local paper is authority for the statement that some persons actually resorted to the unsportsmanlike practice of shooting them after they had gone to roost. The consequence is that the birds were greatly disturbed and scattered. In fact the disturbance has continued during the past two or three years notwithstanding some effort to prevent it. Our home is so situated that the birds flocking in at night from the south and west pass over or near us and it has long been a delight to hear and watch them coming. We have often seen unbroken streams of blackbirds extending from the roost westward as far as we could see, an air-line of something over a mile, and these great streams would usually last for some minutes.

On October 15, 1905, I visited the roost from 5:15 to 5:45 p. m. and saw only about one hundred birds which flew about but did not, I think, roost here finally. Some Grackles found shelter for the night in the trees of the Friends' Meeting-House yard, and continued to congregate there until November 18, but on subsequent visits to the old roost no birds were to be seen and it is my opinion that it was entirely abandoned this year for sometime prior to the departure of the birds for the south.—*Lydia G. Allen.*

In the late autumn of 1894, I visited this roost about dusk. The birds were there by thousands and had apparently nearly all come in but had not yet quieted down for the night. In fact, nearly every bird seemed to be calling and the resultant sound at a distance of a quarter of a mile closely resembled the steady discharge of steam from a gigantic locomotive. It is sad to think of the passing of such an impressive ornithological phenomenon.—*Witmer Stone.*