

DISCUSSION AND CORRESPONDENCE
THE SONG OF THE GRASSHOPPER SPARROW
(AMMODRAMUS SAVANNARUM
AUSTRALIS MAYNARD)

For many years I have been interested in the song of the grasshopper sparrow. This sparrow appears to be fairly common around Washington, D. C. During the early part of the summer of 1916 I frequently heard its peculiar, insect-like, lisping notes, for the bird is more often heard than seen. One male, however, almost invariably perched upon a certain cedar tree in the National Cemetery, near the McClellan Gate, to deliver its dainty, high-pitched it-tip-i-ts-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e. This particular bird sang in this manner for many mornings, always singing from the same favorite tree.

For many years I was familiar with this field sparrow around my home town, Oxford, Mass., and have often heard delivered a more complete song than the one usually described by practically all observers and ornithologists. The usual song, it-tip-i-ts-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e, frequently terminated with a most remarkable series of faint, rapidly uttered, wild, ecstatic, flowing, warbler-like notes—an exuberant chippety-chippety-chippety, continued for six or eight seconds. This last performance appears to have been a sort of passion song and is remotely like a tiny edition of the oven bird's passionate outburst as it mounts into the air above the woodlands at night. This more complete song is not as commonly heard as the lisping monotone and I have never yet heard it elsewhere than in New England. I feel, however, that this wonderful little twittering rhapsody is a part of its true song, at least in some portions of its range.

In the literature referring to the habits of this sparrow I find only two references to this variation in its song. In "Birds of New York," Memoir 12, Vol. 2, by Elon Howard Eaton, an excellent description of the song by Gerald Thayer is cited. Thayer interprets the usual song as "sit-tit-ts-e-e-e-e-e-e-e-e." He does not regard this as the true song of the grasshopper sparrow, however. The true song which he heard was a "long, rambling

twitter," uttered in a tone similar to that of the insect-like notes given above, although not as loud, and continuing as long as 10 to 12 seconds. Eaton says:

This rolling twitter is uttered when the male and female are flying together over the meadows or seated near each other.

L. A. Fuertes has also heard this more complete song of the grasshopper sparrow and likens it to the twittering song of the prairie horned-lark heard at a considerable distance.

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DECORATIVE AND PICTORIAL ART

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: As an artist, I was interested in the quotation on art, used as an apt illustration in the interesting article, "Education after the War," by Messrs. Franklin and MacNutt, in SCIENCE of December 15. The argument is based on a misconception of the relative values of decorative and pictorial art; a misconception which is entirely modern. The Greek or medieval potter or weaver would have been much surprised if, when he was decorating a jar or a fabric with conventional forms, he had been told that his art was less "living" than that of the picture maker. Pictorial art is no higher or more alive than decorative art; it is simply a different expression of the artist's feeling for the beautiful.

The artist who designed the angel, probably in mosaic, illustrated in the article, desired to fill a given space with a symmetrical arrangement of line, form and color, which would be pleasing to the eye. As he was decorating a church, this arrangement took the form, or rather became the symbol, of an angel. He pointed the thumbs because the pattern was thus improved and he put red spots on the hands because he wanted some bright color in that particular place. (Though for the matter of that, I know of no data which warrant our concluding that angels haven't pointed thumbs or red spots on their palms!) If he had been decorating a banquet hall, he would have used some symbol of conviviality, such as grapes, or a figure of Bacchus, or whatever symbol was best adapted