

**LAND OF THE LINGERING
SNOW: CHRONICLES OF A
STROLLER IN NEW ENGLAND
FROM JANUARY TO JUNE**

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Land of the Lingering Snow: Chronicles of a Stroller in New England from January to June by
Frank Bolles

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NEW ENGLAND
FROM JANUARY TO JUNE*

BY

FRANK BOLLES



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LAND OF THE LINGERING SNOW.



FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW.

SUNDAY, the eleventh day of the new year, was what most people would call a good day to stay in the house. The face of New England winter was set. No smiling sky relieved its grimness, no soft breeze promised a season of relenting. The notes of the college bell were muffled and the great quadrangle was deep with snow, as I left Old Cambridge behind me and sought the hills of Arlington three miles or more to the north. Slowly climbing the heights, after my car ride, I looked back at the world I had left. The sky was a mass of dull gray clouds, with a copper-colored spot where the sun was hiding. Boston and Cambridge lay under a pall of smoke and dun-colored vapor. The broken ridges from Belmont to the Middlesex Fells were buried deep in snow, the soft whiteness of which was interrupted by patches of dark pines, dotted with stiff cedars, or shaded



by the delicate etching of birches and elms. The air was in that condition which favors the carriage of distant sounds. I heard the rumble of trains on the Fitchburg, Massachusetts Central and Albany railways on the one hand and of those on the Northern roads on the other. Now and then the tooting whistle of a train sounded like the hooting of a mammoth owl.

Entering the woods, I found written upon the snow the records of those who had travelled there before me. A boy with his sled had been across to a pond in the hollow. A dog had followed him, running first to one side, then to the other. Further on I struck another track. The prints were smaller than the dog's, round, and in a single line, spaced quite evenly, like those of a fox. Somebody's cat had been hunting on her own account. In an open space, bunches of goldenrod and asters had been pulled to pieces, and all around their stalks the footprints of small birds, perhaps goldfinches or redpolls, were thick. Not far away the snow on an open hillside was pencilled by the rising stems of barberry bushes. From the pine woods to these bushes numerous tiny paths led. The most dainty feet had printed their story there. The journeys seemed to have been made in darkness, for the paths made queer curves, loops, false starts into the open pasture and quick re-

turns to the woods. The barberry bushes had been found, however, and were thoroughly ensnared in the tracks. The mice which formed them had made holes in the snow near the stems of the bushes, and these holes led through long tunnels down to the ground and possibly into it. Among the pitch pines, old orchards, and chestnut trees squirrel tracks were countless. Most of them were those of the red squirrel, but in deeper woods I found records of gray squirrels as well. Along frozen brooks, where alders, willows, privet, and rosebushes were thick, the small brown rabbits had been feeding and paying moonlight visits to each other. In an orchard I found a place where a crow had alighted and marched about with long strides. Most interesting of all were the hurried tracks of a flock of birds which had been feeding on barberries, juniper and privet berries. They had been disturbed by a dog and had skurried through the thicket, their sharp toes printing innumerable "crow's feet" in the snow. What were they? I pushed on to see, and soon started a flock of fifteen quail from a dark grove of pines. Later I found one cuddled up in a hollow in the snow under a juniper, eating the berries over her head. I nearly stepped upon the bush before she flew.

Descending into a ravine filled with ruddy

willows, privet, and rose bushes gay with their red hips, I heard a note which made me halt and listen. Yes, a robin. The sides of the ravine were clothed with savins, the ridges were crowned by tall pines. Rose hips and sumac seeds, barberries, privet and juniper berries furnished food, and the sun is always warm — when it shines. A soft rain began to fall, and it loosed the tongues of the birds. Chickadees called from tree to hedge. Golden-crested kinglets lisped to each other in the cedars. A dozen crows circled over the high pines, cawing discontentedly, and the robin's note sounded from three or four quarters at once. I gained the top of the ridge and looked across a pasture. In a branching oak were several birds. As I drew near, others flew in from neighboring savins and bunches of barberry bushes. They were robins. In all, thirty-six flew into the oak and then went off in a noisy flock as I reached the tree. Their plumage was much lighter than in summer. The rain fell faster and I left the pasture, homeward bound. The last I saw of the pasture hillside it was sprinkled with robins running back and forth on the snow, picking up privet berries. They were as jolly as in cherry time.

While recrossing pasture and field, swamp and thicket, I noticed countless black specks upon the snow. They moved. They were

alive. Wherever a footprint, a sharp edge of drift, or a stone wall broke the monotony of the snow surface, these black specks accumulated, and heaped themselves against the barrier. For miles every inch of snow had from one to a dozen of these specks upon it. What were they? Snowfleas or springtails (*achoreutes nivicola*), one of the mysteries of winter, one of the extravagances of animal life. Fortunately they prefer the cold face of the snow to a life of parasitic persecution.

As I caught a homeward-bound electric car, I looked back at the ridges of Arlington with gratitude and admiration. They made a landscape of ermine, a soft blending of light and dark. The falling rain, snowbound farms, savindotted hillsides, bluish belts of woodland, delicate tracery of elm branches; all mingled to form a background for reverie, a gentle good-by to a day of rest.