

## ECHOES OF A VANISHING HOST.

(By ALEXANDER SPRUNT, JUNR.)

A low, though distinct murmur, hushed by distance, but ever growing into a louder hum, sinking, rising, in an increasing monotone, came across the still air. It vibrated steadily, rose and fell in growing tones, its wavering cadence as uninterrupted now as the voice of the restless surf. Rapidly it mounted higher, developing into a moaning roar, pervading the whole expectant stretch of field and stream. The children glanced at each other wonderingly, and moved, half fearfully, toward the house. As though some giant cataclysm was about to occur, the roar deepened and grew in volume until the very air seemed to tremble, when, over the tree tops, appeared a swiftly rolling dark mass, its outer edges broken into thin streamers, which opened and closed as though a thousand individual particles were being hurled about by the violent momentum of the central body.

The man's face lighted; he broke into a run. "The pigeons, mother," he shouted, "they are back again." Suddenly the light of the afternoon sky faded—twilight, almost darkness closed over the clearing as the forefront of the mighty mass passed over the cabin. The children, huddled together, glanced upward in fearful wonder as the rolling billows swept over them. It seemed as if the roar of a mighty storm was convulsing the countryside. Rank after rank, a vast company of hurrying birds, beating the air with a million wings, dipped toward the farther woods, their wide spread phalanx shutting the sky from view.

Company after company settled into the woods, lighting on the swaying trees until their groaning branches could stand no more. Sharp cracks resounded through the uproar, the swishing crash of falling limbs passed unheeded as they poured their living freight to the ground, covering them with a mass of twigs and swirling leaves. Whole trees swayed, bent and collapsed to the forest floor, crushing hundreds of the fluttering birds into the earth. Band after band circled overhead, dropping in, now rising to swirl about each other in indescribable confusion over the swarming multitudes in the trees below, while lower still, on and under the litter which covered the ground, were bleeding bodies, broken wings, and a thousand trickling streams of red.

Pandemonium reigned as the larger part of the host moved ever forward overhead, to fill the trees for miles around with members of its stupendous company. Little by little, the uproar grew less, the roar sunk into a troubled murmur, died down, flared up again as the splintering crashes echoing among the