

Croak!

Hans Christian Andersen

All the birds of the forest were sitting upon the branches of the trees, which had quite enough leaves; and yet the birds were unanimous in their desire for more leaves - the "leaves" of a journal; a new, good journal was what they longed for - a critical newspaper such as humans have so many of, so many that half of them would be sufficient.

The songbirds wanted a music critic, each for his own praise - and for criticism (where it was needed) of the others. But they, the birds themselves, could not agree on an impartial critic.

"It must be a bird, though," said the Owl, who had been elected president by the assembly, for he is the bird of wisdom. "We ought not elect anyone from another branch of animals, except perhaps from the sea. There fish fly, like birds in the sky, but that, of course, is our only relationship. However, there are quite enough animals to select from between fish and birds."

Then the stork took the floor and rattled from his beak, "There are indeed beings between fish and birds. The children of the marsh, the Frogs - I am voting for them. They are extremely musical, and their choir singing is like church bells in a lonely wood. I get an urge to travel," said the Stork, "a tickling under my wings, when they begin to sing."

"I am also voting for the Frogs," said the Heron. "They are neither bird nor fish, but still they live with the fishes and sing like the birds."

"Now that's the musical part," said the Owl. "But the paper must speak of all the beauties of the forest. We must have coworkers. Let each of us consider everyone in his family."

Then the little Lark sang out cheerfully and prettily, "The Frog should not be the editor of the paper - no, it should be the Nightingale!"

"Stop your chirping!" said the Owl. "I am hooting for order! I know the Nightingale. We are both night birds. Each bird sings with his own beak. Neither he nor I ought to be elected, because the paper would become an aristocratic or philosophic newspaper, a beau monde paper, run by high society. It must also be an organ for the common man."

They agreed that the paper should be called *Morning Croak* or *Evening Croak* - or just *Croak*. They unanimously voted for the latter.

It would fill a long-felt need in the forest. The Bee, the Ant, and the Gopher promised to write about industrial and engineering activities, in which they had great insight. The Cuckoo was nature's poet. Not counted among the songbirds, he was, however, of the greatest importance to the common man. "He always praises himself; he is the vainest of all birds, and yet not much to look at," said the Peacock.

Then the Flesh Flies paid a visit to the editor in the forest. "We offer our services. We know people, editors, and human criticism. We lay our larva in the fresh flesh - and then it decays within twenty-four hours. We can destroy a great talent, if necessary, in the editor's service. If a paper is the spokesman for a party, it dares to be rude; and if one loses a subscriber, one will get sixteen in return. Be cruel, give nicknames, put them in a pillory, whistle through your fingers like a gang of young radicals, and you become a power in the state."

"Such an air rover!" said the Frog about the Stork. "I actually looked up to him when I was little and felt a trembling admiration. And when he walked in the marsh and spoke of Egypt, my imagination carried me to wonderful foreign lands. Now he doesn't impress me any more - that is all just an echo in my memory."

"I have become wiser, rational, important - I write critical articles in *Croak*. I am what, in the most correct and proper writing and speech of our language, is called a Croaker!

In the human world there is also that sort. I have written a piece about it on the back page of our paper."