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AND THEIR

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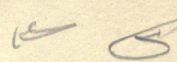
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From Uncle J. W. Farbox. 

TINY HOUSES.







THE FIRST NEST.

TINY HOUSES
AND THEIR BUILDERS.



CASSELL PETTER & GALPIN:
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TINY HOUSES.



THE SWALLOW FAMILY.

HERE, children, come round me, and listen, for I am going to tell you stories about birds, and if you don't like my stories, the more 's the pity.

Of all the creatures in the world, I do think that birds are the most delightful. They are so pretty, and so cheerful, and their songs

are perfectly delicious. The mere act of flying must be such intense pleasure, that it seems unnecessary to have any other if you have that, and yet birds (many of them) sing also; and what gift is to be compared with the gift of song? To fly and to sing! only just imagine what a life it must be!

I shall talk to you about a great many birds. I shall take you into distant lands, and even on to the sea, and tell you many curious and interesting things; but there are few birds more curious and interesting than our own little swallows, and I intend to begin with them. I call them our own swallows, for, though I have heard people say that they are selfish, because they only visit us to enjoy the sweet summer-time, and forsake us in the winter, I do not agree with them. Swallows are *not* visitors; they build their nests here, and it is here that they rear their young; and if they leave us in the winter, it is only because, like some of ourselves, they cannot live in a cold climate, and so they very wisely take their dear little families away for the months that it would not agree with their constitutions to spend here, making their appearance among us again early in April and not flying off till the end of September, or, in mild seasons, the middle of October.

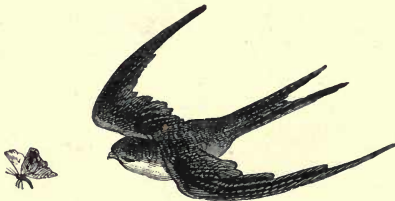
Poor little things! they do not like the cold: they choose such warm places for building their nests. There is none they like better than a chimney, the angles of which are warm and snug; though, of course, they do not build where there are fires lighted below, which would be likely to smoke them out. They seldom commence the construction of their neat little homes till a full month after their appearance among



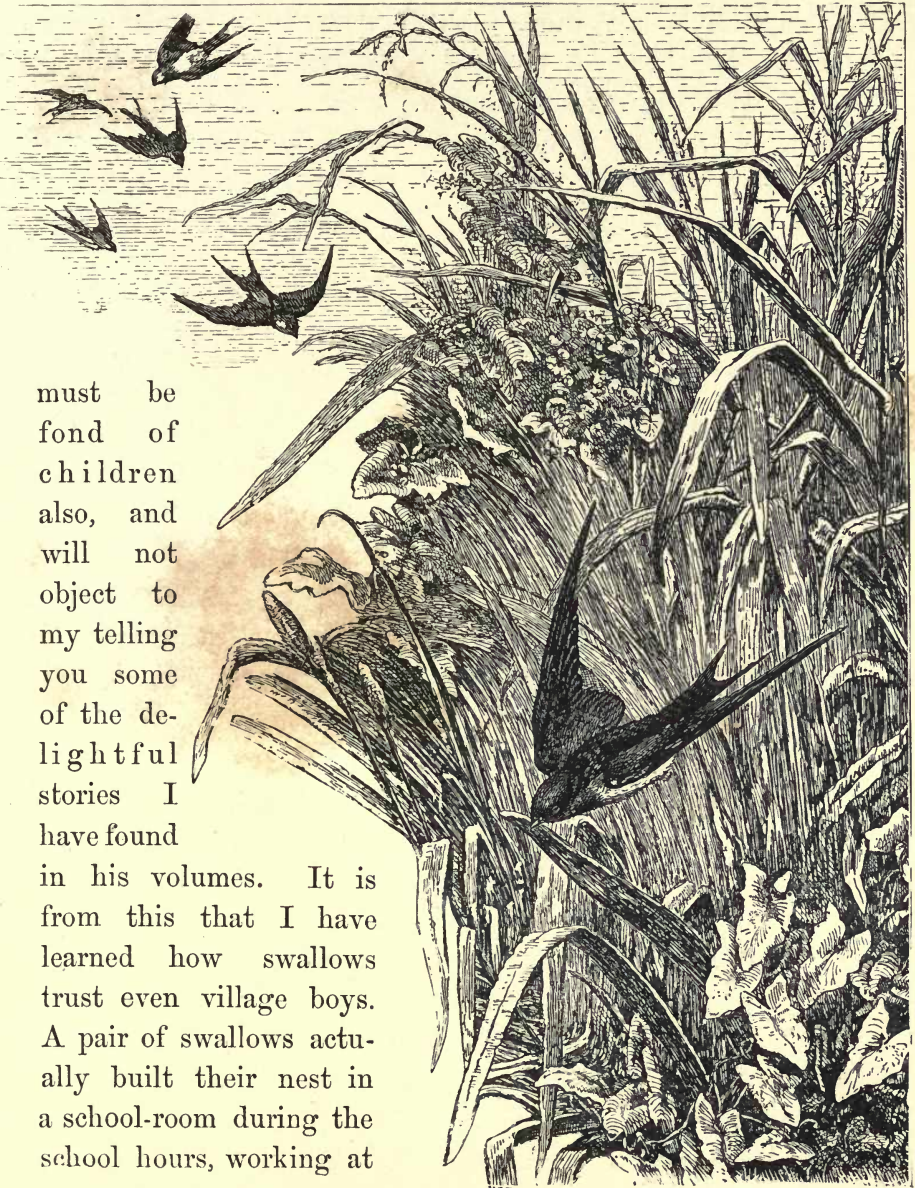
CHIMNEY SWALLOWS.

us, in "the merry, merry month of May;" and not many fires are lighted then in our houses, except in the kitchens, and the sly little fellows, though too clever to build in the kitchen chimneys themselves, constantly select a shaft that runs up beside them, so as to enjoy the warmth, without inconvenience or danger. But it is curious that, though so fond of chimneys that they have gained the title of "chimney-swallows," they have never been known to build in a chimney in Ireland. What *can* the reason of this be? Possibly it is that the good people there do not sweep their chimneys sufficiently well to suit these particular little people. Swallows are remarkably tame, friendly, and easily domesticated birds. They rank next to our own dear robin redbreasts in these good qualities, and they are respected for them, and beloved almost as much as the robin himself, and this even by that mischievous class of beings called village boys, whose devotion to birds in general shows itself in a form more agreeable to the boy than to the bird; but swallows are so confiding that they trust even boys, as I will presently tell you. They build not only in our chimneys, but in our houses. They have been known to enter these by means of broken panes in the windows, and make their nests in open drawers, or even, in one instance, on the top of a frame of a picture hung over the fireplace. There is a very instructive and entertaining

book about birds, by a clergyman, which I am sure you will all of you read with pleasure when you are older. This gentleman is so fond of birds that I think he



must be fond of children also, and will not object to my telling you some of the delightful stories I have found in his volumes. It is from this that I have learned how swallows trust even village boys. A pair of swallows actually built their nest in a school-room during the school hours, working at



it day after day, though there were forty scholars there noisily carrying on their pursuit for knowledge all the time. When it was found out what the swallows were doing, the window was left open for them to fly in and out of, and not a boy disturbed them at their work, or after it, for the eggs were laid, and the little birds safely hatched, in the middle of the school.

It is a wonderful distance the swallows come that they may spend their summers with us, and build their nests here. They fly over the wide, inhospitable ocean from Africa, from Asia Minor, Japan, and other warm countries, at the rate of ninety miles an hour (the very fast-flying swallow, called the *swift*, is said to fly at the rate of 180 miles an hour), and they are sometimes so tired that they alight on ships out at sea, and cover the rigging for a time, till they have rested themselves a little, and then off they are again in their rapid, graceful, sweeping, wonderful flight. There are few things more extraordinarily rapid than the flight and evolutions of swallows; they dazzle and confuse our eyes till sometimes we hardly know whether we have really seen them at all. Nothing stops them, and they stop for nothing. They hardly ever alight—indeed, one kind, called the Alpine swift, it is said, never *does* alight, except to sleep, but is always on the wing. They fly with their beaks wide open, to catch insects *as they go*—insects being their only food; and if they want to refresh themselves by bathing or drinking, they dash *through* the water, without a moment's pause that can interrupt their flight. They are extremely attentive to their little ones, feeding them while they are unfledged every three

minutes through the day; and when they begin to take them about on their rapid flights, and they have not yet learned how to eat on the wing they actually catch insects for them, and feed them as they fly, without stopping, in the cleverest manner imaginable. I wonder why they are always in such a hurry that they cannot stand still even to dine? Is it only the love of movement, or has their rapid flight some meaning that we do not understand?

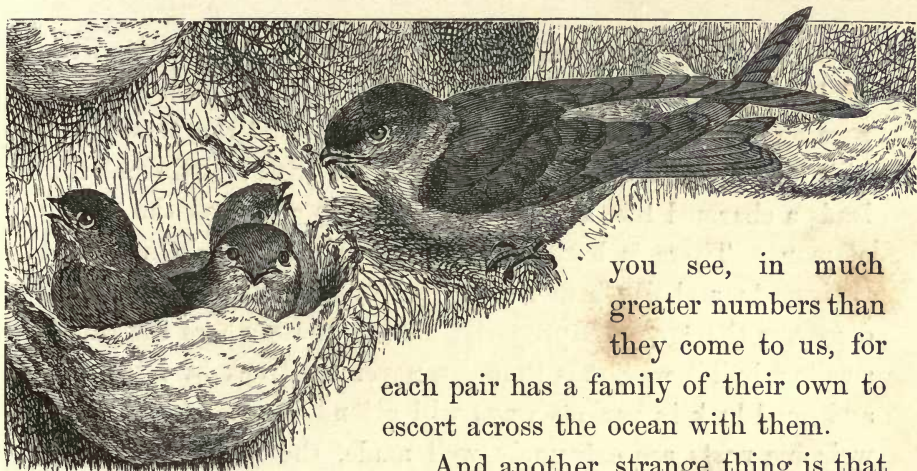


CLIFF SWALLOWS.

It is a very curious sight to watch swallows for a few days before their departure from us. They marshal in large companies at evidently appointed places of rendezvous; they eagerly consult together, they twitter and chirp, and fly to and fro, and arrange all the preliminaries of their long journey, in a manner at once cheerful and fussy. And when at last they do start, they have been known to form a continuous line of half a mile as they go. They return,



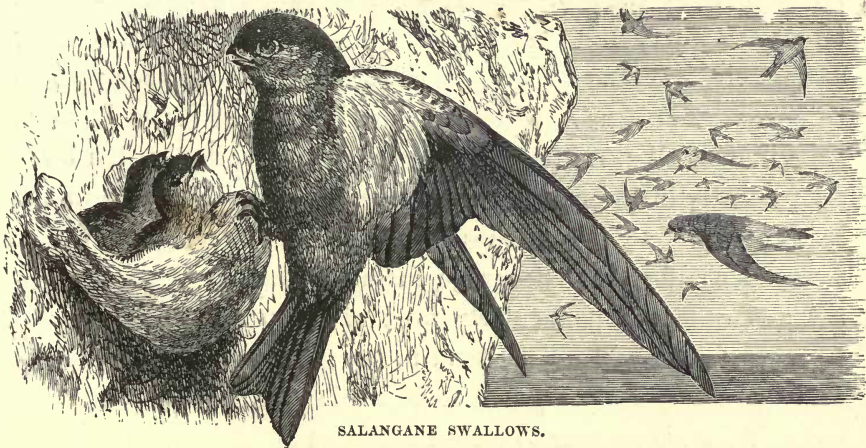
CAYENNE SWALLOWS.



you see, in much greater numbers than they come to us, for each pair has a family of their own to escort across the ocean with them.

And another strange thing is that there seems to be a master-swallow in all flocks, for at the sound of the two short cries that are an evident signal given by a single bird, a whole flock will fly off in an instant, in the most vehement and otherwise unaccountable manner.

Now I will describe some American swallows to you that I think are quite worthy to be talked about. One of them, which



SALANGANE SWALLOWS.

is called the Rufous Swallow, is an uncommonly fortunate little bird. It is considered that all sorts of ill-luck—from the milk turning sour in the dairy, upwards—will attend the person who kills one; the consequence is that the merry little creature leads a charmed life, and is never afraid to approach the houses of man. There is hardly a barn in which they do not erect their nests, and the farmer rubs his hands with delight when he discovers them on his property, for the house where the rufous swallow builds will, it is thought, never be struck by lightning, and good luck in various ways will attend its inmates. These welcome nests are extremely well made, the mud walls being strengthened and knit together by hay. The shell of the nest is about an inch thick, and the hay and clay are in regular layers. It takes a full week to make it, as there is a great deal of work in its construction. The shape is curious, being like a cone turned upside down, and one side that is attached to the wall is flattened. The birds are remarkably sociable and friendly with each other, or what is called gregarious; and twenty or thirty nests are sometimes crowded together as closely as possible. But now I am going to tell you of a very remarkable thing about this nest, which distinguishes it, as far as I know, from that of all other birds. You know that while the hen birds sit patiently in the nest hatching the eggs, the cocks are in the habit of perching on branches near them, and pouring forth their songs to comfort and encourage them. Whether the little cock rufous swallow is particularly fond of his own wife, or of his own comfort, I will not pretend to say; but certain it is that he attaches a tiny rest or perch to the side of the large nest, just entirely for his honour to sit on while he sings to his mate.

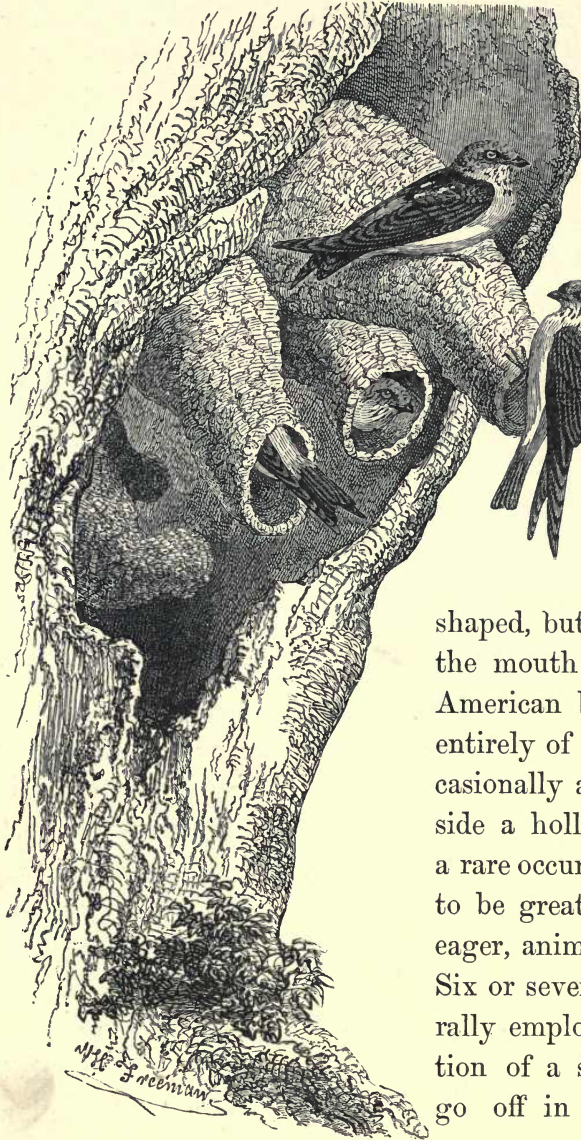
The other American swallow is called the Rufous-necked ; he builds wonderful nests on rocks, flask-shaped, with wide, short necks, formed entirely of mud, and he attaches them to the sides of perpendicular rocks. Numbers congregate to do this, and the profusion of nests covers the sides of the rocks and cliffs.

These birds form in flocks at sunset, calling each other together, and have the appearance of light, beautiful clouds moving along. At times there seems to be meaning in their motions, then they become all confusion, and quickly dash down towards earth like a waterspout. They settle at last, but twitter and move their wings all night, and in the morning skim over the surface of a lake, and then separate in search of food.

There are some swallows much more wild than any of the others, who, flying from the haunts of man, make their nests in the plains of the Island of Cayenne and among the marshes of Guiana. These birds have the singular taste to prefer the dead branches of trees and shrubs to support their dwelling-places to the happy living ones ; and these dwelling-places are indeed very different from those made by any other swallows. They resemble a great fleece of wool or plume of feathers scattered by the wind against the branch of a tree, and they appear quite unformed and without consistency, though when examined they are found to be carefully composed of the down of plants, and their inside to be solid and well knit. The entrance is near the bottom, and almost invisible, losing itself in the long downy filaments of the plants which are used in its construction.

But no swallow I know of can compare with the exquisite little Australian bird called the Fairy Marten or Ariel Swallow.

The names will convey to you some idea of its lightness, beauty,



and grace ; but no one who has not seen it can really form a correct notion of the airy charms that attend its flight. It, too, builds its nest upon rocks, always close to rivers, but far from the sea. The nest is flask-

shaped, but much narrower at the mouth than that of the American bird, and is formed entirely of clay or mud. Occasionally a nest is found inside a hollow tree, but this is a rare occurrence, as rocks seem to be greatly preferred by the eager, animated little builders. Six or seven of them are generally employed for the formation of a single nest. They go off in all directions, re-

turning with their beaks filled with clay or mud, which they munch and knead very thoroughly before they apply it to the nest, whilst one (who we may suppose is the architect, while the others are only the masons) sits inside and arranges the material, smooths it, sees that everything is done properly, and puts finishing-touches to the work of the others. The nests vary in size; the necks of the largest among them are ten inches long, while some are not more than seven inches, and the round entrance at the end of the neck varies also from four to seven inches in diameter.

Clay, if well kneaded and baked in the sun, becomes very hard when really dry; and about this the fairy swallows show considerable cleverness. In hot, dry weather they only work in the morning and evening hours, and amuse themselves by chasing flies in the middle of the day, because the clay stiffens soon, and hurts their delicate beaks; but in wet weather the flies get a holiday, and the birds work away steadily all day, so that the nests are quickly built.

There is a curious story of a gentleman who, on an unusually cold day in September, found lying in his garden no less than ninety-two swallows, apparently



quite dead, seemingly starved by the cold. He packed them up in a hamper, not knowing what to do with them, and the next morning happening to be mild, they one and all, to his great surprise, spread out their wings and flew away. So this gentleman had the pleasure of knowing that he had saved ninety-two lives.

They all make their nests of moist earth, which they collect bit by bit, and carry in their bill from the side of a pond or river, or even from roads if there has been rain enough; the nest is open at the top, and the clay moulded into shape with grass or straw, and lined with feathers or something equally soft.

A pair of swallows, returning to their old nest in the following year, found it occupied by a sparrow, who, considering that possession was nine points of the law, held the charming little residence in spite of the little feathered builders. The swallows endured this for a day or two; they then went away, and returned with half a dozen friends, all of whose mouths were distended with moist clay, and they actually steadily set to work and built up the sparrow in the nest, leaving it a poor little solitary prisoner, to die of starvation, unless, indeed, it repented its ill-doing, and begged for mercy through the walls of its prison, when, let us hope, the swallows relented, as we all should towards those who have asked pardon for their faults.

Now I will just tell you one more story about these dear little swallows, which I think is a remarkably pretty one. It is about a baby swallow that fell down a chimney before it was quite fledged, and the children in the house reared it and petted it; and it was not in the least shy, and took its food bravely, and was as happy as ever it could be. They always

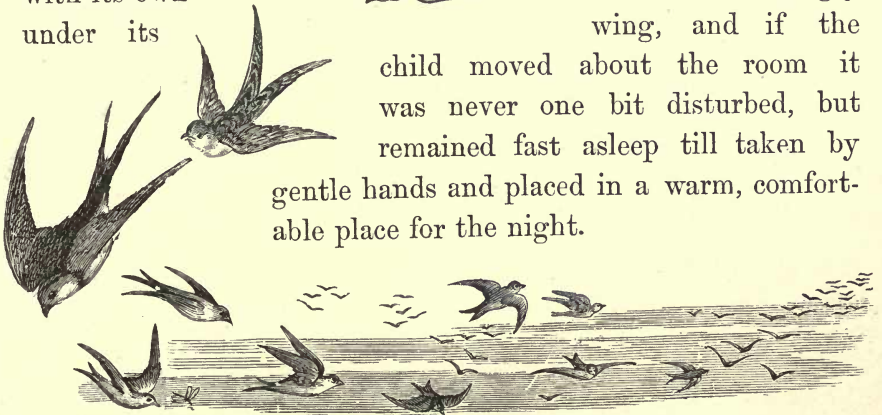


whistled when they fed it, and they took it out with them for each child found a fly it whistled, little swallow flew up to it and When the bird grew a little swallows used to try to tempt specially to prevent it from children's hands, by flying round when it tried to do so. But all swallow remained quite faithful, took its little patrons. Even taken to spend most of the it used to tap with its beak window at night, mitted, would roost of the children with its own under its



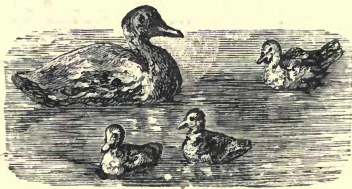
in about a week a walk, and as and the good ate the fly. older the wild it away, and alighting on the and round it in vain; the and never for- after it had day out of doors at the nursery and when ad- on the head of one and go fast to sleep, head tucked snugly wing, and if the

child moved about the room it was never one bit disturbed, but remained fast asleep till taken by gentle hands and placed in a warm, comfortable place for the night.





WATER-BIRDS.



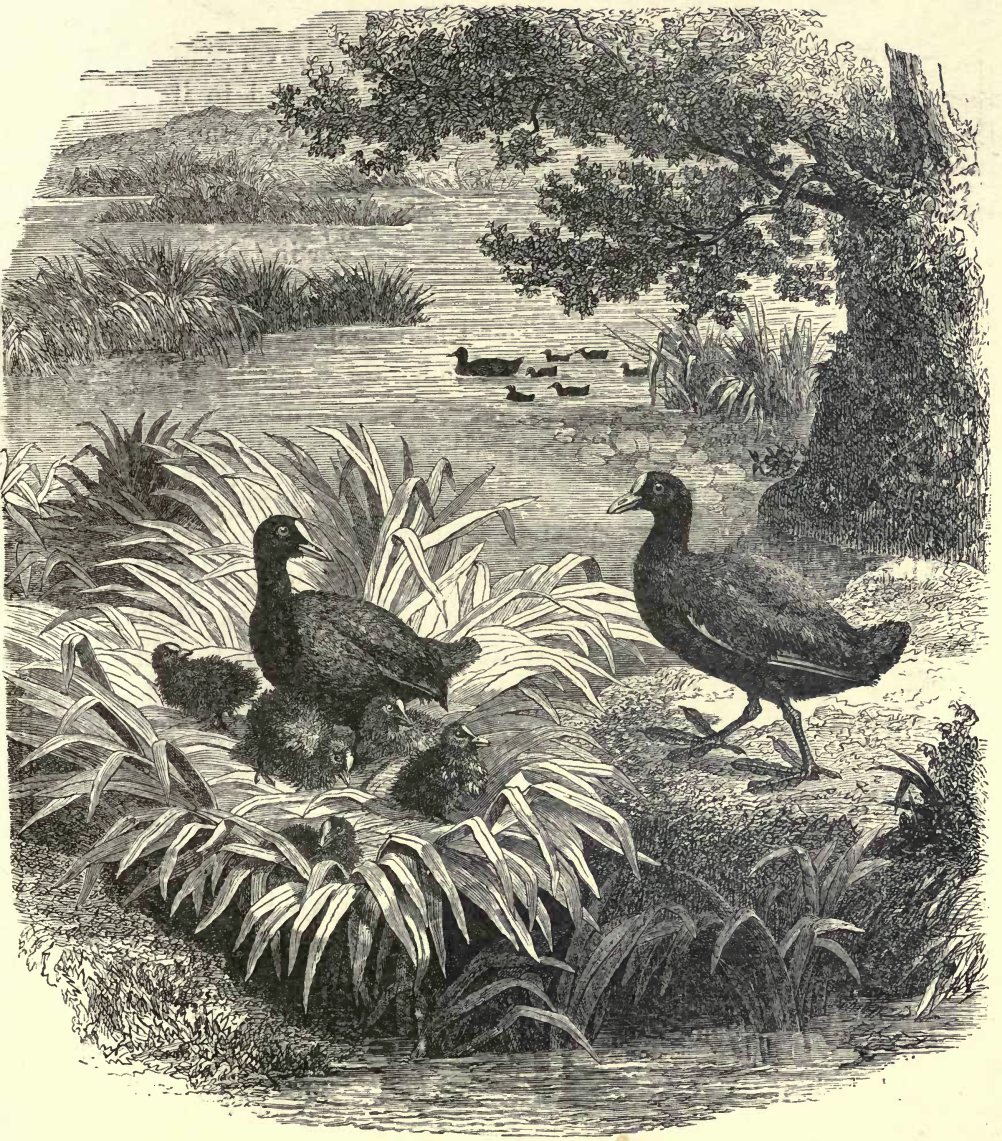
I WILL now tell you a little about some of the birds who live in the water, and which are very different from any other birds, because their principal occupation is to swim. They have wings and they have legs, but these wings

and legs seem made chiefly to enable them to move easily and swiftly about in lakes and rivers. When they attempt to fly I think they must amuse the little inhabitants of the air—more especially the swallows—by their awkward movements; and we all know the ridiculous way in which they walk—or waddle, as it has been called—on dry ground. I dare say some of you have heard of persons being requested not to waddle like a duck. The swan is the most beautiful and distinguished-looking of water-birds, when in its native element, but it perhaps cuts the sorriest figure of all on dry earth. These charming birds are said to live for 300 years, and, dumb during all that time, just before they die to be able to sing. Only imagine waiting 300 years for the beautiful gift of song, and then dying soon after you have received it! But you must remember I only stated that they are *said* to do this; and unfortunately a great many things are often said (even about swans) that are not exactly correct.



The tame swan arches its wings up while swimming, as if it knew that it was watched and admired, and must do its best to reward the attentions paid to it, for the wild swan has no such movement, but swims in a straightforward, commonplace manner. When frosty weather sets in, flocks of these sensible creatures congregate together, and prevent the water from freezing by dashing it about with their wings in any pleasant part of the lakes or rivers where they love to be, or in which their food is plentiful. This food consists of water plants, insects, and occasionally fish.

I will tell you two stories, one of a tame and the other of a wild swan, which will show you how clever and how affectionate they are. A tame swan, nearly twenty years old, and who had brought up a great many broods in nests, made, as usual, among rushes and reeds on the ground, by the borders of a lake, was, while sitting, one year, on her eggs, observed to be extremely busy collecting grass and leaves, and everything she could lay hold of, and raising her nest higher and higher from the ground. A load of such things was good-naturedly placed within her reach, and with the utmost activity and industry she raised her nest, with the eggs in it, several feet above the ground. On the very same night down came torrents of rain, and up rose a flood, which did great mischief to the cottages and barns of the farmers, who had *not* foreseen it, while the happy swan sat on her uninjured eggs, and looked majestically down on the havoc around her. The story of the wild swan is prettier still. A flock having been fired into, one bird was wounded and captured, and after having been kept in captivity for some time, its mate, who had appeared very



COOTS.

unwilling to leave it when the flock dispersed, reappeared, flew round and round in the air, and then descended to its side, and showed the greatest joy at the reunion, and the faithful creature remained with its beloved, becoming quite tame and accustomed to its captors, till the wounded one recovered, when the two were allowed to depart together in triumph.

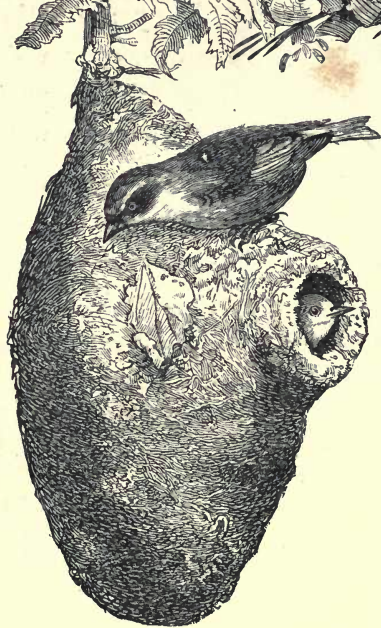
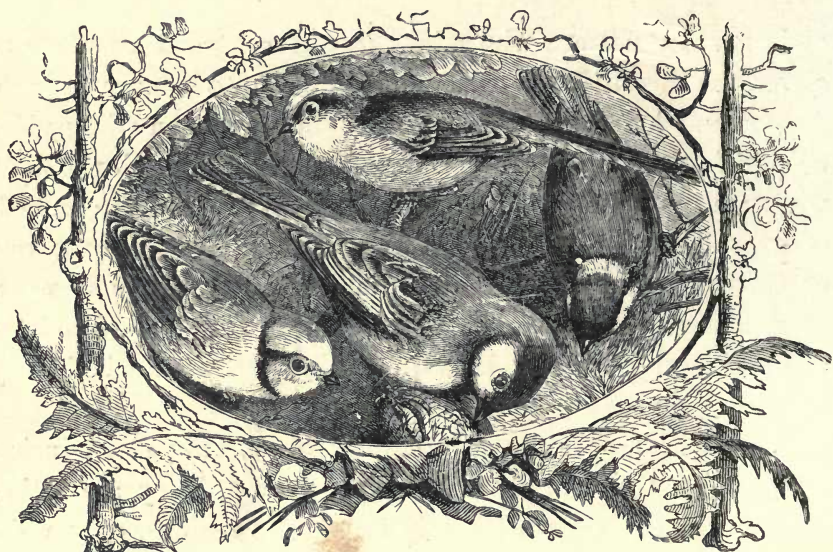
We will now turn from the swan, the acknowledged king of water birds, to another bird, small and homely in comparison, who lives in the same element, and, in the same manner as the swan, builds its nest among reeds and rushes, to which, however, it attaches it so slightly that a sudden storm or high wind will cast it forth unprotected and alone on to the angry waters. I mean the Coot, a pretty enough creature, black, with a white patch on the top of its head, of a horny substance, devoid of feathers, which has gained it the name of the Bald Coot. It looks remarkably well in the water, and as it swims it nods its head, and the patch, reflected in the clear mirror beneath, looks as if it rose to the surface of the water with every movement.

In winter-time, coots are as silent as swans, but in the summer they utter a strange, harsh cry, more resembling the word "Krew" than anything else, and that has been described as what might be uttered by a "crazy trumpet." As winter draws near, coots leave inland waters and lakes, and collect in flocks near the sea, in salt-water inlets, and suchlike places, where, I suppose, they spend a sociable winter together; although it seems curious that they select the most exposed situations for the coldest time of the year. They possess a great talent for hiding themselves, which may be envied by shy

and cowardly persons who might like to conceal themselves as cleverly as this little water-bird does, but cannot manage to do so. A coot and her children disturbed by a sportsman will paddle off post-haste to the nearest rushes, and there, though the dogs will rush up and down, and, to all appearance, not leave an inch of ground unsearched, or that has not been hunted over two or three times, no birds will reward their efforts; but when sportsmen and dogs are gone, Mrs. Coot and family will quietly reappear, and paddle back again to the place from which they had fled.

The Phadaropes are pretty little birds, only eight inches long, while the coot is twice this length. They are rather uncommon, and are residents in the Arctic regions, only visiting us during the summer months. The Grey Phadarope is extremely accomplished, for it flies, runs, and swims equally well. It flies high in the air and rapidly along, like a snipe, while it can run like a sandpiper—which bird, when marked down by a sportsman, suddenly rises yards from the spot where it is supposed to be, having run nimbly along the whole distance—and it can swim like a duck, whose powers in that way we need hardly describe. Few, if any, water-birds can perform all three feats with such perfection. It makes itself a neat nest in a hollow in the ground, and is not in the least afraid of man, trusting, perhaps, to escape him by the means of at least one of its three accomplishments.

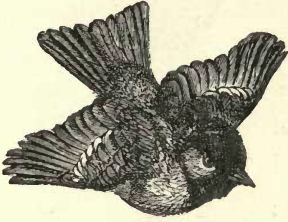




TIT-MICE.

OF all created birds, there is not a pleasanter nor a more comfortable family than that of the Tits. They are so small, so clever, and so lively, and, besides that, they are so exceedingly pretty. They present a curious contrast to our little friends the swallows, who seldom alight, and spend their lives in rapid, graceful flights. The tits, on the contrary, are always alighting, and when

they fly, which is generally only from bush to bush or tree to tree, it is in a jumping, fluttering way, and whenever they can

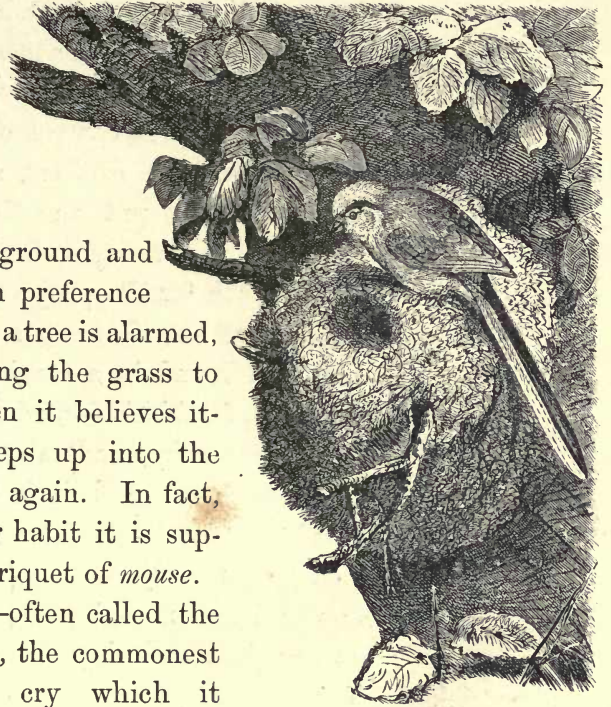


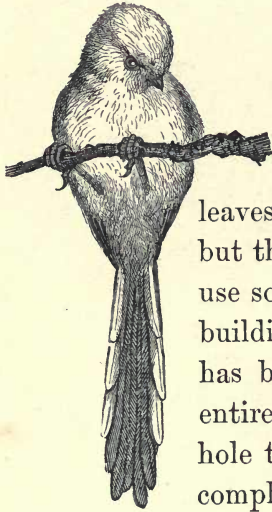
they run along the ground and creep up the trees in preference to flying. If a tit on a tree is alarmed, it drops down among the grass to hide, and then, when it believes itself to be safe, creeps up into the branches of the tree again. In fact, it is to this creeping habit it is supposed to owe its sobriquet of *mouse*.

The Great Tit—often called the Oxeye—is, I believe, the commonest in England. The cry which it utters in early spring, and which changes a good deal as the year advances, is supposed to resemble the two syllables “Ox-eye;” but some people consider the sound is like “Titlyeform,” and in several English counties that is the name it is known by. It is also called Black-cap and Tom-tit.



It makes its nests in holes in trees and walls, or crevices of rocks, and sometimes takes possession of the forsaken nests of other birds. It is said often to build in pumps, the entrance to the nest being by the hole in which the handle works;



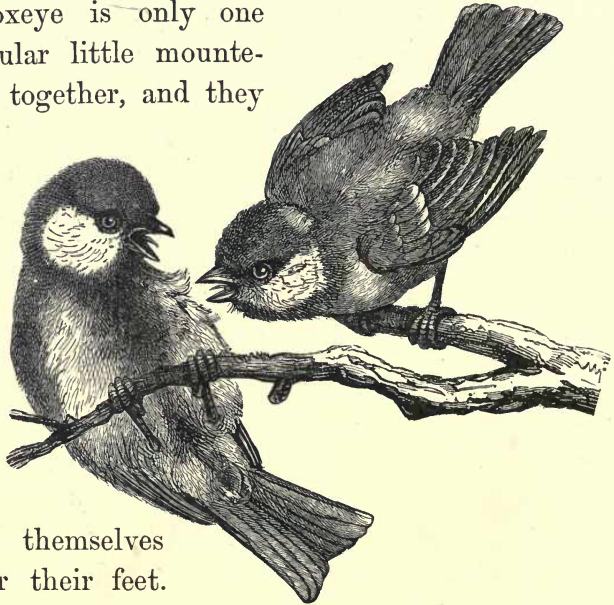


sometimes on the side of roofs, and in branches of trees near the ground. The nest is composed of moss, hair, feathers, and leaves, loosely put together; but there is nothing it likes to use so much for the purpose of building as fur, if it can get it, and a tit's nest has been found in a crevice in a wall composed entirely of rabbit's fur, with a delightful round hole to enter by, and altogether as pretty and complete a thing as it is possible to imagine.



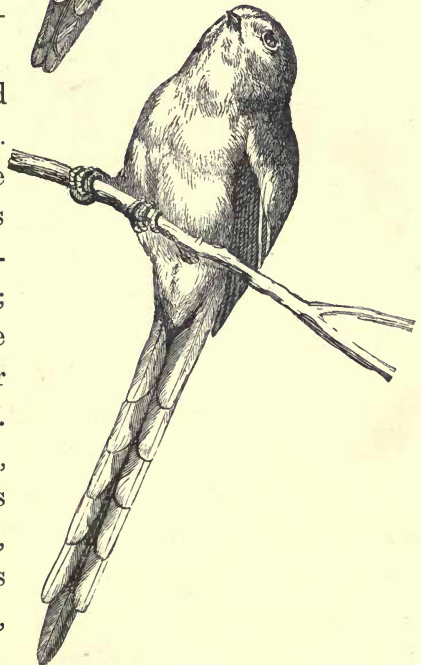
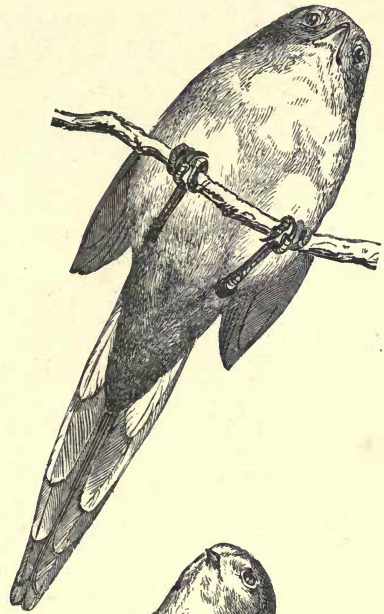
Tits in general (there are a great family of them,

of which the oxeye is only one species) are regular little mountebanks; they act together, and they play tricks such as might fit them to appear in a bird-circus with great success; and it seems immaterial to them whether, in the course of these tricks, they find themselves on their head or their feet.



The oxeye is, perhaps, the least playful and the most courageous of its kind. It bites if attacked, and instead of flying away from its nest if disturbed, it remains there, and strikes out with its wings in a pugnacious manner at the offender. The nests built by all the tit-mice are extremely pretty, and if placed in a hole in the trunk of a tree a curious effect is produced by the little tits sometimes popping their heads out while their parents are away procuring them their dinners.

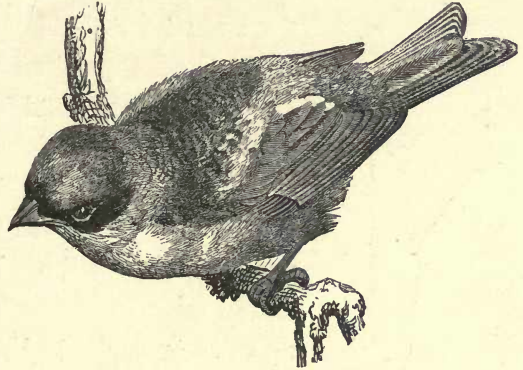
The Cole-tit is very small, and extremely neat in its appearance. The Scotch fir is its favourite tree, and I certainly admire its taste, for Scotch firs are delightfully strong and wild-looking; and I can fancy how the little creature likes them, if only for their extreme contrast to itself. It is a most restless little being, and is never quiet, but visits hedge after hedge, tree after tree, and district after district, its flight being short and unsteady,



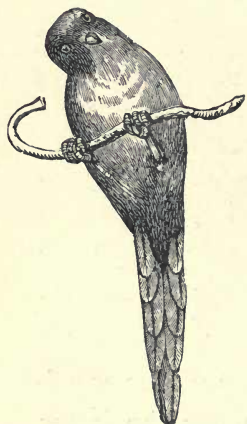


LONG-TAILED TIT AND NEST.

produced by an incessant flutter. It creeps about among the branches, sometimes upright, sometimes like a fly on the ceiling of a room, always pecking and picking at leaves and bark for what it can



find. It feeds on insects and seeds. The berries of the woodbine and the thistle appear its favourites among the latter, and it will hold them with its claws against the hard branch of a tree, and peck at them with his beak till it extracts the kernels. It will hang on to the thistles till it has picked off the seeds, then it flies to the bough of a neighbouring tree, and hammers its burthen with a loud rapping sound against it, till the seeds are separated from the down. It is very glad to get wheat and oats in winter, and will often hoard up a portion of these ready for a day when there might be a scarcity. Its taste in food is not, however, only of this simple and harmless description, for it will pick a bone or fragment of meat with pleasure, and I regret to say it will sometimes even eat little birds. I have heard of a nest full of little birds being put into a cage with a number of other birds, among which was a cole-tit. This individual appeared to be so much interested in the arrival of the little strangers that it was supposed it was going to feed and take care of them, when all of a sudden, to the horror of the lookers on, it seized one of them in its claws, and, with an air of calm satisfaction, very deliberately began to eat it up.



I must now tell you something about the Long-tailed Tits, of whom I am extremely fond, as I am sure you will be also when you make their acquaintance. They are the tiniest and quaintest little dears you can imagine; for though they are not more than five inches long from the tip of their beaks to the end of their tails, yet as their tails alone measure three inches, you can fancy what minute little bodies they have got. They are dressed in white and brown, being very soft and downy, and are fond of puffing themselves out with a deliciously important air. They are busier, more active, and constantly employed than even the other tits, busy and active as they all are. They are not easily tamed, neither are they shy, having bold and spirited

little hearts. They are always in a great hurry, and fly straight through the air, their long tails giving them the appearance of arrows, and so they skim lightly along, seeming as if a gust of wind would make them over-balance their short bodies. Their tender, gentle little chirp, "Twit, twit," is quite captivating.

Their nests are really so beautiful and so wonderful that I must give you a description of them. They are hollow balls of an oval shape. They have always a round opening on one side, and sometimes, but not



always, another just opposite to it, which have been described as a front and a back door. And it is said that the cock sits with his head out of the principal entrance, and the hen with her tail through the humbler one, so that both doors are closed



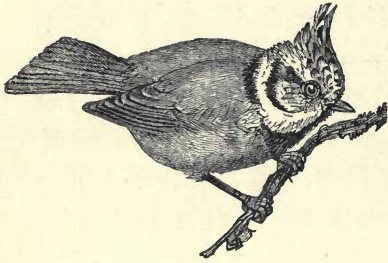
up when the family are "at home." The nest—which so seldom, however, has these two openings, that we may describe it as having only one—is charming in appearance, but so elegantly covered and draped with moss and lichens that it is not always easy to distinguish it from the branches of the tree between which it is built. The cocoons of spiders' eggs and the chrysalises of moths assist in joining the moss and fragments of other things together, whilst it is so thickly lined

with feathers that it has been nicknamed a feather-pole, between two and three thousand having been counted in the lining of a single nest. It is quite waterproof, and very warm. In these charming cradles they deposit ten or twelve pure white eggs, sometimes spotted with a pale pink, and not larger than peas, and these the hen hatches, and both hen and cock guard with devotion and courage. It is not, perhaps, strange that such little creatures should be affectionate, but their courage and willingness to fight, even with man, in defence of their children is as extraordinary as it is charming. Timid as she is at any other time, and taking rapid flight at the sound of a human footstep, the hen will certainly remain sitting over her young brood with heroic calmness, sometimes even when handled as well as examined.

The Blue Tit, which, from its lovely colouring, is also called Blue-cap, Blue-bonnet, Blue Mope, and (I don't know why) Nun and Bill-biter, is a most delightful little darling, being, with the exception of the long-tailed, the prettiest and most compact of the whole pretty and compact family of tit-mice. The male bird is only four inches and a half long, and weighs less than half an ounce, and the hen is smaller and lighter yet. Its forehead and the sides of its head are white, while its crown and collar are a deep, brilliant blue. Its throat also is deep blue, and its breast is yellow, with a stripe of deep blue like a riband running down the middle of it, while the coat it wears on its little back is a greyish greenish blue. This dear tiny bird is to be found all over Europe, and is especially common in England and Ireland. They are both spirited little creatures and, I am afraid, rather quarrelsome. When they fight together they

become so extremely interested in the combat that you may walk up to them and take them up in your hands before they pay you any attention, or find out what you are about. They fight, too, with other birds, as well as together, but are never able to conquer that unconquerable little friend of all our hearts, the robin redbreast. They are brave enough to attack even hawks, and they have a particular dislike to the owl. Like some other pugnacious persons, they are warm-hearted, faithful, and affectionate, and the hen cannot be frightened away from her duty of guarding her young—not even by branches of the tree in which she has her nest being sawn off in her immediate neighbourhood, and before her very eyes. On one occasion an old decayed stump of a tree was broken in pieces by a single blow, the fragments flying with a great shock to considerable distances; in the root a blue tit-mouse was discovered sitting on fourteen of her sweet little eggs, and there she remained immovable amid the noise and ruin around her.

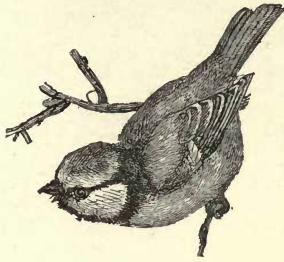
These birds are so very small that they are able to build their nests in the most unexpected places. What do you think of an earthen bottle which had been placed on a garden wall—the bottle fifteen inches deep, and the neck only one inch round—and a pair of blue tits laying ten eggs in the bottom of it (where afterwards their nest was found), hatching and feeding their children there, and at last bringing the whole ten safely away through this narrow neck which they had themselves traversed so often when leaving them in search of food, or returning to bring it to them? Or, what do you think of their entering a letter-box by means of the slit for letters, and making their nest inside, and enjoying there all their domestic duties



and rearing their young, though the box was opened four times every day to take out the letters! The Marsh Tits also are tame and amiable; they live together in considerable numbers, and are very sprightly, their spirits appearing

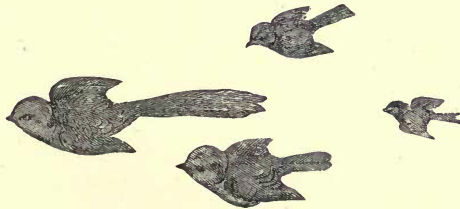
exuberant, and the positions into which they throw themselves being most entertaining. When the time for nest-building comes, they take great pains to scoop out a passage downwards in a tree, forming a large cavity at the bottom, in which the nest is very securely placed. The bird carries the chips of wood it has pecked out away to a considerable distance, leaving them perhaps in the middle of a road, or anywhere, so that suspicion may not be excited as to where they came from, which certainly seems as if they were guided by more than instinct, and were taking measures founded on *reason* for the benefit of the future little family they make such busy provision for. The nests are remarkably well made, and are formed of moss, wool, grass, and, whenever they can get it, rabbit's fur. Indeed, all the tits seem as fond of fur linings to their nests as we are of fur jackets to cover our arms and shoulders. Nothing can be prettier than a little nest made of soft white and grey fur.

While I was writing the description of the curious places in which some of our small birds confidingly build their nests, a dear little girl, who is at present staying with me, entered the room, radiant with pleasure, to announce that, being in the kitchen garden, she had found a beautiful nest between the side



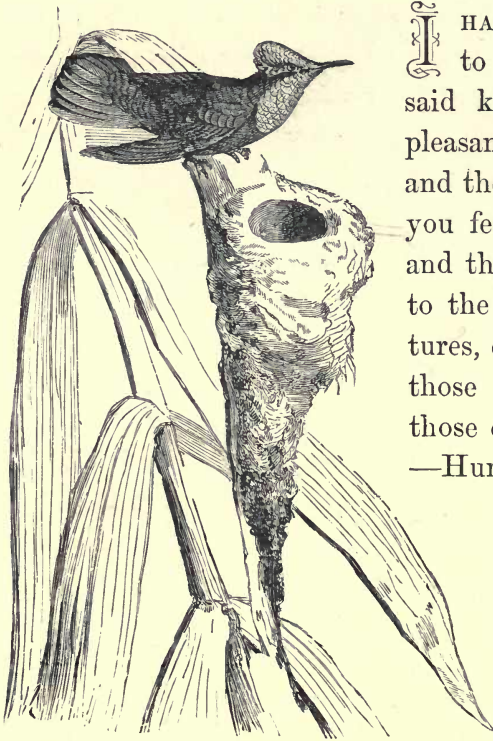
of an old hamper and the tool-house, with a great blackbird sitting on it, and when the great blackbird flew away three beautiful little eggs lay beneath. In truth, one of the numberless blackbirds that make my home gay with their sweet music has selected this curious place to rear her young in. I trust she may do so undisturbed, and that no ruthless hands will meddle with her, or interrupt the songs with which her mate cheers and encourages her performance of domestic duties.

One word I must say about the Crested Tit, an extremely pretty little bird, with a crest on his head which he has the power of raising and lowering at pleasure, and when raised he evidently feels uncommonly proud of himself, and, I think, is one of the briskest, pertest, and, shall I say, most conceited-looking personages that can easily be met with on a long summer's day. If I do say *conceited*, be it remembered that it is in a kindly sense—more as the word was used long ago, when people talked of having a “great conceit for a thing,” than as we apply it now, in censure of a quality very disagreeable in anybody, and—allow me to whisper this in your ears—most especially so in children.





HUMMING-BIRDS.



I HAVE praised birds in general to you, children, and I have said kind things and told you pleasant anecdotes of the swallows and the tits. I hope I have made you feel affection towards them, and that you will remain faithful to the amiable and pretty creatures, even when we talk about those fairy miracles of beauty, those crowning glories of nature—Humming-birds. Fairy miracles I may well call them, as they are, as compared to other birds, in their loveliness, and sweet, saucy ways, what fairies are as compared to men. Well do I remember that on

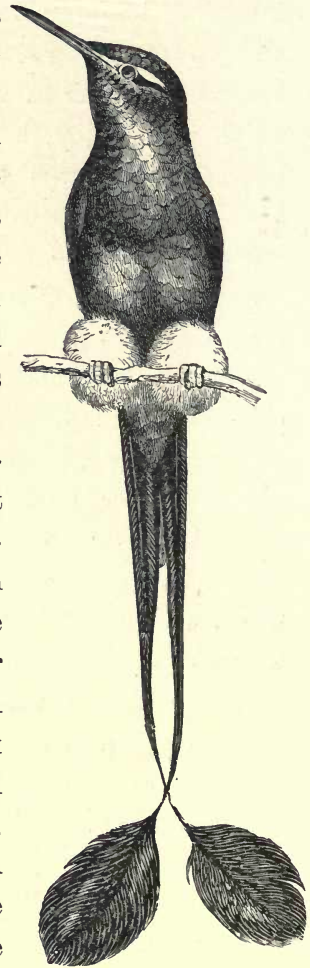
the occasion of one of the great treats of my childhood—a day spent in the British Museum—the collection of stuffed

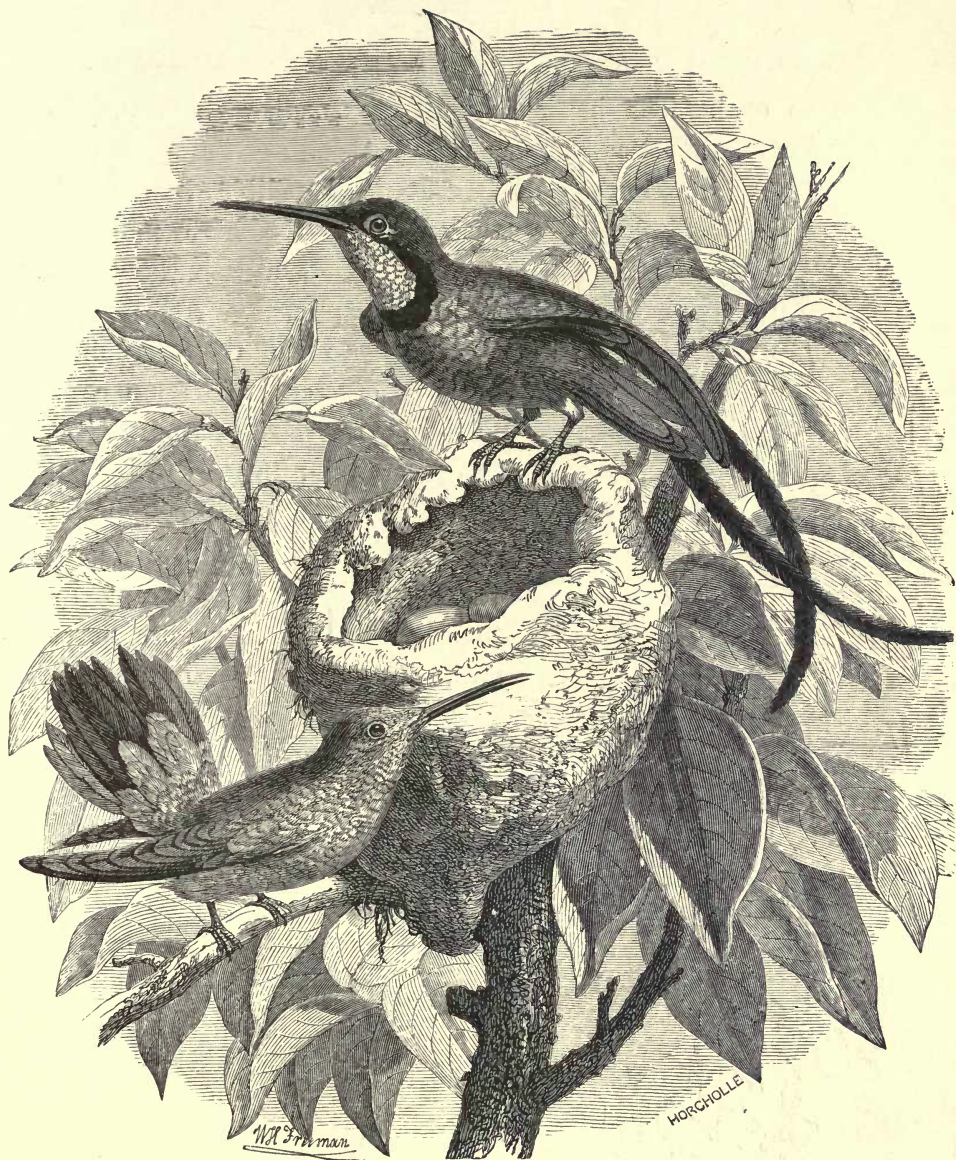
humming-birds, in various attitudes, and differently employed, was to my delighted eyes the greatest treat of all. The other collections in that wonderful place (which I hope you, all of you, enjoy, have enjoyed, or will enjoy) had lost their interest or charms to me; but it was the humming-birds, the first time I saw them, that struck me dumb with amazed joy, and it was to the humming-birds that afterwards I most looked forward when the visit to the Museum was to be repeated; and if these humming-birds excited such feelings when seen dead, and inside a house in the heart of the great city of London, what must it be to behold them alive, and enjoying life under the splendid skies of their native land? Oliver Goldsmith, whom perhaps you have heard of as a charming poet who lived in the days when our grandfathers were young, and whose poems, whether you have heard of them or not, you will some day read with pleasure, writes of the humming-bird in such pretty, quaint, old-fashioned language that I think I cannot do better than repeat what he says about it to you now:—"In quadrupeds, the smallest animals are ugly and noxious; and the smallest of birds are the most innocent, beautiful, and sportive. Of all those that flutter in the garden or paint the landscape, the humming-bird is the most delightful to look on, and the most inoffensive. Of this charming little creature there are six or seven varieties, from the size of a small wren down to that of an humble-bee. A European would never have supposed a bird so very small and yet completely furnished out with a bill, feathers, and wings, exactly resembling those of the largest kind. A bird not so big as the end of one's little finger would probably



be supposed but a creature of the imagination, if not seen in infinite numbers, and as frequent as butterflies on a summer's day, sporting in the fields of America from flower to flower, and extracting their sweets with its little bill. The smallest humming-bird is about the size of a hazelnut. The feathers on its wings and tail are

black, but those on its body and under its wings are of a greenish brown, with a fine red cast or gloss, which no silk or velvet can imitate. It has a small crest on its head, green at the bottom, and as it were gilded at the top, and which sparkles in the sun like a little star in the middle of its forehead. The bill is black, straight, slender, and of the length of a small pin. The larger humming-bird is near half as big as the common wren, and with no crest on its head; but to make amends it is covered on its throat and breast with changeable crimson-coloured feathers, that in

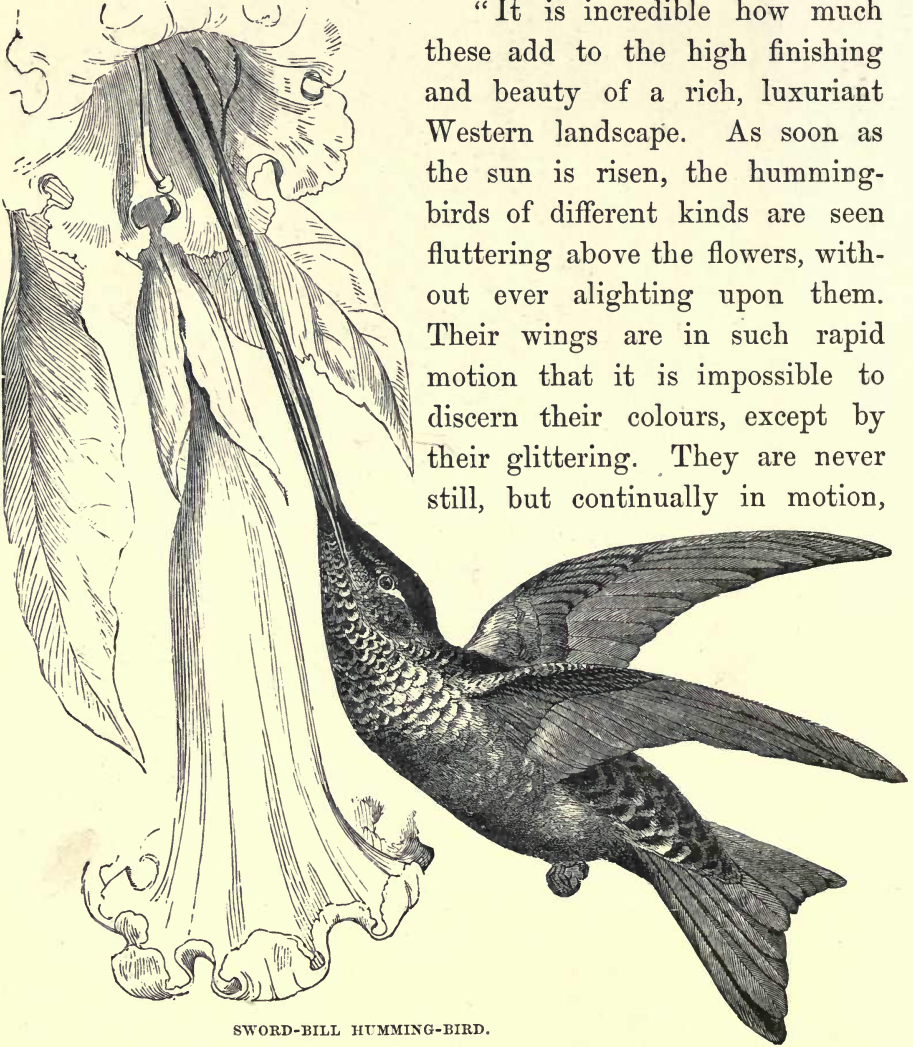




THE CRIMSON TOPAZ AND ITS NEST.

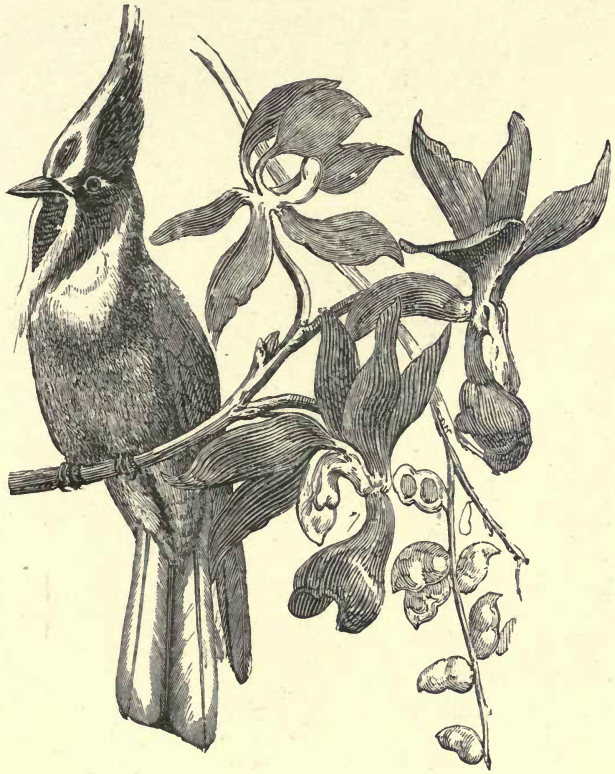
different lights change to a variety of beautiful colours, much like an opal. The heads of both are small, with very little round eyes, almost as black as jet.

“It is incredible how much these add to the high finishing and beauty of a rich, luxuriant Western landscape. As soon as the sun is risen, the humming-birds of different kinds are seen fluttering above the flowers, without ever alighting upon them. Their wings are in such rapid motion that it is impossible to discern their colours, except by their glittering. They are never still, but continually in motion,



SWORD-BILL HUMMING-BIRD.

visiting flower after flower, and extracting its honey as if with a kiss. For this purpose they are furnished with a forky tongue that enters the cup of the flower, and extracts its nectared tribute. Upon this alone they subsist. The rapid motion of their wings brings out a humming sound, and from this they have their name; for



HELMET-CRESTED HUMMING-BIRD.

whatever divides the air swiftly must thus produce a murmur.”

Since the days of this pleasant writer much has been discovered about humming-birds unknown to him, and instead of six different kinds, as he believes there to be, I fancy there are nearer sixty, among which none are more interesting than the Hermit and Pigmy Hermit. Such delightful little creatures cannot but make delightful little houses to live in, and so in truth they do, and they attach them generally to the end of a leaf. It gives a good idea of the smallness of a creature to

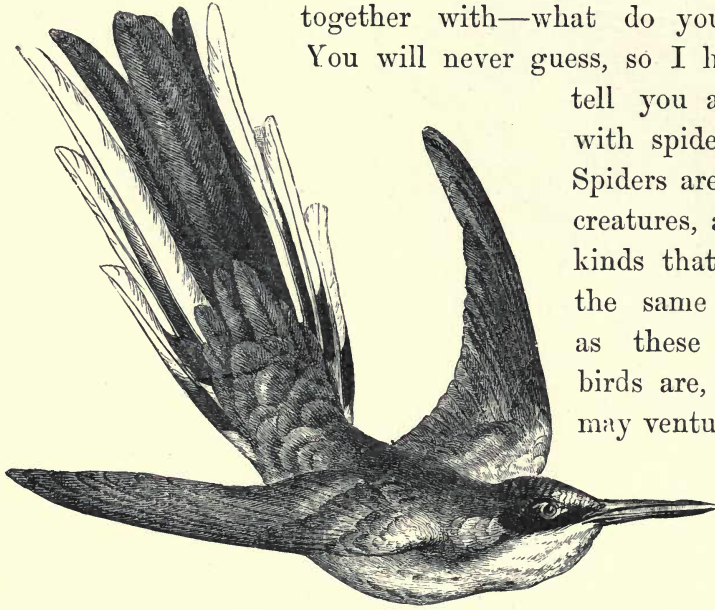


THE RUBY-THROATED HUMMING-BIRD AND NEST.



remember that its nest can hang secure from the end of a leaf! An orange, or a pomegranate, or a citron leaf are what they seem to prefer, but several kinds select rocks and twigs, and some have actually been known to build in a house inhabited by man, or to make nests hanging over

the salt waters of the sea, attached to a twig of wild vine. The pretty nests are funnel-shaped, and in some the end of the funnel is so long and narrow they may be called a tail. They are composed of moss, the silky fibres of flowers, the cotton-like down of seed-vessels, and a sort of woolly substance which is supposed to be extracted from some kind of fungus; and all these various materials are safely bound and knitted



together with—what do you think? You will never guess, so I had better tell you at once— with spiders' webs! Spiders are not nice creatures, and those kinds that dwell in the same countries as these exquisite birds are, I think I may venture to say without fear of contradiction,

especially nasty. We are in the habit of thinking they all weave their webs only to catch flies, and probably that is what the spiders think themselves, but the humming-birds know better, to them the spiders are like what the masons are to us, who mix mortar to unite the bricks or stones with which we build our houses. There is a great variety in these webs: some have long elastic threads, some are soft and felt-like; and the clever bird makes use of each just for the purpose for which it is most fitted. With the first it ties the materials together, while the second it interweaves through them, producing a firm mass capable of resisting wet; and with this it also secures them to the leaf. The nests are sometimes adorned outside with seeds, sometimes with lichens. The Sawbill Humming-bird makes his like an open network purse; the Brazilian Wood-nymph, who

hangs her charming nest to the twigs of creeping plants covering forest trees, fashions it long and flat, and studs it over with patches of lichen, so that it is very difficult to detect that it is a nest at all.

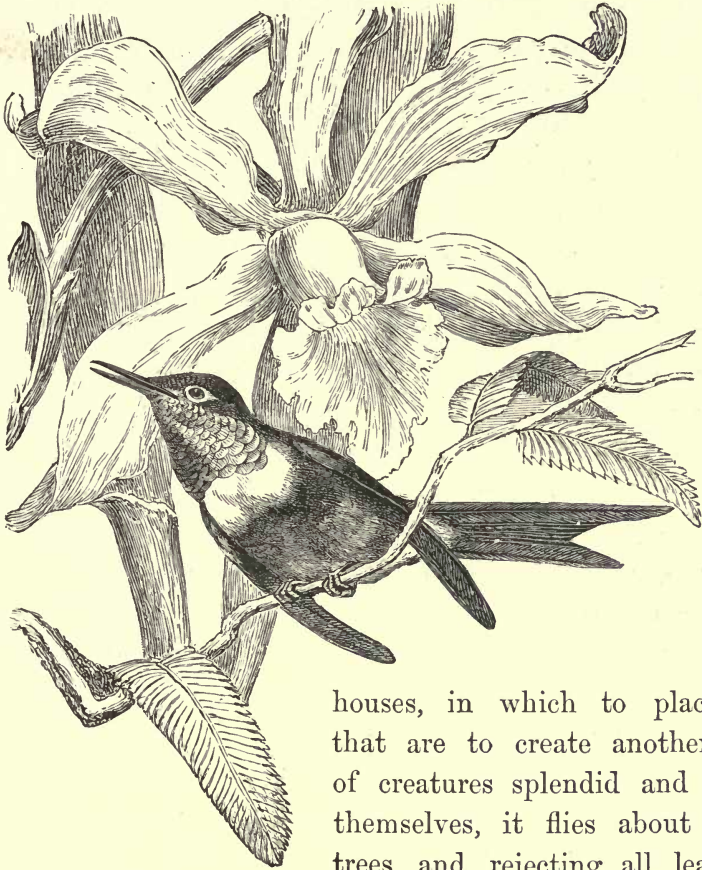
The Fiery Topaz and the Crimson Topaz are, perhaps, the most splendidly beautiful in colouring and plumage of all humming-birds, and therefore I may safely say, of all known birds of any kind. The body of the first is fiery scarlet, with a black velvet head; the breast is like the most brilliant emeralds, and in the middle of it is set a patch of crimson no less brilliant; the lower part of the back is also emerald-green, and the long feathers of the tail, which cross over, are purple, with a green gloss. The crimson topaz closely resembles it; only, where the other is scarlet, it is of the most magnificent crimson hue. You can imagine how splendid such colours as these must look with the rays of the sun shining on them, and setting them off with new beauty every moment. Now I will tell you a very strange thing: this bird, unlike other humming-birds, does *not* fly about in the sunshine at all, but hides its lovely plumage during the day-time (which seems to be only made to show them off), and does not make its appearance till after the sun has set. What can the reason be? Curiously enough, there is a little mouse that burrows in the sand, whose coat in the sunshine glitters with all the colours of the rainbow; and this eccentric animal spends its life buried in the black mud of the sea-shore. Verily the great Creator of all has not made these creatures only for our benefit, as in our puffed-up vanity we are sometimes inclined to imagine. He has His own good reasons for the beauties He bestows on His creation, but the



reasons are not always what short-sighted man attributes to Him.

The fiery topaz (do not you like the name very much? I do) makes really a wonderful nest. It looks as if it was formed of buff leather, and when first it was discovered, everybody was discussing as to

where humming-birds could have procured buff leather. I don't know whether any inquiries were made at the leather-shops—in fact, I will not take upon myself to say whether there were any leather-shops in the neighbourhood; but, one way or another, nothing is safe from the prying eyes of man, and so even fiery topaz humming-birds cannot build their exquisite nests in the Brazilian forests without their mode of masonry being discovered, and classified, and printed in big learned books for clever men, from which they are again extracted into little



unlearned books for the amusement of children. Well, then, when these fiery topazes — I hope you will like reading this name as much as I shall like writing it—want to build themselves little

houses, in which to place the eggs that are to create another generation of creatures splendid and beautiful as themselves, it flies about among the trees, and, rejecting all leaves, mosses, and lichens, fixes on one, and one only, fungus of a thick, soft, and leathery substance, which, though soft, is very tough. It is, indeed, so tough and leathery that you would imagine nothing could be done with it; and *how* the bird moulds it, I am happy to say, we have not yet discovered—for pity's sake let these sweet fairies have some lovely secrets of their own, unwritten in our books!—but somehow it *is* done, and a

curiously-shaped nest, something of the funnel-form, is the result, so curiously similar in colour to the branches that surround it, that it appears like some excrescence, the natural growth of the tree, rather than the nest of a cunning and skilful little bird. Another humming-bird, called the Ruby-throated, one of the smallest of these small gems, makes its nest almost too tiny for even itself to sit in, and resembling so exactly the knob on a branch of a tree that it requires a very experienced eye to know that the apparent knob it rests on contains within it two white eggs, about the size of peas, belonging to an exquisite little bird, who has made her nest too small to contain herself, in order, I suppose, to render it the more secure from any intruder, whether man, beast, or bird. When these dear little eggs yield up their dear little birds, the parents come to them with their beaks full of the delicious honey they have extracted for their benefit from the lovely flowers, and the youngsters thrust theirs deeply into them, and so are fed.

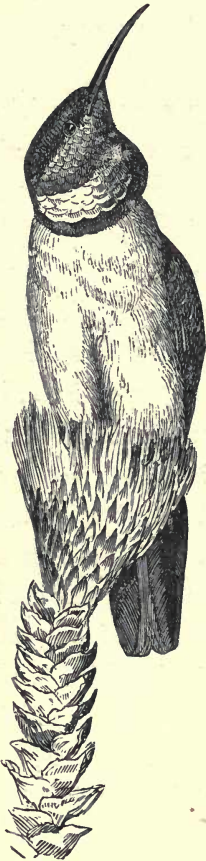
The vervain is a common weed in the West Indies, about a foot high; it has a slender stem, and bears a bright blue flower. So fond of it is one of the humming-birds that it has been actually named after it, and is called the Vervain Humming-bird. Wherever the vervain is plentiful, its tiny admirer (one of the least of the least of birds) is equally plentiful; and it is charming to watch its graceful flights and playful gambols around its favourite flower. It darts about, now here, now there; it poises its elegant form in front of a blossom; it probes its deepest recesses with its tongue, long, slender, and forked; it shoots for hundreds of feet into

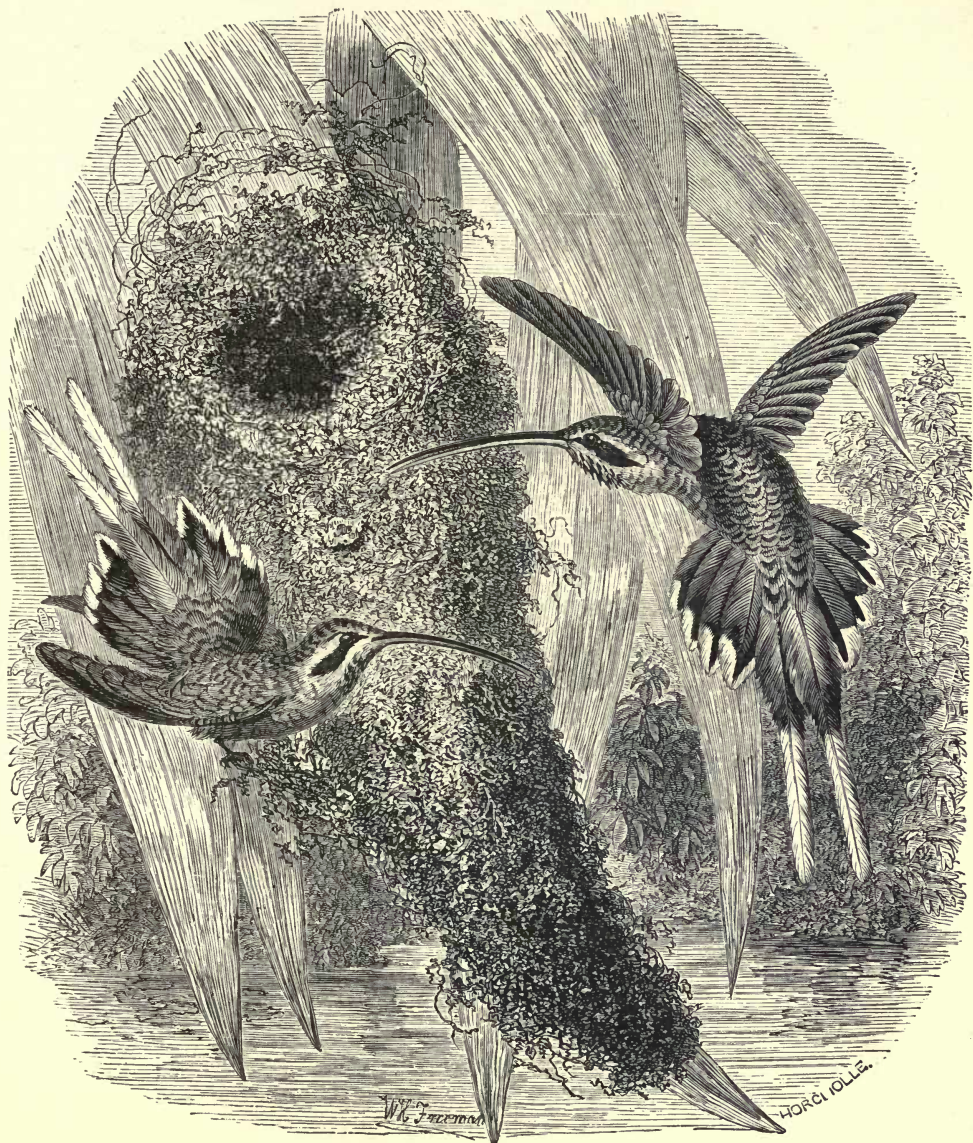
the air, and then descends, as if shot from a gun, before the flower, and there balances itself in front of the sweet blue petals laden with honey, very much as if it had not left them at all. The nest it makes is only just large enough to hold its eggs and itself; but, wonderful and clever creature! when the eggs are hatched, and as the young birds increase in size, it actually enlarges the nest to hold them, and what at first was only the size of the cup of an acorn becomes by degrees twenty times as big—or as large, let us say, as a coffee-cup.

And now I am going to tell you something very astonishing, and that you will agree with me is also very sad. Something sad about humming-birds! That appears unnatural and strange, does it not? But it is about spiders too, and I am sure that it is neither unnatural nor strange that anything should be sad about spiders. At first sight it may strike you as *both* unnatural and strange that humming-birds and spiders should be mentioned in the same breath; but stop a minute, if you please, and remember all that I have just mentioned about humming-birds' nests. What are they made of? Moss, lichens, seeds, down, silky fibres of plants. Very well; but how are these bound together? and how are they attached to the leaves or twigs from which the pretty purse-like things hang down? Why, by spiders' webs. Yes, by spiders' webs; and so you see we already have a connection between humming-birds and spiders—between the most beautiful little birds that exist, decorated with gay plumage, flying from flower to flower to seek the sweet honey that forms their food, and between those rather disagreeable, somewhat disgusting, crawling, creeping

reptiles called spiders. In the delightful countries where humming-birds abound, the finest parts of South America, abounds also a very abominable sort of spider, which weaves the thick, strong webs the charming little creatures use to strengthen their nests with. In my opinion, it is an act of great condescension on the part of the bird, and one for which the reptile ought to feel grateful and honoured. But apparently

the spider does not agree with me; and, to tell you the truth, I don't much care to have spiders agree with me in my opinion; their doing so will not, to say the least, *strengthen* me in the idea that I was right. Now I am going to describe a spider to you, and I hope you will like the description. It is the kind that is to be found near the haunts of the humming-birds, and whose webs they are so kind (among the webs of other spiders—for, as I have told you, they use various kinds) as to employ. The body of this spider is nearly two inches long, so that, to begin with, it is bigger than many a humming-bird, and its horrid legs it can expand to seven inches, and body and legs alike are covered with short, greyish-red hairs. These hairs are very hard, and fearfully irritating to the touch, which is supposed to be not from any poison contained in them, but merely from the nature of their substance. Across crevices in trees the spiders make dense white webs, and in these





THE WHITE-TIPPED HUMMING-BIRD.

webs they catch, not flies—not even dragon-flies or fire-flies—but birds! Catch them, kill them, eat them; and poor little humming-birds, though more beautiful than others, have no security against this dreadful fate. Nor is this all. Towards humming-birds the spiders have a peculiar spite; on them they wreak what perhaps we may be permitted to call a retributive vengeance. It is possible—let us

hope so—that they *are* in some measure safe from the dangers that beset other birds

—their brilliant, joyous customs of skimming from flower to flower, taking rapid flights

upwards, and alighting again in front of the beloved blossoms, may render them less liable to be caught in dense white webs stretched over crevices in trees than less sportive creatures.

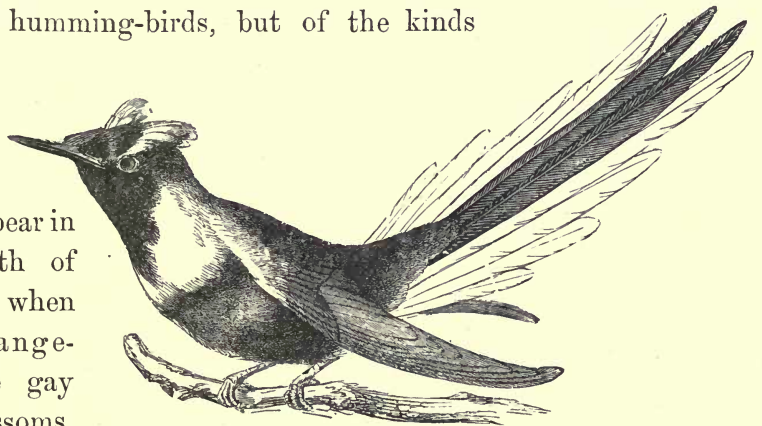
But the spider, with its powerful legs and disgusting hairs, is not to be defeated; if it fails in catching the darlings in one way, it will succeed in another, and that way is as cruel as it is artful.

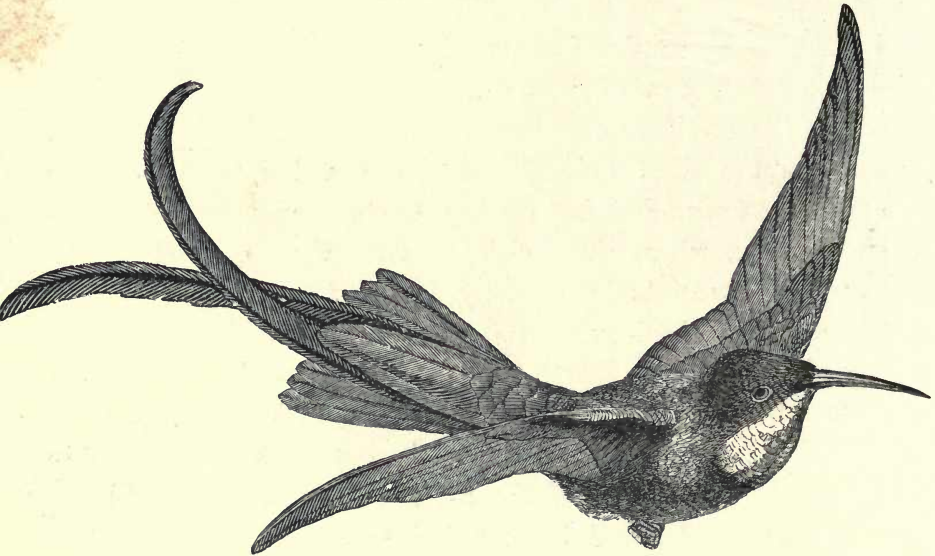


I imagine these dreadful creatures sallying forth at night—evil deeds, you know, are often done in the night, from which the evil-doer would shrink by daylight—sallying forth, then, in the dead of night, crawling and creeping up the beautiful trees, and insinuating themselves into humming-birds' nests, where they wickedly suck their eggs and their young, the parents being away at the time seeking food for the poor little darlings, whom, on their return home, they find sucked by spiders. My dear children, let us hope that this seldom happens; let the sanguine among us hope that it never happens at all. To some minds it may be a satisfaction to know that the natives of the country deny it, others will feel that no natives could be expected to acknowledge a feat so disgraceful, and that would envelope their country in such a cloud of shame.

In one part of South America, which is called the country of the Amazons, from the name of the great river that runs through it, there are not a great number of different kinds of humming-birds, but of the kinds that there

are, multitude upon multitude appear in the month of January, when the orange-trees are gay with blossoms,

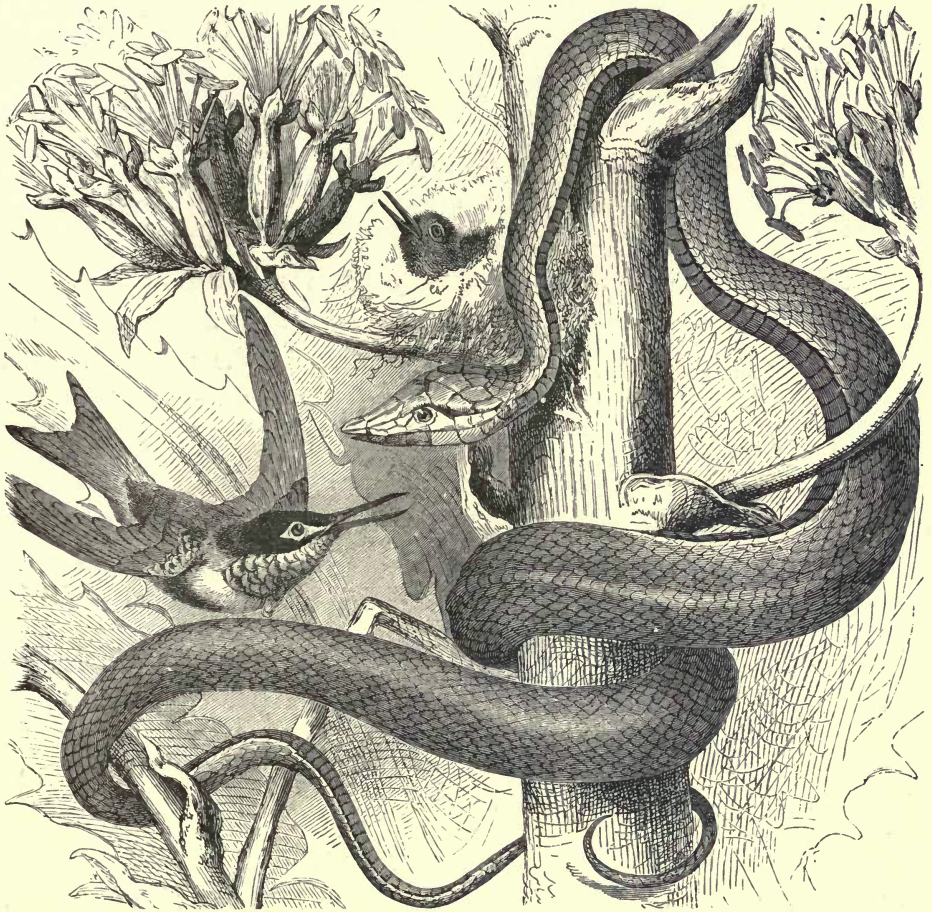




and enjoy themselves with charming gambols round them, which is one of their favourite trees, owing to the fair and fragrant blossoms, full of rich nectar, which invite their delicate touch. Some of these humming-birds live entirely in the shade of the forests, and others delight themselves in bright, sunny places; the first searching for insects through bushes, and passing above and beneath every leaf with extraordinary rapidity as they do so; the other seeking clear places filled with the flowers in which it delights, and only entering a forest where there is a sunny opening filled with bright blossoms, or a tree covered with fragrant flowers.

You have, all of you, I am sure, heard or read of the fascination which some snakes possess for little birds; and, indeed, for other animals. Some people dispute that this is so; but, for my own part, I am disposed to believe it. These snakes lie on the ground, and attract the birds by their fixed wicked gaze;

the little victims appear to do their best to resist the fascination, but at last drop helplessly into the big jaws opened to receive



them. And such jaws as they are! A serpent's mouth, to begin with, is out of all proportion to the size of its head; and then, as if this was not enough, its jaws, instead of being

formed with stiff bones and joints like other animals, are *elastic*, so that they can stretch them out, and open these huge mouths to almost any size. You have seen pictures of snakes, and some of you may have seen the big foreign snakes themselves that are kept in zoological gardens, or, stuffed, in museums; and what do you think of their being able to swallow animals so much bigger than themselves as stags and buffaloes? There is one kind of snake that is called the whip-snake; it is common in India, and resembles whipcord in appearance, and one of its sly tricks is to twist itself round the branch of a tree, and let its head and upper part of its body hang down, looking like anything in the world but a snake, and so to attack birds and flying creatures of all kinds, and whip them into its mouth as they are fearlessly passing it; and then one can just fancy how the horrid creature chuckles over their sad fate and its own cleverness. Other snakes climb up trees; on the banks of the Nile the trees are as full of snakes—leaping and crawling about the boughs—as trees in other countries are of birds. Does not the idea make you shudder. But in South America, where they do not live in trees in that dreadful manner, they climb up trees, and rob the nests both of the eggs and the birds; and sometimes the brave little birds turn upon them, and defend their nestlings quite heroically. I have heard even of the tiny humming-bird doing this. A huge snake was just twisting itself up to kill the young birds in their nest, when the mother hen popped out her indignant head at him from within, and the cock, who had flown out in search of food, and happened to be returning at the moment, actually attacked him with beak and claw,

and so astonished the monster that he relinquished his vile intentions, and dropped down to the ground again from sheer surprise.

A snake that attacked the nest of a juida in South Africa was also boldly repulsed by the birds, who screamed with fury while they endeavoured to drive it away. It seems as if birds knew by instinct that snakes were their born enemies, for we can hardly suppose that in the following story the particular birds were influenced by any previous misconduct with which they were acquainted on the part of the particular snake:—A gentleman living near King William's Town, in Kaffraria, was working in his garden, when he was disturbed by the cries and screams of birds. He immediately guessed that this meant *a snake*, and running to the spot, found a number of thrushes and other birds dashing desperately at a low shrub. As he approached, out rushed a snake; he struck the snake with a spade, and flung it, half-alive, over the branch of a tree, holding it securely, however, by the end of the tail. He did this out of curiosity, wishing to see what the birds would do, or whether they would do anything. His doubts on the subject were soon set at rest. The thrushes seemed greatly interested by this course of action. "They flew round in a wide circle, dashing with open beak and wing at the snake, and screaming with the utmost fury." This pleasing occupation they pursued with such violence that several times one of the birds, dashing itself against the branch of the tree instead of the snake, fell to the ground, half-stunned from the violence of the blow it had inflicted on itself; and they continued to wreak their vengeance on the snake for several minutes.



STORMY PETRELS.

IT is a great jump to go from humming-birds to Stormy Petrels; the two elements in which they dwell—the air and the sea—are not more different from each other than are these inhabitants of sea and air. The humming-bird, brilliant as a fairy, made for sunshine and for joy, fluttering amid flowers, and nourished by the ambrosial nectar that flowers yield for

its benefit; the petrel, dark and stern in appearance, living only for night-time and storms, skimming over the wildest oceans lashed into madness by hurricanes, and rejoicing in their fury, because it then the more easily finds its gloomy food. Sad and dreary are the ideas connected by our sailors with these creatures—the smallest, I believe, of all sea-birds, but the most unwelcome. At the sight of one, the expectation and fear of a storm springs up in the mind of the bravest; for “Mother Carey’s chickens,” as the stormy petrels have been nicknamed, are supposed to bring the storms with them, and never to appear except for that cruel purpose. Birds of ill omen indeed; and yet not, perhaps, such evil creatures as they are painted. They may scent the storm which they do not cause, and, told by some instinct that it is coming, they fly fearlessly forth, because in the storms they are most sure to find the food they love best tossed about on the waves. In fact, I believe the stormy petrel to be an innocent, harmless, and pretty bird, and that it does not in the least deserve the hatred with which our sailors regard it. The most careless mariner takes in his sails when a stormy petrel flies menacingly (as he considers) towards him. Well, then, is it not a useful and kind little creature to prepare him for the danger, and so give him a better chance of escaping it? And if the word “warningly” was put in the place of “menacingly,” would not the sailor love and bless the bird that warned him? Alas! I am afraid it is a subject on which it is useless to be reasonable. “Mother Carey’s chickens” will always be dreaded and detested at sea; and probably if, on a long voyage, with a darkened sky and a rising wind, a flock

of these chickens appeared in sight, or a solitary creature pursued its weird flight towards the ship I was in, my heart too would sink, not only with fear of the storm, but of the creature who seemed to bring it. Sailors will not even allow that these poor birds have the power of making nests, which is natural



to all birds. They believe they lay a couple of snow-white eggs while swimming, take them up under their wings, and so hatch them, while their mate supplies them with food during the time this process of hatching lasts. I wonder they allow them the common bird-like privilege of laying eggs at all, and do not believe that suddenly, in the midst of a wild storm, a number of little fresh-fledged petrels spring violently from the mother's mouth to assist her in tormenting and terrifying poor sailors. Neither is the power of sleep granted by sailors to

petrels, and it is commonly reported that they fly and swim about only when they ought to be asleep at night. This certainly is not true, as I have read accounts of stormy petrels swimming after ships all through the day-time and disappearing at night. This is easily accounted for, as what they follow ships for is the chance of any food that may be thrown over-board suiting their taste; and, in fact, if their consciences are as good as their appetites, there is not much to say against them, for no food seems to come amiss to their palate. In the night there is not the same chance of their getting a dinner as in the day, and so they retire from the wake of the ship; but where to? is a question that may be fairly asked, and that, I must confess, it is not easy to find an answer to, for sometimes the ship they have been following is a thousand or twelve hundred miles from any land, and cannot be reached in the course of a few hours. So if the poor little bird sleeps at all, it must do so floating on the surface of the sea; and such I believe to be the case. And why not? A friend of my own, travelling through Persia in a hurry, chose to ride post, and was obliged, therefore, to keep up with the Tartar couriers bearing the letters, and he learned to do as they did, and to sleep in the saddle, riding hard all the time, and for a whole week all the sleep he got (he assures me he had plenty) was on horseback riding at a good trot; and if an Irish gentleman can sleep thus, why should not a stormy petrel slumber when tossed up and down on the surface of the sea?

All water-birds, I believe, have glands filled with oil, which they can produce at pleasure, both to feed their young and to varnish their feathers into a waterproof coat, very useful to



STORMY PETRELS AND NESTS.

them while swimming; but petrels carry this oil manufactory to excess—they are half oil, they are made of oil, they smell of oil, they use oil for everything, they spurt it out of their



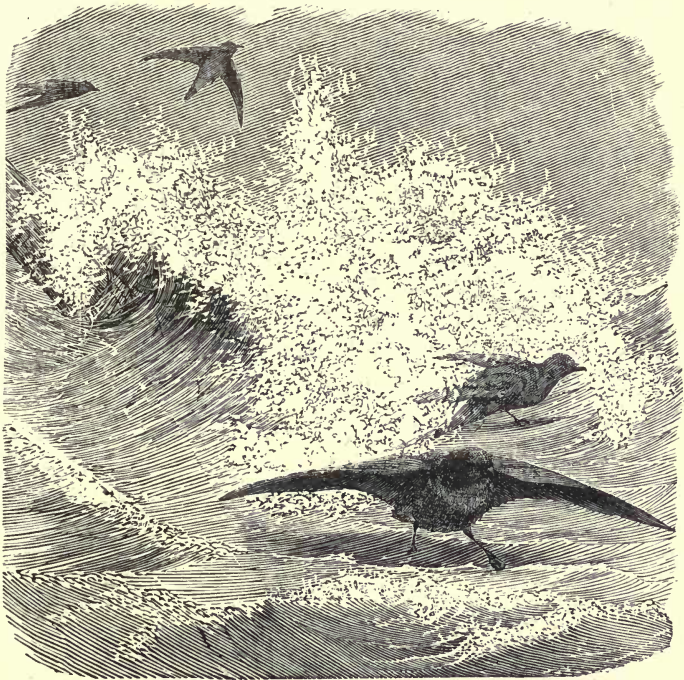
mouth in large quantities if attacked or angry, and they are sometimes shot by the poor inhabitants of the countries they frequent on purpose to be used as lamps, a wick being passed through their bodies, which burns brightly till the reservoir of oil is exhausted.

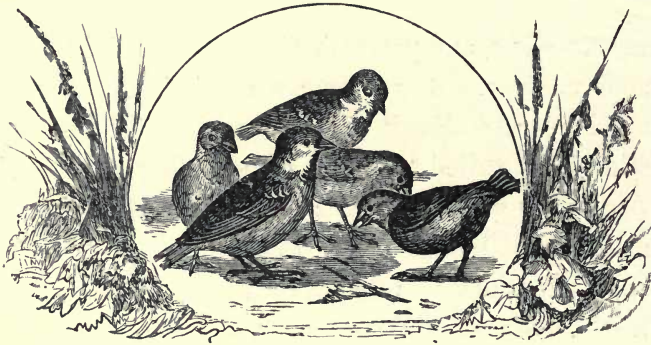
The stormy petrel's wings are extremely long, and in

consequence of this they rise with great difficulty from the ground, and run along for some distance before they can get under weigh; but when once risen, they fly with extreme swiftness, skimming along the tops of the waves with the utmost grace and agility, terrible as the movements appear in the eyes of the seamen, or hovering for a moment with their wings upraised while they dip their beaks into the water in search of food. They swim well, but seldom alight for that purpose.

They burrow in the sandy shore, and there deposit their eggs, making sometimes nests only just deep enough to hold them, and sometimes digging down to the depth of a foot. They are very glad, however, to be saved the trouble of doing this, and will take possession of deserted rabbit warrens, or any other excavations they can find. They like crevices in rocks or holes in cliffs where the stones are loose, and at a great height above the sea. A very few feathers, stalks of grass, seaweeds, or grasses are all the materials they use. They are faithful and attentive to their young, and will allow themselves to be made captive rather than forsake their nests. The young petrels are very amusing-looking little people, just like puffs of white down, so that it is not easy to imagine them to be birds at all, and one wonders where the sooty-black dress they afterwards are to assume, with only patches of white on it, is to come from. The petrel never utters a sound in the daytime, or even in the night, except when engaged in hatching its young, when from under the sands, where their nests are safely concealed, their curious cry may be continuously heard, though not loud in itself. As the petrels are sociable birds, and burrow in numbers, the multitude of voices becomes quite

startlingly sonorous, and proceeds through the night in a steady, monotonous manner. Some people say it is like the croaking of frogs, others resemble it to the quacking of young ducks; then, again, it is called "a sort of warbling chatter;" then, again, it is purring, or buzzing; while even the monotony has been denied, and it has been said to be interrupted by a sudden "click," and occasionally to assume the character of a sharp, shrill whistle.





SPARROWS.

AM now going to tell you a good deal about sparrows. Small common birds enough, concerning which you will, perhaps, fancy there is not much to say. I hope, however, you are not, any of you, going to give yourselves airs about them. I have heard sparrows called "vulgar birds," with "awkward manners." Nay, I am sorry to say that I have even read such expressions in printed books, and applied to this nice, friendly little brown bird. Are daisies vulgar? Have *they* awkward manners when they uncurl their pretty buds, and open them to the spring sunshine? If they are and have, then sparrows may be so styled also, but hardly, I think, unless the same words may

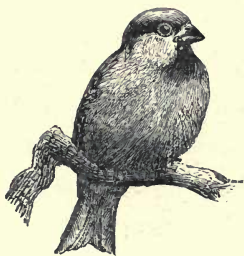




be used about daisies. They are *common*, and so are daisies and buttercups, so are grasses and moss; but in no other sense of the word are they *vulgar*. Do you happen to know that vulgar really only means common, and that it is

we who have misused the word by *commonly*—that is, *vulgarly*—applying it as a term of censure? Why, the blue sky above our heads is *common*, and so also, let us hope, are some of the best and brightest qualities of our nature; but are it and they to be nicknamed *vulgar* on that account? It is, then, of the common, but not vulgar, sparrow that I will now talk a little, and first let me draw your attention to the Hedge-sparrow, which is not a sparrow at all, but in reality belongs to the family of the Warblers; but as it is always called a “sparrow,” and is actually placed by several naturalists among sparrows,



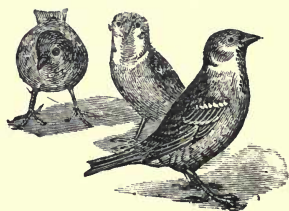


with only a word of reminder that it is *not* one, I suppose I may venture to take the same liberty with it. It is slenderer in form than



the real sparrow, and has not the same black patches on its head and throat, otherwise there is little difference between them. It is a friendly, sociable bird, afraid of nobody, and comes among us so early that it often builds its nest in bare hedges, and lays its beautiful bright blue eggs before the other birds have more than begun to think of such matters. I mean it makes its appearance to begin this work of building, when I say "comes among us," for it is a faithful little friend, staying here all through the winter, creeping about in our gardens to get what food it can, unpretending, easily satisfied, and endowed with a never-failing cheerfulness that some of us might be glad to share.

These birds are in such a hurry to begin the pleasant duties of setting up a house of their own, that it is by no means uncommon to find snow lying in the poor little nests; and the want of leaves to shelter them, arising from the same cause, exposes them too often to attacks from other birds, and from, alas! those enemies of all birds—boys!



The nest is very substantially made, and is large in size, considering the smallness of its builder; it is not an elegant nest, but has something that reminds one of a basket in its shape,

and is always placed near the ground, and generally in a hedge, though it is to be met with in bushes, or in holes of trees. When in the latter, the architect makes a dome-shaped roof for it, which improves the appearance very much.



By making her little dwelling so early in the year, and putting it where it is so easily detected, the hedge-sparrow lays herself open to a peculiar and unforeseen danger—the danger of being made hatching-mother to a cuckoo's egg. Have you ever heard of the wonderful ways of the cuckoo, that bird we are all so very fond of, and whose sweet cry is the call for spring, and brings in its train all the joys of summer. It rushes over here from Africa, and wakes us out of the dulness of winter days with its joyous ever-welcome "Cuckoo, cuckoo!" Strange creature! unlike all other birds, it never makes a nest. It lays its eggs on the ground, and then carries them in its beak, and deposits them in the nests of other birds; and though it is much larger than any of the birds who give it a chance of doing this, it is so extremely sly that it actually lays eggs out of all proportion to its size, they are so small, and when a hedge-sparrow has laid one or two of her own,



it privately introduces its egg into her nest; so that when her number of five is completed, whatever egg is crowded or in the way, it is sure not to be that laid by the cuckoo. It is wonderful how she watches for the first egg to appear, so that the appearance of hers shall not surprise the nursing mother, and then she really and truly carries her own egg in her beak, and puts it into the nest with the other. The pipit, a kind of lark, and the hedge-sparrow are the birds whose nests Mistress Cuckoo generally selects to confer this doubtful favour upon, but other birds sometimes come in for one of her progeny also. When once she has safely placed her egg out to nurse, the general opinion is that she takes no more trouble about it, and has not the slightest affection for little Master or Miss Cuckoo when he or she makes its appearance in the world. But this is hardly credible, and I, for my part, am more inclined to believe the few watchful observers, who tell us that the cuckoo often takes up her residence near the nest to which she has intrusted her egg, hovers about it, and apparently feels a decided interest in its welfare. Nay, I for one will not doubt the story of the young cuckoo, who, when the sparrows and their progeny had in some way or other met with an untimely fate, was at once visited and fed by its own mother, who paid it unremitting attention till it was able to use its wings, and take care of itself.

Having told you all this about sparrows that are not sparrows, and cuckoos that are hatched by them, it is perhaps time that I should find something to say of the real bird—the House Sparrow—well known to everybody—faithful, confiding, friendly, pert, and pugnacious. It is curious to find a bird

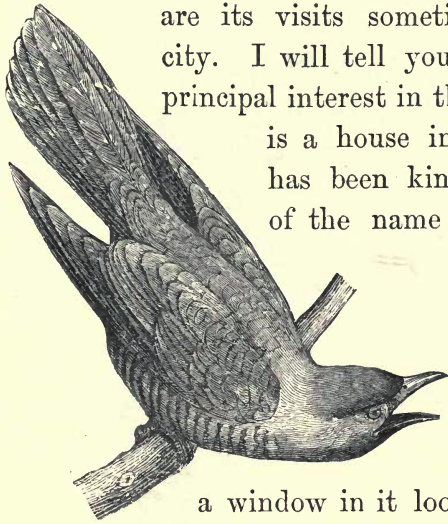


AMERICAN SONG SPARROW.

that seems to be really happier in a street than in a tree, and to prefer the refuse food flung out from houses to the insects and grains that it can capture fresh for itself. Yet this is the case with the house sparrow, who, perhaps, is the only bird living that prefers the haunts of men to Nature. Very comforting and pleasant



are its visits sometimes to the inhabitants of a city. I will tell you of sparrows that formed the principal interest in the lives of two women. There is a house in a street in London, which has been kindly provided by a good lady of the name of Twining, as a home for poor people who are very ill or very old; and in a room at the top of this house two women spent their lives. A room at the top of a house



a window in it looking on to the roofs of other houses! you would not think they could find much to amuse themselves at such a window as that, would you? And yet from that window the great interest and pleasure of their lives came. And what do you think brought it to them? Why, the sparrows. One of these women was very old, but she was able to toddle about the room, old as she was; and the other was quite young, but she had lost the use of her legs, and was obliged to lie always in bed. When the old woman looked out of window

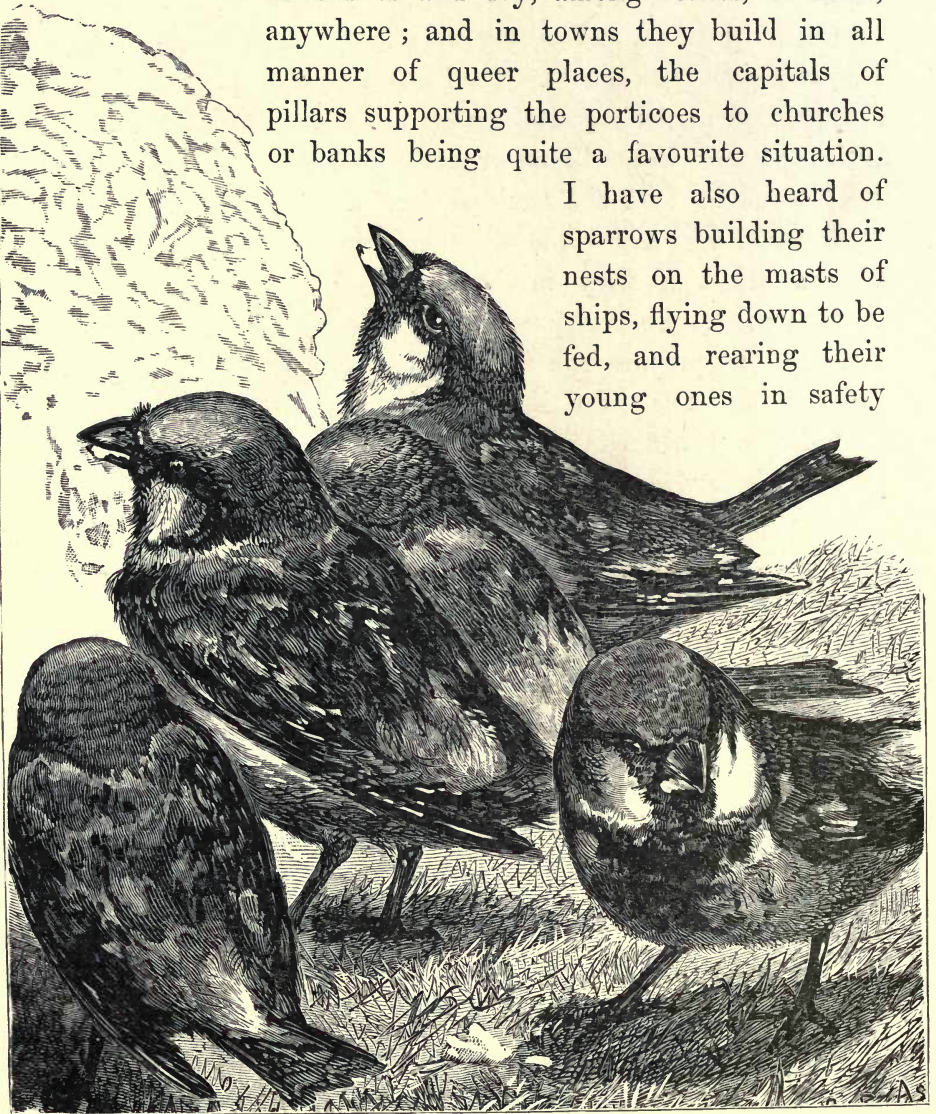
she saw numbers of little house sparrows hopping happily about on the roofs of the houses, and she got quite interested in watching them, and seeing all the quaint, pleasant things they did, and so she described them to the poor girl who always lay in bed, and she also liked hearing about them, till she wanted to see them for herself, and begged to have her bed moved so that she could do so. And when the winter-time came, and the birds were cold and hungry, these two women asked if they might *feed* the sparrows. So the poor girl in bed used to prepare the food, and make it all ready for them, and then the old woman toddled over to the window, and put it out for the little birds to eat, and both watched them quite happily as they pecked it up, and came in flocks to do so, and fought or fraternised over it, as the case might be. Such things give great delight to prisoners.



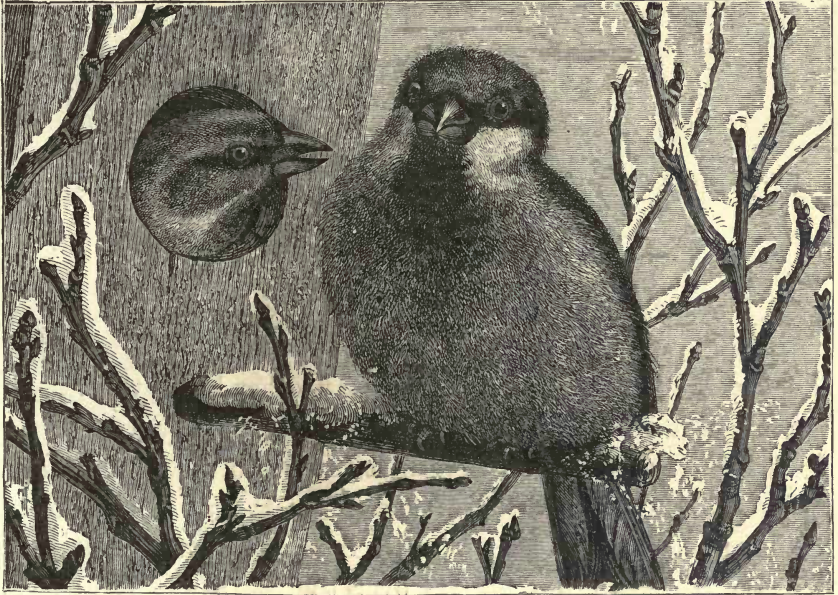
Sparrows build rather rough nests, loosely put together, and lined with anything soft they can find, feathers being a favourite material. In the days when cottages had thatched roofs they liked nothing better than the eaves of such roofs under which to place their homes; but modern improvements, in the shape of slates and tiles, have put them out a little, still they build in the eaves, and in all kinds of curious places besides. It seems necessity rather than inclination that ever makes them fix on a tree at all; and when they do, they take considerably more pains with their houses

than in any other situation that they select. They build in bushes and ivy, among stones, in holes, anywhere; and in towns they build in all manner of queer places, the capitals of pillars supporting the porticoes to churches or banks being quite a favourite situation.

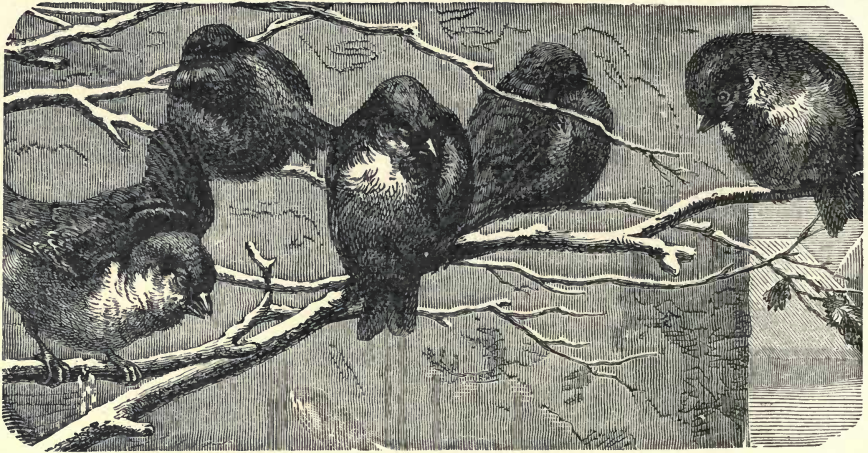
I have also heard of sparrows building their nests on the masts of ships, flying down to be fed, and rearing their young ones in safety



during short voyages ; or if there had not been time for the eggs to be hatched, the nest having been carefully brought down by some kind sailor when the ship reached port, and being placed in some sheltered crevice of a wall, the birds have



continued their happy labours on dry land after their pleasant little trip to sea. During the winter they take shelter anywhere that shelter can be found, creeping into all sorts of funny nooks, and popping their pert little heads out when least expected, to the surprise and amusement of the lookers on. They like bathing, which would make us believe that they are cleanly birds ; but then what are we to think of their love of rolling themselves in the dry, dusty roads ? They are



very fond of lying down on their sides in the sun, giving themselves up with easy indolence to a sparrow's *far niente*. They consider, in common with many other birds, that worms are among the "delicacies of the season," but they are very far from being the early bird that finds the worm, for they actually allow the big blackbirds to forage for them. These clever little people have been seen to lie in wait among bushes, and when a blackbird has hunted over the lawn, and is carrying off a fine fat worm in its mouth, out springs Master Sparrow, and, I suppose, in consequence of the sudden shock of his unexpected appearance and ready *peck*, the blackbird, though so much larger and stronger a bird, drops his tasty burden, and scurries off in great haste. But before you blame the cunning sparrow for this impudent behaviour, listen to me while I tell you what sparrows have been known to do. If they capture the worms that belong to blackbirds, and snatch them forcibly from their beaks, they actually feed canary birds with worms

and insects in the tenderest and most generous manner. A lady had one of these sweet-singing little yellow favourites in a cage hung outside her window, and was astonished to see a sparrow bringing it worms, and paying it the greatest attention. It began to do this at first in rather a shy way, and only staying a moment or two, dropping the delicate morsel into the cage, and flying hurriedly off. But it soon grew bolder, and the friendship between the free bird and the captive in the cage strengthened every day. The canary would put its shining head out through the bars, and receive the worm in its beak from the beak of the other, and then the sparrow would perch on the cage, and the two would thoroughly enjoy each other's society. The neighbours (as well as the owner of the canary) were so impressed by the conduct of the sparrow, that they hung their own canaries out of doors just to see what would happen, and, if you will believe me, that kind-hearted sparrow fed them one and all. But, faithful to his first friend, he brought most of the tit-bits to *him*, and while he fed the other canaries did not remain with them, but always returned to perch on *his* cage. I do wonder what was passing in the heart of that sparrow—a little, homely, brown-coated bird—while he fed and tended all those splendid and refined foreigners!





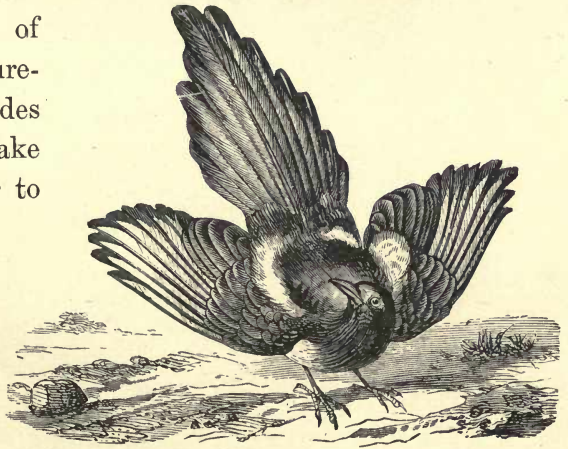
MAGPIES.



TO tell you the truth, I have not, for my own part, a very good opinion of magpies. It is considered an unlucky thing to see a magpie, and people tell you that you should bow to it three times, in order to prevent some misfortune happening in consequence, and that if you do this, a second

magpie will probably (attracted, I suppose, by the hope of being treated with such supreme politeness) put in an appearance, and that *two* magpies are prophets of good instead of bad fortune. People tell you this, I say, but, of course, they are either very foolish or very merry people; and when I say I suppose the second magpie is drawn towards you by your bows, I hope you are quite aware that I am talking nonsense. The fact is, magpies are sociable beings, and fly about in parties, so that you seldom see one without at least another following.

The reason I object to magpies, then, is not because I consider them birds of ill omen, but because they are such shocking thieves. They steal everything they can get hold of. If a magpie saw your thimble or scissors lying about, it would like nothing better than to fly off with that same thimble or scissors to its nest. Magpies have stolen silver spoons and money, and servants have been supposed to be the thieves, and suffered instead of the magpies, and after all the missing articles have been discovered in the nests of these cunning, demure-looking birds. Besides this propensity to take what does not belong to them, they are so very cruel. They suck the eggs of other birds, and they even murder and devour the little birds



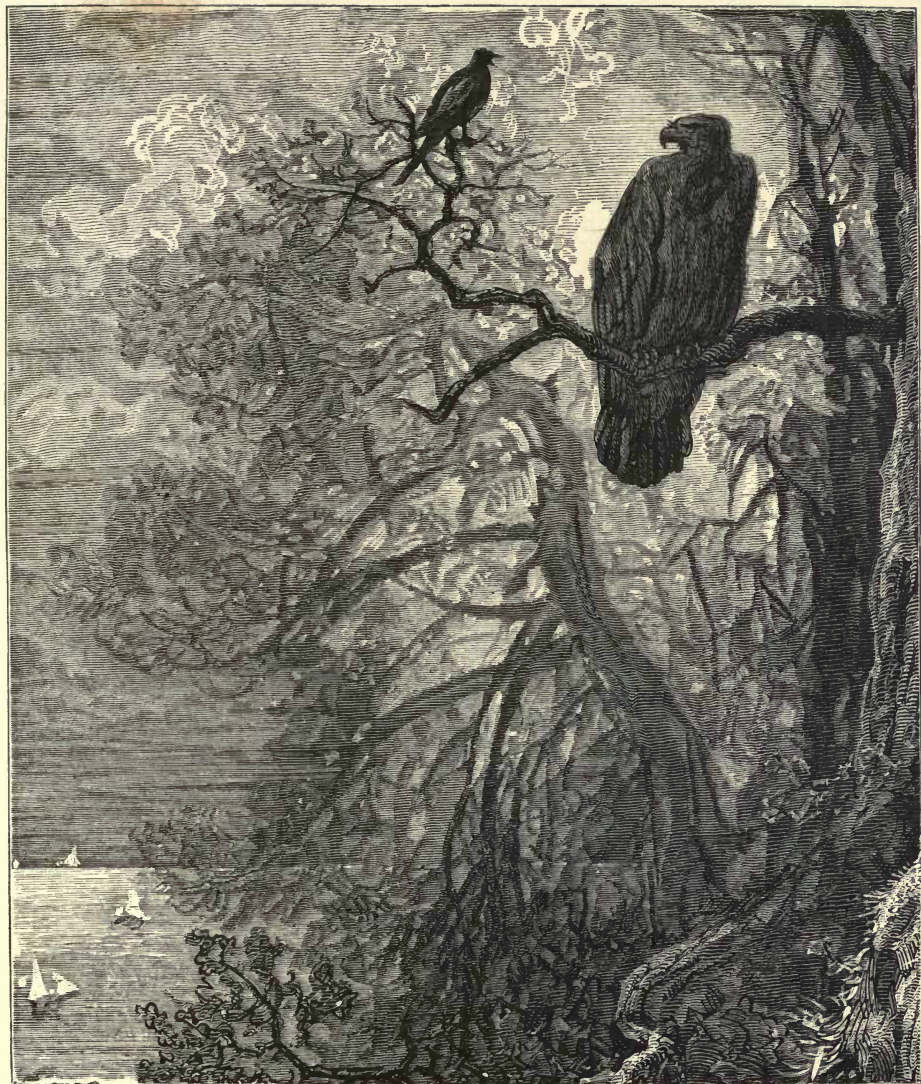


THE MAGPIE'S NEST.

themselves after they have been hatched. Magpies have been taught to speak very successfully sometimes, and are said to become almost as great chatterers as parrots. One that learnt all his speeches from a parrot used to disappoint passers-by, by calling out from his cage, hung up against the house, "Pretty Poll, pretty Poll," and then when people looked up, expecting to see the bright-plumaged lively-mannered parrot, there was nothing to be beheld but an ordinary black-and-white magpie. Not that magpies are, after all, such ordinary black-and-white birds as they are generally supposed to be. If you examine them carefully in a good light, you will find almost every shade of green and of purple among the feathers, which, at the first glance, seem only black and white. Of course, magpies talk in rather a foolish manner, only uttering over again just what they have picked up from others; and there is an old French fable of a magpie meeting an eagle, the king of birds, and being extremely alarmed in consequence; but, to his great delight, the eagle, instead of putting an end to him with beak and talons, imperiously desired him to talk and be amusing. The magpie at once obeyed, and rattled on with all the phrases, opinions, and bits of news that he had, during a long life, succeeded in picking up in different directions, all joined together in a regular magpie *mélée*. The eagle listened with such profound attention, that the magpie felt quite certain he had made a most agreeable impression, and his fears yielding as his vanity was gratified, he ended by offering to skip about and watch everywhere and everything at the eagle's court; and then he plumed himself in great glee as he thought what a good thing he had made of this chance encounter with the

king of birds. In short, he felt that he had made a hit. Poor magpie! The eagle, though well aware that magpies are the best spies that could be engaged, instantly declined his very obliging offer, informing him that he did not wish to have his court corrupted by—gossip! This is a lesson for us, as well as for birds, that it is better not to talk unless we have something to say worth hearing, and that possibly when we have been chattering away to some eagle of our acquaintance, and think we have delighted him, we have really made no better impression than this magpie did on *his* great friend.

Magpies make such extraordinary nests: they build them much in the same places as, and they are not larger than, those of rooks or of wood doves; but they consider it necessary to defend them in a manner that no rook or wood dove ever dreamt of using. It is hardly against other birds they would use this defence, and it really looks as if they were afraid of men, or shall we rather say of boys? For so close and strange is the wall they make outside, and sometimes also inside, their nest, that the creature with hands, who wishes to rob it, is actually often obliged to use a knife, and cut deeply down before he can reach the egg-treasure within. Is it only the eggs that cunning magpie builds this defence to guard, or has he an idea in his mind of the spoons, thimbles, and other articles that he may wish to hide within it? Who can say? Not I; frankly, I have no wish to read a magpie's mind, even if I had the power to do so. One sly fellow fixed on a gooseberry bush for his house to be placed in, and not considering its thorns enough, actually fenced its nest as usual, and then fenced the gooseberry bush also. The nest is always a large



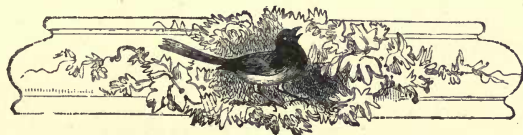
THE EAGLE AND THE MAGPIE (A FABLE).

one, though hardly large enough to allow the bird to sit within it without bending its long tail up over its back. The nest is made of fibrous roots of plants, wool, and feathers, all plastered together with mud and clay in the very nicest, neatest manner, and outside is the wonderful defence I have said so much about, composed of thorny branches, generally hawthorn, selected, no doubt, as the *most* thorny and common, and interlaced together in the most aggravating manner possible. Above, a canopy of the same is erected with perhaps even more care, and is more dangerous to the hand of the intruder than the body of the nest itself, while the entrance door is left as small as the architect can contrive it without rendering it out of the question for himself to go in and out. Sly and cunning thief! while eating the eggs and young birds of others, he thus keeps his own secure; and while stealing any of our possessions he can, he takes care we shall not steal his.

Monkeys are well known to copy anything they see men do; they are imitative animals, and will gravely and attentively follow the example set them by others, but magpies do more than this. Their love of mischief leads them to *undo* what they see others do; and as I am very fond of gardening, I sincerely pity the gentleman who, wanting to sow some delicate seeds in specially prepared soil in a sheltered spot in his garden, which happened to be full of stones, picked the stones carefully out, laid them in a heap, and sowed the seed in the soil he put into their place, and then, on looking over his shoulder, found that his pet magpie had busily employed itself in taking up and restoring to its original place every stone that he had just laid aside.

But the most amusing story I ever heard of a magpie was about one who formed a wonderful friendship with a sheep. It used to be constantly seen sitting on the sheep's back, and seemed as if it really could not make enough of it. Whether the sheep's tastes or wishes had been consulted, it was not so easy to see, or whether it shared the lively affection felt for it by the magpie. It submitted, at any rate, to the caresses of the bird, and appeared resigned to having it as a frequent guest on its back. I would rather not have been that sheep, I confess! I should not like to have a magpie always perched on my back! At last, one day that sheep was sheared, and in its wool was found concealed all manner of extraordinary things—thimbles, sixpennies, half-pennies, pens, scraps of ribbon, and I really don't know what besides. The fact is the poor unconscious sheep had all this time been the receiver of stolen goods, the thief having brought these various little articles, and carefully concealed them in its wool.

I wonder what the feelings of the magpie were when that sheep was shorn!





THE WREN.

“The wren, the wren, the king of all birds,
On Stephen’s day was caught in the furze;
Though he is little, his family’s great.
Put your hand in your pocket, and give us
a trate”



SO sing the Irish boys on the
28th of December, the day of
St. Stephen, when they carry
branches of holly about with them,
and expect halfpence in return for
their song; but what the legend is
on which the custom is founded, or
why the tiny wren should, on any
day in the year, be considered to

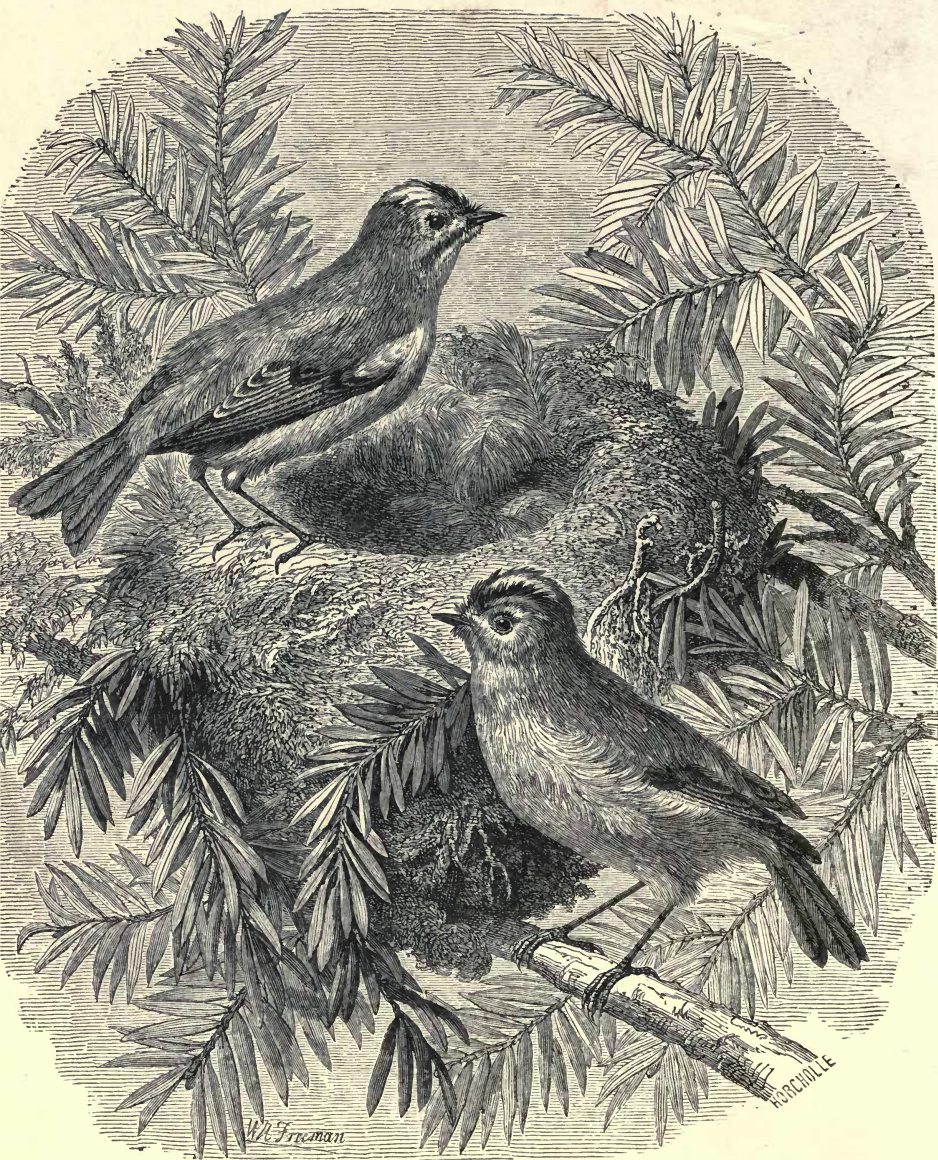
usurp the throne of the eagle, and be styled the king of all
birds, I have not an idea. It is such an unpretending bird

in appearance, and so extremely small, though it *is* given rather a consequential air by carrying its tail very erect. Its simple garb has been immortalised in verse :—



“Cherry pie is very good,
And so is currant wine;
But I will wear my brown gown,
And never dress too fine.”

The conclusions may not be logical, but what does the want of logic signify in a nice little lady who will always be con-



THE GOLDEN-CRESTED WREN AND ITS NEST.

tented with a brown gown, and who is quite resolved against finery?

This wise bird never leaves us, but remains on through the winter, and in ordinary seasons does not suffer in consequence of thus staying at home, but in very severe winters the poor creature perishes from cold or hunger; so I am sure we ought to feed it, and take care of it in any way that we can. It is very familiar in its manners, and lives in our gardens and close to our houses, as well as in lanes or hedges, and sometimes at night several wrens may be found cuddling up together in an old nest to keep themselves and each other warm. If a nest is not available, they content themselves with a hole in a tree, or even among stones, and they do not go to bed without almost as much chatter and bustle as half a dozen children may make before settling for the night, and sometimes there seems to be a good deal of disputing as to which should have the snuggest and warmest corner, and one or the other, while all this piece of work is going on, comes and peeps out of the mouth of the hole to see if anybody is observing them, when they all of a sudden become as quiet as a set of little frightened mice.

The wren has a clear, bright note, and sings with such force that its little body vibrates all over with the effort of bringing out its song. Now and then it sings with a loudness and strength which astonishes all the other birds, and, perhaps, its small self also. I have heard of people being astonished too. Men who know all about birds, and therefore, of course, about wrens, have been called out of their houses now and then by a loud, piercing, ringing song, which they could

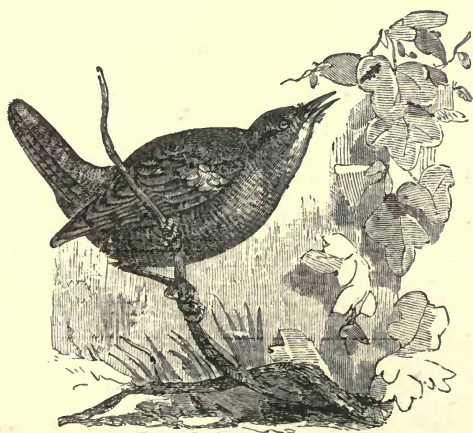


not recognise as that of any bird they were acquainted with, and to their amazement have found that it proceeded from the tiny form of a wren! On one of these occasions, and it was late in September, a number of other birds flocked round to listen to the surprising songster—sparrows, chaffinches, and robins—the former came inclined to chastise the little person for making such a noise, but shrank back startled into submission when they approached it; the dear robin, on the contrary, had only peaceful, friendly intentions throughout. The wren makes a very large nest considering its own size, or rather its own want of size, and places a domed roof over it. It is round, but the side against the tree, or whatever else it is built on, is flattened. There is a good deal of difference in the materials used for the nests, and it is generally contrived to look as like what it is built on as possible, so as not to be easily detected. Twigs, little roots (dead or living), leaves, moss, ferns, grass, hay, are all used; and it is sometimes most comfortably lined with hair



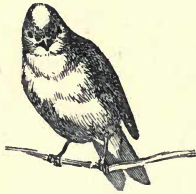
or feathers, and sometimes, again, it is not lined at all. It is one or two inches thick, and inside it is about four inches deep, and perhaps not more than three inches wide. The architects do not seem to be at all particular about the positions of their dwelling, and put it anywhere and

everywhere—on the ground, or twenty feet up in a tree, and in every intermediate place that can be imagined, even to an old tattered bonnet hung up in a field with the intention of frightening birds away, but changed by a pair of confiding little wrens into a foundation for their own residence. Then they will also take possession of the nests of other birds, either deserted by them, or even during their absence they have been known to throw out the eggs, and deposit their own instead; and a wren has been detected stealing the materials of a well-made thrush's nest, and flying away with them to build its own instead. How puzzled that thrush must have been, when each time it returned with something fresh to build up the walls of its nest, it found them always smaller than when it had left them, and the act of building rendered endless till the clever little wren had finished its own home



with the materials supplied by the other. But the slyest thing, I think, a wren ever did was, when disturbed by some children who had the impertinence to watch it when at home, it coolly built up the entrance to its house, and opened one on the other side. There is no reckon-

ing on what these birds will do, they choose such curious places for their nests ; in some of these of which I have read I should so like to find a nest myself ! I have plenty of cactuses in my greenhouse, but no wren ever built a nest in one of them yet. I read of such a thing being done in a cactus placed on the highest shelf in the greenhouse, and the little creature had to squeeze itself in and out of a small hole left for a vine stem every time it brought a morsel of grass



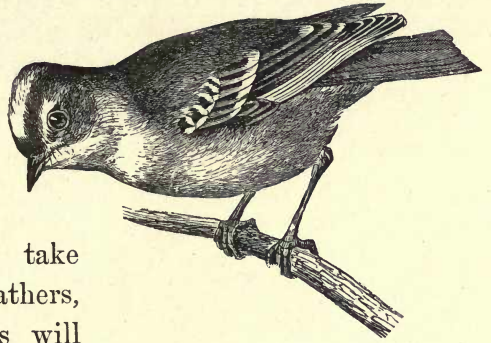
or moss for building purposes, and in this difficult manner she built an immense nest. What put it into her head to come inside at all, leaving a world full of trees and bushes outside the glass ? Oh, wren ! I will leave

the door of my greenhouse wide open if thou wilt promise to build a nest in one of my cactuses ; but oh, wren ! thou small and capricious bird, I know I should leave that door open in vain !

I will tell you another curious thing about wrens' nests. It has often been noticed that numbers of unfinished wrens' nests are found, with no eggs in them ; and it has been supposed that the little builders are peculiarly sensitive and frightened, and that on discovering or imagining that their work has been observed, they have flown off, and recommenced it in some more retired place. But this is not the case. The real fact is, that while the good little hen is sitting on her eggs, the cock pretends to be employed in building a nest for her, so that nobody should know he has in reality long ago completed his work, and that she is busy now on hers. He makes as many



as half-a-dozen nests near where his own is, but all in conspicuous places, while the actual nest is hid away as safely as possible. And the clever wren, though he makes the nest, does not take the trouble to line it with feathers, because he knows no eggs will ever be placed in it, and therefore the soft, smooth lining will not be required. It is just as if we built the bare walls of a house in which we never put any furniture; because, while we build them, we know quite well nobody will ever live inside them.



When frightened, the wren utters a note that sounds like "Chit, chit," from which, in Ireland, it is sometimes called the chitty wren. It cries out "Chit chit" so often and so loudly if that worst enemy of birds, the cat, makes her appearance, that in thus giving vent to its feelings, it is very useful to other birds of all kinds, who receive timely warning from its impassioned "Chit, chit."

The common wren is not more than four inches long, and, wearing her brown gown, never dresses too fine; but there is a charming little variety which is still smaller, called the Golden-crested Wren, which has, as its name shows, a most beautiful crest on the top of



its head. These birds are not quite so hardy as the common wren, and fall an easy prey to cats or cruel boys in the winter, when they seek warm, sheltered places in gardens and near houses to protect themselves from the inclemency of the weather, little dreaming, poor things! that there are worse dangers to be encountered than frost and snow.



The golden-crest hangs its nest from the lower part of the branch of a tree, near the end, the fir tree being the one it usually selects, though it does not object to others, and sometimes chooses a bush, such as the laurestinus. It makes the nest resemble exactly in colour whatever tree supports it, and the little opening is near the top of the nest. A high wind will sometimes blow it about, and dislodge the eggs, which are the smallest laid by any British birds, and extremely pretty; they are sometimes of a pure white just spotted into red, but the usual colour is a reddish brown, deepening in the shade of

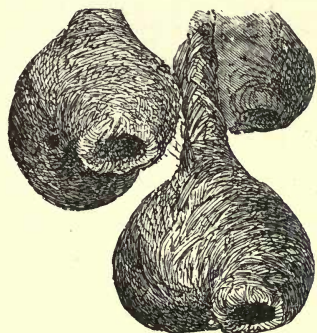


THE BEARDED GOLDEN-CRESTED WREN.

brown towards one end. How distressed the poor little parents must be when they return to their pretty homes they left safe and comfortable, and find them empty, and the tiny treasures they kept in them scattered about on the unsympathising earth! If the eggs were not broken, and the wrens were as clever as the cuckoos I have told you about, they might take them up in their beaks and gently replace them in the soft feather bed in which they ought to have been. But I never heard of a poor little wren doing this; in fact, I never heard of any bird carrying an egg in its beak except the cuckoo, and it is such an out-of-the-way and unexpected thing for a bird to do, that for a long time it was not supposed that the cuckoo *did* or *could* do such a thing, and great wonder was felt as to how she laid her eggs in a nest too small for her to sit in. I think he was a happy man who first saw a cuckoo flying towards a hedge-sparrow's nest with an egg in her beak, and actually beheld her deposit it by the one little egg (but, as we know, scarcely smaller than her own) which already occupied it. If we all of us kept our eyes open, and looked about us, and watched the wonderful and curious things that are happening round us every day, and every hour and every minute of every day, we might each and all of us make discoveries as interesting as that which one day one man made about the cuckoo and her egg. Nature is always at work. Birds, insects, trees, flowers, grasses, mosses, all the pretty things around us, are still full of undiscovered secrets, which a careful observer may find out. Would you not like to be that observer? I should; and there is no reason I know of why either you or I may not be, if we will only work and watch.

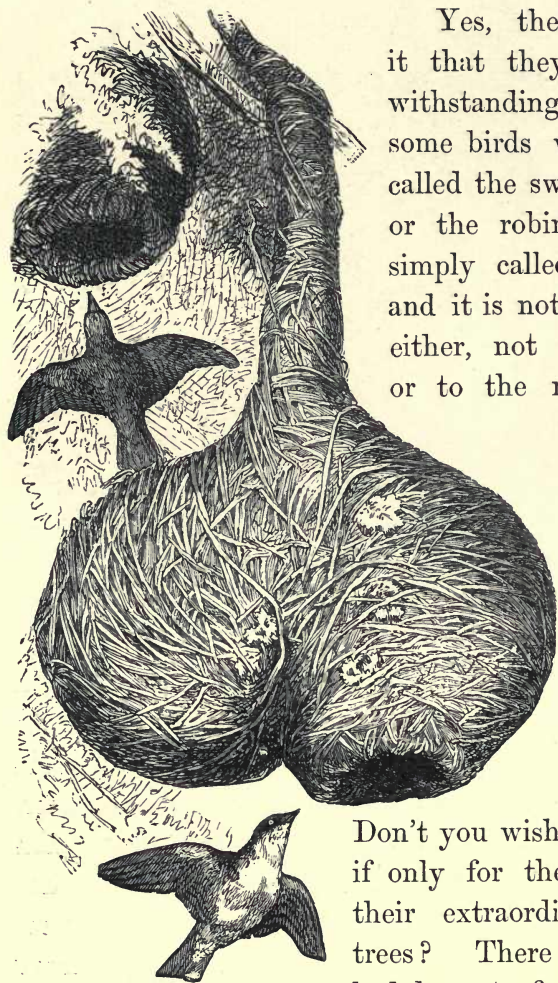


THE WEAVER BIRD.



PERHAPS you will exclaim, when I begin to talk to you about the weaver bird, "Why, are not all birds weavers? What is it you have been telling us, about the way in which they make their nests, unless it is that they are weavers weaving these sweet little habitations in which they live?"

Some certainly perform the work rather carelessly, and the result is such a loosely-knit web that they do hardly deserve to be called weavers at all. But as to the others, with the single exception of that naughty yet beloved bird, the cuckoo, are they not all weavers?"



Yes, there is no doubt of it that they are; and yet, notwithstanding this fact, there are some birds who, instead of being called the swallow, or the magpie, or the robin, or the linnet, are simply called the Weaver Bird; and it is not such an unfair name either, not unfair to themselves or to the rest of the feathered creation, for they do weave very wonderful nests in a very wonderful manner. They are to be found only in hot countries—such as Africa and Asia. In India they are as common as robins are with us.

Don't you wish they came over here, if only for the summer, and wove their extraordinary homes in our trees? There would be nests for bad boys to find and make captive!

There would be nests for good, wise people to watch the making of, and the subsequent rearing of the little birds in, at a safe, cautious distance, kindly holding their breaths for fear they should disturb the clever, pretty creatures! They

almost always hang their nests from the ends of twigs and branches, and all the birds whose nests hang in this manner, either from trees or cliffs, or, in fact, anything else, are called pensile birds. Pensile is derived from a Latin verb, and means hanging. The swift I told you about, with its wonderful nest, is a pensile bird, and so, indeed, may some of the dear little titmice be called. Very often the weaver bird suspends its hanging home



over the water, and not at a great height above it either, but far nearer the water than any one would expect it to choose as the place for a receptacle—first, for breakable eggs, and then for downless, helpless little birds. You will wonder, I daresay, why it does this. Wait a minute, and I will tell you. In those hot countries where the weaver bird weaves, monkeys and snakes also abound, and are the greatest enemies that any nice, plump birds possess. The slender branches which will bear birds' nests will not support the monkey thief, who is far too cunning to trust to a frail prop, which will snap under him, and precipitate him into the water, where he would undoubtedly be drowned.



BENGAL WEAVER BIRDS AND NEST.

Some snakes live
 cate little baby-
 water keeps the
 parent bird fixes on
 the good of its dar-
 and when a monkey
 in the neighbourhood,
 birds, knowing their treasures
 cure, scream, and scold, and
 feated enemies, and even dare
 them, give a passing peck as they
 then, wheeling round above their
 their happy homes in triumph.



almost entirely on eggs and deli-
 birds, and from them also the
 birds safe; so the instinct of the
 this curious place for
 ling small family;
 or snake shows itself
 the delighted old
 are perfectly se-
 taunt their de-
 to rush wildly at
 shoot past, and
 heads, return to

The Red-billed Weaver lives in Africa, and is a very queer bird, as I am sure you will agree with me in thinking, when I tell you that it spends its life in attending on buffaloes. We have all of us our favourite animal. Some people like kittens; some (especially some gentlemen) prefer horses to every other animal; some admire antelopes so much that they would fix on them as their favourites; many like dogs best; I myself love a large red Irish setter more than all; and so on: each individual has his or her special taste, and the special taste of the red-billed weaver is a buffalo! Now, I must say this appears very odd, for there is nothing I know of in a buffalo that is either pretty or attaching. Sometimes you may find buffaloes without these weaver birds, but never, never, *never!* are these weaver birds to be found without buffaloes; and if buffaloes depart from any part of a country that they have hitherto inhabited, why, lo and

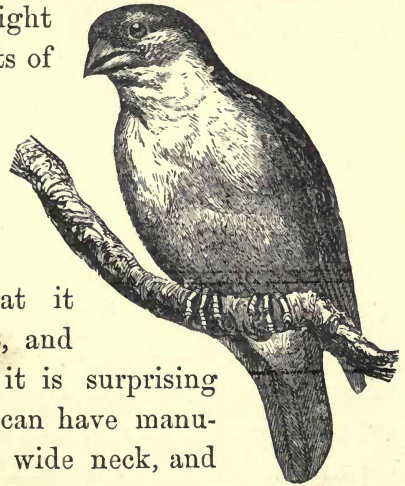
behold! strange as it may appear, these weaver birds disappear also. Now, shall we try to find out the reason for this wonderful affection of a bird for a beast, and we may also say, of a beast for a bird, for surely buffaloes might rid themselves of creatures so much smaller than themselves, if



they found their attention a torment instead of a pleasure. The weaver perches on the buffalo's head, dives in among its hair, flits round and round it, dashes down its back with lively pecks. Then, perhaps, it pauses, looks anxiously round it, and rises into the air with a peculiar whining sound, unlike any it has made before, and off rushes the buffalo into the thickest part of the forest, and off rushes the weaver bird after it. What can the meaning of it all be? Do you remember the magpie that formed such an extraordinary

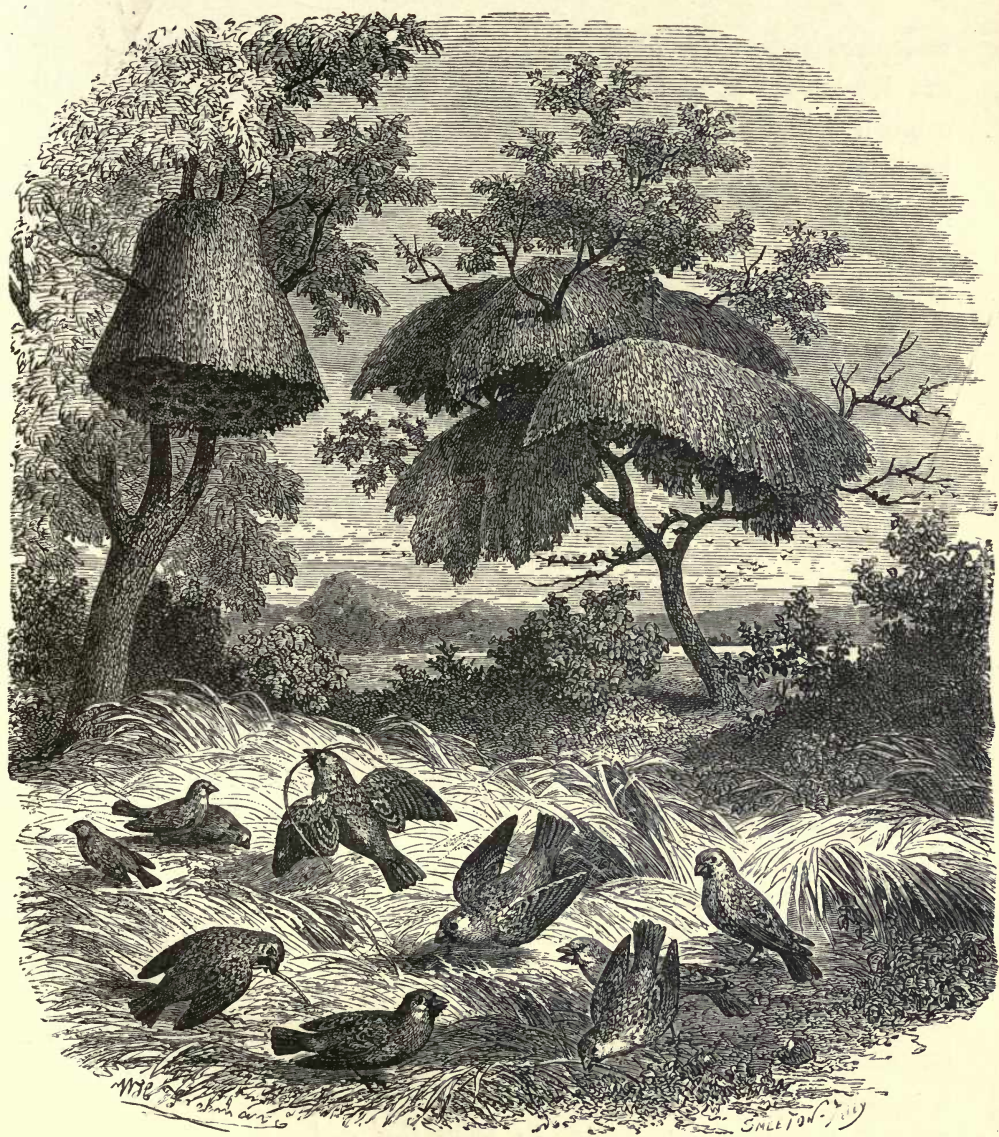
affection for a sheep, and what happened when that sheep was shorn? But this will not assist us here. The weaver bird is not a thief, and the buffalo has no wool about its thick hide in which stolen goods could be received. The real explanation is this. The buffalo is covered with insects that make the principal food of the weaver, and the weaver is really dining when it is hopping and pecking about on the beast's back. The buffalo likes this, as the insects are rather troublesome sometimes; and then the weaver is of another use to the buffalo—it is vigilant and quick at discovering danger. When it rises with that whining sound into the air, it gives warning to the buffalo that danger is near at hand. That peculiar sound it never makes except when there is occasion for alarm; and thence the rapid flight of the animal that it has so kindly warned. There are other beasts that are attended in the same manner by other birds; but I will only mention the crocodile, who has a faithful friend in a little creature called the Zic-zac, who acts as its tooth-pick, flying right into its mouth, and picking out bits of fish from between its teeth.

A most beautiful and well-thatched nest is made by the Mahali weaver birds of South Africa. The bird is only six inches long, and the nest that it makes is so large, and so stout, and so thick, and so strong, that it is surprising to think how so small a creature can have manufactured it. The nest has a short, wide neck, and



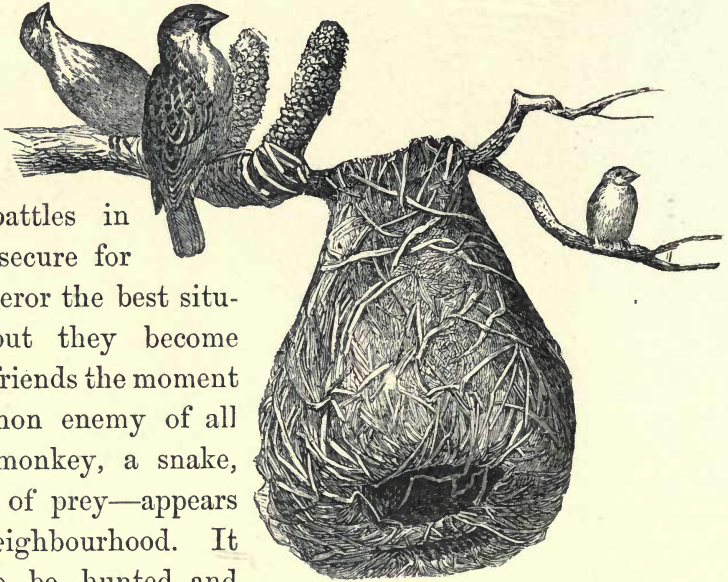
rather a long bottle-shaped body, and the outside is intentionally made as rough as possible. The grass-stalks of which it is woven are extremely thick, and the ends are all left to project outside the webs, and to slope downwards, so as to throw off the rain, like the eaves of a roof. Twenty or thirty of these nests are often found clustered together on the branch of a single tree, which seems to be a convincing proof that these weaver birds are very sociable in their habits.

Then there is a small yellow-coloured kind, that makes the most singular nest of all. It is formed of a sort of grass that we know nothing about here—very narrow, elastic, and yet stiff, something like the twine that we all of us tie up little parcels with; but it is impossible for me to give you any notion of the extraordinary skill with which this grass is woven, and then again interwoven. One really finds it difficult to believe that a bird, with its claws and beak, could produce such a specimen of art as the nest of this yellow-coloured weaver, which in the colonies is called the Oriole. It is a little smaller, perhaps, than a thrush, of a brilliant canary colour all over, except the ends of its wings, which are brown. It is remarkably sociable, and builds in flocks: several hundred nests will often be found on a few trees close together. And yet I hardly know whether it can be called sociable; for though it builds a city, like the inhabitants of a city, it often does not seem to know its next-door neighbour, each family keeping together and enjoying domestic life in a strictly private manner, though two nests are sometimes actually built, like houses in a row, or, at any rate, like those in the suburbs of towns that are called semi-detached houses. They make a great fuss, noise,



SOCIABLE WEAVER BIRDS AND NESTS.

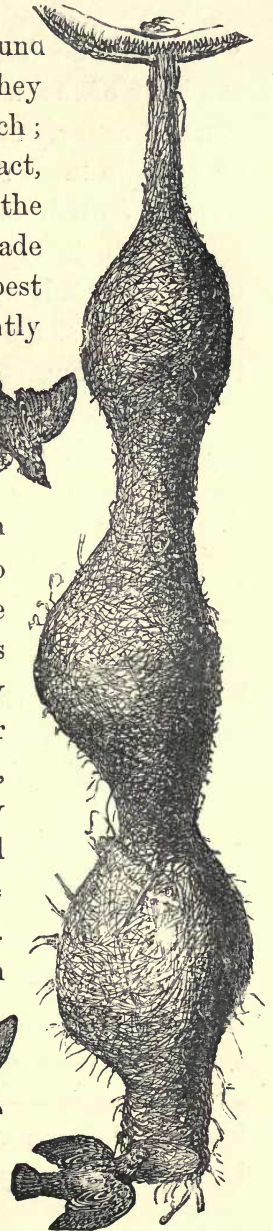
and piece
of work
a b o u t
building,
and enjoy
pitched battles in
order to secure for
the conqueror the best situ-
ations; but they become
excellent friends the moment
the common enemy of all
—say a monkey, a snake,
or a bird of prey—appears
in their neighbourhood. It
is sure to be hunted and



violently chirped at by hundreds of indignant birds, who are united in bonds of fellowship which appear for the moment as closely woven as the links that keep their houses together, till the intruder is put to an ignominious flight. It is fortunate for their children that the house-bonds are, in reality, more closely woven than those of good fellowship, as the latter fall asunder with wonderful rapidity when the foe has disappeared, and the birds are as ready to live apart, or, if necessary, to fight each other, as ever.

After—probably by the ordeal of combat—the different sites have been chosen, and each bird is secure of its own end of a branch (the branches selected are always very slender, and always overhang the water, so that the end of the nest, when completed, only just escapes touching it), the clever little

architects begin by working stout reeds round the branch, so as to hang downwards. They then attach the dome-like roof to the branch; then comes the globular bulb, which is, in fact, the nest; and then the neck, in which the entrance is often found. The upper part is made much the strongest, and of the thickest and best materials, the neck being comparatively slightly built. They always reverse the order in which we erect our houses, as we are obliged to build our walls first, and put the roofs on them afterwards; while these architects first thatch their roofs, and then gradually descend to the lower story of all. To look at these nests swinging lazily backwards and forwards from the end of the branches to which they hang attached, you might fancy them rather insecure nurseries for the little eggs to lie in, as it is evident that the eggs might at any moment be dislodged from the globe-shaped centre, and fall through the neck, out of the hole at the end of it, into the cruel water. But here you may learn the useful lesson never to judge a thing before you really understand it. The weaver birds know better how to take care of their little ones than you think, or, in all probability, than



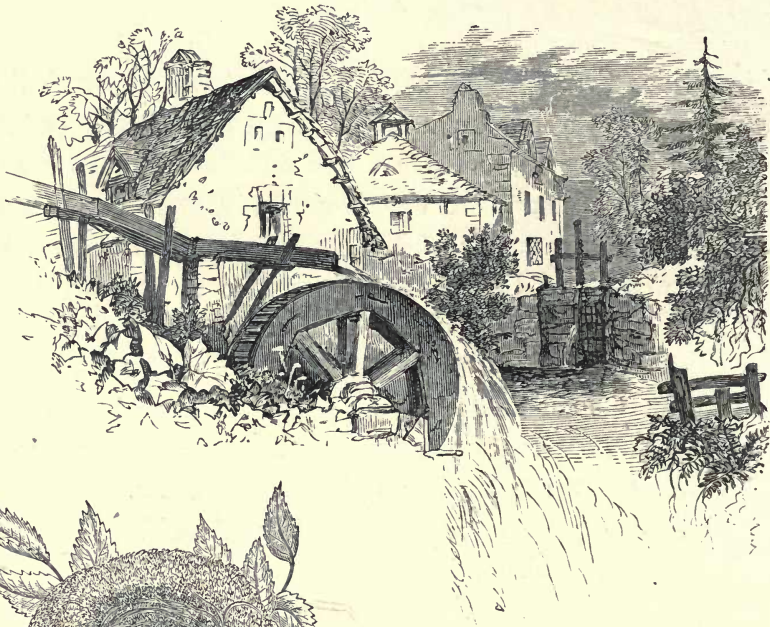
you could do for them. Just where the neck is joined to the body of the nest, is a partition about two inches high, which runs all across, and renders it as impossible for the little birds or eggs to tumble out, as the board across the nursery door does for *its* toddling inhabitants to run away.

The Gold-capped Weaver makes such a strong nest, that you may play at ball with it without in any way hurting the beauty of either its shape or its covering. It is often suspended from two reeds hanging over water, and is then entirely woven out of reeds interlaced together just as neatly, as regularly, and as cleverly, as if it was plaited by human fingers. But inside, none of this strong, hard work is to be seen, only beautiful curtains of leaves overlapping one another, and kept together partly by their own elasticity, and partly by the shape of the chamber.

I spoke of the nests of some of the weaver birds being close together ; but I will tell you now about the weaver birds that build enormous conglomerations of nests, really forming bird cities, and who live in them on the best terms possible, so much so that they are called the Sociable Weaver Birds. They are natives of South Africa, and are little, unpretending creatures, about five inches long, and of a pale buff colour.

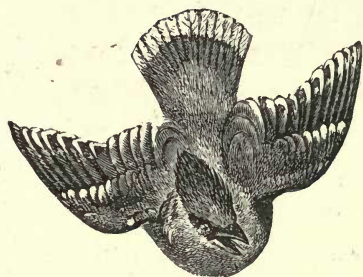
In the parts of South Africa most frequented by bushmen, or Bosjesmens, as they are called, grows a very large, wiry grass, tough and coarse, which colonists call Booschmannie grass, on account of these bushmen, who make their homes in the midst of it. This is the material of which the sociable weaving birds form their nests : they carry it in great quantities to an acacia tree, acacias being celebrated for the hardness of their wood,

and capable, therefore, of bearing a great weight; and there they hang it over a branch which they select with care, as suited to the purpose, and weave and interlace it into a snug little roof, and under this the nests are set closely together till they look like a number of holes pierced in grass, and one begins to wonder as to how each family knows its own house, so exactly alike are all the houses. Two birds begin this extraordinary production by making the roof and one nest, and then two more come and make another nest, and so on, and so on, till the acacia tree contains a large colony; and the nest is one of the most astonishing objects in Nature. The birds return to this city spring after spring, but the old nests are not good enough for them, so they are rejected, and new ones woven; thus each huge nest, if we may so call it, contains a number of deserted and a number of inhabited cells, and every year the size increases, till at last it is big enough to shelter five or six men. In one edifice more than three hundred nests have been counted, each occupied by a couple of old birds and five or six young ones, besides all the deserted nests of previous seasons; and so the sociable weaver birds go on increasing and increasing their city to an enormous size, till at last the weight is too much even for the strong acacia whose branches they wisely chose to support it. But this seldom happens when the city is occupied, but generally in the rainy season, when no birds are in it, for it is then that the grass of which it is built sucks up so much moisture that it becomes too heavy a weight for the supporting branch.



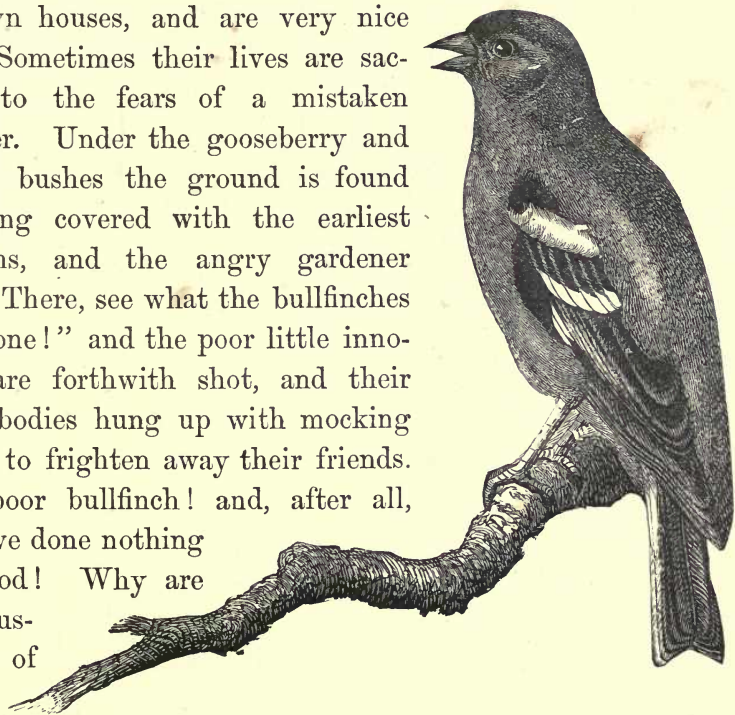
FINCHES.

I AM tired of telling you of the foreign birds who live in hot countries, build wonderful houses or cities, make friends of buffaloes, and have to defend themselves from monkeys and snakes. There is a great deal to say about the sweet little creatures who gladden our own land, and I am determined that I will say a little of that great deal now. I do not admire people who run through France, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland, while they know almost nothing of the beauties of the British Islands; and in order that I may not resemble them, I will utter not a word more at present about weavers and humming-birds, of both of which I have told you so much,



but will talk to you instead about Finchs.

Finches. There are a great many of them, and they are all pretty and amiable birds; there are Greenfinches, and Hawfinches, and Bullfinches, and Goldfinches, and Chaffinches, and other finches besides, I daresay, whose particular names I do not remember at this moment. They are all gay, graceful, and sportive birds, with remarkably pleasant manners; and they live in our own fields and gardens, about our own houses, and are very nice pets. Sometimes their lives are sacrificed to the fears of a mistaken gardener. Under the gooseberry and currant bushes the ground is found in spring covered with the earliest blossoms, and the angry gardener cries, "There, see what the bullfinches have done!" and the poor little innocents are forthwith shot, and their pretty bodies hung up with mocking cruelty to frighten away their friends. Alas, poor bullfinch! and, after all, you have done nothing but good! Why are you suspected of eating



a blossom which you left lying on the earth? And if you did not eat that blossom, what was it that you did eat? Why, the wicked worm that, curled up concealed within it, would, later on, have devoured and destroyed the forming fruit, but which your sharp and friendly beak deprived of life and destructive power, for which very kindly act, poor little martyr! you have been ruthlessly murdered; and when the blossoms again come upon the gooseberry and currant bushes from which the worm has been taken, the gardener rejoices in his crops, and smiles to think that there are no bullfinches to scatter them on the earth. Foolish fellow! there are no

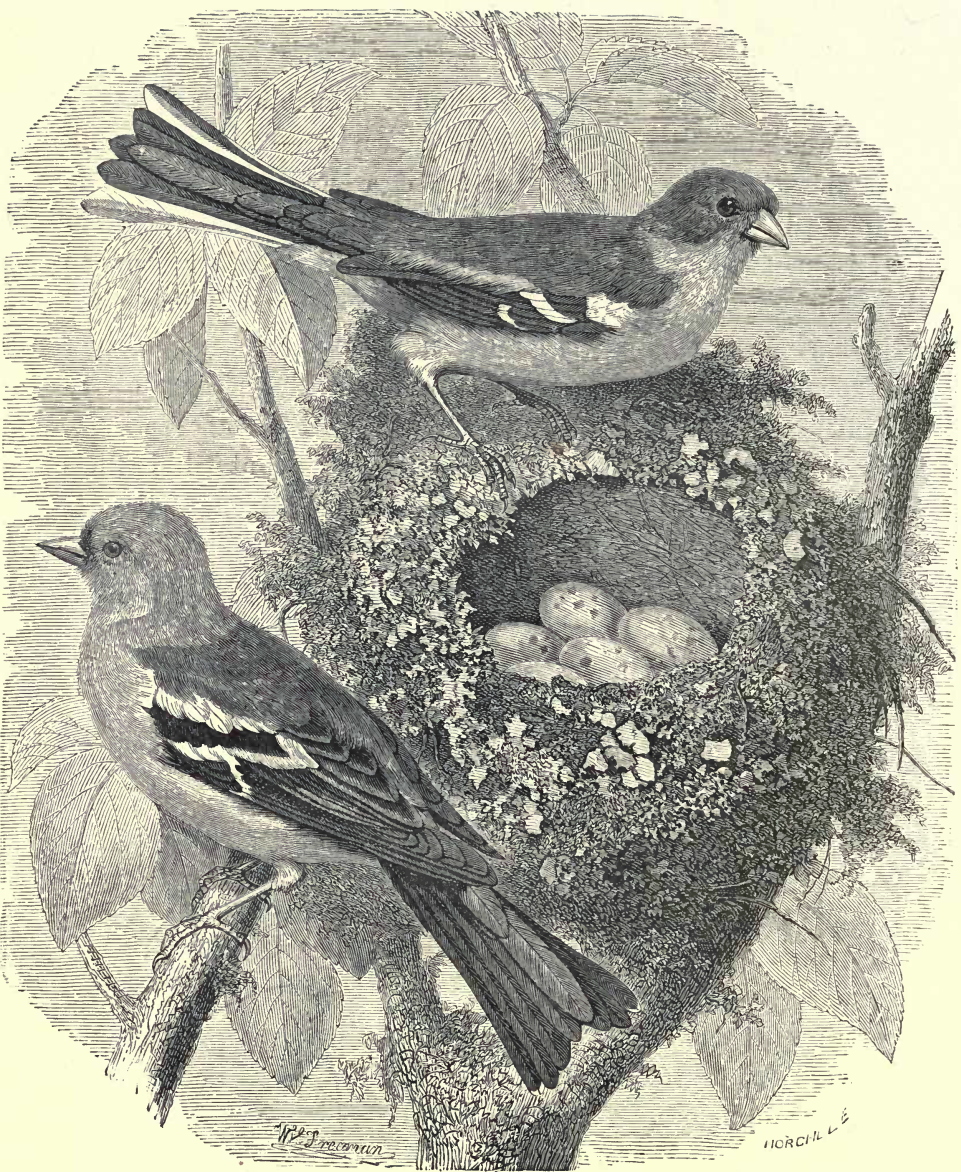
worms within them, therefore the bullfinches would have left them alone. Ungrateful man! but for those murdered birds, your bushes, full of worms, would have borne no fruit!

The bullfinch is really one of the most beautiful birds we possess, with a lovely red breast and exquisite plumage. It puffs itself out in a pretty and comfortable manner, holds its head awry in charming bird fashion, and every time it utters its sweet, plaintive note, gives a coquettish flirt with its tail. The chaffinch, which is, perhaps, the commonest of all



the family, is not so pretty as most of the others, though its colouring is not to be despised; and it is such a merry, happy creature, that the French have a saying—"As gay as a chaffinch." I don't think that the clear French air, which is supposed to make the inhabitants of France more cheerful than we islanders, has anything to do with this. I will venture to say that an English chaffinch is as gay as a French one. All the finches are remarkable for cleanliness and neatness in their personal appearance, but the chaffinch is perhaps the most so of all. It is always washing itself; even in the coldest winter, when pools are covered with ice, it hunts about till it finds some nook or sunny place where a bath is available, and there it seems thoroughly to enjoy one; and after doing this flies off to a frost-covered tree, where it may be seen pluming and preening itself as gaily as if it was in the middle of summer. It is a very useful bird as a sentinel, for it utters a note of alarm, and gives warning of approaching danger to its feathered friends, who all fly away when that well-known signal is heard, thus acting the part for other birds that the weaver bird I told you about does for buffaloes. All finches are tamable, and are clever at learning anything, but I think





THE CHAFFINCH.

the goldfinch and bullfinch are the most so of any. The greenfinches, or green linnets, are shy, and yet easily tamed. If placed, while young, in a cage, they become fond of their captivity, and if allowed to fly out of doors in the day time, will return at night, and voluntarily roost in what is to them, evidently, a happy home, not a prison. They are very affectionate, and the following story is such a pretty one that I will tell it to you word for word as I found it in a book:—

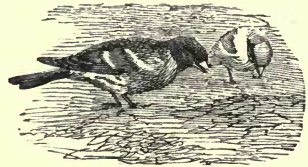
“One day several little nestlings were caught in a field adjoining the garden; they were scarcely fledged, and could not fly. We put them in a small cage, which we placed in a low hedge bordering the field in which they were captured. It was not long before they were discovered by the parents, who immediately visited them, and brought them food. These marks of affection interested us; and fearing that where they were placed the young nestlings might become a prey to prowling cats, we gave them their liberty. The parents, however, appeared not satisfied as to the safety of their young ones, for, a short time after, they were observed in the act of carrying one of them away; they were bearing it between them, at about the elevation of a foot and a half from the ground, and in this manner were seen to carry it about fifty yards, namely, from the spot where the young birds were set at liberty to the end of a gravel path, where they entered a clump of fir-trees. In what manner the parents supported the nestling was not very apparent, as the observers did not like to follow too quickly, lest the old birds should relinquish their burden; but from the close vicinity of the three during their flight, it appeared as if they must have upheld it by means of their beaks. The other



nestlings were conveyed away in the same manner."

Some people believe that no birds sing as they do sing from its being their nature to sing in that particular way, but simply from imitating their parents. I tell you at once that this is not my opinion ; and if it was true, I wonder why all cuckoos say "Cuckoo," instead of twittering like hedge-sparrows, or tra-la-ing like pipits ?

However, it is a fact that many birds have the power of singing like other birds if properly taught, and this is especially the case with some of the finches, who, having naturally only rather a hoarse chirp as their own note, have, by being placed in the same cage with canaries, learned to sing as well as that lovely-voiced, golden-coated king of little birds himself. The linnet (which is a finch) has a charming song of its own, but has also a great power of imitating other birds, and can be taught to sing a little like a nightingale merely by hearing a constant repetition of the nightingale's song. It can also be taught to speak, as it is asserted many other birds can, besides the parrot. There was a celebrated talking linnet at Kensington, who used to repeat the words "Pretty boy" quite distinctly. Linnets are very gentle, easily tamed, and extremely affectionate ; they are lovers of beautiful scenery, always choosing the fairest and most flowery places to build their nests in ; they are also clever in other ways besides singing and talking. I



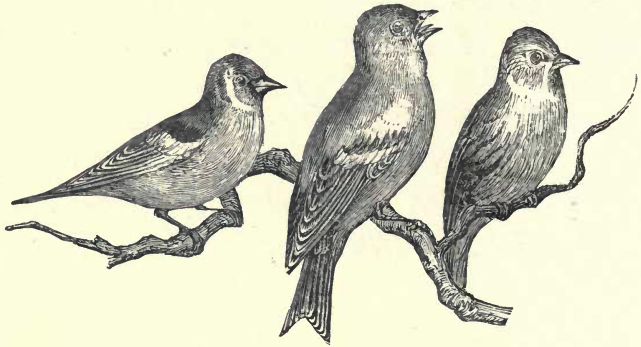
have read a charming anecdote of a linnet that I will tell you now. A gentleman was passing a furze bush when a linnet fell suddenly down, as if in a fit, at a little distance from him. He ran forward to pick it up, but it raised itself, fluttered painfully on, and then fell again; and this it did several times, till it had lured him a considerable distance from the furze bush; then, as he himself describes, "it rose up and flew away, twittering (laughing at me, as I discovered afterwards) like the pertest and strongest linnet in the world." He immediately suspected what it was about, and running back to the furze bush, searched it, and discovered the linnet's nest, with five eggs, quite warm, as the dear little mother had only just left them, to flutter and fall, and draw his attention away from her treasures, and that, too, at the risk of her own life, for at any moment he might have knocked her down and killed her with his stick. Partridges will practise just the same loving

manceuvre, as is well known to sportsmen; but it is not generally known that dear little linnets are quite as clever, affectionate, and faithful.



Birds in cages differ in many ways from those that live in all the natural freedom of out-of-

doors. The difference in food, makes a considerable difference in their colour, the plumage of captive birds being seldom as gay

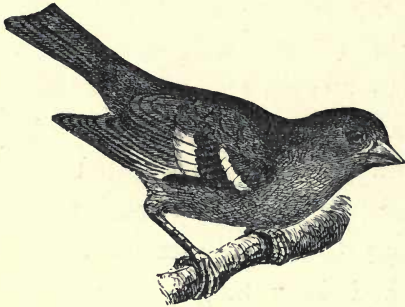


and brilliant as that of the free. It is a fact, that a goldfinch, old enough to have come to its full colours, and as bright and pretty a creature as a goldfinch always is, having been caught and put in a cage, at the end of the first year lost most of its beauty, and was but a dingy-looking fellow. Every year he grew darker and darker, and by the time four years had passed, he was coal-black. His food had been almost entirely hemp-

seed, a great favourite with most birds, but from its heating properties, generally given only as a tit-bit. I once fed two canaries chiefly on hemp-seed, believing it was to them what venison and turtle is to us, and having determined to treat my birds as well as birds could be treated. They were very happy, and ate voraciously, but, alas! they both died of fits in the course of a few weeks, and I was told



afterwards that the heating nature of the hemp-seed was the cause of the untimely deaths of my little favourites. They did not live long enough to put on mourning for my folly, as the poor goldfinch did in grief at his own captivity. These delightful little goldfinches and bullfinches will not only learn to sing various tunes, but will actually teach them to you or to me if we are willing to learn from them. I have heard of a goldfinch that had been taught to whistle a tune beautifully. I don't know whether it was "God Save the Queen," "Rule Britannia," or "Tommy, Make Room for your Uncle," or what it was, and it does not much matter, for, at any rate, it was a tune, and this tune it endeavoured to teach to its master with the most praiseworthy perseverance. It never tired of whistling it, and if its master made a mistake, which sometimes, perhaps, he pretended to do, in order to see what would happen, the goldfinch got desperately angry, hopped about indignantly, and fluttering itself out into a round ball, uttered angry "clucks." When it recovered its temper, it went back again to the exact note where the provoking pupil had gone wrong, and commenced whistling it, with care and precision, over again. There is hardly anything that goldfinches and bullfinches, but more especially, I believe, the former, cannot be taught to do when their education is attempted in earnest. Their extreme docility and gay, elastic spirits stand them in good stead here, for there can be no doubt that these qualities are quite as useful when you want to learn anything, as the most brilliant abilities, not that our little friends do not possess abilities as brilliant as their plumage, for I really believe they do. They



can be taught to draw water with a small bucket, that they may drink and bathe; and to open the box in which the seed is placed when they want to dine; but this is not all. A goldfinch will carry a gun over its shoulder, point and fire it. It

will fall down and pretend to be dead, and allow itself to be handled and pulled about, and even dangled by its feet head downwards, without showing the least sign of life.

I have heard of two goldfinches that started out to fight a duel, and meeting beak to beak, each turned round, took six paces, and then again turning, presented their pistols, and fired. One fell as if dead, the other hopped over to it, and pulling and pushing it about with claws and beak, showed every sign of regret and sorrow when he found that he had shot his antagonist, and on this performance the curtain fell, amid the

loud applause of the audience, for, of course, these goldfinches were trained actors, and this duel was fought on a very tiny platform or theatre erected for the purpose.

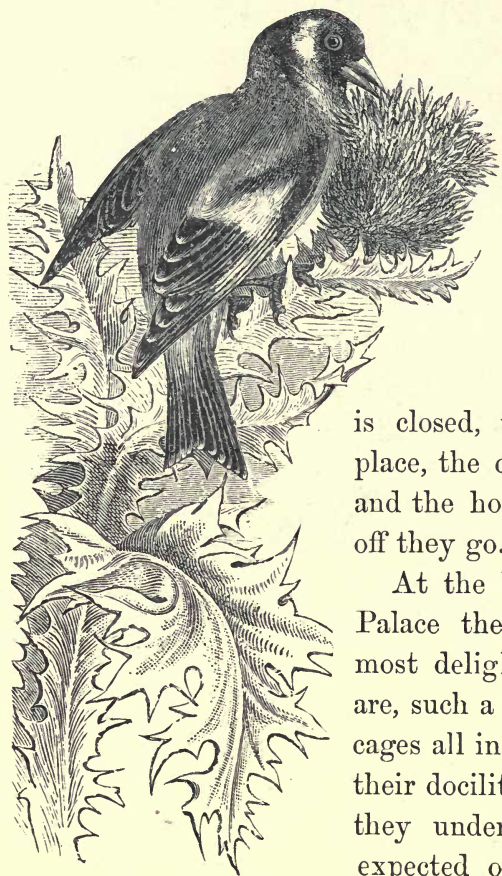
Then some of you may have seen those wonderful performing goldfinches, where a little





GOLDFINCH.

carriage is drawn by two who act as horses, two more as coachman and footman sit on the box, and one, the mistress of the fair equipage, reclines within; the coachman cracks his whip, and off goes the vehicle. After a time it stops, the footman hops down, opens the door with his claw, and presenting a wing, the lady within rests on it, and steps out with languid grace. She hops up and down, evidently on



an esplanade or public walk of some kind, while her carriage and obsequious servants await her pleasure. Then she returns to them, down hops the footman, presents a wing, and into the carriage hops the fashionable mistress; the door

is closed, the footman resumes his place, the coachman cracks his whip, and the horses starting at full trot, off they go.

At the bird show at the Crystal Palace the goldfinches behave in a most delightful manner; there they are, such a number of them, in their cages all in a row, and probably from their docility and sweet good nature, they understand that something is expected of them; and so they sit,

with beaks wide open, pouring out their pretty, pleasant songs. I am sure birds are happy when they sing—at least, they sing to express the strongest feelings they possess, and a bird's strongest feelings are, I am sure, generally joyous. Certainly



when a nightingale is first imprisoned, it sings wildly and passionately, and dashes itself desperately against the bars of its cage. Poor little enchantress! I *am* sorry for it. I never like to think of a nightingale in captivity.

These delightful little birds, the finches, build delightful little nests, one and all. The chaffinch fixes on the fork of

a tree or bush, where several branches being thrown out, an actual cup is formed, where the nest can be snugly placed; while the goldfinch selects the end of a long branch, and its little home sways about, and dances merrily in the breeze. It is rather a shallow nest, but the edges are thickened and turned slightly inwards, so that however much the nest is tilted up and down as the branch moves, the eggs are safely retained within it. Is it not a wonderful instinct that makes the little bird do this in preparation for the yet unlaidd treasures? The chaffinch's nest is deep in proportion to its width. It is made of wool matted curiously together, and so interwoven with moss, lichens, spider-webs, and cottony down, that an outside is produced actually undistinguishable from the branches of the tree amid which it lies. They are stuck



about it in the most ingenious manner, and make it, even when subjected to minute investigation, appear like a natural excrescence. It is lined with hair, arranged methodically, so as to form a cup, in which the pretty eggs repose. Horses' hair, and the fur of other animals is extensively used for this purpose, but the hair of the cow is evidently the favourite, and it is amusing to see the chaffinch, too good-natured to pluck the hairs from the cows themselves, flying over the fields, and searching for them in the

crevices of trees and posts against which the cattle rub themselves, and then flying off again with the discovered treasures to its nest, which, when completed, is very strong, and very elastic. The



goldfinch prefers vegetable down or sheep's wool for the lining of its nest to hair; and though it uses the same material as the chaffinch for the walls, it weaves them in so deftly, that the outside is quite smooth. The eggs are white, tinged with blue, and with small purple spots over them. A pair of goldfinches, with their nest and eggs, make one of the prettiest groups in the world.

The bullfinch is much more capricious than either chaffinch or goldfinch in the site it selects; sometimes it is a tree, but more frequently a bush, and as it builds nearer the ground, by the curious rule I have mentioned before, the nest is not half so pretty or nicely made as the others. It is loosely knit, shallow, and not neatly rounded, the structure being of twigs, with delicate fibrous roots flimsily woven through them.





THE STONE-CHAT.

THE Stone-chat is a very pretty bird, of a lively, busy, bustling character. It frequents almost the whole of Europe, and many parts of Africa and Asia also. In our islands it remains all the year round, or if that is a doubtful fact as far as England is concerned, it undoubtedly does so in Ireland. It is about five inches long, and has a black back, and a breast of an orange-brown colour. Its song is plaintive, sweet, and low. The ordinary note being like "Chat, chat," and some people choosing to say it sounds like two stones struck together, it is supposed that it is from thence its name of stone-chat has been derived; but I am more inclined to think that it is because it utters its "Chat, chat" from wild, stony, uncultivated places. It frequents

commons, and the sides of cliffs, moors, and heaths—anywhere, in fact, where underwood, wild broom and gorse, with its lovely golden blossoms, can be found; and I must say that I admire its taste, for anything more lovely than the flower-covered commons that are still to be met with in Old England, it would be difficult to see—long may they be kept sacred from the ruthless hands of the cultivator, undivided by hedges, and undesecrated by the plough! Long may the pretty gay stone-chat find an English common to reside in! It is a clever, merry bird, and may be watched for a long time in vain with the hope that it may lead you to its nest. On the contrary, by many a sly manœuvre, it will take you *from* that beloved home, but never draw your attentions *to* it in an unguarded moment, for its moments are never unguarded when it believes there is danger abroad for its young. It is a restless, noisy creature, seldom remaining still, or keeping in the same place; now up, now down, now on the top of a bush or stone, then darting to





THE STONE-CHAT.

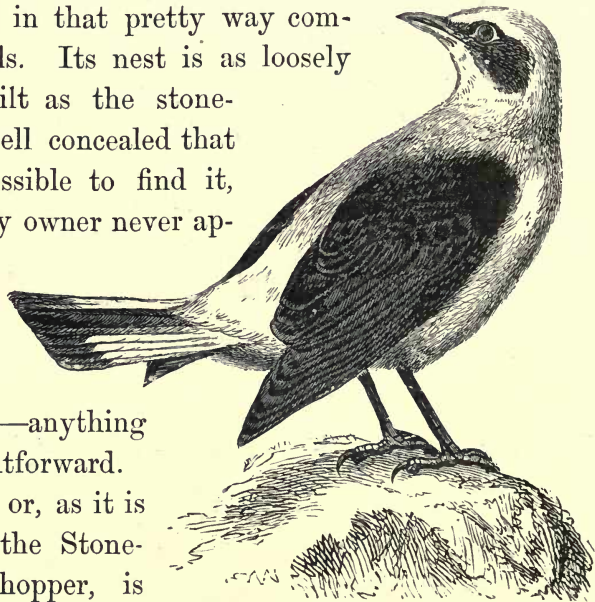
the ground, where, however, it does not remain an instant; then up again to a twig, where it hangs till the twig bends with its weight; then off again to another bush; and so on during the whole of its brisk, busy day.

It builds its nest in all manner of places, but all of the same kind, and all of a kind where it is almost impossible to detect it. Sometimes, but not often, it may be found in a hedge, if there be one near the wild places it affects, but generally it is in a furze bush, or in a tuft of thick high heather, or in grass and herbage, at the foot of a furze bush, or any other wild, tempting-looking bush that grows near. The nest itself is larger than one would expect to find it, and seems larger even than it is, on account of its being so loosely and carelessly put together. It is composed of the materials nearest at hand—grass and heath, and fibrous roots; and then it is lined with hair or wool. Five or six eggs are laid, of greenish-blue colour, speckled with reddish-brown; and the parents rear their little ones in one of these wild places, leading, I am sure, a healthy, happy life. Sometimes the small creatures may be seen running out from their bush to be fed, but retreating again timidly at the least disturbance. Rarely are the nests found near towns or houses, for, as a general rule, they are country birds, and would hardly know how to behave in our gardens, missing the sweet freedom of their own breezy commons.

The Whinchat only visits our islands in the summer. It is a beautiful bird, and always welcome when it comes. It frequents the same places as the stone-chat, and builds in the lower parts of furze bushes; but it is also fond of haw-

thorn hedges, where it places its nest, and it has no objection to fields and pasture-land, not, apparently, being quite as wild in its taste as the little stone-chat. It has a sweet, melodious song when at ease; and when alarmed, has a curious cry of "Peep, tick, tick, tick," each syllable repeated from one to six times. I have heard, that when brought up from the nest, it has been discovered that it imitates the songs of other birds, even daring to attempt to reproduce the delicious strains of the thrush or the nightingale. But I can hardly believe in such presumption on the part of the little whin-chat, and still less can I imagine that if it *did* attempt to imitate those heavenly harmonies, it would prove successful enough to have its song recognised as what it was intended to represent. When it sings it shakes its little tail, and slightly upraises its wings, in that pretty way common to many birds. Its nest is as loosely and carelessly built as the stone-chat's, and is so well concealed that it is almost impossible to find it, especially as the sly owner never approaches it direct, but goes towards it in a round-about way, up and down, in and out, zig-zig—anything rather than straightforward.

The Wheatear, or, as it is sometimes called, the Stone-checker, or Clod-hopper, is



rather a larger and not so bright-coloured a bird as the others. They are found over most parts of Europe, but prefer temperate climates, and they arrive rather late in the season, and often set off on their winter journey as early as August and September. They appear to cross the seas to us during the night, as they hardly ever arrive in England later than nine o'clock in the morning; and when they do come, the poor little travellers seem very tired. They often perch on fishing-boats to rest by the way. They do not generally appear in flocks, but in pairs. A few of them are said to winter in the south of England, and a couple hopping gaily about, once astonished Hyde Park by appearing there in November. In Ireland they arrive early, and leave early, and make the mountain sides, turf bogs, and sandhills gay while they remain, and they also frequent the sea coasts, and build their nests among rocks, in the ruins of old stone walls, and such like places. About the Giant's Causeway, on the Irish coast, there are a great number; for while the stone-chat shows its taste by selecting the loveliest English commons for its residence, the wheatear is equally fastidious, and fixes on the finest wild scenery in Ireland. Here their nests are built among the rocks, and they are watched with great interest flying down to them from considerable heights, and perching on the rocks near them, "the body drooping below the wings, and the breasts puffed out."





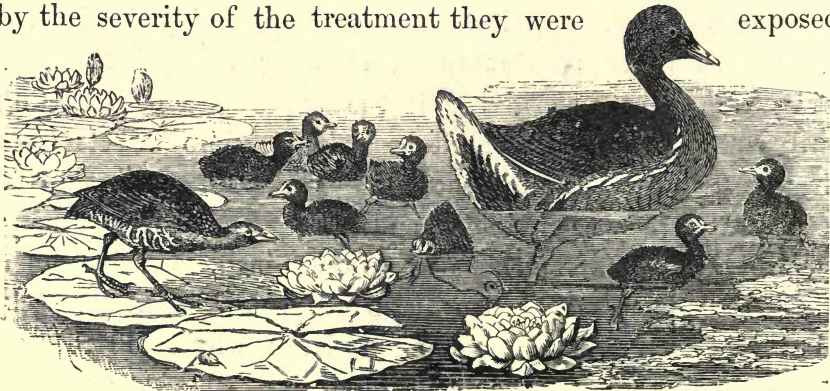
THE MOOR-HEN.

I CAN'T think why those birds who possess two names—moor-hen and water-hen—are almost always called by the former. It is quite true that they are to be found on moors, but not on what we generally think of by that name—not on the high forest moorlands, only on watery moors, that more deserve to be called marshes than moors ; whilst it has truly been

said, "that there is not a river, lake, canal, brook, or even pond, which moor-hens do not either inhabit all the year round, or occasionally visit." A moor-cock is a game bird, and as that title is therefore appropriated, the cock of the moor-hen is degraded or complimented—take it which way you like—by being designated moor-hen also. This does seem rather ridiculous, it must be admitted; and I suppose it is to avoid this absurdity that a new name has recently been given to the moor-hen—gallinule, or little fowl. This is a pretty name, and one which is suitable, for moor-hens are small, and they are also easily tamed, and are domestic sort of creatures, that would take kindly to the diminutive, generally considered as it is to be a pet name.

The gallinule, then, for so will I call it, is an accomplished bird. It not only swims and dives, but it walks remarkably well also, which is the case only with water birds of the class called waders, to which it belongs. If it is at home swimming and diving on the surface of a smooth lake or flowing river, it is no less so when it steps ashore. It walks nimbly on, sometimes easily, sometimes very rapidly, and jerks its tail gaily with every step it takes, showing the bright white feathers beneath, and giving it the appearance of strutting airily; and with its coral-red beak it pecks up insects from the grass, and makes altogether quite an imposing object in the scene. It is very easily tamed, and not the least afraid of man; I have heard of its picking up crumbs inside the hall of a gentleman's house, and when disturbed, looking wistfully back, as much as to say, "I was doing no harm, why could you not leave me alone?" and then continuing its meal.

Their nests are large, strong, and roughly made. They are built among rushes and reeds, or the roots of trees; and the great object of the builder seems to be, as no doubt it is, to conceal them, for it builds them of rushes and flags, and very often spreads these about all round in a curious way, so as to cover a much greater space than the nest itself, large as it is, and so to draw attention from the fact that a nest is there at all. But with all these precautions the nest is soon discovered, for it is on ground but roughly covered by reeds or rushes, and it is very loosely attached to any support, so that it is easily blown away, and the family is sometimes hatched and reared on the water itself. Occasionally the nest for the eggs is built in a tree some distance from the water. It is difficult to know why this is ever done, whether it is from a mere whim or vagary, or whether the builders have some potent reason for the act deep and hidden in their minds. Perhaps they have suffered in some previous season from the insecurity of their home. It may have been disengaged and blown away, as we have just stated; been buffeted about, and the eggs, or young birds even, injured by the severity of the treatment they were exposed





W. G. Freeman

SHEPHERD

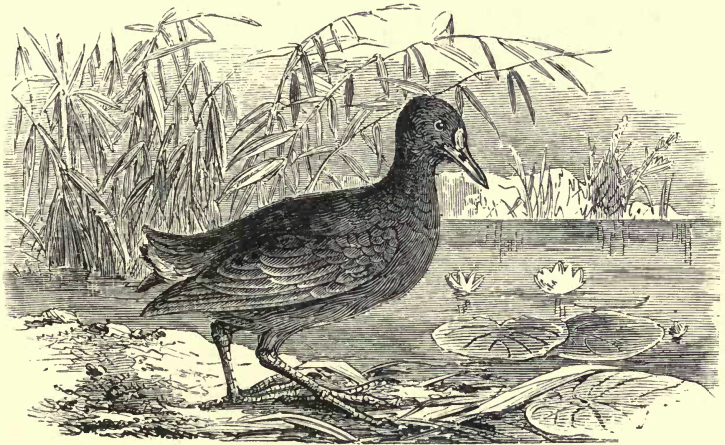
MOOR-HEN AND NEST.

to. The parents, terrified and perplexed by all they had gone through, may have determined to avoid similar dangers, and so they place the nest safely in a tree, as much as a quarter of a mile (as they have been known to do) from the water. When this is the case, while the hen sits on her precious eggs, the cock generally forms *another* nest by the pond or river; and after the young birds are old enough, he has been actually *seen* conveying them in his claws from their safe haven in the tree to the element in which they delight, and there is the new nest ready for them to sleep in at night now they are old enough to do so without the same danger that they must have run while they were only eggs. This is certainly a sensible and comfortable arrangement, and I should very much like to know exactly what the birds are thinking about while they make the plan, and carry it out in all its various particulars, so cleverly.

The pike is a terrible and much to be dreaded enemy to young gallinules. It darts up from below to the surface of the water, and opening its big mouth, the poor little thing is destroyed before it is even aware that it is in danger.

I wonder why no water birds have pleasant voices. The gallinules certainly are no exception to this rule. Their note is something like the very hoarse bark of a dog, with quite as much croak as bark in it. It is sometimes as incessant as that of the cuckoo in early spring. If your attention is drawn by this strange cry, and you endeavour to find the bird, you will have considerable difficulty in doing so. Should it discover your wishes, you may be sure it will evade you in some way or other; if not by hiding among the rushes, by diving under the water, beneath which it can remain unharmed for a wonder-

fully long time if there are weeds at the bottom for it to cling among. I have even heard that it will trick you in the following curious manner:—You see it at some distance on the surface of the water, when, evidently alarmed at your approach, it suddenly disappears. If you search for it, you certainly will not look for it nearer to yourself than when you first saw it, as you suppose the frightened creature will get as far away as possible. Not a bit of it. What it has done is this: diving below, so as to be entirely concealed, it has made its way under the water towards you, and is now lying close beneath your feet, clinging with its claws to the mud and rushes, and with nothing out of the water but the tip of its sly little beak. And if that is not very clever of the gallinules, I should like to know what is!





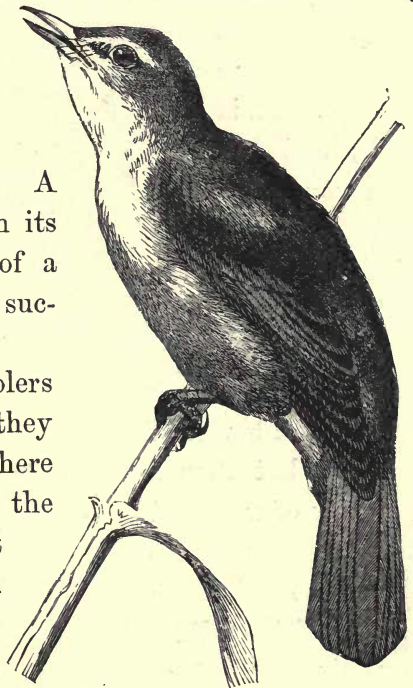
WARBLERS.



“EAR me! Are not all singing birds warblers?” perhaps you will ask—“little warblers, as they are often called?” Yes, of course they are; but there are some birds that bear especially the name Warblers, as others do robin, sparrow, or finch, and it is about these I am going to talk to you now. Not that I shall have something to say of all the warblers, for there are too many of them; but I can tell you about some of the commonest and best known. Let me see, there is the Dartford Warbler (a

rare kind in England, and so called because the first recognised was at Dartford), and the Blue-throated, and the Wood, the Willow, and the Melodious Willow, the Sedge, the Rufous Sedge, the Reed, and the Great Sedge, the Garden, the Orphean, and the Grasshopper, and how many more I wonder, don't you? They are all of them very nice little birds, I think, and they have pretty songs, most of them, and if they have not, they can learn pretty songs. Some of them—I think the sedge and the reed—take kindly to confinement, and are quite happy when brought up in cages. They are quickly tamed, and they sing like different birds, imitating the lark and the linnet, the robin, the sparrow, and even the thrush. Of course, it is only when kept in a cage that people become thoroughly acquainted with these imitative talents in birds, but it is not only in cages that they display them. A warbler has been heard, safe in its bush, imitating the cackling of a neighbouring poultry-yard very successfully.

The Sedge and Reed Warblers are alike in many respects: they both like the edges of water, where they build their nests among the plants that grow there; but the former is commoner in England than the latter. No reed warbler was ever recog-



nised in England till the year 1785, nearly a hundred years ago, but that is not any reason for supposing that none had ever visited us before that date. People are more observant in many ways nowadays than they were in our grandfathers' time. The nests of these birds are very different, and the Reed has a great advantage here over the Sedge Warbler. The nest of the latter is near the ground, raised from it by rushes or other coarse herbage. It is well made, and stronger than you would expect from the size of the bird or the materials he uses. The framework of it is literally only made of the blades of grasses; but then a quantity of wool and hair are woven into these, so that a strong little edifice is attained at last, as



well as an extremely narrow one. Most small birds make their nests in the form of a cup, and the sedge warbler is no exception to this—at least he is not if you judge only by the outside of his nest; but look inside, and you will find that it is a very small and shallow cup, half of its size being

in the thickness of the strong, narrow walls, and especially of the floor, intended, doubtless, to keep out the cold and wet inseparable from the damp situations selected.

Now let us turn our attentions to the very beautiful nest of the Reed Warbler. This pretty little bird selects three or four reeds to support its nest (thence comes its name, of course); it generally suspends it about three feet above the ground, but it has been found at an elevation of nine or ten feet. It is





THE SEDGE WARBLER AND ITS NEST.

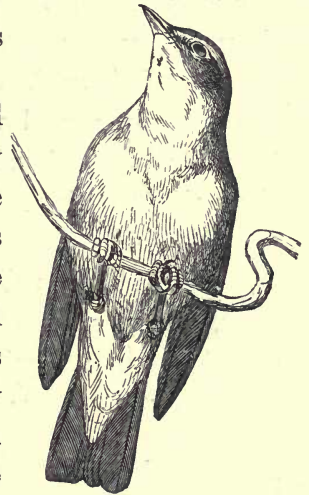
really a most artistic piece of work, and is tied round these rushes with long grasses and sedges in an extraordinary manner.

There is a loose foundation of long stalks, lichen, grass, dry leaves, and wool, and resting firmly placed in this, yet capable of being taken out of it without injury to either, is what may be called the nest itself, lined thickly

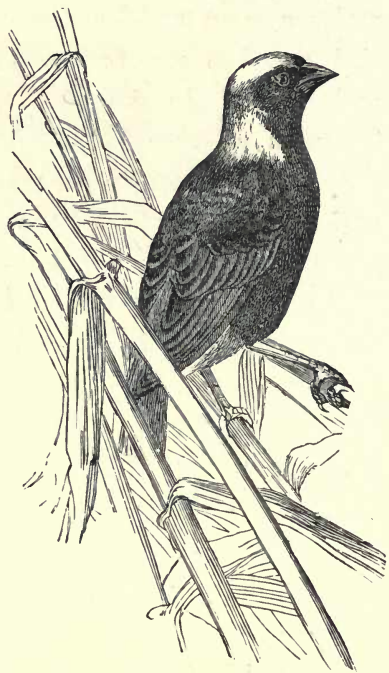


with, and indeed almost entirely made of, the blossoms of the reed. The whole thing is exceedingly narrow and deep, being often five inches deep outside, so that it can sway about on the reeds uninjured. As the frail yet seldom broken supports bend pliantly down to the very edge of the water, the nest sways and bends with them till the mouth, with the parent bird sitting happily and safely within, actually lies on the surface of the water, and rises again, reeds and nest uninjured.

Very wonderful twin nests of reed warblers were once discovered. They were suspended between six reeds, the two centre reeds being used by both birds alike, and ran through both nests. The nests were neatly built, and differed in no particular from ordinary ones—just as long and as narrow, just as carefully woven, and as prettily lined with reed blossoms, and swinging about among the

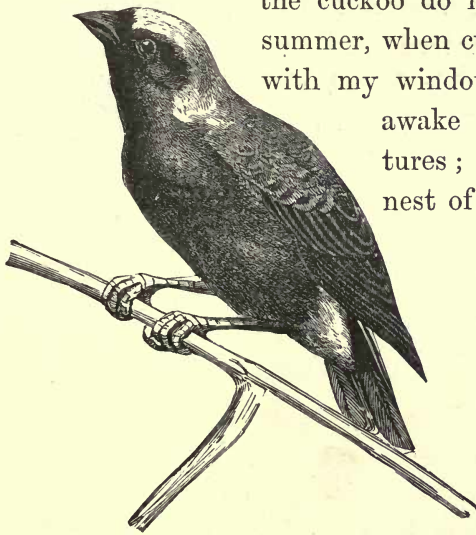


rushes just as easily as if they stood alone. In one nest were four eggs, and in the other three. It is to be hoped that when the little people made their appearance, they would prove to be possessed of good sense and good temper, so that they might live happily in a proximity that is not always pleasant where those delightful qualities do not abound. Twin nests of this description have been found built by the warblers in low evergreen bushes, which they seldom select for their homes, and therefore, perhaps,



like to persuade a friend to keep them in countenance when they do so; but this is the only instance I have heard of a twin nest erected amid rushes. Wherever the reed warbler does take up its quarters, it is found in great abundance. It is rather shy, but so fond of chattering that it really does not seem able to hold its tongue; and while it conceals itself in herbage, or among low bushes, its loud, and, I am afraid I must admit, harsh "Chree, chree, treet," is ever to be heard. When frightened it makes a sound which it is said can only be thus expressed, "k-u-r-r-r," with as many more r's, I suppose, as anybody likes to add to those I have already given. It is always running about, and is as nimble and active as a bird can be. The same

may be said of the habits and ways of the sedge warbler, which will play at hide and seek, in and out of bushes and grass, in a surprising manner, and all to draw away the attention from its nest of any one who has ventured nearer to it than it approves of. These warblers have the same clever way of pretending to be ill or hurt, falling down, and then fluttering away in order to persuade you that its nest is anywhere in the world but where it is. It is extraordinary how many birds do this. While I speak of the resemblance of the sedge and reed warblers in so many ways, I must not omit to give the former credit for having a much better voice than the latter. It is a very powerful voice to proceed from such a tiny throat, and though rather shrill, is not without music in it. It sings till twelve o'clock at night in the summer, and sometimes, indeed, till morning, as I have heard



the cuckoo do in my own home. One hot summer, when cuckoos abounded, and I slept with my windows open, I have been kept awake by these pertinacious creatures; and talking of cuckoos, the nest of the sedge or reed warbler is, sometimes chosen by them to deposit their eggs in. I will give you an instance of this in the words of the gentleman who observed it, Mr. Thomas:—"At the latter end of July, while reading in my garden, which adjoins a

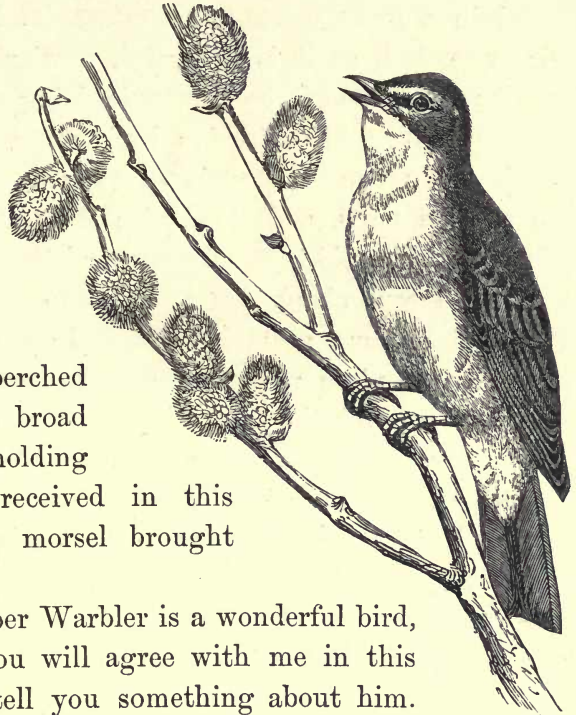


market garden, I was agreeably surprised to see a young cuckoo, nearly full grown, alight on the railings between the two, not

more than a dozen yards from where I was sitting.

Anxious to see what bird had reared this cuckoo, I silently watched his movements, and had not waited more than a moment, when a reed warbler flew to the cuckoo, who, crouching down with his breast close to the rail, and fluttering his wings, opened wide his orange-coloured mouth to receive the insect his foster-mother had brought him. This done, the reed warbler flew away for a fresh supply of food. The difference in the size of the two birds was great—it was like a pigeon feeding a giant. While the reed warbler was absent, the cuckoo shuffled along the rail, and hopped upon a slender post to which it was nailed, and which projected about eight inches above the rail. The reed warbler soon returned with more food, and alighted close to the cuckoo, but on the rail beneath him; she then began to stretch herself to the utmost to give him the food, but

was unable to reach the cuckoo's mouth, who, like a simpleton, threw his head back, with his mouth wide open, as before. The reed warbler, by no means at a loss, perched upon the cuckoo's broad back, who, still holding back his head, received in this singular way the morsel brought for him."



The Grasshopper Warbler is a wonderful bird, and I am sure you will agree with me in this opinion when I tell you something about him. In the first place, his note is exactly like that of a grasshopper, from which, of course, he has had this name given him. Now, perhaps it will be sufficient oddity in a bird to chirp like a grasshopper, but I have something odder to tell you. The grasshopper warbler is a ventriloquist. You may stand in a meadow and fancy you are hearing numbers of grasshoppers chirping loudly all round you, first in one direction and then in another, first here and then there, while in reality it is one little bird in the hedge just behind you who is doing it all.

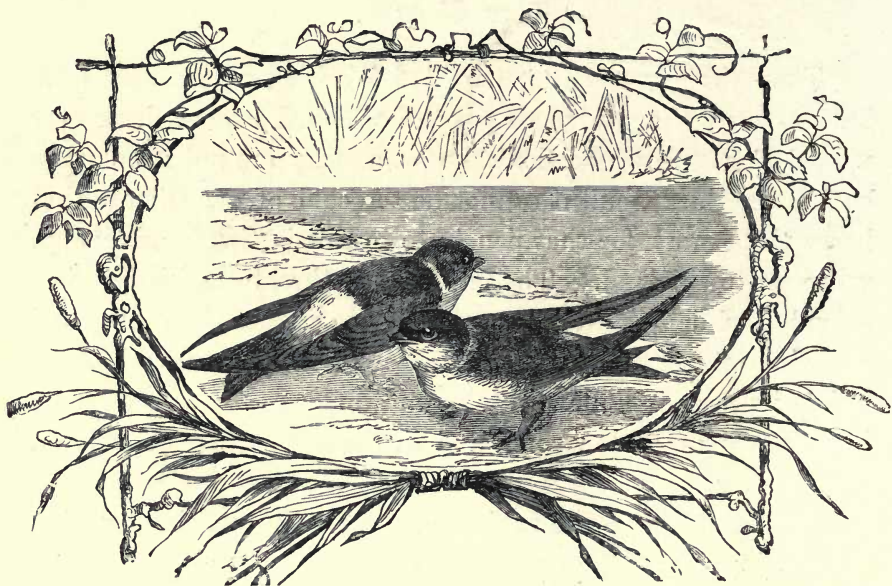
It creeps through hedges like a mouse, and runs along the

ground in a graceful manner tossing its head. Its nest is difficult to find, as it is a careful, cautious little thing, and is anxious to conceal it, and clever in doing so. It is generally placed on the ground, hidden by herbage, grass, or bushes, shaped like a cup, and made of grass woven firmly together with a little moss, and lined with finer kinds of the same. It is ensconced amid tufts of grass, and the bird makes no way to it, but creeps along like a mouse to and then into it. I have read of four nests being found in a field of Italian rye grass, in a place where the grasshopper warbler was rare, so that it was all the stranger to suddenly alight on this little colony. Three of these nests were built on the ground near hedges. The fourth was several inches from the ground, the luxuriant tuft of rye grass in which it was built having carried it up with its own growth. It was supported by these grasses like a reed warbler's nest in a bed of reeds, and was woven of grass. When it was necessary to cut the grass, the owner of the field removed the nest and placed it on the hedge bank close by for safety, and the bird fed its young as usual, and did not appear to object to its little jaunt. Afterwards the nest was put back on the roots of the grass from which it had been taken, and the equanimity of the parents remained unmoved.

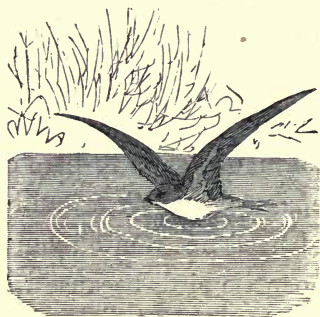
The Garden Warbler sings really well, and is said to resemble the nightingale, of course only in a very slight degree, as any one who has ever heard the nightingale will know; but in the Island of Shetland nightingales are unknown, and the poor misguided Shetlanders have boasted of being visited by those queens of song, when really only the garden warblers have called upon them.

Then there is the Blue-throated Warbler, a beautiful bird, but not more than three or four of which, I believe, have ever visited England; why I don't know, as they are not uncommon on the Continent, and it cannot be the cold of our climate that keeps them away, for they penetrate to Russia, Sweden, Norway, and even to Lapland. The breast and throat of this bird is a splendid brilliant blue, with a pure white spot in the centre, and a border outside the blue, first of black and then of white. It builds its nests in hollow willows and under roots, leads a lonely life, sings a sweet, low song, and in the season, lives chiefly on blackberries.

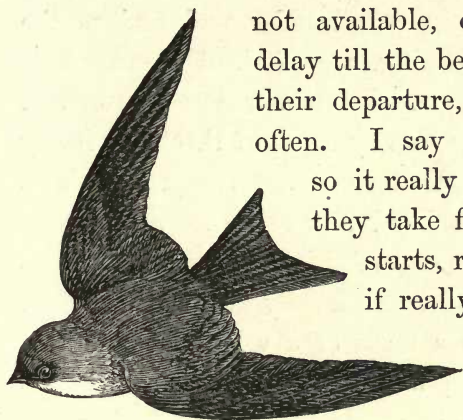
I must not leave the subject of the warblers without saying a word or two about some who only inhabit far distant lands in other quarters of the world than ours. In Australia there is the Rock Warbler, which also bears the name of the Cataract Bird, because it is always to be found where waters rush wildly through rocky grounds. This singular creature has never been seen in a forest or wood, and has never been observed to perch on the branch of a tree. It is about the size of a sparrow, and in colouring not unlike our hen robins. I need not remind you that this cataract bird is what is called a pensile bird, because it builds hanging nests; and in America there are two more pensile warblers worthy of notice—the Prairie and the Pine-creeping Warblers. Both these are pretty birds, very small and lively. The latter resembles our old friends the titmice in its movements. The prairie warbler, though lively, and with a brisk, jerking air, is very cool in its manners, and never seems to lose its composure under any circumstances.



MARTINS.



HAVING told you so much about swallows, there does not seem much left to say of Martins; and yet I may give a few words to *them* without tiring you or repeating anything that I have said before. They come to us a few days later than the swallow makes his appearance, about the twenty-first of April, and from that on to the beginning of May; but, like swallows, they sometimes disappear for weeks afterwards, and then, suddenly reappearing, remain for the whole summer. About six months later, or hardly so much, as it is generally before the middle of October, they may be observed collecting in large flocks, on church towers, high house-tops, or, when these are

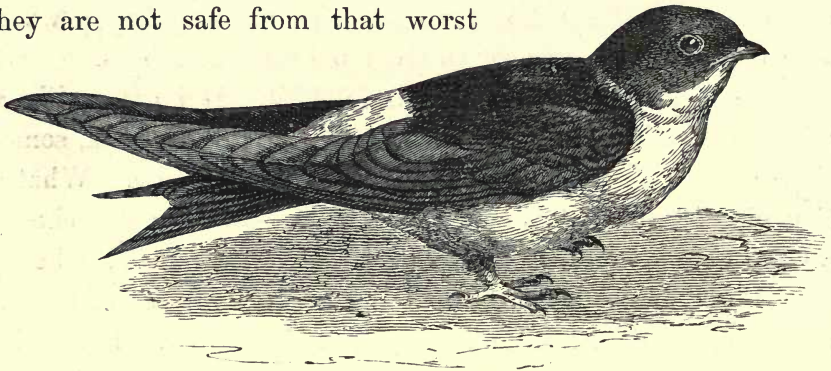


not available, on trees. They sometimes delay till the beginning of November to plan their departure, but this does not happen often. I say to *plan* their departure, and so it really is, for they meet days before they take flight, and make several false starts, returning with great noise, as if really they were training for the journey; at last they are off in earnest, and they fly by night, and at a great height

from the ground. As soon as ever the martin returns to this country it flies to its old home, clings to the walls of the very same cottage beneath whose eaves the year before it built its nest, peeps in at the windows, and even makes a rapid, momentary entrance, and all this time it appears to be really full of joy. After a while it sets to work, and builds its nest in the old place, probably repairing the old nest itself, if by a lucky chance it has been left there; this is easily done with straw and grass, plastered in with clay from the nearest pond or stream. I cannot but believe that these martins are very happy when they return in this manner to their old summer homes.

The Sand Martin is a wonderful bird. It burrows like a rabbit, only it does so, not only in soft sand, but in rock, sometimes so hard that it would destroy the edge of a knife. What a sharp beak a sand martin must have, to be sure! It will choose a place with softer materials to work on if it can find it; but if not, it sets steadily to work on the hard rock or side of a cliff, and begins at once in the most systematic manner. It uses its

legs as a pivot, on which it turns round and round, and as the whole time it never ceases pecking, a good-sized circular hole is soon the result of its labours. It then makes a tunnel of from two to three feet long, generally straight through; if any obstacle meets it on the way that it cannot conquer, such as a stone, it is not too proud to bend and curve its road out of the straight direction. At the end of this tunnel it makes its nest, and a safer place for a nest can hardly be imagined. In itself it is nothing more than a mass of dry herbage and soft feathers, pressed together by the weight of the bird's own body; in fact, it is rather a large, comfortable cushion or feather bed than a nest. The eggs deposited thereon are beautiful, being extremely small, and of a delicate pinky whiteness. Here the young birds are hatched, in darkness and security; but alas for them when old enough to venture out at the mouth of their homes! Little sand martins are great delicacies, and those horrid big ogres, magpies and crows, scent them out, and actually hover round the holes, too small for them to enter, and snap up the poor babies when they are making their first attempt at flight. But while they are still in their nests even, they are not safe from that worst





SAND MARTINS AND NESTS.

enemy of birds and their eggs, to whom I have had occasion to allude before—the boy! On the side, high up a perpendicular cliff or rock, the holes that contain the treasures may be seen by dozens and dozens, and the danger of the adventure is only an additional temptation. Of course, boys climb up at the risk of their lives, and, clinging to the face of the rock with one hand, introduce the other deep into the burrow and rob the nest; and if a boy was killed every year, as he ought to be, when thus employed, I do not believe it would in the least deter the remainder of that extraordinary species from enjoying the same feat, and running the same risk—do you?

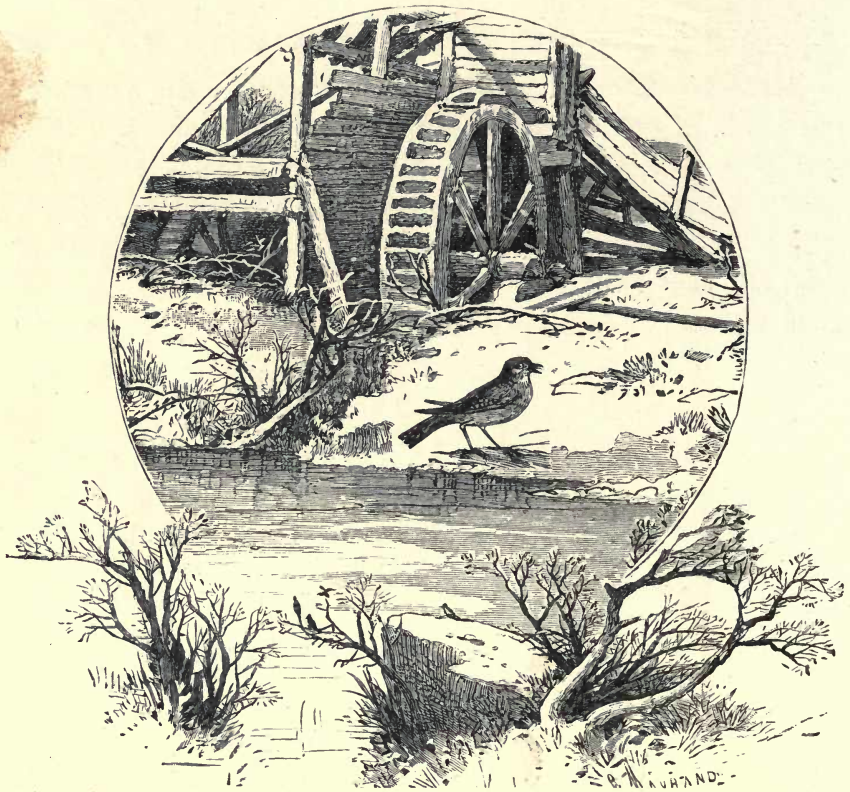
It is curious that birds accustomed to the calm and retirement of cliffs and rocks, and choosing such solitude as the end of a burrow for their cities of nests, should also build these cities in the sides of railway cuttings. Yet such is the case, and the noise, din, bustle, and racket appears to be no objection in their eyes; and in some places they are protected by the railway porters, for their usefulness in killing flies, that tormenting plague of close quarters in hot summer weather. The approach of the martins is looked forward to as a blessing, and if a few hot days occur in early spring before they come, the flies have it all their own way, and the porters are miserable, and hail the first martin with delight, even though it “does not make a summer.”

I must not forget to tell you about the sort of nest that the common martin makes under the eaves of houses, and in corners of windows; also in more ambitious places, such as the arch of a gateway, or in the side of a cliff. It is closed all round, except a tiny entrance on the most sheltered

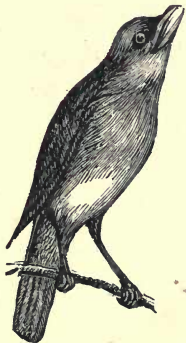
side, and it is very small, only just large enough for one of the birds to enter in when the eggs require its presence. It is made of mud cemented together with curious care, and lined with hay, grass, and feathers; the outside is rough, but the inside is very soft and smooth. Now I will finish what I have to say about martins with a story of a pair of them and our old friend the swallow, to whom they might have addressed the inelegant slang phrase, "You're another!" I will give the story in the words of a very pleasant bishop, who tells us delightful anecdotes of birds.

"A pair of martins having built in the corner of a window, one of which, from a remarkable white feather in one of its wings, was known to be the same bird which had built there the year before, had no sooner finished their nest than a strange swallow conceived the plan of taking possession of the property, and once or twice actually succeeded in driving the owners out. For a week there was a constant battling; at length the two rightful owners were observed to be very busily engaged in lessening the entrance into the nest, which in a short time was so reduced that it was with difficulty they could force themselves into it singly. When they had accomplished their object, one or other of them always remained within, with its bill sticking out ready to receive any sudden attack. The enemy persevered for a week, but at length, finding its prospects hopeless, left the pair to enjoy the fruits of their forethought."





THE ROBIN.

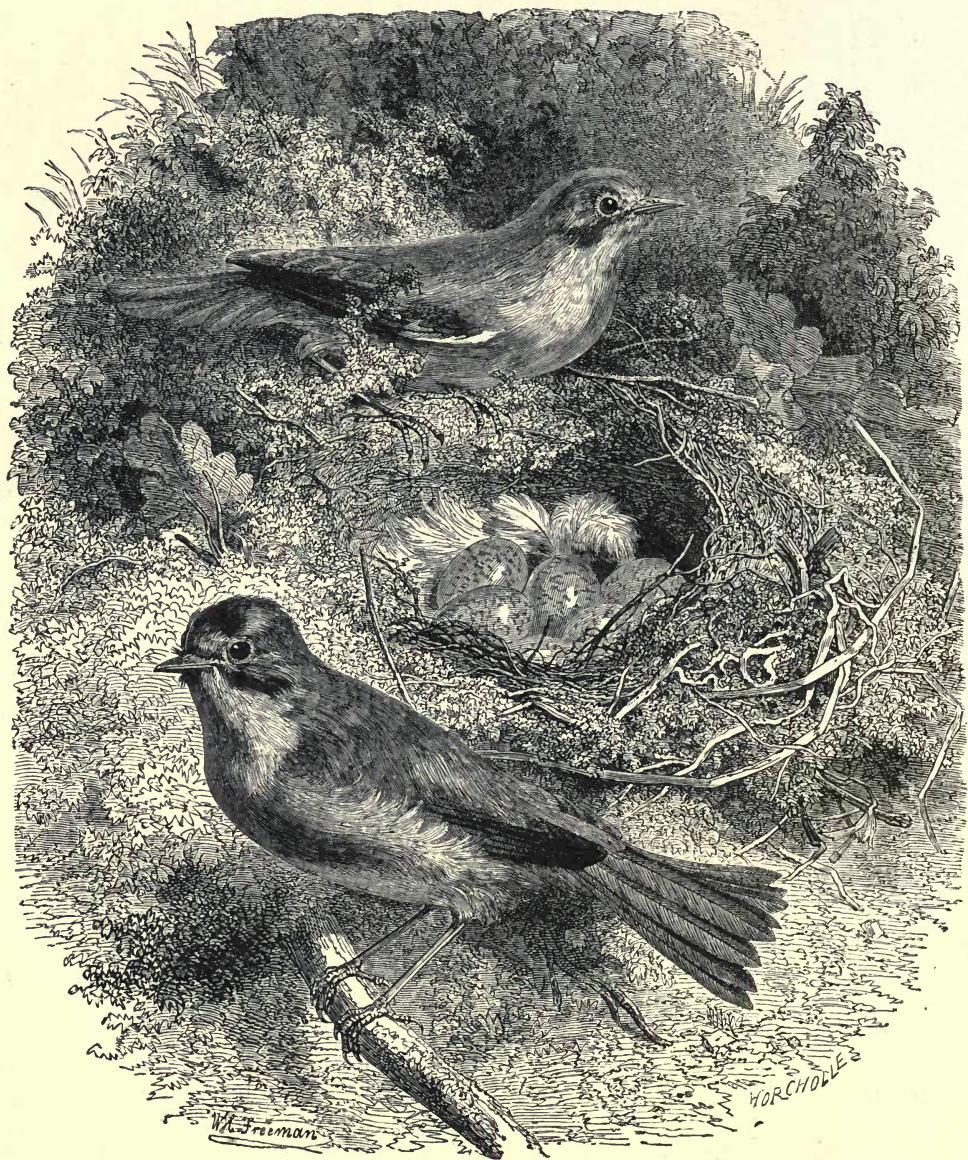


IT seems almost impertinent to say anything about the Robin. Dear little Robin Red-breast, our cherished companion and familiar friend, to talk about you, and describe your habits and ways, is like turning historian to the domestic habits of a brother or sister of our own. I have not left you to be one of the last of the birds I speak about from any disrespect or want

of love, but rather from this feeling, that you were too sacred a "household god" to be chatted about at all; but now I have determined to mention you, lest you should misunderstand the motive of my silence, and fancy I did not care for you as I do; lest your feelings should be hurt, in fact, at being altogether omitted from a book about birds. Dear Robin, everybody loves you; you are among birds something like our own Princess of Wales among women, inasmuch as nobody's lips are ever opened about you except to praise; inasmuch as you have never excited any feeling in any breast except a feeling of love and admiration.

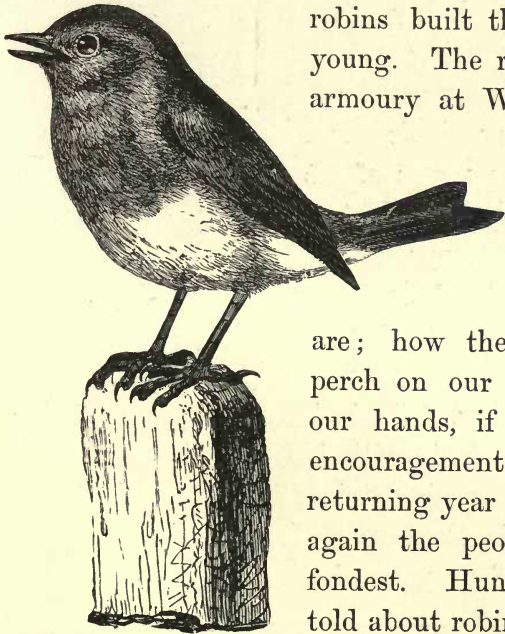
The robins build their nests all round me in the lovely home wherein I live. Often, when not well, I lie for hours beneath a goodly cedar on a lawn, feasting my eyes on hills and woods such as are not given to many eyes to feast on, and there the old robins bring their young, and introduce them to me in the prettiest manner possible. I have had as many as seven or eight perching all round me, slight, shapely things, just beginning to take the beloved colouring on their breasts, and hopping or fluttering about with the surprised joy of the very young.

All robins sing—the hen as well as the cock—and the birds that are born in May or June sing in the autumn, so that as the leaves begin to turn, even in a small garden, thirty robins have been heard all singing at once from different parts. Their nests are charming, made of fine grass and moss, and warmly lined. They place them in banks and hollows, and cover them over with leaves, so that they may not be detected, just as the dear kind robins covered over with leaves the two poor



THE ROBIN REDBREAST.

little children in the wood. They will also build low down in bushes, and even in those trees, such as yews, that have branches lying on the ground, in crevices in walls, or the ivy that grows on them. They have been known to build in rooms, and in all manner of curious places, none, perhaps, more curious than the following:—Our sailor King, William IV., placed in a building in his grounds at Bushy Park a curious and interesting relic. It was no less a thing than that part of the mizen-mast of the *Victory* against which the great Lord Nelson leant when, in the moment of conquest, he received his death-wound. A hole is in this part of the mast, through which a large shot had passed, and in this hole, while the mast stood among the sailor king's treasures at Bushy Park, two



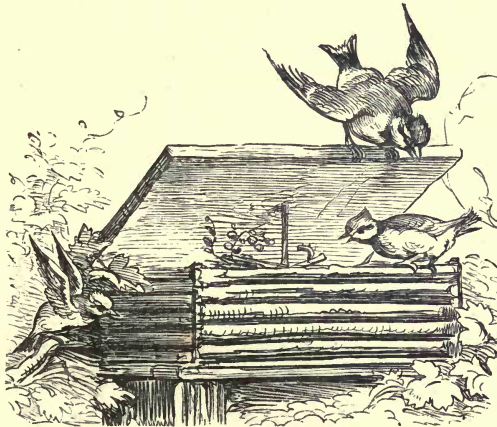
robins built their nest and reared their young. The relic is now in the Queen's armoury at Windsor Castle. I wonder whether the nest is still in the hole pierced by that cruel shot!

We all know how kind and tame robins are; how they will enter our houses, perch on our shoulders, and feed from our hands, if we give them the least encouragement to do so, the same birds returning year after year, and recognising again the people of whom they were fondest. Hundreds of stories could be told about robins. I must content myself

with only one or two. In the county of Donegal, in Ireland, there is a grand mountain called Muckish. I will not tell you what Muckish means in the wild Irish language, as you would perhaps then not believe that the mountain is as beautiful as it is. On the side of Muckish, a golden eagle was trapped, and afterwards it was kept a prisoner by a gentleman into whose possession it came, who had it chained to a perch. I think it is very wrong to trap and chain eagles, but that has nothing to do with my story. A little robin made friends with this eagle, and still greater friends, perhaps, with the food with which this eagle was fed. It regularly visited the eagle at feeding-time; when the king of birds descended from his perch to receive his dinner, the robin coolly took his place, presenting a very amusing contrast to the recent occupant. It then hopped on the chain, fearless and unhurt, and pecked up little scraps of his food. Robins are wonderfully fond of fat and butter. If you want really to gain a robin's heart, put a little fat or butter among the crumbs you throw out to it on the cold winter days. In an Irish cottage a robin sought shelter every winter, and during the summer the mistress of the house regularly supplied it with crumbs whenever it visited her. She had always kept a cat till the robin formed this friendship with her, but she then dismissed Mistress Pussy, for she might injure or frighten the bird. That woman had a discriminating soul! If you are kind to a robin you may have it build on your window sill, and become a member of your family. Two ladies fed one through the winter;



and when spring came, put a box outside the window, and anxiously watched to see what it would do. It fell into their wishes in the politest manner possible, building its nest and rearing its young there. The ladies pulled horse-hair out of an old chair and left it about, and the robin's nest was entirely built with this horse-hair. Robins are very fond of each other, and very faithful in trouble. A slate trap had been set to catch birds, and a robin was observed perched outside it. The pertinacity with which it remained there drew attention, and on the trap being opened another robin was found caught within. It was carried into the house, and its friend, doubtless its mate, followed it, and left the captor no peace till the captive was set at liberty, when the two robins flew off happily together.





THRUSH AND BLACKBIRD.



NEXT to the robin in tameness, next to the nightingale in the beauty of his song, stands that delightful bird the Thrush, and scarcely second to the Thrush is the Blackbird.

They surround me where I live, and in reward for the food with which I supply them during the winter, they pour into my ears their delicious spring songs. Once a thrush sung out to me loudly and sweetly in the wood close to my house, in the midst of the bitter winds of January. One year a thrush built his nest in, and the young thrushes came triumphantly forth from, a jessamine bush at my hall door; and I suspect a blackbird, not usually so tame as thrushes, of having a nest at this moment very close to another part of the house, for it is always there; its shrill, sweet song penetrates into the rooms, and in March it used to stand on the window sill close to where a lady lay ill in bed, and eat

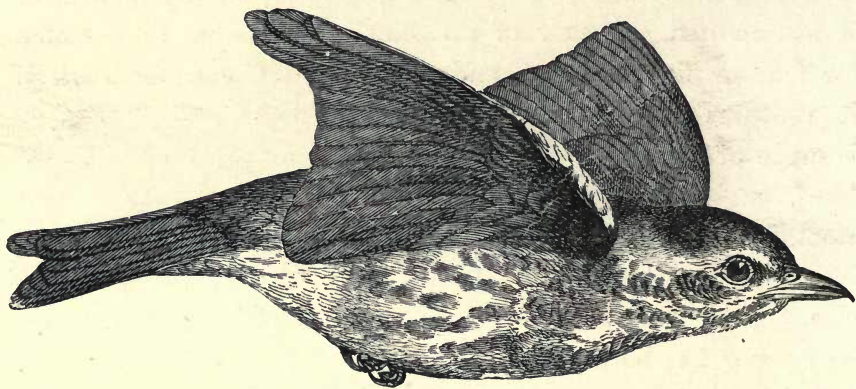
the ivy berries that clustered round it. I suppose it was a missel thrush that sang to me in the winter, as I do not know whether any of the other thrushes are such defiers of cold. The missel thrush builds its nest in the most conspicuous parts of trees, generally in the forking of the stems of main branches; and when it has placed its home, exposed to the attacks of other birds, and evident to all, it defends it with the utmost courage and pugnacity from the attacks it has invited. A pair of thrushes will thus prove a match for four or five magpies, and will hunt off even a hawk if it ventures too near to them. The nest

is made of twigs of trees, moss, grass, wool, feathers, shavings, and anything else. Part of a newspaper has been found in it, though it is not to be supposed that thrushes read the news; and once a lady's lace cap that had been washed and laid on the grass to dry, disappeared. The thief was not discovered till the autumn, when, as the leaves fell from the trees, something white was discerned high up in one of them, and



on further examination it proved to be a thrush's nest, in which the missing lace cap formed one of the most conspicuous materials. Such behaviour, I am afraid, is more worthy of a magpie than of a thrush.

The common Song Thrush is fond of evergreens. Wherever I turn from my hall door I am surrounded by rhododendrons, and many a thrush's nest lies within their



luxuriant branches. The cock thrush, it is said, takes good care of his mate: on wet days he feeds the young himself, but on fine days he allows their mother to perform the task, while he sits near and sings to her. Thrushes are easily tamed: I have heard of one in captivity that would follow its mistress about, and had been taught to whistle several tunes. She fed it on a paste made of crumbs of bread and rape-seed, of which it ate fifty-two pounds in the course of the year. Mistaken kindness to feed it so well! The poor bird had the gout; one of its legs would swell, and give it great pain for several days together. I am sure none of

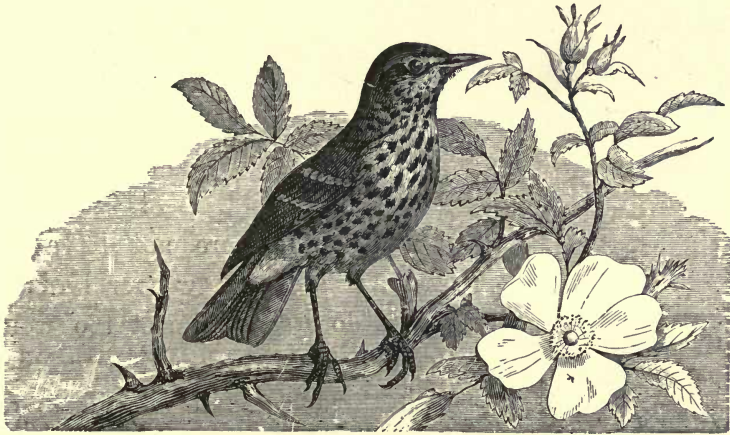


THE FALLEN BRANCH.

my wild thrushes in their rhododendron nests, that fly about and collect their own food, ever had the gout. So it seems to be the same with birds as with men. It is the gentleman in his easy chair, eating his good dinner, who suffers from gout, not the labourer who earns his bread by the toil of his hands.

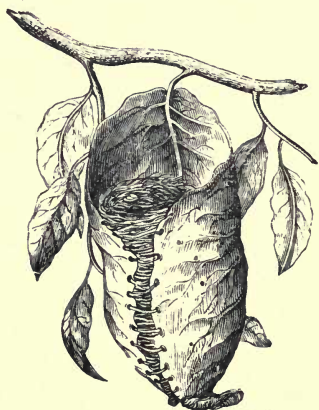
The Blackbird, I believe, is the largest song bird in England. It is said to be a great imitator of other birds, and that it can crow like a cock or caw like a rook if it chooses. I am very glad it does *not* choose to do this generally, but is contented with singing like a blackbird, though some people will not give it the credit even of its own song, but declare that it is, when singing its very best, only imitating the thrush. I don't agree with them. The world is surely large enough for both thrush and blackbird to be original. They are shy birds, but can be tamed in captivity, when they can be taught a great deal, and are agreeable companions. There is a curious old book called "Pepy's Diary," being a journal kept by a very gossiping gentleman, more than two hundred years ago, when Charles II. was king. A sentence in this shows that as long ago as that, blackbirds were kept in captivity, and taught to whistle tunes: "22nd May, 1863.—Randall, the house carpenter at Deptford, hath sent me a fine blackbird, which I went to see. He tells me he was offered twenty shillings for him as he came along, he do so whistle. 23rd.—Waked this morning between four and five by my blackbird, which whistled as well as ever I heard any; only it is the beginning of many tunes very well, but then leaves them and goes no further."

The blackbird's nest is made of twigs and roots, and a layer of mud inside. Young unfledged birds are most ridiculous-looking, with their great yellow beaks always wide open calling for worms. I remember a nest full of them, which a servant, in a house where I staid as a child, had stolen from a tree. Every day I used to see him feeding the creatures, always clamorous, with wide opened yellow beaks, asking for more. What wonderful little beings I thought them, and how I grieved when they all died—grieved for them, not for him; for even then the sentence my conscience pronounced against him was, "Served him right." It is a cruel thing to steal a nest of little birds from their parents.





THE TAILOR BIRD.



A TAILOR BIRD! Yes. Why should there not be a tailor bird as well as a weaver bird? and yet it does seem almost too wonderful that a bird should actually sew with thread! Man is said to differ from the rest of the animal creatures, inasmuch as he laughs and cooks; and if there was anything we might think

we laughing, cooking human creatures had invented, and that belonged solely to us, it would, perhaps, be the art of sewing. We never *could* have thought that a bird would sew. I don't believe any beast does (though a monkey might in imitation, if he saw you or I at work), and I will almost take upon myself to pronounce, as a fact, that no fish can sew; but no one must be so presumptuous as to say the same of a bird; for there is a tailor bird, and that tailor bird sews!

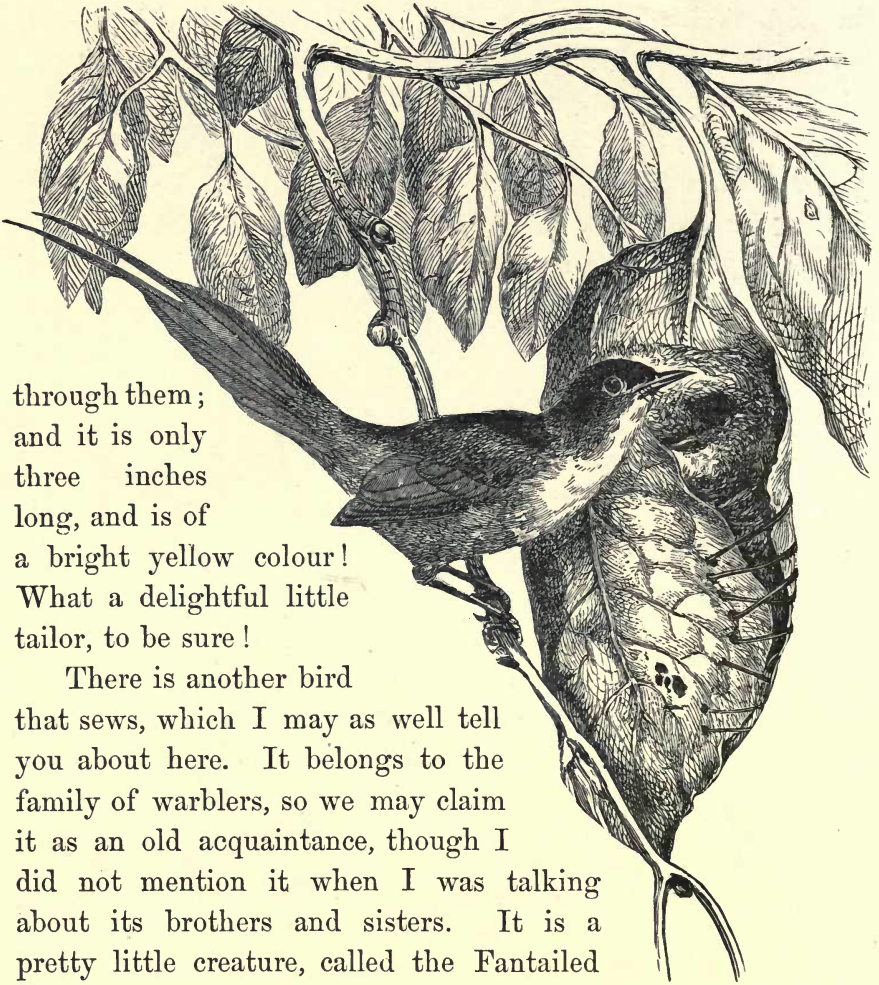
This wonderful bird is a native of India; it is not shy, and it frequents gardens and *compounds*, which is what the piece of ground enclosed about a house is called in that country. It has a beak shaped very much like a shoemaker's awl—don't be alarmed, I am *not* going to ask you to believe that it makes shoes, or wears them either! But after selecting a large leaf hanging from the end of a twig, it pierces a number of holes along the edges of it with this awl-like beak; it then gets the long fibres of plants, which make capital thread, and carefully sews the leaf up into a complete bag. But, stranger and cleverer still, if the leaf is not large enough, or in any other way is not suited to make a bag, it actually goes and fetches another leaf, pierces it with holes also, and sews the two together, making, by that means, a first-rate job of it. Now let me whisper in your ear a very singular thing, which it requires a little faith and some imagination to believe, but which is nevertheless true. Occasionally this good tailor has been known to tie a knot at the end of the thread, so as to be sure it does not slip through! Have not some of us, some time or other, been



TAILOR BIRD AND NEST.

in distress for want of a knot at the end of our thread, and sighed over half a dozen stitches put in, when, lo! out they all come with the end of the thread in the air, just for want of a knot in it? Next time let us remember the tailor bird, and profiting by his bright example, carefully make a knot before we begin our work.

Now perhaps you are wondering how eggs can lie and birds be hatched between a couple of leaves, so listen to me while I tell you that this is not the case. The leaves are only the outer walls of a snug little mansion, which is to be most luxuriantly furnished within with soft white down, not only extremely elegant in appearance, but forming one of the softest and most comfortable beds possible for the eggs that are intended to lie in it. So you see the tailor bird thinks of everything, and is not at all a personage to be despised. The entrance to this charming little dwelling is at the top, and from the manner in which the whole thing is managed, it does not betray itself as a nest, but may be taken by the enemies of the bird for nothing more than the foliage of the tree; and the bird and its nest full of eggs are altogether so extremely light that the very end of the slenderest twigs will support both house and family, but certainly not the mischievous depredators that would devour them, so there they hang in perfect safety, laughing at the foes that would injure them. This little tailor is entirely yellow in colour, and only measures three inches in length. I certainly should like very much indeed to see the lively, clever, tiny thing hard at work sewing up its nest, selecting the leaves, and then carrying to them the long pieces of thread, and piercing the holes with its beak, and drawing the thread

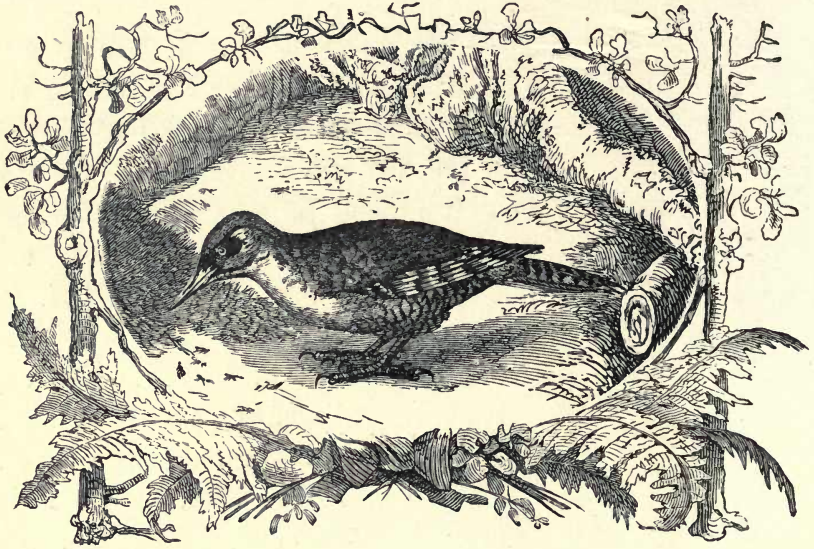


through them ;
and it is only
three inches
long, and is of
a bright yellow colour !
What a delightful little
tailor, to be sure !

There is another bird
that sews, which I may as well tell
you about here. It belongs to the
family of warblers, so we may claim
it as an old acquaintance, though I
did not mention it when I was talking
about its brothers and sisters. It is a
pretty little creature, called the Fantailed
Warbler, in consequence of the peculiar shape of its tail,
and it does not spend its life so far away from us as India,
for it visits Europe, though I am sorry to say it has never
made its way into England. Like the reed warbler, it fixes
on reeds to support its nest, and it sews together a number

of their flat blades for this purpose; but it has a way of its own for doing this, which does not resemble either the tailor man or the tailor bird. Instead of taking a long thread, and sewing steadily in and out, and out and in, till the thing is finished, it employs a great number of very short pieces of thread, which it passes through the holes it has made, and ties a knot at the end of *each* of them. So I think, in its own way, it is quite as clever as the tailor bird is in his. The worms that weave silk have not an idea of using the silk they weave in this manner. No one ever heard of a tailor caterpillar or a tailor spider; they only weave, they cannot sew. Wonderful are the homes that, in distant countries, spiders make for themselves. They burrow in the ground, and line the little tunnels they form with strong elastic silken webs, that will not let through a particle of dust or sand, but they have not the faintest idea of drawing out long silken threads from these webs and sewing with them. Talking of spiders, I could tell you most wonderful things about them, and about ants and wasps, in all manner of countries, who build all manner of nests, in all manner of ways; but I have not time to do so now, because all our stories have been about birds, and I have one or two little things to say you will like to hear concerning woodpeckers and larks, whom I decidedly prefer to ants, and spiders, and wasps, though I will not deny that there are more curious facts to be narrated of insects than have ever yet been told of birds.





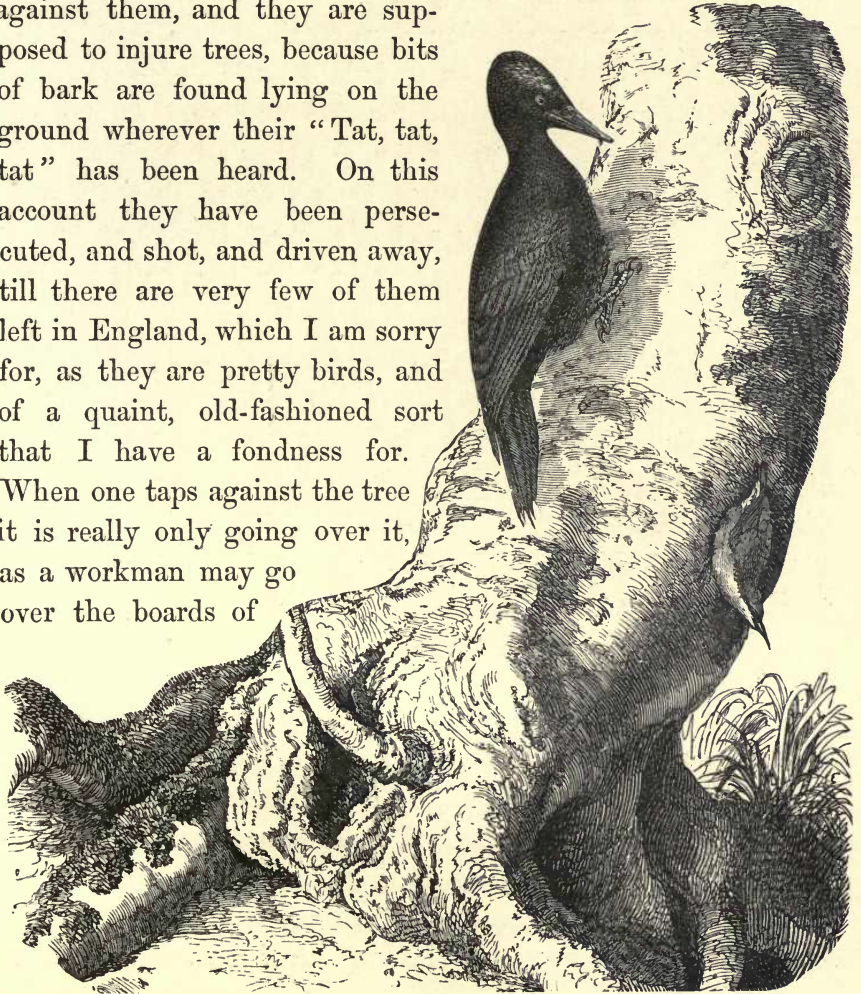
THE WOODPECKER.

WE have all of us heard of
“The woodpecker tapping the hollow
beech tree,”



but I daresay we none of us know a great deal about the woodpecker himself, or why he is always tapping—always tapping trees, as his name of woodpecker shows. Well, I have been telling you about birds that burrow in earth and sand, and even rock; but woodpeckers burrow in wood, and that is one meaning of the tapping sound they are for ever making with their long, sharp, useful bills. Another is, that a hoard of insects live under

some diseased portions of the bark of trees, and on these insects woodpeckers feast, and this diseased bark they peck away in order to get at them. I believe they are rather useful to woods by this behaviour than otherwise, but there is a prejudice against them, and they are supposed to injure trees, because bits of bark are found lying on the ground wherever their "Tat, tat, tat" has been heard. On this account they have been persecuted, and shot, and driven away, till there are very few of them left in England, which I am sorry for, as they are pretty birds, and of a quaint, old-fashioned sort that I have a fondness for. When one taps against the tree it is really only going over it, as a workman may go over the boards of



a floor or wainscot to discover where the wood is rotten, and where it is sound, and the sound wood it leaves whole and unharmed, just as the workman would do, while when it comes to the rotten wood it scatters the bark about, as I have before said, and eats up the insects within it. For these purposes it is forever ascending trees, clinging close to them in a manner that no other bird, I believe, does, or indeed could do, for its whole frame seems especially formed for this purpose. It has *such* extraordinary toes: they are sharp, and they are hooked; there are four of them, two pointing each way, so that they are perfectly fitted for climbing and clinging. Its breast-bone is so flat that it can press closely against the tree while it clings with its toes, without the muscles of its legs being in the least inconvenienced. Its very tail helps in this ascent, in making which it spends most of its time: it is short, and the feathers are quite unusually stiff, and the clever creature, when climbing, presses them inward against the tree, so that they help greatly in supporting it. The long, strong, powerful beak is well fitted for every purpose that it is required for; and within that beak what do you think there is? A tongue that is perhaps more useful to its owner than even the beak itself, or the hooked claws, or the flat breast, or the stiff tail, for it is unusually long; it can be thrust out far and far beyond the beak into any hole the beak has found, and its tip is barbed with little things that, like the teeth of a rake, catch hold of and pull up the insects which, I need scarcely say, then disappear within the beak, and are no more seen.

The woodpecker burrows into rotten trees without much trouble, and lays its eggs at the bottom of the burrow, on the

little broken chips of wood that have fallen inwards during its work. It does not take the trouble to build any nest, the tunnel it makes being, in fact, its only nest. It never in England fixes on a sound tree, as, unlike the American species, its bill is not strong enough to penetrate the hard wood; or if that is not the case, it is lazy and does not choose to take the trouble. Its burrows may be found, however, in trees that *appear* perfectly sound—splendid forest kings, making a grand appearance outside, but rotten to the core, and the bird has sometimes got the blame of this rottenness, when the wind and the rain are, in fact, the true culprits. A branch blown away from a tree leaves a hollow, and in this hollow rain may lodge, and silently and secretly eat its way deeply into the trunk. In this manner, going slowly and steadily on for years, the whole centre of a tree decays, unsuspected by all who see it, and not only does the whole centre decay, but it becomes *filled with water*, and if a hole is made through the outer covering, instead of the heart of oak that ought to be within, out rushes gallon upon gallon of dirty water, bearing along with it fragments of decayed wood.

The Green Woodpecker is the common kind in England. It is a really beautiful bird, and makes a splendid object fluttering about from tree to tree in those woods from which prejudice has not banished it. It is more than a foot long, the wings reaching to nearly half the length of the tail; it has a brilliant red crown, and what has been called a moustache of the same colour, while the rest of it is every imaginable shade of yellowish-green, greyish-green, greenish-brown, and yellow. It has been said that its tapping sound,

when making its nest, can be heard half a mile off. It burrows as high up in the tree as it can find a place to suit it, sometimes fifteen or twenty feet. Its tongue has been described in the following words:—"It has the appearance of a silver ribbon, or rather, from its transparency, of a stream



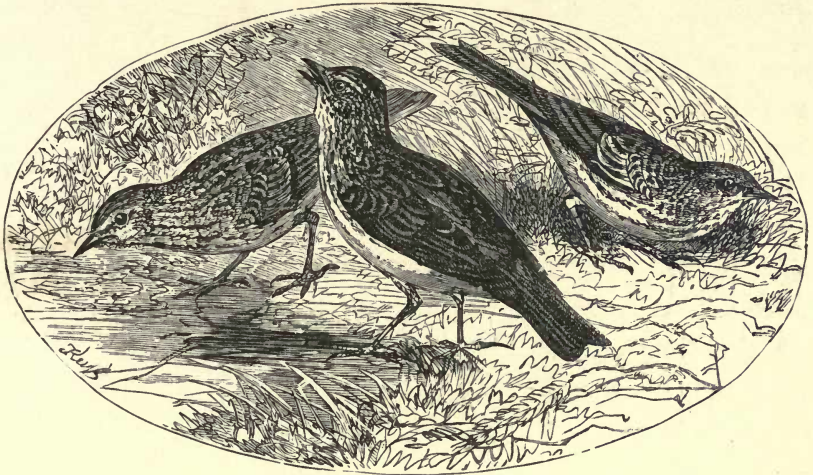
of molten glass, and the rapidity with which it is protruded and withdrawn is so great, that the eye is dazzled in following its motions; it is flexible in the highest degree." This description may be perfectly accurate, extraordinary as it sounds, but I will not vouch for it, for, to tell you the truth, I have never seen the tongue of a woodpecker. The note of the woodpecker is called a laugh, and it is said to be the merriest of birds, going about laughing from tree to tree. It is rather a harsh sound, however, and I don't think it would have suggested the idea of laughing to me; but I



THE DOWNY WOODPECKER.

like the notion of a laughing bird, and, at any rate, it is a nicer attempt at laughter than that made by the laughing hyena.

There are several woodpeckers common in America, and it is said that their beaks are very hard, and that they can tunnel their nests into sound, undecayed trees. The Ivory-billed Woodpecker has been known to cut chips from a mahogany table, and to "cut a hole fifteen inches in width through a lath-and-plaster partition." The Downy Woodpecker is very small. It makes most ingenious tunnels, sloping for six or eight inches, and then driven perpendicularly down the tree, and it is said to do this, not in rotten trees, but in sound ones. The sloping part of this curious nest is only the passage into it, and is but just large enough to admit the bird; but the perpendicular chamber in which it resides, where it lays its eggs and brings forth its little ones, is large and roomy. Both cock and hen bird work away, relieving each other at regular intervals, and never ceasing in their labours for several days till the tree-buried mansion is finished; and then the nest is sometimes seized upon by a small, impertinent, unconquerable imp—the house wren! This tiny personage, as soon as the nest is large enough for its purposes, drives off the persevering, but, I must say, cowardly carpenters, and seizes upon their work for himself. The wren has actually got rid of the woodpeckers, and taken possession of their premises, after they have deposited their treasure there in the shape of a first egg.



LARKS.



LARKS are small birds with long heels. You may be surprised to hear that birds have heels at all, but I assure you it is the case. I have just taken up a book about birds, and in it I find the following sentence:—"All the lark species are distinguishable from other small birds by the length of their heels." Therefore it is evident that all birds have heels, and that larks have especially long ones. This heel being long and straight, prevents it being able to cling to the branch of a tree, like other birds, and in consequence of this peculiarity the lark never perches on a tree. The Skylark is always on the ground or in the sky. The nest is found between two clods of earth, so that *they* actually make the outer walls of it, which walls are carefully lined with dried grass and roots. The joyous flight of the lark up into the sky, as high or higher than the sight of man can reach, its

complete abandonment to the joy of the flight, leaving earth and all its dark cares behind it, and singing louder and louder, and more and more gaily, the higher it ascends, has given rise to the expressions of being "Out on a lark," and "Larking" for any excursion that is only for pleasure. I believe, however, the lark has more at heart in these delightful flights than mere self-enjoyment. His good little mate is patiently sitting all the time on her nest full of eggs, and the erratic and amusing ascent, and exquisite joyful song, is for her entertainment, quite as much as for his own. Have you ever watched a lark fly from the ground up into the sky till he becomes an almost invisible speck, and is lost there? If not, take my advice, and do so the first opportunity, for you may believe me, that it is a charming sight to see. As the spring advances, the lark's flight advances also; as the sun rises higher in the heavens, so does the lark, who appears always to make for the sun, rise higher after it. When near earth, the flight is a little slower, and the song not so powerful; but the nearer to the sky he comes, the more rapidly he flies, and the louder he sings, as if his joy became so exuberant he hardly knew how to vent it. Now he is quite out of sight, vanished high above your head. Ah! where can he have gone to? Wait and watch. A moment ago he was there; for a moment he is invisible; in another moment—yes, there he is again, a little speck, but this time becoming larger instead of smaller; this time drawing nearer, instead of fluttering further away! He flies faster as he approaches home, but his song is softer, and if there is more tenderness in it, there is less triumphant joy. At last he drops on the ground, but without the slightest



THE SKYLARK.

appearance of fatigue. To fly up into unfathomed space is less fatiguing to the skylark, than to run to the end of the garden walk is to you or to me. Such is the regular ascent and descent of the skylark in its well-known lonely flight, unless anything happens to alarm it, when all at once it appears to cease to fly, and drops down to earth like a stone. In this manner it avoids the birds of prey that might injure it, but who can only fly, not drop like stones, and therefore are unable to follow the poor pretty creature, thus escaping from their cruel beaks and sharp talons. The skylark's flight occupies never less than ten minutes, sometimes it has been said to be for an hour occupied in its delightful excursion, when the strength of both throat and wings, one would think, must be quite exhausted; but, as I have said before, it is not so, and the wonderful, happy creature comes to earth again as fresh as he left it.

Larks begin to sing before sunrise. At midsummer they have been heard to begin at two o'clock in the morning, but I think this must be an exception to the general rule, and that few larks would be such early birds as that; they often, however, continue singing till late in the evening, but, like most other birds, are more or less silent for a couple of hours about noon-time. They dislike windy, wet weather, and show their displeasure at it, by being rather silent when it comes, and they generally leave off their constant music in July; but a second inspiration appears to seize them in October, when they sing again. Even during the winter months, in mild weather, a lark here and there, more determinedly "larkish" than his brothers, may be seen and heard; but he neither flies as high nor sings as loud as in spring

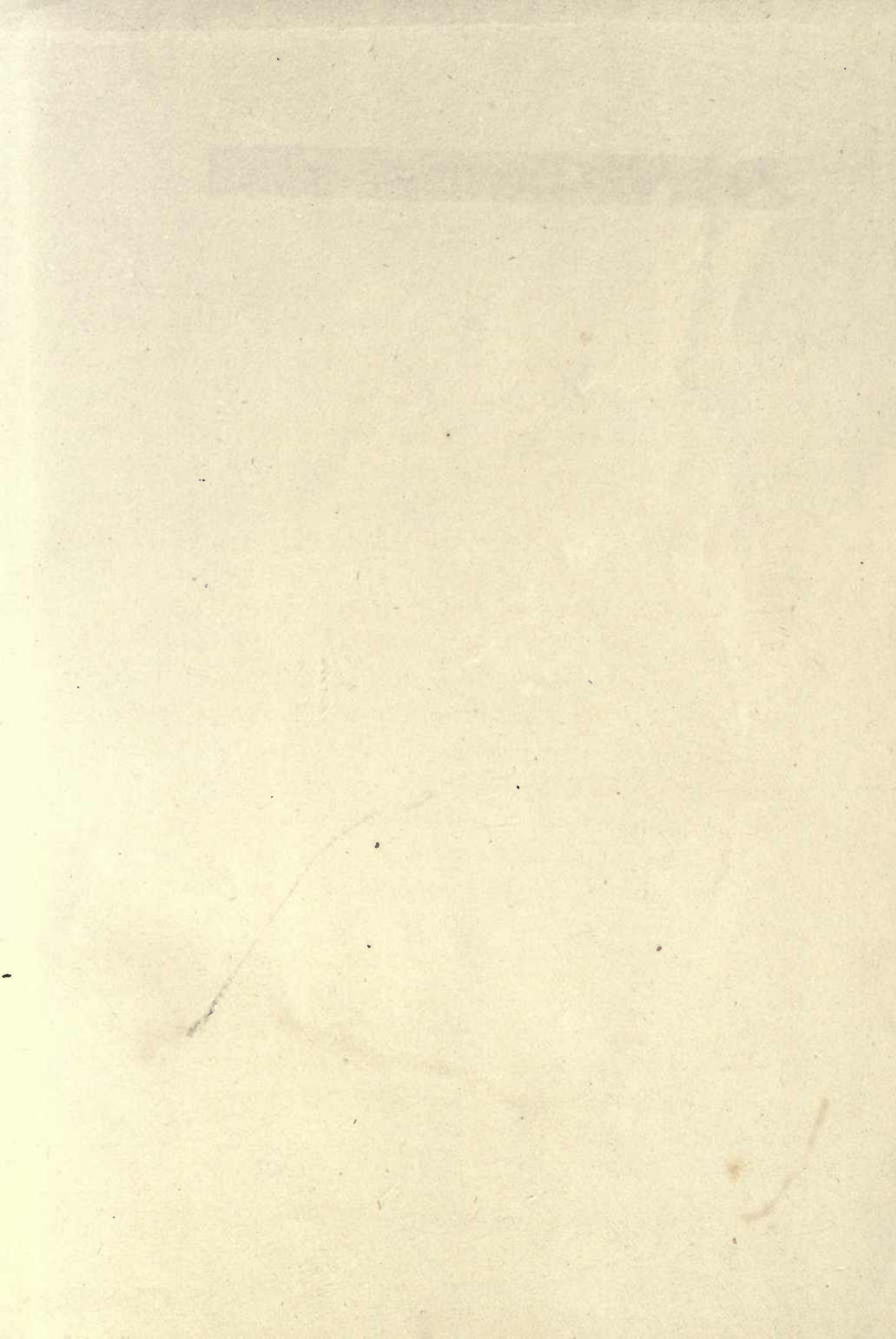
and summer-time, nor, I think, can it be expected of him to do so. It is very kind of him to fly or sing *at all* in the winter.

Larks are affectionate, and are fond of their young ones in a remarkable way, even among birds; and they are also very clever in taking care of them. When the sweet hay time comes on, and mowers are busy in the fields with their great scythes, it is sometimes a dangerous season for larks, who make their nests on the ground. Often the poor little nests must suffer; but only think how ingenious their owners are if they do. A mower once cut off the upper part of a lark's nest with his sweeping weapon. The lark sitting in it was uninjured. The man was sorry for what he had done, but there was no help for it—at least, so he thought; the lark knew better, and soon afterwards a beautiful dome was found, made of grass, over the nest, by the patient brave bird, who, unappalled by the imminent danger she had so narrowly escaped from, thought only of keeping her eggs safe and warm, and covered away from that deadly, gleaming scythe. Now don't you admire the busy, bold lark for this? When a nest has been destroyed in any way—for safe as the little homes built between, and concealed by, clods of earth may generally be, there *is* a time of year when the situation is sadly dangerous, for hay must be mown and crops must be reaped, even when skylarks build their nests in the midst of them—well, then, when the danger has not been escaped, and the nests have suffered mortal injury, the dear, fond parent birds have been seen flying away, and carrying in their claws their unfledged younglings, who,

having no feathers to enable them to fly, must have been left to perish but for this heroic effort on the part of their parents. I should like to see the larks so employed! How curious it would be, when, attracted by their cry, and looking up into the clear blue summer sky, to see the little family making their way through the air, the little helpless children supported by their kind father and mother!

I should take pleasure in telling you a great many more stories about birds and all the other wonders of the animal creation, my dear children, but I have not time to do so now; and if I had, you might not have time to listen to me, for we have all of us so much to do, and to see, and to think about in this beautiful, busy world in which the good God has placed us. I hope very much, that all I have been able to tell you will give you a greater interest than you had before in His birds, that you will spare their eggs, and if you possess any birds themselves, that you will be very kind to them, and cherish them; and I hope also that you will like reading about these interesting creatures, and studying their habits and ways both in books and out of doors.

But to all these hopes I must add one other, the highest and deepest of all, and that is, that everything you read, or hear, or see about any of God's creatures, either the biggest or the smallest, the most important or the most insignificant, will lead you nearer to Him, and fill your hearts with thoughts of His wisdom and goodness, who not only gave to you your immortal souls, but also to the birds their brilliant plumage and delicious songs.



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