THE BIRDS OF TENNYSON

"He clasps the crag with crooked hands."

THE

BIRDS OF TENNYSON

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TO MY WIFE

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PREFACE.

THIS book, as the title implies, is intended to collect and explain the many references to birds made in the poems of the late Poet Laureate. Tennyson exhibits a knowledge of birds and their ways which is considerably greater than that displayed by the majority of British Poets, and which entitles him to take a place in this respect by the side of Chaucer, Wordsworth and Shakespeare.

The idea of doing for Tennyson what has already been done for Shakespeare by Mr. Harting, was first suggested to me by my friend Mr. J. R. V. Marchant, and in the work thus undertaken I have for nearly three years found happy occupation during my leisure hours.

My thanks are due to Messrs. Macmillan and Co. for kindly permitting the quotations of many passages from the poems of Tennyson, to my wife for her encouragement and assistance, to my mother for much advice, to my friend, Mr. Howard Saunders, for some most valuable notes, to Mr. G. E. Lodge for his skilful and spirited drawings, and lastly to my friend, Mr. J. R. V. Marchant, not only for suggesting the idea of the work, but for having during its progress, given me the constant advantage of kindly criticism and wise advice.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

ERRATUM.

Page 50, last line, *for* "pipit" *read* "tree-pipit."

INTRODUCTION.

One of the chief merits of Tennyson as a poet is his power of presenting minutely faithful pictures of natural objects. Being, as Mr. Warde Fowler calls Virgil, "the genuine poet of the country," he attracted the admiration of Charles Kingsley by his "handling of everyday sights and sounds of nature," of Mr. Lecky by his "minutely accurate observation," and of the late Duke of Argyll by his "imagery from natural things."

The scenes which Tennyson describes are almost entirely drawn from English country life. Except his classical pieces almost all his poems deal with England and its scenery, and the political, social, scientific and religious problems of the English people, either in his day or

in the past. It has been pointed out that while his great contemporary, Robert Browning, takes many of the subjects of his poems from Italy and foreign countries, Tennyson always keeps near at home; hence it is that his pictures of home life are vivid and accurate, his style is more direct and his influence among his own people greater than that of his obscurer rival. Tennyson's intimate knowledge of the facts of country life is shown by the many marvellous bits of detail which adorn his poems. It is said that a Lincolnshire farmer confessed that, although he had lived all his life in the country, he had never noticed what was the colour of ashbuds in early March till he read Tennyson's lines in *The Gardener's Daughter* :—

that hair
More black than ashbuds in the front of March.

A still more beautiful natural figure on the same subject is to be found in the lines from *The Brook* :—

her hair
In gloss and hue the chestnut, when the shell
Divides threefold to show the fruit within.

The change in the colour of trees is admirably described in the lines from *In Memoriam* :—

Autumn laying here and there
A fiery finger on the leaves.

Other instances of minute accuracy of detail might be given, such as the line from *The May Queen* :—

And by the meadow-trenches blow the faint sweet cuckoo-flowers;

or the lines from *The Brook* :—

I make the netted sunbeams dance
Against my sandy shallows.

A charming description of sea-life is to be found in the poem on the sea-shell, which redeems the dreary melodrama of *Maud* :—

See what a lovely shell,
Small and pure as a pearl,
Lying close to my foot,
Frail, but a work divine,

Made so fairily well
With delicate spire and whorl,
How exquisitely minute,
A miracle of design!

Few poets have had such opportunities of acquiring a knowledge of nature as Tennyson, whose whole life was with rare intervals passed in the country. His early years were spent in his home at Somersby in a "land of quiet villages, large fields" and "gray hillsides on the lower slope of a Lincolnshire wold." The North Sea, "where the seamew pipes or dives," was not far off, and in the summer he often stayed at Mablethorpe with "an immense sweep of marsh inland" on the one side, and on the other "an immeasurable waste of sand and clay at low tide." The Lincolnshire scenery stamped itself indelibly on his imagination, and forms the background of many of his poems; *The May Queen* is "all Lincolnshire inland," while "*Locksley Hall* is its seaboard" (E. Fitzgerald, in "Life

of Tennyson," I. 192). Lincolnshire pictures abound in Tennyson's poems; for instance, the following passage from *The Gardener's Daughter*:

A league of grass, wash'd by a slow broad stream,
That, stirr'd with languid pulses of the oar,
Waves all its lazy lilies, and creeps on,
Barge-laden, to three arches of a bridge
Crown'd with the minster-towers.

Many of the different aspects of Lincolnshire scenery are to be found described in the *Ode to Memory*, where reference is specifically made to the poet's early home, *e.g.* :—

The woods that belt the gray hill-side,
The seven elms, the poplars four
That stand beside my father's door;

and

the brook that loves
To purl o'er matted cress and ribbed sand;

and

the livelong bleat
Of the thick-fleeced sheep from wattled folds,
Upon the ridged wolds;

and

> The high field on the bushless Pike,
> Or even a sand-built ridge
> Of heaped hills that mound the sea;

and

> a garden bower'd close
> With plaited alleys of the trailing rose,
> Long alleys falling down to twilight grots,
> Or opening upon level plots
> Of crowned lilies, standing near
> Purple-spiked lavender.

Tennyson lived in Lincolnshire from his birth in 1809 till 1828, when he went up to Cambridge; after leaving Cambridge in 1831 he returned to Somersby, and, except while making visits abroad and to various parts of England, remained there till 1837. From 1837 to 1840 he lived at High Beech in Epping Forest, and from 1840 to 1851 at Tunbridge Wells, Boxley, Eastbourne and Cheltenham. In 1851 he married and lived first at Warninglid and then at Twickenham; in 1853 he moved to Farringford, near Freshwater,

"close to the ridge of a noble down." In 1867 he acquired a second home (Aldworth) at Blackdown, near Haselmere; this was the house with

the view
Long-known and loved by me,
Green Sussex fading into blue
With one gray glimpse of sea.
(*To General Hamley.*)

Here the poet escaped in the summer from the tourists who overran his lawn at Farringford. London he knew well, but rarely lived in for long. During the whole of his life his permanent home was in the country; he always lived in the presence of nature (Jowett, in "Life," II. 134). We may apply to him the lines in which he himself describes the life of old Sir Thomas Wyatt; he loved

Plain life and letter'd peace,
To read and rhyme in solitary fields,
The lark above, the nightingale below,
And answer them in song.
(*Queen Mary.*)

Tennyson thus had exceptional opportunities of observing natural objects. He also had keen powers of observation. Though extremely short-sighted he could see objects close at hand with great clearness; one night he saw "the moonlight reflected in a nightingale's eye, as she was singing in the hedgerow." For distances beyond the range of his limited sight he used at Farringford a field-glass to watch "the ways and movements of the birds in the ilexes, cedars, and fir-trees." Few poets have been more in sympathy with and have better understood the life and ways of birds. From his mother he inherited a love for animals. He was "wise in winged things" and knew "the ways of nature." In his boyhood he used to blow

> Mimic hootings to the silent owls
> That they might answer him.
> (Wordsworth, *Poems of the Imagination.*)

One night when sitting by the open window in his own particular attic at Somersby, he heard

and answered the cry of a young owl, which thereupon came nestling up to him, fed out of his hand, and finally took up its abode with the family ("Life," I. 19). We may say of him in the words of Coleridge, that he

Knew the names of birds and mocked their notes
And whistled, as he were a bird himself.

During his boyhood Tennyson would soon learn to notice the "peal of the hundred-throated nightingale," the "sightless song" of the sky-lark, the "flute-notes" of the blackbird, the "hum" of the "dropping snipe," the weird boom of the bittern (the "butter-bump" of the "Northern Farmer"), the caw of the "building rook," the "pipe" of the "tufted plover," the "human whistle" of the great plover, the "call" of the curlew, the "sudden scritches of the jay," and "the moan of doves from immemorial elms." In the neighbourhood of Somersby he would explore the "haunts of hern and crake," whence

came the brook which he has celebrated in song, and notice the

> Cries of the partridge like a rusty key
> Turned in a lock.
>
> (*The Lover's Tale.*)

Sounds such as these he would be familiar with before he had the power to describe them, while the poetic passion lay dormant

> As the music of the moon
> Sleeps in the plain eggs of the nightingale.
>
> (*Aylmer's Field.*)

It was probably from Lincolnshire that the poet gained most of his knowledge of birds, although both Farringford and Aldworth afforded excellent opportunities for continuing his observations. As the late Earl of Selborne said of him, "he never forgot the influences which surrounded him in childhood, and never lost the habit of observing and sympathising with nature which colours much of his poetry" ("Life," II. 458). Of course the Lincolnshire of Tennyson's youth,

that is, of the first part of the nineteenth century, was a very different county from the Lincolnshire of to-day. As Mr. J. Cordeaux writes in his notes on "Lincolnshire and its Birds," published in 1874, "No county has undergone greater change in less than seventy years than Lincolnshire. It has been transformed from a land of wood, heath, mere and marsh into the most flourishing agricultural district in England. Its fens and marshes have given place to dry and sound pasture, its great heaths and barren wolds to fruitful turnips and waving corn; the large woodlands, once the haunt of the kite and the buzzard, under the exigencies of time, have been greatly restricted or altogether removed. Could those who knew the county a century ago see it in its present altered state, they would certainly fail to recognise the face of the country, so completely have the old natural features and landmarks been removed." Tennyson himself saw the beginning of the change, and he describes

it in the words which he has put into the mouth of the dying Northern Farmer who "stubb'd Thurnaby waäste" :—

Dubbut looök at the waäste : theer warn't not feeäd for a cow ;
Nowt at all but bracken an' fuzz, an' looök at it now—
Warn't worth nowt a haäcre, an' now theer's lots o' feeäd,
Fourscoor yows upon it an' some on it down i' seeäd.

The work begun by the Northern Farmer has been carried on by the scientific agriculturist :—

wi' 'is kittle o' steam
Huzzin' an' maäzin' the blessed feälds wi' the Divil's oän teäm ;

and the result is that now Lincolnshire, "except its lonely and unchanged sea-coast, offers scarcely any special attraction for resident and migratory birds." The kite which Tennyson mentions ("The stock-dove coo'd till a kite dropt down"), and which is now almost extinct in England, he

may often have seen wild in Lincolnshire in his boyhood. Lincolnshire was a former stronghold of the kite (H. Saunders, "British Birds," 335), but the last nest known there was taken in 1870. Lord Lilford writing in 1875 says: "The last kites I saw alive and wild in England were three which rose together from the side of the railway as we passed in a train, almost two miles south of Lincoln, in September, 1850." Mr. Cordeaux saw a pair sailing over the Humber marshes in 1878.

Signs of the influence on Tennyson of his country bringing-up are to be seen in his command of dialect and his frequent use of the homely provincial or archaic names of English birds, such as the dor-hawk (nightjar), yaffingale (woodpecker), glimmer-gowk (owl), windhover (kestrel), wood-dove (stock-dove), culver (ring-dove), redcap (goldfinch), lintwhite (linnet), mavis (song-thrush), ouzel (blackbird), merle (blackbird), stag-turkey (turkey-cock). The knowledge

of bird life which Tennyson unconsciously acquired during his early years was cultivated and developed in later life. The biography of the poet by his son, the present Lord Tennyson, shows signs of an intimate acquaintance with and constant affection for the "wild little poets." His brother speaks of "his tremendous excitement when he got hold of Bewick for the first time, how he paced up and down the lawn for hours studying him." Morris's "British Birds" (bought in 1867) became a great favourite with him. But his best teacher was Nature herself. We are told that he learnt from his own observation the fact which he afterwards found recorded in Morris, that "starlings in June, after they have brought up their young ones, congregate in flocks in a reedy place for the sake of sociability." "However absorbed Tennyson might be in earnest talk, his eye and ear were always alive to the natural objects around him. I have often known him stop short in a sentence to

listen to a blackbird's song, to watch the sunlight glint on a butterfly's wing, or to examine a field flower at his feet" (Mrs. Richard Ward in "Life of Tennyson," II. 11). To use the poet's own words :—

A rustle or twitter in the wood
Made dull his inner, keen his outer eye
For all that walk'd or crept or perch'd or flew.
(*The Last Tournament.*)

The diaries and letters of the poet and his wife are full of allusions to bird-life, and contain references to the "snap-snap" of the wings of the fern owl, to the finding of a young cuckoo in a sparrow's nest, to "leaden-backed mews wailing on a cliff," to woodpeckers in the New Forest, kingfishers and oyster-catchers on the Freshwater downs, and a heron flying over the Solent. Close to his home at Aldworth were "groves of oak," while the more distant slopes were clothed with larch and chestnut, "haunts of woodpecker, jay, wood-pigeon, and turtle-

dove," while on the summit of Blackdown the poet would watch " owls of all sorts, nightjars, sparrow-hawks, hobby-hawks, pheasants and partridges," or in the evening, " when wandering by the stone-diggers' cart tracks," would hear the " swish " of a flock of wild duck passing overhead, or the " wail of a plover winging its way to the chain of solitary pools " (" Life," II. 413). In the " careless-ordered garden " at Farringford the poet observed with pleasure the appearance of rarer birds such as the rough-legged buzzard and the crossbill, the latter of which was the subject of a letter to the Duke of Argyll in 1887. He noticed " the birds that made their home in the chalk-ledges ; the peregrine falcons, the ravens with their iron knell, the kestrels, the carrion crows, the different kinds of sea-bird, from the cormorants drying themselves on the pinnacles of rocks in heraldic attitudes to the sea-gull sunning himself among the tufts of samphire and of thrift, were ever a fresh interest " (" Life," II.

370). He tells us how the sight of a robin watching him while he was digging one day in his garden at Farringford gave birth to the lines twice repeated in *Geraint and Enid* :—

As careful robins eye the delver's toil.

At Farringford he was fond of sitting in his kitchen-garden summer-house and listening to the turtle-doves "purring" or to the notes of the thrush; there it was that in his 80th year he finished his song of *The Throstle*, which he had begun in the same garden years before ("Life," II. 353).

To the love of Tennyson for birds we owe the beautiful allusions to them of which his poems are full. No poet is so satisfying to the ornithologist, for no poet had a more accurate knowledge of birds or had a happier power of describing their peculiarities. Mr. Phil Robinson, while accusing British poets of being "inadequately informed as to the ordinary objects in nature,"

and "unfair towards those which they profess to understand," excepts Tennyson from the charge and admits that he is always tender and true to nature.

The author of an article in the *Spectator* of August 18, 1900, on "The Ornithology of Tennyson," says that "in Tennyson's ornithology no flaws can be detected," and he quotes a number of passages in justification of the statement. The Rev. J. E. Tuck, in an article on the same subject, which appeared in the *Naturalist* of February, 1893, writes that Tennyson, if not a scientific ornithologist, was "a keen observer of Nature and a lover of birds, especially of the song-birds which can be seen and heard around such an English country home as the Lincolnshire rectory in which he was born." Mr. Tuck justifies the statement by a number of quotations from the poet's works. Mr. J. E. Harting, in reviewing the last-mentioned article in the *Zoologist* for 1893 (p. 145), dissents from the writer's conclu-

sions and strikes a discordant note. His remarks are as follows: "Picturesque enough are these allusions, no doubt, and poetical, but too often, alas! inaccurate. The expressions in many cases which are intended to be descriptions of notes and flights are neither the best which could be employed, nor are they sometimes sufficiently correct to satisfy the critical ornithologist. In my opinion, they tend to prove that the laureate had neither a good eye for colour nor a good ear for bird music, while occasionally want of close observation has led to his attributing certain habits which they do not possess." Mr. Harting quotes in support of his remarks two references, one to the swallow, the other to the sea-gull. These references will be considered later on (see pp. 95, 173). He also mentions with praise a "few happy allusions" to birds in the poems of Tennyson, but concludes that they "do not of themselves entitle the departed laureate to be regarded as more than an ordinary lover of birds, while

as an ornithologist, in the proper sense of the term, he shows himself, in my humble judgment, inferior to many English poets who have preceded him." The opinion of such an eminent ornithologist as Mr. Harting is entitled to every respect, but it is hoped that the following pages will show that his judgment in this case was a little hasty.

The poems of Tennyson contain several bird-passages of great beauty. One of the best is in the *Progress of Spring* :—

Up leaps the lark, gone wild to welcome her,
About her glance the tits and shriek the jays,
Before her skims the jubilant woodpecker,
The linnet's bosom blushes at her gaze,
While round her brows a woodland culver flits,
Watching her large light eyes and gracious looks,
And in her open palm a halcyon sits
Patient—the secret splendour of the brooks.

* * * * *

Now past her feet the swallow circling flies,
A clamorous cuckoo stoops to meet her hand ;

* * * * *

"The wild Hawk stood with the down on his beak,

The blackcap warbles, and the turtle purrs,
The starling claps his tiny castanets.
Still round her forehead wheels the woodland dove,
And scatters on her throat the sparks of dew.

Another notable bird-passage is from the *Poet's Song* :—

A melody loud and sweet
That made the wild swan pause in her cloud,
And the lark drop down at his feet.

The swallow stopt as he hunted the fly,
* * * * *
The wild hawk stood with the down on his beak,
And stared, with his foot on the prey,
And the nightingale thought, 'I have sung many songs,
But never one so gay.'

The gradual "tuning-up" of the bird chorus in early dawn is described in many passages, *e.g.* :

Till notice of a change in the dark world
Was lisped about the acacias, and a bird
That early woke to feed her little ones
Sent from a dewy breast a cry for light.
(*The Princess*).

Or,

When the first low matin-chirp hath grown
Full quire.

(*Love and Duty.*)

Or,

Listen how the birds
Begin to warble in the budding orchard trees!

(*The Flight.*)

Or,

O birds that warble to the morning sky,
O birds that warble as the day goes by,
Sing sweetly.

(*Gareth and Lynette.*)

Or,

Risest thou thus, dim dawn, again
So loud with voices of the birds.

(*In Memoriam*, st. 99.)

Sadder in tone but far more beautiful are the lines from *The Princess* :—

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square.

The references in Tennyson to the nesting

of birds are particularly tender. Few "baby songs" have ever been written so sweet as :—

What does little birdie say
In her nest at peep of day ?
Let me fly, says little birdie ;
Mother, let me fly away.
Birdie, rest a little longer,
Till the little wings are stronger ;
So she rests a little longer,
Then she flies away.

A beautiful picture of home illustrated by scenes taken from bird life is to be found in two passages from *Becket*. One is of a cheerful tone and describes the feeding of the "yellow-throated nestling in the nest" (*Lancelot and Elaine*) :—

The pretty gaping bills in the home-nest
Piping for bread—the daily want supplied—
The daily pleasure to supply it.

(Act II., sc. 2.)

The other is sadder :—

We came upon
A wild fowl sitting on her nest, so still

I reach'd my hand and touch'd ; she did not stir ;
The snow had frozen round her, and she sat
Stone-dead upon a heap of ice-cold eggs.
Look ! how this love, this mother, runs thro' all
The world God made—even the beast, the bird ! *

(*Becket*, act v., sc. 2.)

The interest that Tennyson took in wild birds is shown by the number of different kinds to which he refers in his poems. Of all poets of established reputation he heads the list for the number of birds which he mentions. The wild birds of the English Parnassus number less than 100, while the wild birds of the latest ornitho-

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* A similar incident is described at greater length by Ethel Coxhead in a poem called *The Mother Duck*, which appeared in a book called *Birds and Babies* published in 1883, the year before the publication of *Becket*. The last lines are as follows :—

On her nest the duck lay frozen,
With her eyes shut—cold and dead.

Just a little common wild-duck
Lying stiff, without a breath,
But whose heart was brave and faithful.
And whose love had conquered death.

logical authority (Howard Saunders) number 384. Of course, many of the birds that appear in ornithological treatises are rare visitors, and the ornithological list is swollen by the insertion of a large number of different varieties, while the poets deal more with *genera* than with *species*, and probably with the most important and characteristic kinds. Mr. Phil Robinson, in his book on " The Poets' Birds," gives the number of the poets' birds as seventy-six, but his quotations refer to a larger number. A comparison of the works of such poets as Shakespeare, Milton, Spenser, Chaucer, Drayton, Cowper, Wordsworth, Scott, Burns, Coleridge, Southey, Keats, Shelley, and Tennyson, shows that the aggregate number of wild British birds mentioned by one or other of these poets amounts to ninety-seven. The list would be considerably increased in number if we took into account the works of such minor poets as Hurdis, Bishop Mant, Grahame, Clare, Gisborne, Leyden, Annette F. C. Knight, Sewell,

Stokes and Gilbert White, many of whom are little more than rhyming ornithologists. It is perhaps better to compare poets who are not ornithologists with ornithologists who are not poets, than to take those who are half ornithologists and half poets. The poetic list as compared with the ornithological is as follows :—Of the order *Passeres*, which contains all the songsters and small birds, the ornithological list contains 132, the poets' 36, namely, the song-thrush, field-fare, blackbird, stonechat, robin, nightingale, blackcap, golden-crested and common wren, hedge-sparrow, tomtit, nuthatch, wagtail, shrike, swallow, martin, greenfinch, goldfinch, siskin, house-sparrow, chaffinch, mountain-finch, linnet, bullfinch, common bunting, yellow-hammer, starling, chough, jay, magpie, jackdaw, raven, crow, rook, skylark and wood-lark. Of the 16 *Picariæ*, the poets' list contains 5, the swift, nightjar, green-woodpecker, kingfisher and cuckoo ; of the 10 *Striges*, the poets' list contains 3, the

white, tawny and eagle-owls; of the 25 *Accipitres*, the poets' list contains 11, the vulture, buzzard, golden eagle, white-tailed eagle, goshawk, sparrow-hawk, kite, peregrine-falcon, merlin, kestrel, and osprey; of the 3 *Steganopodes*, the poets' list contains 2, the cormorant and gannet; of the 14 *Herodiones*, the poets' list contains 3, the heron, bittern, and stork; of the 42 *Anseres*, the poets' list contains 5, the goose, swan, wild duck, shoveller, and teal; of the 5 *Columbæ*, the poets' list contains 3, the ring-dove, stock-dove and turtle-dove; of the 8 *Gallinæ*, the poets' list contains 6, the grouse, ptarmigan, black-cock, pheasant, partridge, and quail; of the 11 *Grallæ*, the poets' list contains 5, the landrail, moorhen, coot, crane, and bustard; of the 53 *Limicolæ*, the poets' list contains 10, the stone-curlew, dotterel, grey plover, lapwing, oyster-catcher, woodcock, snipe, godwit, knot, and curlew; of the 31 *Gaviæ*, the poets' list contains 1, the seagull; of the 9 *Pygopodes*, the poets' list

contains 2, the loon and the dabchick. Tennyson mentions 60 birds, viz., the song-thrush, blackbird, robin, nightingale, blackcap, golden-crested and common wren, hedge-sparrow, tit, shrike, swallow, martin, greenfinch, house-sparrow, linnet, starling, jay, magpie, jackdaw, raven, crow, rook, skylark, swift, nightjar, green woodpecker, kingfisher, cuckoo, white, tawny and eagle owls, vulture, buzzard, golden and white-tailed eagle, sparrow-hawk, kite, peregrine-falcon, kestrel, heron, bittern, stork, goose, swan, ring-dove, stock-dove, turtle-dove, ptarmigan, pheasant, partridge, quail, landrail, coot, crane, stone-curlew, lapwing, woodcock, snipe, curlew and seagull. Chaucer, who comes next in the list, mentions 51 birds, Shakespeare mentions 49, Scott 46, Wordsworth 39, Burns 37, Keats 18, Milton 16, Coleridge 15, and Shelley 13. Virgil mentions about 20 birds, but he deals much more with *genera* than with *species* (Warde Fowler, *A Year with the Birds*, p. 216). The favourite

bird of Tennyson is the lark, which is also the favourite of Shakespeare, Scott, Burns, Wordsworth and Coleridge, in the sense that it is mentioned by them more than any other bird. Tennyson mentions it 33 times; next to the lark comes the nightingale, to which there are 23 references in Tennyson, the swallow with 21, the owl with 15, and the linnet with 12. In the following pages will be found detailed references to all the passages in which Tennyson makes specific reference to any English wild bird.

Tennyson's references to domestic and caged birds are few and unimportant, and may be disposed of in a few lines. He mentions several times the tame "villatic fowl," cocks and hens, guinea fowl, geese and turkeys. One of the best of these references is a passage from the *Princess*, where King Gama's impotent efforts to check the princes from fighting are well compared to the helpless alarm of a hen that has reared a brood of ducklings when she sees them take to their native element :—

'Boys!' shriek'd the king, but vainlier than
a hen
To her false daughters in the pool; for none
regarded.

In the *Churchwarden and the Curate* the indignant keeper is represented as turning as red as "a stag-tuckey's wattles," *i.e.*, the red flesh that hangs under the neck of a turkey-cock.

The poet's references to the birds of the dovecote will be dealt with hereafter. He makes several allusions to—

The peacock in his laurel bower,
The parrot in his gilded wires.
(*The Daydreams.*)

His allusion to—

Long-tail'd birds of paradise
That float thro' heaven and cannot light,
(*Epilogue.*)

embodies the old mistaken belief that birds of paradise had no legs.

CHAPTER I.

SONG.

Causes of the song of birds—Lark—Nightingale—Thrush — Blackbird — Linnet — Greenfinch — Robin —Wren —Blackcap — Starling — Sparrow.

Few passages in Tennyson are more beautiful than the well-known lines from *The Gardener's Daughter*, describing the chorus of birds on a bright spring day :—

From the woods
Came voices of the well-contented doves.
The lark could scarce get out his notes for joy,
But shook his song together as he near'd
His happy home, the ground. To left and right
The cuckoo told his name to all the hills ;
The mellow ouzel fluted in the elm ;
The redcap whistled, and the nightingale
Sang loud, as tho' he were the bird of day.

In the same context the poet lightly touches on the interesting question of the causes that provoke the song of birds :—

> And Eustace turn'd and smiling said to me,
> Hear how the bushes echo! by my life,
> These birds have joyful thoughts. Think you they sing,
> Like poets, from the vanity of song?
> Or have they any sense of why they sing?
> And would they praise the heavens for what they have?
> And I made answer, 'Were there nothing else
> For which to praise the heavens but only love,
> That only love were cause enough for praise!'

In several passages Tennyson connects the music of birds with their love-making in spring, *e.g.* :—

> Nightingales warbled and sang
> Of a passion that lasts but a day.
> (*In the Garden at Swainston.*)

And again—

> They love their mates, to whom they sing; or else their songs, that meet

The morning with such music, would never be so sweet!

(*The Flight.*)

Or—

'I'll never love any but you'—the morning song of the lark;
'I'll never love any but you'—the nightingale's hymn in the dark.

(*The First Quarrel.*)

And again—

For that day
Love, rising, shook his wings and charged the winds
With spiced May-sweets from bound to bound, and blew
Fresh fire into the sun, and from within
Burst thro' the heated buds, and sent his soul
Into the song of birds.

(*The Lover's Tale.*)

And—

But listen—overhead—
Fluting and piping and luting, 'Love, love, love,'
Those sweet tree-Cupids half-way up in heaven,
The birds.

(*The Foresters.*)

And—

A song on every spray,
Of birds that piped their Valentines.
(*The Princess.*)

One of the latest, but sweetest of the poet's songs, *The Throstle*, is not only a beautiful and successful imitation of the bird's note, but a poetic explanation of the motives of its song prompted by the approach of the pairing time and warmer weather :—

'Summer is coming, summer is coming,
I know it, I know it, I know it.
Light again, leaf again, life again, love again,'
Yes, my wild little poet.

Sing the new year in under the blue,
Last year you sang it as gladly,
'New, new, new, new!' Is it then *so* new
That you should carol so madly?

'Love again, song again, nest again, young again,'
Never a prophet so crazy!
And hardly a daisy as yet, little friend,
See, there is hardly a daisy.

'Here again, here, here, here, happy year!'
O warble unchidden, unbidden.
Summer is coming, is coming, my dear,
And all the winters are hidden.

With this beautiful poem should be compared Macgillivray's imitation of the thrush's song:—

Dear, dear, dear
  Is the rocky glen;
Far away, far away, far away
  The haunts of men.
Here shall we dwell in love
With the lark and the dove,
Cuckoo and corn-rail;
Feast on the banded snail,
  Worm and gilded fly:
Drink of the crystal rill
Winding adown the hill,
  Never to dry.

With glee, with glee, with glee,
  Cheer up, cheer up, cheer up; here
Nothing to harm us; then sing merrily,
  Sing to the lov'd ones whose nest is near,
Qui, qui, qui, kweeu, quip,

Tiurru, tiurru, chipiwi,
Too-tee, too-tee, chiu choo,
Chirri, chirri, chooee,
Quiu, qui, qui.

The delight of birds at the sun and the approach of warm weather is referred to in *Gareth and Lynette* as one of the causes of the songs of lark, mavis, merle, linnet—

When they utter forth
May-music growing with the growing light,
Their sweet sun-worship.

With these passages might be compared the lines from Chaucer's *Romaunt of the Rose*—

The briddes, that han left hir song,
Whyl they have suffred cold so strong
In wedres grille, and derk to sighte,
Ben in May, for the sonne brighte,
So glade, that they shewe in singing,
That in hir herte is swich lyking
That they mote singen and be light.

To the same effect is Coleridge's *Answer to a Child's Question* :—

Do you ask what the birds say? The sparrow,
the dove,
The linnet and thrush say, 'I love and I love!'
In the winter they're silent—the wind is so
strong;
What it says, I don't know, but it sings a loud
song.
But green leaves, and blossoms, and sunny warm
weather,
And singing and loving all come back together.
But the lark is so brimful of gladness and love,
The green fields below him, the blue sky above,
That he sings and he sings; and for ever sings
he,
'I love my love and my love loves me.'

Compare, too, the passage from Tennyson's *Lucretius* :—

The all-generating powers and genial heat
Of Nature, when she strikes through the thick
blood
Of cattle, and light is large, and lambs are glad,
Nosing the mother's udder, and the bird
Makes his heart voice amid the blaze of flowers.

A similar strain of thought accompanied by a warning note is to be found in *Early Spring* :—

O follow, leaping blood,
The season's lure.
O heart, look up and down
Serene, secure,
Warm as the crocus cup,
Like snow-drops, pure!

Of a graver tone still are the following lines on the same subject :—

The songs, the stirring air,
The life re-orient out of dust,
Cry thro' the sense to hearten trust
In that which made the world so fair.
(*In Memoriam*, st. cxvi.)

Compare the lines from *Akbar's Dream* :—

Shadow-maker, shadow-slayer, arrowing light from clime to clime,
Hear thy myriad laureates hail thee monarch in their woodland rhyme.
Warble bird, and open flower, and men below the dome of azure
Kneel adoring him the Timeless in the flame that measures time.

"In the Spring the wanton Lapwing gets himself another crest."

The approach of the pairing-time not only prompts "birds' love and birds' song" but leads to the putting on of the nuptial plumage :—

> Birds make ready for their bridal-time
> By change of feather.
>
> (*The Sisters.*)

The same idea is worked out in greater detail in the well-known passage in *Locksley Hall* :—

> In the spring a fuller crimson comes upon the robin's breast ;
> In the spring the wanton lapwing gets himself another crest ;
> In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnish'd dove,
> In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.

The reverse side of the picture is to be found in the lines :—

> Some birds are sick and sullen when they moult,
>
> (*The Sisters.*)

where the reference is to the period in late summer when birds cease their song.

Compare the passage with *Becket* (act i., sc. 3) :—

The bird that moults sings the same song again.

The subject of the causes that provoke the song of birds is discussed by Mr. Warde Fowler in an interesting chapter in his *Summer Studies of Birds and Books*, and he comes to the conclusion that Darwin's suggestion that all birds' songs are love songs does not square satisfactorily with the facts. He points out that there are other causes which prompt the song of birds, particularly of those that sing in autumn, and that song is often the expression of high spirits and happiness, abundance of food and pure enjoyment of life. He also points to the remarkable fact that the song of a bird may even be "an expression of anger at some intrusion or calamity. It is well know that you may make a sedge warbler sing by poking a stick or throwing a stone into the bush in which he happens to be. I have even known the bird sing vociferously its

regular song, though somewhat loudly and harshly, while one of its young brood was being killed close by; for unknown to me my dog had seized this tender fledgeling, and it was not till I discovered this that I discovered the meaning of the song. I have some reason to think that the nightingale's song, which is of the same highly emotional type, is also sometimes used in this way; for Mr. —— tells me that he has known a nightingale sing loudly in a tree overhead while he was examining its nest in the undergrowth below."

By the light of these remarks one should look at the lines from *In Memoriam* (st. xxi.) :—

> I do but sing because I must
> And pipe but as the linnets sing.
>
> And one is glad; her note is gay,
> For now her little ones have ranged;
> And one is sad, her note is changed,
> Because her brood is stol'n away.

Probably the passage is also partly inspired

by the beautiful lines of Virgil on the nightingale whose nest has been robbed :—

Qualis populea moerens philomela sub umbra
Amissos queritur foetus, quos durus arator
Observans nido implumes detraxit ; at illa
Flet noctem, ramoque sedens miserabile carmen
Integrat, et moestis late loca questibus implet.

This passage from Virgil has been imitated by Phineas Fletcher :—

As a nightingale, whose callow young
Some boy hath markt, and now half nak'd hath taken,
Which long she closely kept, and foster'd long,
But all in vain ; she now, poor bird, forsaken,
Flies up and down, but grief no place can shaken ;
All day and night her loss she fresh doth rue,
And when she ends her plaints, then soon begins anew.

(*Elisa.*)

Thomson has also imitated more diffusely the same passage of Virgil :—

Oft, when returning with her loaded bill,
The astonished mother finds a vacant nest,

By the hard hand of unrelenting clowns
Robbed ; to the ground the vain provision falls,
Her pinions ruffle, and, low drooping, scarce
Can bear the mourner to her poplar shade,
Where, all abandoned to despair, she sings
Her sorrows through the night, and on the bough
Sole-sitting, still at every dying fall
Takes up again her lamentable strain
Of winding woe, till wide around the woods
Sigh to her song, and with her wail resound.
(*The Seasons—Spring.*)

It should be observed that it is the male nightingale and male linnet that sing, not the female. As Mr. Warde Fowler puts it, "True song is always a male character ; if female birds sing at all, they sing, so far as seems to be known, a feebler and inferior song." The female bird that sings is a greater rarity even than a female poet. Tennyson sometimes makes the singing linnet female, as in the passage just quoted, and again in *Claribel* :—

Her song the lintwhite swelleth.

It is the male in *Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere* :—

Sometimes the linnet piped *his* song.

The female nightingale is represented as the songster in :—

No nightingale delighteth to prolong
Her low preamble all alone.
(*The Palace of Art.*)

The male bird is the songster in :—

The nightingale
Sang loud, as tho' *he* were the bird of day.
(*The Gardener's Daughter.*)

Also in :—

The living airs of middle night
Died round the bulbul as *he* sung.
(*Arabian Nights.*)

In other cases the male bird is the songster ; *e.g.* :—

The lark could scarce get out *his* note for joy.
(*The Gardener's Daughter.*)

and

Theer wur a lark a-singin' '*is* best of a Sunday at murn.
(*Northern Cobbler.*)

and

The lark flys out o' the flowers wid *his* song to the sun and the moon.

(*To-morrow.*)

and

The bird that pipes *his* lone desire.

(*After reading a Life and Letters.*)

In the line from *The Northern Cobbler*, where two lovers are represented singing a hymn together in chapel, "like birds on a beugh," Tennyson seems to be referring to a duet of the male and female birds which is not altogether true to nature.

The chief English poets exhibit considerable difference of expression on the question on the sex of singing birds. Most of them in the case of the nightingale ascribe the gift of song to the female. This is probably the result of the influence of the classical legend of Philomela. Almost the only exceptions are to be found in Milton, Cowper, Byron, Coleridge, and Tennyson, but most even of these poets vary and some-

times write of the singing nightingale as female and sometimes as male. Thus Milton writes :—

> The night-warbling bird that, now awake,
> Tunes sweetest *his* love-laboured song.

In other passages such as :—

> Thee, *chauntress*, oft the woods among
> I woo to hear thy evensong,

Milton writes of the songtser as female.

Cowper, who writes,

> The nightingale that all day long
> Had cheered the village with *his* song,

also has

> The nightingale *she* pours
> Her solitary lays.
>
> (*Olney Hymns.*)

Byron, under the influence of the Eastern legend, that makes the rose the mistress and the nightingale the lover, writes :—

> For there the rose o'er crag or vale,
> Sultana of the nightingale,
> The maid for whom *his* melody
> *His* thousand songs, are heard on high.
>
> (*The Giaour.*)

So, too, in the *Bride of Abydos* :—

A bird unseen but not remote,
Invisible *his* airy wings,
But soft as harp that houri strings
His long entrancing note.

Coleridge makes the singing nightingale male :—

'Tis the merry nightingale
That crowds and hurries and precipitates
With fast thick warble *his* delicious notes.
(*Sibylline Leaves—The Nightingale.*)

In the case of the lark the variation between the male and female is more general. Shakespeare, who writes;

Lo! here the gentle lark, weary of rest,
From *his* moist cabinet mounts upon high
And wakes the morning.
(*Venus and Adonis.*)

also has,

Doth welcome daylight with *her* ditty.
(*Passionate Pilgrim.*)

Milton makes the songster male in—

And now the herald lark
Left *his* ground nest, high tow'ring to descry

The morn's approach, and greet her with his song;

(*Paradise Lost.*)

and also in—

To hear the lark begin *his* flight
And singing startle the dull night.

(*L'Allegro.*)

The female lark is mentioned in *Comus* in a passage where there is no specific reference to song :—

Ere morning wake, or the low-roosted lark
From *her* thatched pallet rouse.

In Gay, Thomson, Cowper, Rogers, Keats, Coleridge, the singing lark is the male; in Chaucer, Spenser, Phineas Fletcher, Beaumont, Waller, Parnell and Shenstone, the singing lark is the female; in Scott and Burns the singing skylark is the female and the woodlark the male.

The singing blackbird in the poets is generally represented as the male, as in Shakespeare—

The throstle with *his* note so true;

and in Drayton,

The throstle with shrill sharps, as purposely *he* sung
T' awake the lustless sun;

(*Polyolbion.*)

and in Skelton

The throstle with *his* warbling.

So the song-thrush is generally the male, as in Drayton,

Upon *his* dulcet pipe the merle doth only play;

(*Polyolbion.*)

and in Burns,

The merle in *his* noontide bower
Makes woodland echoes ring;

(*Queen of Scots.*)

and in Butler

And understood as much of things
As the ablest blackbird what *he* sings.

(*Plagiaries.*)

The robin by virtue of its name is always spoken of as male, and the same is the case with the bullfinch, chaffinch and hedge sparrow. The singing linnet is generally the male except in

Tennyson, where, as it has already been pointed out, it is sometimes male, sometimes female.

It is now proposed to deal in greater detail with the songsters mentioned by Tennyson, that is, the lark, nightingale, thrush, blackbird, linnet, goldfinch, greenfinch, robin, wren, blackcap, starling, sparrow.

The Lark.—The skylark is the favourite bird of Tennyson, as of most poets, and is mentioned by him oftener than any other bird. The features in the lark which attract the attention of poets, as of all observers of nature, are its song and its flight. The lark is one of the few birds that make melody "in mid air,"* most bird-songsters make melody "in branch," whence the lines in *Becket* :—

These tree-towers,
Their long bird-echoing minster aisles.

Almost alone of birds, except the pipit and

---

* *Gareth and Lynette.*

the meadow pipit, the lark sings while it is flying, and rarely while it is at rest; flight and song seem inextricably connected with one another in the lark and indicate an excitement and joyous vitality which are most noticeable in the early morning, but which continue through the day, and are made more remarkable by the contrast between the height to which it soars and the lowly situation of its "thatched pallet" on the ground. The joyousness of the lark's song is referred to in the lines:—

The lark could scarce get out his notes for joy.
(*The Gardener's Daughter.*)

and

Up leaps the lark, gone wild to welcome her.
(*The Progress of Spring.*)

and,

Be merry in heaven, O larks;
(*The Window.*)

and,

Could live as happy as the larks in heaven;
(*The Foresters.*)

and,

Gamesome as the colt,
And livelier than the lark.

(*Talking Oak.*)

The elaboration of its song and the clearness of its note are thus described—

The quick lark's closest-caroll'd strains;

(*Rosalind.*)

and,

Lavish carol of clear-throated larks;

(*The Lover's Tale.*)

and,

Then would he whistle rapid as any lark.

(*Gareth and Lynette.*)

The morning song of the bird is a frequent topic with the poet :—

'I'll never love any but you,' the morning song of the lark.

(*The First Quarrel.*)

Each morn my sleep was broken thro'
By some wild skylark's matin song.

(*The Miller's Daughter.*)

But ere the lark hath left the lea
I wake.

(*In Memoriam.*)

The lark has past from earth to heaven upon
the morning breeze.

* * * * *

They love their mates to whom they sing ; or
else their songs, that meet
The morning with such music, would never be
so sweet !

(*The Flight.*)

The lark first takes the sunlight on his wing.

(*The Cup.*)

Three noticeable characteristics of the bird—its early song, clear note and peculiar, circular, up-springing flight, are well described in the lines :—

And morn by morn the lark
Shot up and shrill'd in flick'ring gyres.

(*The Princess.*)

The ease and swiftness of its movements are proverbial, as in the line :—

An' Molly Magee kem flyin' acrass me, as light
as a lark.

(*To-morrow.*)

The great height to which it ascends is referred to in the lines :—

Clear as a lark, high o'er me as a lark.
(*The Holy Grail.*)

And drown'd in yonder living blue
The lark becomes a sightless song.
(*In Memoriam.*)

and,

The shadow of a lark
Hung in the shadow of a heaven;
(*In Memoriam.*)

and,

I lose it, as we lose the lark in heaven;
(*Lancelot and Elaine.*)

and,

Theer wur a lark a-singin' 'is best of a Sunday at murn,
Couldn't see 'im, we 'eärd 'im a-mountin' oop 'igher and 'igher;
(*The Northern Cobbler.*)

and,

And while the lark flies up and touches heaven;
(*The Foresters.*)

and,

Thou that can'st soar
Beyond the morning lark.

(*The Falcon.*)

The last line bears a strong resemblance to Shakespeare's—

Thou hast hawks will soar
Above the morning lark.

(*Taming of the Shrew.*)

The contrast between its lowly nest and the height to which it rises is the motive of such passages as :—

O happy lark, that warblest high
Above thy lowly nest;

(*The Promise of May.*)

and,

The lark has past from earth to heaven upon the morning breeze!

(*The Flight.*)

The male lark when it is making love to its mate hovers in the air and "flutters" to the ground. Hence the lines from *The Day Dream* :—

His spirit flutters like a lark.
He stoops—to kiss her—on his knee.

The sudden descent of the "low-roosted lark" to its "thatcht pallet" is referred to in the lines :—

> And the lark dropt down at his feet.
>
> (*The Poet's Song.*)

The song of the lark in its descent to its nest is well described in the passage from *The Gardener's Daughter* that has been already quoted :—

> But shook his song together as he near'd
> His happy home, the ground.

One of the achievements of faith is thus described by the poet in a beautiful passage in *The Ancient Sage* :—

> She hears the lark within the songless egg.

In *Harold* the contrast is beautifully drawn between the horror of an underground prison and the life in the open-air, to which the lark contributes one of its attractions :—

> And over thee the suns arise and set,
> And the lark sings, the sweet stars come and go,
> And men are at their markets, in their fields,

And woo their loves and have forgotten thee;
And thou art upright in thy living grave,
Where there is barely room to shift thy side.

In *The Voyage of Maeldune* one of the characteristics of the Silent Isle is thus described :—

High in the heaven above us there flicker'd a songless lark.

More prosaic references are to be found in such passages as :—

When heaven falls, I may light on such a lark;
(*The Foresters.*)

and,

My master, Charles,
Bad you go softly with your heretics here,
Until your throne had ceased to tremble. Then
Spit them like larks.
(*Queen Mary.*)

The Nightingale.—If joy is the prevailing characteristic of the lark, the "hundred-throated nightingale" is, according to Tennyson, still more remarkable for the force and passion of its song. Tennyson alludes to the passionate nature of the bird's song in these lines :—

Mad for thy mate, passionate nightingale

(*Harold.*)

Their anthems of no church, how sweet they are!
Nor kingly priest nor priestly king to cross
Their billings ere they meet.

(*Ib.*)

The nightingales in Havering-atte-Bower
Sang out their loves so loud, that Edward's prayers
Were deafen'd.

(*Ib.*)

'I'll never love any but you,' the nightingale's hymn in the dark.

(*The First Quarrel.*)

Nightingales warbled and sang
Of a passion that lasts but a day.

(*In the Garden at Swainston.*)

Tennyson records in his diary that one night when he saw the moonlight reflected in a nightingale's eye, and she was singing in the hedgerow, the bird's voice vibrated with such passion that the leaves trembled around her; this may be

the source of the passage in the *Gardener's Daughter* :—

In whispers, like the whispers of the leaves
That tremble round a nightingale.

The power of the bird's song is referred to in the following lines :—

How far thro' all the bloom and brake
That nightingale is heard!
What power but the bird's could make
This music in the bird?
(*The Ancient Sage.*)

and

And all about us peal'd the nightingale.
(*The Princess.*)

The variety of its song is described in the following passage :—

The nightingale, full-toned in middle May,
Hath ever and anon a note so thin
It seems another voice in other groves.
(*Balin and Balan.*)

This "thin note" is imitated in the *Grandmother* :—

And whit, whit, whit in the bush beside me
chirrupt the nightingale.

In the already-quoted passage from the *Gardener's Daughter*, Tennyson shows that he had noticed the fact that the nightingale does not limit its performance to the hours of darkness :—

> And the nightingale
> Sang loud, as tho' he were the bird of day.

This should be contrasted with Shakespeare's :

> I think
> The nightingale, if she should sing by day,
> When every goose is cackling, would be thought
> No better a musician than the wren.
>
> (*The Merchant of Venice.*)

The following lines from *Queen Mary* refer to Elizabeth's sojourn at Ashridge in Buckinghamshire, one of the counties of England most famous for nightingales :—

> You have sent her from the court, but then she goes,
> I warrant, not to hear the nightingales,
> But hatch you some new treason in the woods.

One of Tennyson's most beautiful similes depicts the contrast between the unmarked and

unadorned eggs of the nightingale and the passion and elaboration of the song of the birds which are hatched from them :—

> But where a passion yet unborn perhaps
> Lay hidden as the music of the moon
> Sleeps in the plain eggs of the nightingale.
>
> (*Aylmer's Field.*)

The resources of language are exhausted to describe the song of the nightingale, which in one place is said to "bubble," in another to "peal," in another to "warble."

The pleasure that the bird takes in its own performance is referred to in the *Palace of Art* :—

> No nightingale delighteth to prolong
> Her low preamble all alone,
> More than my soul to hear her echo'd song
> Throb thro' the ribbed stone.

A more prosaic reference is to be found in *The Foresters* :—

> You see, they are so fond o' their own voices that I cannot sleep o' nights by cause on 'em.

Tennyson in some passages speaks of the song of the nightingale as a cheerful one, *e.g.* :—

> A sudden nightingale
> Saw thee, and flashed into a frolic of song
> and welcome.
>
> (*Demeter and Persephone.*)

So Shelley in *Prince Athanase* recognises the gladness of the nightingale's song :—

> O summer eve! with power divine bestowing
> On thine own bird the sweet enthusiasm
> Which overflow in notes of liquid gladness
> Filling the sky with light!

Coleridge, too, writes (*Sybilline Leaves, The Nightingale*) :—

> 'Tis the merry nightingale
> That crowds, and hurries, and precipitates
> With fast thick warble his delicious notes.

Keats in his matchless *Ode* calls it—

> Too happy in thy happiness;

but in the same poem speaks of its "plaintive anthem."

In a passage in which the nightingale, though

not mentioned by name, seems referred to, Tennyson speaks of the mixture of joy and grief in its song :—

Fierce extremes employ
Thy spirits in the darkening leaf,
And in the midmost heart of grief
Thy passion clasps a secret joy.
(*In Memoriam.*)

With this might be compared the lines from *The Birds* of Montgomery—

Minstrel, what makes thy song so sad yet sweet ?
Love, love, where agony and rapture meet.

To a similar effect is the passage from Tennyson's *Recollections of the Arabian Nights* :—

The living airs of middle night
Died round the bulbul as he sung ;
Not he ; but something which possess'd
The darkness of the world, delight,
Life, anguish, death, immortal love,
Ceasing not, mingled, unrepress'd,
Apart from place, withholding time.

The passage from Tennyson's *Poet's Song*—

And the nightingale thought, 'I have sung
many songs,
But never one so gay'

seems meant as a confession by the nightingale that gaiety is not its strong point.

The sadness of the nightingale's song is one of the conventions of poetry. Mr. Warde Fowler, one of the most accurate and sympathetic of observers, says: "I never yet heard a nightingale singing dolefully, as the poets will have it sing; its various phrases are all given out *con brio*, and even that marvellous *crescendo*, which no other bird attempts, conveys to the mind of the listener the fiery intensity of the high-strung singer." ("A Year with the Birds," p. 163). Probably the passion and the intensity of the nightingale's song justify the poetic convention which represents it as plaintive or melancholy, for ardent passion is never gay or mirthful.

Song-thrush.—The thrush is one of the five birds that Tennyson mentions for their mirth:—

O merry the linnet and dove
And swallow and sparrow and throstle.
(*The Window.*)

Joy is the prevailing tone in the note of the bird as described in the poem which has already been quoted in full :—

Sing the new year in under the blue,
Last year you sang it as gladly.

The song-thrush is one of our earliest songsters. Mr. T. Southwell, in a paper on " Marsham's Indications of Spring " (*Transactions of the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists Society*, ii., 33), states as the result of observations taken over a period of sixty-six years that the average time for the commencement of its song is January 16. The bird is fond of singing from the bough of some high tree such as Wordsworth's tall ash-tree :—

To whose topmost twig
A thrush resorts.
(*The Excursion.*)

So too Tennyson in *The Foresters* writes :—

The topmost tree that shoots
New buds to heaven, whereon the throstle rock'd
. . sings a new song to the new year.

And again in *In Memoriam* :—

When rosy plumelets tuft the larch
And rarely pipes the mounted thrush ;

where "rarely" means "finely," as in the *Owl's Song*—

And rarely smells the new-mown hay ;

and "mounted" means perched on the high branch of some tree.

The thrush is in full song in March, as Tennyson writes in his *Ode to the Queen* :—

And thro' wild March the throstle calls.

The song of the thrush in spring is again referred to :—

The blackbirds have their wills,
The throstles, too.

(*Early Spring*.)

In the last verse of the same poem, Tennyson

varies these lines by substituting "poets" for "throstles":—

> The blackbirds have their wills,
> The poets too.

The variation is, perhaps, to show the close connection between human poetry and the 'sweeter music' of the wild little bird-poet.

To the whistling note of the song-thrush, which has hence received the name of whistling thrush, or whistling Dick (Swainson, "Provincial Names of British Birds," 3), Tennyson refers in the line from *Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere*:—

> Sometimes the throstle whistled strong.

It should be noticed that in writing of this bird Tennyson prefers the homelier and more beautiful name of the "throstle"; he only once uses the name "thrush," namely, in the passage from *In Memoriam* which has been quoted above. He twice uses its other name of "mavis," as in

Gareth and Lynette, when he writes of the lark, mavis, merle, linnet, uttering forth :—

May-music growing with the growing light.

And in the lines from *The Foresters* :—

The lusty life of wood and underwood,
Hawk, buzzard, jay, the mavis and the merle.

In the lines from *Claribel* :—

The clear-voiced mavis dwelleth,
The callow throstle lispeth.

The poet, if he is not referring to the same bird under different names, seems to draw a distinction between the song-thrush and the missel-thrush. Perhaps "clear-voiced mavis" refers to the piercing note of the missel-thrush, which is called "storm-cock" from its singing loud in defiance of rough weather, or "big mavis" from its size; while "throstle," as elsewhere in Tennyson, and apparently always in the older poets, means the song-thrush. Compare Skelton's :—

The threstell with his warblynge,
The mavis with his whistell,

where "threstell" means the song-thrush and "mavis" the missel-thrush. There is, however, a passage in Spenser's *Epithalamion* where "mavis" and "thrush" are both used, and, if separate birds are meant, "mavis" must refer to the song-thrush and "thrush" to the missel-thrush :—

The thrush replyes, the mavis descant playes.

Here the word "descant," *i.e.*, "the altering the movement of an air by additional notes and ornaments," is an exact description of the music of the song-thrush (Swainson, "Provincial Names of British Birds," 3).

The Blackbird.—Along with the "throstle with his note so true" naturally comes .—

> The ouzel-cock so black of hue,
> With orange-tawny bill.

The blackbird appears in Tennyson under the three names of the "blackbird," the "ouzel," and the "merle." In the already-quoted passage

from *Gareth and Lynette*, Tennyson mentions it under the name of the "merle," along with the lark, the mavis, and the linnet, as uttering forth

May music growing with the growing light;

he also mentions it under the same name along with the hawk, the buzzard, the jay, and the thrush, as forming part of—

The lusty life of wood and underwood.
(*The Foresters*, Act I., sc. 3.)

Under the name of the "ouzel" it appears in the beautiful bird-passages in the *Gardener's Daughter*, where, among the other sounds of May:—

The mellow ouzel fluted in the elm.

The reference here is clearly to the blackbird, for the ring-ouzel is a rare mountain bird, with a brief and monotonous song (Howard Saunders, p. 16), while "mellow" exactly describes the rich notes of the blackbird, whose clearness of note is well described by the word "fluted," an

expression which is used of the blackbird by Hurdis in his *Favourite Village* :—

Ouzel fluting with melodious pipe;

and, again, by Phillips in his *Pastorals* :—

Fluting through his yellow bill.

Its attacks on fruit are referred to in the passage :

And while the blackbird on the pippin hung.
(*Audley Court.*)

The "flute notes" of the bird are heard from the middle of February, but cease or degenerate on the approach of hot weather in June. To this and its ravages among the fruit with the "gold dagger" of its "orange-tawny bill," Tennyson alludes in his poem on *The Blackbird* :—

O blackbird! sing me something well:
While all the neighbours shoot thee round,
I keep smooth plats of fruitful ground
Where thou may'st warble, eat and dwell.

The espaliers and the standards all
Are thine; the range of lawn and park;

The unnetted black-hearts ripen dark
All thine, against the garden wall.

Yet, tho' I spared thee all the spring,
Thy sole delight is, sitting still,
With that gold dagger of thy bill
To fret the summer jenneting.

O golden bill! the silver tongue
Cold February loved, is dry:
Plenty corrupts the melody
That made thee famous once, when young.

And in the sultry garden-squares,
Now thy flute-notes are changed to coarse,
I hear thee not at all, or hoarse,
As when a hawker hawks his wares.

Take warning! he that will not sing
While yon sun prospers in the blue,
Shall sing for want, ere leaves are new,
Caught in the frozen palms of spring.

The Linnet.—The linnet is mentioned by Tennyson oftener than any bird after the lark, the nightingale, the swallow and the owl. It is

remarkable for two points, its song and its plumage. Tennyson mentions it twice as one of the joyful birds :—

O merry the linnet and dove,
And swallow and sparrow and throstle.
(*The Window.*)

The merry linnet knew me.
(*The Lover's Tale.*)

The rising cadence of its song is described in the lines :—

Her song the lintwhite swelleth,
(*Claribel.*)

where the female is represented as the songster. More ornithologically correct is the line :—

Sometimes the linnet piped his song.
(*Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere.*)

The sweetness and irregularity of its notes (Howard Saunders, 188) are perhaps a justification for the lines from *In Memoriam* :—

I do but sing because I must,
And pipe but as the linnets sing :

And one is glad ; her note is gay,
For now her little ones have ranged ;
And one is sad ; her note is changed,
Because her brood is stol'n away.

In this passage the line :—

I pipe but as the linnets sing,

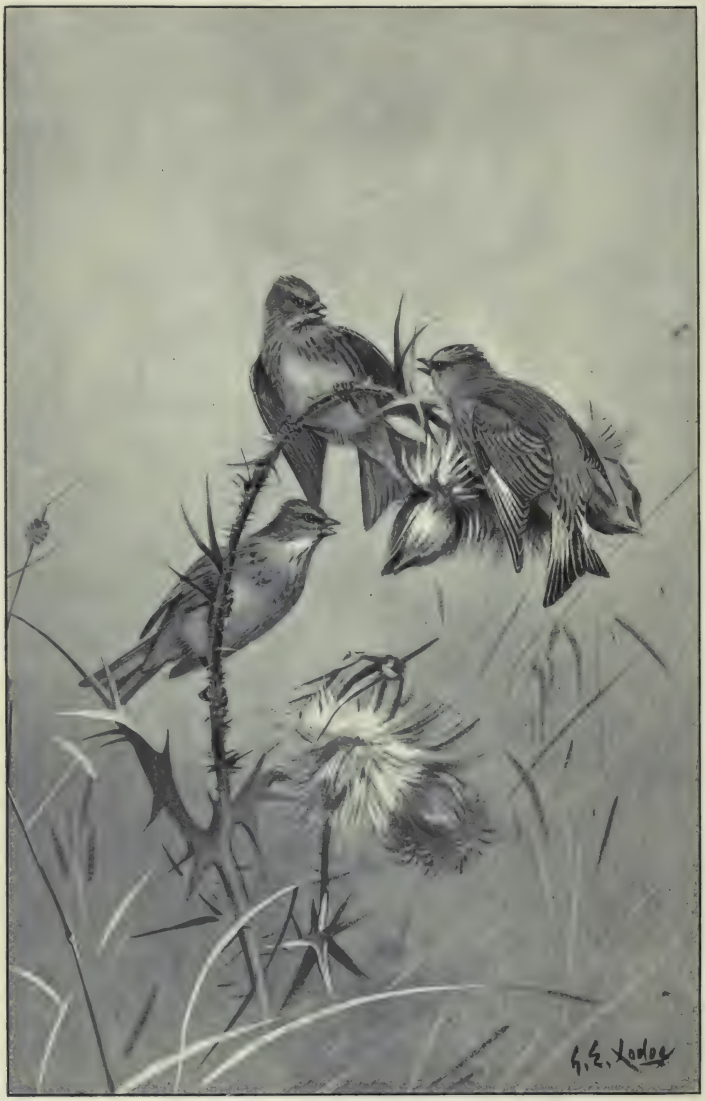
bears a remarkable resemblance to Carlyle's translation of Goethe's song in *Wilhelm Meister* :—

I sing but as the linnet sings.

The fondness of the linnet for singing in rough windy weather is thus alluded to :—

The women sang
Between the rougher voices of the men,
Like linnets in the pauses of the wind.
(*The Princess.*)

The linnet because of its sweet song and from its "capacity for learning the notes of other species" (H. Saunders, 188) is valued as a cage-bird. To this Tennyson refers in the lines :—



"When three gray Linnets wrangle for the seed."

The linnet born within the cage
That never knew the summer woods.
(*In Memoriam.*)

As regards the linnet's plumage, Tennyson notices the fact that its breast, which is brown or dull chestnut in winter, is bright red in spring (Morris, II., 268), when he describes the effect of the advent of spring :—

The linnet's bosom blushes at her gaze.
(*The Progress of Spring.*)

The plumage changes in the autumn, when the crimson feathers are concealed by wide grey margins (Howard Saunders, p. 188). Hence the bird, which is called from its spring plumage the red or brown linnet, receives from its autumn plumage the name of "grey linnet." Thus Tennyson, describing an autumn picture, writes :—

As the thistle shakes
When three grey linnets wrangle for the seed.
(*Guinevere.*)

This passage shows Tennyson's power of observation, for the seeds of the thistle as of other

plants are its favourite food. Hurdis had already observed this, as appears from these lines in the *Favourite Village* :—

> The linnet spare and finch of crimson face,
> That twitter each the none-offending song
> Of quiet prettiness, and pluck the down
> Of the prolific thistle for their bread.

Towards the winter it feeds on hips and haws and mountain-ash berries. This fact Tennyson has noticed in the lines :—

> Hoary knoll of ash and haw
> That hears the latest linnet trill.
>
> (*In Memoriam.*)

The Goldfinch.—The goldfinch, or, as Burns calls it, " the gowdspink, Nature's gayest child," is once mentioned by Tennyson under its provincial name of " redcap," a name which it has received from its crimson head. It is one of the birds in the beautiful passage in the *Gardener's Daughter* :—

> The redcap whistled.

This passage puzzled the Duke of Argyll, who

wrote and asked the poet to what bird it referred. Tennyson answered, " Redcap is, or was when I was a lad, provincial for goldfinch ; had I known it was purely provincial, I should probably not have used it. Now the passage has stood so long that I am loth to alter it."

According to Swainson, " redcap " and " King Harry " or " King Harry redcap " are provincial names for the goldfinch in Shropshire, Suffolk, and the North Riding of Yorkshire. Mr. Cordeaux (" Birds of the Humber District," 54) refers to the " redcap " as its provincial name in Lincolnshire.

The Greenfinch.—The greenfinch, or green linnet, a frequenter of gardens and shrubberies, is once referred to by Tennyson in the passage :—

> Started a green linnet
> Out of the croft.
>
> (*Minnie and Winnie.*)

It is one of the most attractive of English birds,

but is rarely mentioned by poets. Shakespeare never refers to it, but it is the subject of one of the most beautiful of Wordsworth's smaller poems :—

> My dazzled sight he oft deceives ;
> A brother of the dancing leaves ;
> Then flits, and from the cottage-eaves
> Pours forth his song in gushes,
> As if by that exulting strain
> He mock'd and treated with disdain
> The voiceless form he chose to feign
> While fluttering in the bushes.

The Robin.—The allusions which Tennyson makes to the robin, " the darling of children and men," show his accurate observation of the habits of the bird. The nuptial plumage which it puts on in the breeding season is described in the line :—

> In the spring a fuller crimson comes upon the robin's breast.
>
> (*Locksley Hall.*)

The fact that the melancholy note of the robin is almost the only song of English birds heard

during the dull time between autumn and winter is noted in the lines :—

> On the nigh-naked tree the robin piped
> Disconsolate.
>
> (*Enoch Arden.*)

The same fact is referred to by Hurdis in his *Village Curate* :—

> Alone the solitary robin sings,
> And, perch'd aloft, with melancholy note
> Chants out the dirge of autumn.

And by Burns :—

> The robin pensive autumn cheers
> In all her locks of yellow.
>
> (*Humble Petition of Bruar Water.*)

And by Wordsworth :—

> The pensive warbler of the ruddy breast
> This moral sweetens by a heaven-taught lay,
> Lulling the year with all its cares to rest.
>
> (*The Trossachs.*)

The more cheerful side of the robin's nature is referred to by Tennyson in a passage in *The Foresters* (Act III.), where Maid Marian says :—

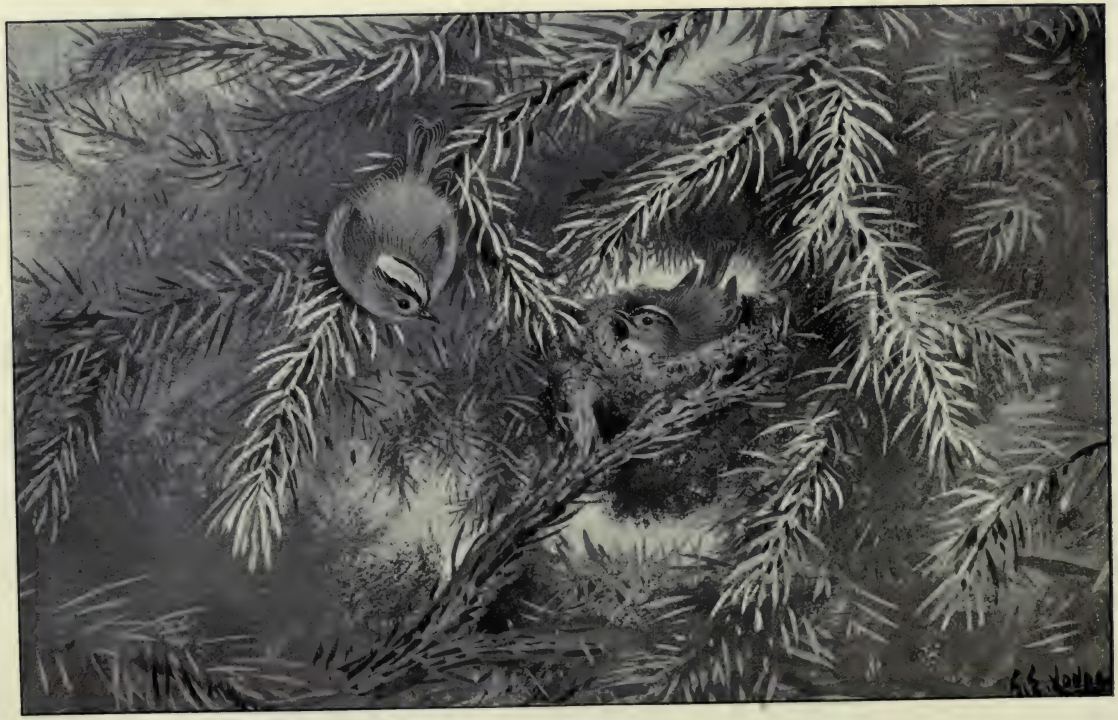
If my man Robin were but a bird-Robin,
How happily would we lilt among the leaves ;
' Love, love, love, love '—what merry madness
—listen.

The fondness of the robin for the company of men and the interest that it takes in gardening operations which give rise to the hope of worms, were observed by Tennyson himself one day when digging in his garden at Farringford, and were recorded in a line which appears twice in the *Marriage of Geraint* :—

And glancing all at once as keenly at her
As careful robins eye the delver's toil.

With that he turn'd and look'd as keenly at her
As careful robins eye the delver's toil.

The Wrens.—Tennyson perhaps makes reference to all three varieties of the wren, namely, the common, the fire-crested and the gold-crested. In his poem of *The Windows, or the Song of the Wrens*, Tennyson perhaps dis-



"And you my Wren with a crown of gold,
You my Queen of the Wrens!"

tinguishes between the fire-crested wren and the golden crest. The lines :—

Look, look, how he flits,
The fire-crown'd king of the wrens, from out of the pine!

and

And flit like the king of the wrens with a crown of fire;

may refer to the rare fire-crested wren, which is distinguished from the golden-crested wren by the black bands on the sides of the crest meeting across the forehead. Both the fire-crest and the gold-crest are frequenters of fir and pine woods.

The following passage seems intended for the gold-crest :—

And you, my wren, with a crown of gold,
You my queen of the wrens!
You the queen of the wrens—
We'll be birds of a feather;
I'll be King of the Queen of the wrens,
And all in a nest together.

With the last line should be compared a similar sentiment from *Geraint and Enid* :—

And we will live like two birds in one nest.

The wrens are the smallest of British birds. The contrast between the eagle, the largest of British birds, and the wren which is the smallest, and yet which, according to the legend, defrauded the eagle of its royal rights, is perhaps referred to in the line from the *Golden Year* :—

Shall eagles not be eagles ? Wrens be wrens ?

A reference to the diminutive size of the common wren as well as to its pugnacity is to be found in the *Marriage of Geraint*, where, in allusion to the mobbing of the sparrow-hawk by small birds, appear the lines :—

Tits, wrens, and all wing'd nothings peck him dead '

The Blackcap.—This charming songster, with its "full, sweet, deep, loud and wild pipe"

(Gilbert White) is rarely mentioned in poetry. Tennyson has one allusion to it :—

> The thicket stirs,
> The fountain pulses high in summer jets,
> The blackcap warbles.
>
> (*The Progress of Spring.*)

The only other reference to it in the poets is to be found in the works of another Lincolnshire poet, Jean Ingelow, who alludes in one of her poems to its depredations among the fruit :—

> The blackcaps in an orchard met
> Praising the berries while they ate.

The blackcap is now a rare bird in Lincolnshire (Cordeaux, "Birds of the Humber District,") though it is common enough in the orchard districts of Middlesex.

The Starling.—The starling is only once mentioned by Tennyson, namely, in the *Progress of Spring* :—

> The starling claps his tiny castanets.

The allusion probably is to the bird's habit of

trembling as it sings. According to Seebohm, his song is warbled forth as he "ruffles the feathers of his head and throat and shakes and droops his wings, as though full of nervous excitement." The diary of Mrs. Tennyson contains a reference to the *Idylls* which the writer has not been able to trace; it is under the date November 8, 1870, and is as follows: "At night he" (*i.e.*, the poet) "repeated some of *The Last Tournament* which he had just written. We read about starlings in Morris; I did not know (what A. had put into his *Idyll* from his own observation) that the starlings in June, after they have brought up their young ones, congregate in flocks in a reedy place for the sake of sociability." ("Life," vol. II., 100.)

The Sparrow.—The sparrow is too commonplace to lend itself to poetic treatment. In the passage,

> O merry the linnet and dove,
> And swallow and sparrow and throstle,
>
> (*The Window.*)

Tennyson may be referring to the welcome notes of the dunnock or hedge-sparrow, though the bird can hardly be considered as lively as the common house-sparrow.

The dunnock, or hedge-sparrow, is perhaps referred to in the lines,

> The very sparrows in the hedge
> Scarce answer to my whistle;
> (*Amphion.*)
>
> The sparrow spear'd by the shrike;
> (*Maud.*)

and

> O wretched set of sparrows, one and all,
> Who pipe of nothing but of sparrow-hawks.
> (*The Marriage of Geraint.*)

The commonplace house-sparrow is referred to in the line,

> The sparrow's chirrup on the roof;
> (*Mariana.*)

and again in *In Memoriam* (st. 119),

> I hear a chirp of birds; I see
> Betwixt the black fronts long-withdrawn
> A light-blue lane of early dawn.

CHAPTER II.

MIGRATION.

Birds of Passage—Nightingale—Swallow—Swift—Martin—Cuckoo.

THE flight of birds is a topic which specially engaged the attention of Tennyson, whose eyes were :—

> keen to seek
> The meanings ambush'd under all they saw.
> (*Tiresias.*)

In particular his poems contain a great number of references to the phenomena of the migration of

> The happy birds that change their sky
> To build and brood ; that live their lives
> From land to land.
> (*In Memoriam.*)

Thus in the *Holy Grail*,

> Chatterers they,
> Like birds of passage piping up and down,
> That gape for flies ;

or in *Passing of Arthur*,

Like wild birds that change
Their season in the night and wail their way
From cloud to cloud ;

or in *The Ring*,

How the birds that circle round the tower
Are cheeping to each other of their flight
To summer lands !

or in *Demeter and Persephone*,

Faint as a climate-changing bird that flies
All night across the darkness, and at dawn
Falls on the threshold of her native land,

or in *Becket* :—

Bar the bird
From following the fled summer—a chink—he's out
Gone !

or in *The Princess*,

and he could not see
The bird of passage flying south but long'd
To follow ;

and again,

These birds of passage come before their time.
(*Queen Mary*.)

The fatal attractions that the lights in light-houses have for migratory birds is alluded to in two passages, one from *The Princess* :—

> Fixt like a beacon-tower above the waves
> Of tempest, when the crimson-rolling eye
> Glares ruin, and the wild birds on the light
> Dash themselves dead.

Another from *Enoch Arden* :—

> As the beacon-blaze allures
> The bird of passage, till he madly strikes
> Against it, and beats out his weary life.

The migrants to whose change of climate Tennyson specifically refers are the nightingale, swallow and cuckoo.

The finest of Tennyson's allusions to the migration of the nightingale is perhaps the passage from *The Marriage of Geraint* which describes the arrival of the nightingale in England in the month of April :—

> So the sweet voice of Enid moved Geraint,
> And made him like a man abroad at morn
> When first the liquid note beloved of men

Comes flying over many a windy wave
To Britain, and in April suddenly
Breaks from the coppice gemm'd with green and red,
And he suspends his converse with a friend,
Or it may be the labour of his hands,
To think or say, 'There is the nightingale.'

The departure of the nightingale in August and September is referred to in *Harold* :—

They are but spring . . . they fly the winter change.

Queen Eleanor in *Becket* says :—

My voice is harsh here, not in tune, a nightingale out of season.

The Swallow.—The swallow is one of Tennyson's favourites and is mentioned by him oftener than any bird except the lark and the nightingale. The two features in the life of the bird which chiefly attract the attention of the poet are its migration and the beauty of its flight. The migration of the swallow, which arrives here at the end of March or the beginning of

April and leaves us in October, is referred to in the following passages :—

> And the swallow 'ill come back with summer o'er the wave.
>
> (*The May Queen.*)
>
> Hubert brings me home
> With April and the swallow.
>
> (*The Ring.*)
>
> Where they like swallows coming out of time
> Will wonder why they came.
>
> (*The Princess.*)
>
> Yet will I be your swallow and return.
>
> (*Queen Mary.*)

Its arrival is mentioned as one of the signs of spring in the *Promise of May*,

> Wi' the butterflies out and the swallers at plaäy;

and again in the Milkmaid's song in *Queen Mary*,

> Swallows fly again,
> Cuckoos cry again.

The first appearance of the swallow and the first song of the cuckoo in each year are close to one

another. In Marsham's "Indications of Spring" the average date for the appearance of the swallow is given as the 13th April, and for the song of the cuckoo as the 23rd April (*Transactions of the Norfolk*, &c., *Naturalists' Society*, II., 44).

The stay of the swallow in England and its return every year are referred to in the lines in which Mary Tudor is complaining of the coldness of her Spanish husband :—

> Why, nature's licensed vagabond, the swallow,
> That might live always in the sun's warm heart,
> Stays longer here in our poor north than you :
> Knows where he nested—ever comes again.

The departure of the swallow "flying south" is referred to in the following passages :—

> Sick as an autumn swallow for a voyage.
>
> (*Harold.*)

> What time I watch'd the swallow winging south
> From mine own land.
>
> (*The Princess.*)

The swallow, from its dislike for cold weather and fondness for warmth, is used by Tennyson

in *Becket* to describe dependents who leave their master on the approach of ruin :—

Farewell, friends ! farewell, swallows ! I wrong the bird ; she leaves only the nest she built, they leave the builder.

The same idea is found in Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* (Act III, sc. 6) :—

2ND. LORD. The swallow follows not summer more willing than we your lordship.

TIMON. Nor more willingly leave master ; such summer birds are men.

So Crabbe to the same effect :—

Chief to the prosperous side the numbers sail.
Fickle and false, they veer with every gale,
As birds that migrate from a freezing shore,
In search of warmer climes, come skimming o'er.

* * * * *

So, on the early prospect of disgrace,
Fly in vast troops this apprehensive race.
Instinctive tribes ! their failing food they dread,
And beg, with timely change, their future bread.

(*The Newspaper.*)

The flight of the "skimming" swallow, one of its most attractive features, is thus alluded to by Tennyson :—

Now past her feet the swallow circling flies.
(*The Progress of Spring.*)

While the swallows skim along the ground.
(*The Foresters.*)

Above in the wind was the swallow,
Chasing itself at its own wild will.
(*The Dying Swan.*)

The fondness of the swallow for dipping in the water is frequently alluded to by Tennyson, *e.g.* :—

Nor dare she trust a larger lay,
But rather loosens from the lip
Short swallow-flights of song, that dip
Their wings in tears, and skim away.
(*In Memoriam.*)

I slip, I slide, I gloom, I glance,
Among my skimming swallows.
(*The Brook.*)

She moves among my visions of the lake,
While the prime swallow dips his wings—
(*Edwin Morris.*)

For knowledge is the swallow on the lake
That sees and stirs the surface-shadow there,
But never yet hath dipt into the abysm.
(*The Ancient Sage.*)

The ferocious side of the nature of swallows, the "mordrer of the flyës smale," as Chaucer calls it, is referred to by Tennyson in the line :—

The may-fly is torn by the swallow.
(*Maud.*)

The following lines from the *Holy Grail* :—

Birds of passage piping up and down
That gape for flies—

probably refer to the swallows. The late Mr. Ruskin, writing of the swallows (*Love's Meinie*, 46), says : "It belongs to a family of birds called 'fissi-rostres' or 'split-beaks.' 'Split-heads' would be a better term, for it is the enormous width of mouth and *power of gaping* which the epithet is meant to express. . . . The bird is most vigilant when its mouth is widest, for it opens as a net to catch whatever comes in its way," The same writer says, "From 700 to

1,000 flies a day are a moderate allowance for a baby swallow." Compare Virgil's description of the swallow :—

" Pabula parva legens, nidisque loquacibus escas."

Mr. Harting objects to the line from the *Poet's Song*,

The swallow stopt as he hunted the bee,

and says that it attributes to the bird a habit which it does not possess (*Zoologist*, 1893, 146). On the other hand, the line is defended in the *Spectator* of August 18th, 1900. The writer says : " Some doubt having been suggested as to whether the swallow does or does not catch bees, the practical evidence of Dixon (always an accurate observer) deserves consideration. Writing of the bee-eater he says : " They were busy hawking for insects and mingling with the swifts and swallows." Mr. Charles Horne, writing to the *Zoologist* (1845, p. 1,137) under the heading " Do swallows eat the honey bee ? " notes the following interesting fact : " On the 16th of this

month I observed several swallows mobbed by hive-bees, as hawks and owls occasionally are by smaller birds; they amused themselves by flying close to a range of hives, but I could not see that they devoured any of the bees, who appeared to be the assailants."

It is perhaps worth noticing that Virgil, in the *Georgics* (IV. 13), mentions the swallow along with the bee-eater as one of the many enemies of bees :—

Absint et picti squalentia terga lacerti
Pinguibus a stabulis meropesque aliaeque volucres
Et manibus Procne pectus signata cruentis.
Omnia nam late vastant ipsasque volantes
Ore ferunt dulcem nidis immitibus escam.

In later editions of Tennyson's works the criticised line was altered, and reads :—

The swallow stopt as he hunted the fly.

The active movements of the swallow and its lively twitter justify its being placed by Tennyson among the merry birds :—

O merry the linnet and dove,
And swallow and sparrow and throstle.
(*The Window.*)

Shelley speaks of "the blithe swallow." So Chaucer, in his description of the Carpenter's Wife in the *Miller's Tale*, says :—

But of hir song, it was as loude and yerne*
As any swalwe sitting on a berne.

The Swift.—With Tennyson's solitary reference to the swift—

The swallow and the swift are near akin
(*The Coming of Arthur.*)

many modern ornithologists might disagree. The swallow and the swift in outward appearance have many points of resemblance, the pointed wings, the forked tail, the little bill. Some naturalists consider that the swift is akin to the humming bird, others to the goat-sucker, and others to the birds of the passerine order. Tenny-

* "Eager, brisk, lively" (Skeat, *Glossarial Index to the Student's Chaucer*).

son's opinion is in agreement with that of Linnæus.

The Martin.—Along with the swift and the swallow naturally comes that universal favourite, the house-martin, which builds its nest under the eaves of our houses when it is not driven away by that domestic pest the house-sparrow. Hence in *Aylmer's Field* the reference to—

the martin-haunted eaves.

The martin's nest of plastered mud is alluded to by Tennyson in a passage in *Launcelot and Elaine* :—

Down to the little thorpe that lies so close,
And almost plaster'd like a martin's nest
To these old walls.

The passage from *The Daydream* :—

Roof-haunting martins warm their eggs,

brings to mind the beautiful and oft-quoted lines from *Macbeth* :—

This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath

Smells wooingly here ; no jutty, frieze,
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle.

The Cuckoo.—The migration of the cuckoo is referred to in the lines from *Queen Mary* that have already been quoted :—

Swallows fly again,
Cuckoos cry again.

When the poet reproaches Mary Boyle with breaking her promise to come with the spring flowers, he writes :—

Be truer to your promise. There ! I heard
Our cuckoo call.

The persistent note of the cuckoo is treated as one of the signs of spring in the line :—

A clamorous cuckoo stoops to meet her hand.
(*The Progress of Spring.*)

The weakness of the cuckoo for repeating its name is thus referred to :—

The cuckoo told his name to all the hills.
(*The Gardener's Daughter.*)

We loved
The sound of one another's voices more
Than the gray cuckoo loves his name.
(*The Lover's Tale.*)

"Gray cuckoo" (*cf.* Shakespeare's "plain-song cuckoo gray") here means the adult bird, which does not put on its gray plumage till the second year.

So seldom is the bird seen that there seems something unsubstantial about its cry :—

Far off a phantom cuckoo cries
From out a phantom hill.
(*Prefatory Poem to my Brother's Sonnets.*)

The note of the bird is first heard in April and is at its best in May :—

"Cuckoo! cuckoo!" was ever a May so fine.
(*The Window.*)

It continues but with a great falling off through June and July; hence the beautiful lines from Shakespeare, *Henry IV.* (Part I., Act iii., sc. 2):

He was but as the cuckoo is in June,
Heard, not regarded.

Its fondness for singing even in the dark is noticed by Tennyson :—

> Midnight—in no midsummer tune
> The breakers lash the shores :
> The cuckoo of a joyless June
> Is calling out of doors :
>
> Midnight—and joyless June gone by,
> And from the deluged park
> The cuckoo of a worse July
> Is calling thro' the dark.

(*Prefatory Poem to my Brother's Sonnets.*)

It is a well-known fact that the cuckoo places its eggs in the nests of other birds, particularly of the hedge-sparrow, and leaves the bringing-up of its offspring to the foster-parents whose own nestlings are often expelled by the young intruder. Tennyson twice alludes to this evil habit, once in a passage in the *Princess* :—

> 'The plan was mine. I built the nest,' she said,
> 'To hatch the cuckoo.'

And again in the prologue to *Harold*, where the

allusion to the Norman supplanting the native prince is obvious :—

> The cuckoo yonder from an English elm
> Crying 'With my false egg I overwhelm
> The native nest.'

Chaucer in the *Parlement of Fowles* (l. 612) goes farther and represents it as killing the foster-parent itself.

So too Shakespeare in *King Lear* :—

"For you know, nuncle, the hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long, that it had its head bit off by its young" (Act i., sc. 4).

One other fact relating to the cuckoo is noticed by the poet, namely, the mobbing of the cuckoo by small birds :—

> I have seen the cuckoo chased by lesser fowl,
> And reason in the chase.
>
> (*The Coming of Arthur.*)

What the "reason in the chase" is ornithologists are not agreed. Some say that the cuckoo is chased by smaller birds because it is very like

a hawk and is mistaken by them for a hawk, which little birds are often in the habit of mobbing.

CHAPTER III.

THE LUSTY LIFE OF WOOD AND UNDERWOOD.

Rook — Crow — Jackdaw — Magpie — Jay — Tits—Doves—Owls—Nightjar—Woodpeckers.

The Rook.—The rook is a favourite with Tennyson, whose poems contain many references to its habits. The fondness of the rook for the elm is referred to in the *May Queen :—*

> The building rook 'll caw from the windy tall elm-tree.

And again in *The Ring :—*

> And in yon arching avenue of old elms,
> Tho' mine, not mine, I heard the sober rook
> And carrion crow cry, ' Mortgage ; '

and in *The Princess :—*

> A shout rose again, and made
> The long line of the approaching rookery swerve
> From the elms ;

and in *Aylmer's Field* :—

As dawn
Aroused the black republic on his elms.

With the last passage should be compared the line from Dryden's *Hind and Panther* :—

Choughs and daws, and such republic birds.

The habit of rooks to leave their rookery and resort on the approach of winter to woods is referred to in *In Memoriam* :—

And autumn, with a noise of rooks
That gather in the waning woods.

The line from the same poem,

The rooks are blown about the skies,

may refer to the force of autumnal winds against which even the strong flight of the rook cannot make headway, or to the antics in which rooks indulge as the wind is rising in the latter part of the year, when they dive down in a frantic, frolicsome manner from a great height in the air, with closed wings, sweeping out when approaching a tree or the ground, as if to save

themselves from being dashed to pieces (Morris, I., 292).

The noise which they make in the evening as they are preparing for the night's rest is described in the *Marriage of Geraint* :—

> Or like a clamour of the rooks
> At distance, ere they settle for the night.

And in *Locksley Hall* :—

> As the many-winter'd crow that leads the clanging rookery home.

In the line last quoted, as in the passage quoted above from the *Princess*, the word "rookery," which properly means the place where the rooks build, is by a figure of speech used for the company of rooks wending their way home.

In this passage "crow" is probably used instead of "rook"; compare the similar passage in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (Act III., sc. 2, l. 51) :—

> Light thickens; and the crow
> Makes wing to the rooky wood.

In the line from *Maud*,

> Maud, Maud, Maud, Maud,

the poet, we are told, intended to represent the cawing of the rooks, "the birds in the high hall garden;" while in the line,

Maud is here, here, here,

he intended to represent the call of the small birds of the wood. ("Life," I., 403.)

The Crow.—The carrion crow is several times mentioned by Tennyson: its bad reputation as a gallows bird is referred to in *Merlin and Vivien*:—

And many a wizard brow bleach'd on the walls:
And many weeks a troop of carrion crows
Hung like a cloud above the gateway towers.

And again in *The Foresters*:—

You ought to dangle up there among the crows.

The foul feeding of the crow and its gloating on the approaching death of its victims are referred to in the lines from *The Last Tournament*:—

Round whose sick head all night, like birds of prey,
The words of Arthur flying, shriek'd.

And again in *Queen Mary* :—

James, didst thou ever see a carrion crow
Stand watching a sick beast before he dies ?
(Act iv., sc. 3.)

With this passage should be compared the lines from *Julius Cæsar* :—

Crows
Fly o'er our heads and downward look on us
As we were sickly prey.

The straightness of the crow's flight has passed into a proverb, and Tennyson shows his accustomed skill in putting a commonplace expression into poetic form when he contrasts the flight of a crow with the meanderings of a stream :—

There runs a shallow brook across our field
For twenty miles, where the black crow flies five.
(*Queen Mary*.)

The crowsfeet at the corner of the eye, which are the signs of approaching age, are said to be so called from the resemblance which they have to the impression of a crow's foot on the ground.

Tennyson expands the expression in *Will Waterproof* :—

> Live long, ere from thy topmost head
> The thick-set hazel dies;
> Long, ere the hateful crow shall tread
> The corners of thine eyes.

A similar passage is to be found in Chaucer (*Troilus and Criseyde*, II., 402) :—

> So longe mote ye live, and alle proude
> Till crowes feet be growe under your yë.

In *Sea-Dreams* Tennyson seems to connect the "crowsfeet" not only with age but also with cunning :—

> Whose pious talk, when most his heart was dry,
> Made wet the crafty crowsfoot round his eye.

The expression picking or plucking a crow with some one else, in the sense of quarrelling or finding fault, is one the origin of which is by no means clear. The expression is used once by Tennyson in the *Northern Farmer* :—

> Theer's a craw to pluck wi' tha, Sam.

The phrase is also found in Shakespeare :—

> We'll pluck a crow together.
>
> (*Comedy of Errors*, III., 1.)

The crow is generally a solitary bird, but it is sometimes found in the company of rooks. A reference to the consorting of rooks and crows is to be found in *The Ring* :—

> I heard the sober rook
> And carrion crow cry, 'Mortgage.'

And perhaps in *Locksley Hall*, where there may be an allusion to the great age of the *annosa cornix* :—

> As the many-winter'd crow that leads the clanging rookery home.

But it may be that in this passage the poet is only using the word "crow" for "rook" (see *ante*, p. 106).

Burns in the lines,

> The blackening train of crows
> Winging their way to their repose;

and Scott in the lines,

Hoarse into middle air arose
The vespers of the roosting crows,

use the word "crow" instead of "rook." In Scotland, and in some parts of England, the word "crow" is generally used for the rook as well as for the carrion crow (Swainson, p. 86).

The Jackdaw.—The "active, bustling, cheerful, noisy jackdaw" is a universal favourite. Tennyson describes its clamour and haunts in the following passages :—

Quarry trench'd along the hill
And haunted by the wrangling daw.
(*In Memoriam.*)

But she, remembering her old ruin'd hall
And all the windy clamour of the daws
About her hollow turret.
(*Geraint and Enid.*)

And the daws flew out of the Towers and jangled and wrangled in vain.
(*The Voyage of Maeldune.*)

Few places come amiss to the daw, who is as much at home in the holes and hollows of an old

forest tree or in quarries and chalkpits as in old towers, the chimneys of a dwelling-house, or in the spires of cathedrals and churches. For he is :—

> A great frequenter of the church,
> Where, bishop-like, he finds a perch
> And dormitory too.
>
> (*Cowper.*)

The Magpie.—The magpie's "harsh chatter" has made it the type of a gossip :—

> Peace, magpie.
>
> (*The Foresters.*)

When Tennyson speaks of

> The magpie gossip
> Garrulous under a roof of pine,
>
> (*To the Rev. F. D. Maurice.*)

he is probably referring to the fact that one of its favourite haunts is in or near fir-trees, on the top of which the nest may often be found.

In the days of falconry the magpie afforded good sport, but Lancelot in praising his falcon speaks disdainfully of the magpie as a quarry :—

'She is too noble,' he said, 'to check at pies';
(*Merlin and Vivien.*)

"To check" means to fly.

The Jay.—The "termagant" jay, a bird "exclusively addicted to woods and their immediately surrounding trees" (Morris) is occasionally referred to by Tennyson. The lines:—

And thro' damp holts new-flush'd with may,
Ring sudden scritches of the jay,
(*Kate.*)

well describe its home in the woods and its "harsh" and "almost startling" note. It is again mentioned as a frequenter of the woods in the lines:—

The lusty life of wood and underwood,
Hawk, buzzard, jay, the mavis and the merle.
(*The Foresters.*)

Its cry is again referred to in the line:—

About her glance the tits, and shriek the jays.
(*The Progress of Spring.*)

The Tits.—Few birds are so charming in their

fantastic motions as those of the tit tribe. Their ravages among the blossoms, which probably they search in quest of insects, gained them an evil name in by-gone times, and they were reckoned as devourers of the "blowth of fruit" on whose heads a reward was placed by a Statute of Henry VIII. Morris refers to an entry in Churchwardens' accounts of payments "for seventeen dozen of tomtits' heads."

Tennyson refers to their acrobatic performances in the fruit trees :—

Look how they tumble the blossoms, the mad little tits.

(*The Window.*)

Compare with this the beautiful lines of Wordsworth :—

Where is he that giddy sprite,
Bluecap, with his colours bright,
Who was blest as bird could be
Feeding in the apple-tree ;
Made such wanton spoil and rout
Turning blossoms inside out,

"Look how they tumble the blossom, the mad little Tits!"

Hung head pointing towards the ground,
Fluttered, perched, into a round
Bound himself, and then unbound;
Lithest, gaudiest harlequin!
Prettiest tumbler ever seen!

The restless movements of the birds of this tribe are referred to by Tennyson :—

About her glance the tits.

(*The Progress of Spring.*)

The watchfulness and loquacity of the tits have made them proverbial in the nursery as tell-tales, and are perhaps referred to by Tennyson in the lines :—

Kiss in the bower,
Tit on the tree!
Bird mustn't tell,
Whoop—he can see.

(*Becket.*)

The comical note of the blue tit is perhaps intended in the lines :—

And the tit-mouse hopes to win her,
With his chirrup at her ear.

(*Maud.*)

Its insignificant size is referred to in the lines from *Geraint and Enid* :—

Tits, wrens and all wing'd nothings peck him dead.

And again in the *Falcon*, where " half a tit and a hern's bill " appear in the bill of fare of the needy count.

The Doves.—Tennyson refers by name to three members of the dove tribe, besides the domestic pigeon, namely, the ring-dove, the stock-dove, and the turtle-dove.

The wood-pigeon or ring-dove, which has received the latter name from the patch of white on each side of its neck, is the largest and commonest of all the wild doves. The coo of this bird when courting is mentioned in the milkmaid's song in *Queen Mary* as one of the signs of spring :—

Ring-doves coo again,
All things woo again.

Ring-doves begin to coo in some years as early

as the 25th December, while in other years they are as late as April 15th; the average date is February 18th, according to Marsham's "Indications of Spring" (*Norfolk Nat. Soc. Trans.*, II., 44). The dark hue of its plumage is referred to in the passages from *The Talking Oak*, which contain an allusion to the prophetic doves in the oak-grove of Dodona :—

> That Thessalian growth
> In which the swarthy ringdove sat,
> And mystic sentence spoke.

The lines in *The Progress of Spring* :—

While round her brows a woodland culver flits,

* * * *

Still round her forehead wheels the woodland dove,

seem to apply to the ring-dove, which is known in some parts of England as the culver (Swainson's "Provincial Names of British Birds"). Compare Spenser's :—

> All comfortless upon the bared bow
> Like wofull culvers doo sit wayling now.
> (*The Teares of the Muses.*)

The stock-dove or wood-dove, which is so called from its habits of building in the stocks of trees, is several times referred to ; it appears twice in the *Promise of May* :—

The stock-dove coo'd at the fall of night

* * * * *

* * * * *

And the stock-dove coo'd till a kite dropt down.

And again in the *Leonine Elegiacs* :—

Deeply the wood-dove coos.

The turtle-dove, which is a spring visitor to our shores, is mentioned as one of the signs of the approach of spring :—

The turtle purrs.

(*The Progress of Spring.*)

In *Becket* it is used figuratively of Fair Rosamund :—

Up from the salt lips of the land we two
Have track'd the King to this dark inland wood ;
And somewhere hereabouts he vanish'd. Here
His turtle builds."

Several of Tennyson's references to the doves

in general are equally applicable to all three varieties, such as those in the following passages :

And oft I heard the tender dove
In firry woodlands making moan.
(*The Miller's Daughter.*)

From the woods
Came voices of the well-contented doves.
(*The Gardener's Daughter.*)

'The dove may murmur of the dove.
(*The Princess.*)

The line from *Locksley Hall* :—

In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnish'd dove

is perhaps most suitable to the ring-dove, with its metallic hue and the mixed gleam of blue, green, and purple on its neck. The line from *The Princess* :—

The moan of doves in immemorial elms

is perhaps a reminiscence of Virgil's :—

Nec gemere aeria cessabit turtur ab ulmo ;

and if so, seems meant of the turtle-doves. The contrast between the demonstrative affection that

the turtle-doves or doves of Venus display to one another, and their frequent quarrels, is referred to in the lines :—

They that loved
At first like dove and dove were cat and dog.
(*Walking to the Mail.*)

And again :—

But since the fondest pair of doves will jar.
(*Becket*, Act IV., sc. 2.)

The "tender eye" (*Maud*) of the dove has become as proverbial as its gentleness, whence the "meek unconscious dove" of *In Memoriam.*

The tame pigeon of the dove-cote is several times referred to by Tennyson. Thus the two lovers in *The Gardener's Daughter* :—

Coursed about
The subject most at heart, more near and near,
Like doves about a dove-cote, wheeling round
The central wish.

The "patient range of pupils" in the *Princess* :—

Sat along the form, like morning doves
That sun their milky bosoms on the thatch.

The flight of the Princess Ida and her companions in the same poem, when the sex of the intruders was discovered, is compared to that of :—

A troop of snowy doves athwart the dusk,
When some one batters at the dove-cote doors.
(*The Princess.*)

The quaint habit that pigeons have of bowing is referred to in the *Brook*, when old Philip is represented as praising—

His pigeons, who in session on their roofs
Approved him, bowing at their own deserts.

In the poem to E. Fitzgerald there is a beautiful picture describing pet doves flocking round their master :—

And while your doves about you flit,
And plant on shoulder, hand and knee,
Or on your head their rosy feet.

Less pleasing is the picture in the following line :—

An he work,
Like any pigeon will I cram his crop.
(*Gareth and Lynette.*)

In a beautiful passage in *In Memoriam* the soul of the mourner is compared to a carrier-pigeon :—

> Lo, as a dove when up she springs
> To bear thro' Heaven a tale of woe,
> Some dolorous message knit below
> The wild pulsation of her wings ;
>
> Like her I go ; I cannot stay.

The carrier-pigeon as the bearer of bad news is also referred to in *Harold* :—

> And thou, my carrier-pigeon of black news,
> Cram thy crop full.

In the lines from *In Memoriam*,

> There flew in a dove
> And brought a message from the sea,
> (St. 103)

is perhaps another reference to the carrier-pigeon, which is again referred to in the same poem :—

> As light as carrier-birds in the air.

The Owl.—Tennyson refers to three varieties of the owl, namely, the barn, or white, or screech

owl, the wood, tawny, or brown owl, and the eagle owl. The barn owl differs from the wood owl in note, colour and haunts; the barn owl screeches and only occasionally hoots, if at all; the wood owl hoots or whoops; the barn owl is white, the wood owl is brown. The barn owl haunts towers and belfries; the wood owl, as its name shows, lives in trees.

In the two poems of Tennyson which are called *The Owl*, and both of which betray marks of the influence of Shakespeare, one seems applicable to the barn owl, the other to the wood owl. The first song, which ends,

> Alone and warming his five wits
> The white owl in the belfry sits,

is clearly meant for the barn owl. The exact meaning of the expression "warming his five wits" is not clear. Mr. Harting ("The Ornithology of Shakespeare," p. 95) quotes Chaucer and Shakespeare to show that the five wits mean

the five senses ; he also quotes from Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing* :—

If he have wit enough to keep himself warm.

The second song of Tennyson to the owl is, it seems, intended for the wood owl :—

Thy tuwhits are lull'd, I wot
Thy tuwhoos of yesternight,
* * * * *
I would mock thy chaunt anew ;
But I cannot mimick it ;
Not a whit of thy tuwhoo,
Thee to woo to thy tuwhit,
Thee to woo to thy tuwhit,
With a lengthen'd loud halloo
Tuwhoo, tuwhit, tuwhit, tuwhoo-o-o.

These lines, as Mr. Harting points out, are an obvious adaptation from the song in *Love's Labour Lost* :—

Then nightly sings the staring owl,
To-who ;
Tu-whit, to-who, a merry note,
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

The wood owl's hoot is like a loud hoo-hoo-hoo,

and both its note and its haunts are well described in the north-country lines quoted from Nuttall by Harting ("Ornithology of Shakespeare"):—

Oh ŏŏŏ, oo
I was once a king's daughter and sat on my father's knee,
But now I am a poor howlet and hide in a hollow tree.

The brown owl is again referred to by Tennyson in the lines:—

I drown'd the whoopings of the owl with sound
Of pious hymns and psalms.
(*St. Simeon Stylites.*)

Shrilly the owlet halloes.
(*Leonine Elegiacs.*)

Bats wheeled and owls whooped.
(*The Princess.*)

When the bat comes out of his cave and the owls are whooping at noon.
(*Despair.*)

Owl-whoop and dorhawk-whirr.
(*The Lover's Tale.*)

The following lines contain references to the barn owl:—

A home for bats, in every tower an owl.
(*Balin and Balan.*)

The owls
Wailing had power upon her.
(*Lancelot and Elaine.*)

The night
When the owls are wailing.
(*Falcon.*)

The line—

And thrice as blind as any noon-day owl
(*The Holy Grail.*)

is more applicable to the barn owl than the wood owl, as the former owl spends its day in deeper darkness than the latter. The line in *The Village Wife*,

While 'e set like a greät glimmer-gowk wi' 'is glasses athurt 'is noäse,

is also probably intended for the barn-owl, which with the great hollow round its eyes bears a strong resemblance to a spectacled face.

The barn or white owl is intended in the line :—

An screeäd like a howl gone mad.
(*Owd Roä.*)

Its unearthly screech has caused it to be regarded as a bird of evil omen. Hence the passage from *The Foresters* :—

> The scritch-owl bodes death.

The same belief is to be found in Chaucer :—

> The oule eek, that of dethe the bode bringeth.
> (*The Parlement of Foules*, l. 343.)

Also in Shakespeare :—

> The screech-owl, screeching loud,
> Puts the wretch, that lies in woe,
> In remembrance of a shroud.
> (*Mids. Night's Dream*, V. 2.)

And—

> Out on ye, owls! nothing but songs of death.
> (*Rich. III.*, IV., 4.)

Tennyson makes one reference to the eagle-owl :—

> A mere
> Round as the red eye of an eagle-owl
> Under the half-dead sunset glared.
> (*Gareth and Lynette.*)

The lines bear witness to the accuracy of his

observation, for the iris of the eagle-owl is of a bright orange hue and is a vivid contrast to the sombre background of dark brown feathers which encircle the eye. The eagle-owl is rarely to be seen in the British Isles except in captivity, but Tennyson had exceptional opportunities for observing it, for Mr. Cordeaux "Birds of the Humber District" 12) says that a relative of the poet, Mr. D'Eyncourt, of Bayon's Manor, not far from Somersby, "kept several of these birds in a semi-wild state in an old castellated building near his house." Tennyson is the only poet who mentions the eagle-owl.

The Nightjar.—The nightjar, under the name of dor-hawk, the name under which it also appears in Wordsworth, is once mentioned by Tennyson :—

> Owl-whoop and dorhawk-whirr
> Awoke me not.
>
> (*Lover's Tale.*)

This bird is called "dorhawk" from its fondness

for beetles, the word "dor" referring to the dor-beetle. The whirr of the dorhawk refers probably to the curious long-drawn churr which the bird makes in its throat. Compare the passage from Wordsworth :—

> The burring dor-hawk round and round is wheeling.

The Woodpecker.—Tennyson in his references to the green woodpecker shows signs of careful observation. The curious cry of the bird, resembling the laugh of a human being, is referred to in the following lines :—

> Her rapid laughters wild and shrill,
> As laughters of the woodpecker
> From the bosom of a hill.
>
> (*Kate.*)

> An echo like a ghostly woodpecker.
>
> (*The Princess.*)

Tennyson also refers to the woodpecker's increased activity as a sign of spring :—

> Before her skims the jubilant woodpecker.
>
> (*The Progress of Spring.*)

One of the provincial names of the woodpecker is the yaffingale (or yaffler, Cordeaux, "Birds of the Humber District,") and this name is used by Tennyson in the *Last Tournament* :—

> I am woodman of the woods
> And hear the garnet-headed yaffingale
> Mock them.
>
> (*The Last Tournament.*)

The epithet "garnet-headed" is a reference to the scarlet border to the feathers of the crown and nape of this bird. "The note most frequently heard is the loud laughing, pleu, pleu, pleu" (Howard Saunders, 274). Hurdis writes of—

> The golden woodpecker, who, like the fool,
> Laughs loud at nothing.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WORLD OF PLUNDER AND PREY.

Eagle —Vulture — Buzzard — Falcon — Sparrow-Hawk—Kite—Kestrel—Raven—Shrike.

THE eagle is a bird with which Tennyson could have had but little acquaintance; hence his references to it are commonplace or conventional. The fondness of an eagle for building in lofty resorts is several times referred to. Thus in *Œnone* :—

> The snowy peak and snow-white cataract
> Fostered the callow eaglet.

And again in *Gareth and Lynette* :—

> For this an Eagle, a royal Eagle, laid
> Almost beyond eye-reach, on such a palm
> As glitters gilded in thy Book of Hours.

And again in the *Last Tournament* :—

A stump of oak half-dead,
From roots like some black coil of carven snakes,
Clutch'd at the crag, and started thro' mid air
Bearing an eagle's nest.

The last-mentioned poem also contains a reference to the conventional legend appearing in so many shapes of babies being taken up by eagles to their nests.

The other allusions in Tennyson to the eagle are either to its flight or its swoop, as :—

When he rose as it were on the wings of an eagle beyond me.

(*The Wreck.*)

They rose to where their sovran eagle sails.

(*Montenegro.*)

At such an eagle-height I stand.

(*Becket.*)

Until she let me fly discaged to sweep
In ever-highering eagle-circles up
To the Great Sun of Glory.

(*Gareth and Lynette.*)

And eagle-like
Stoop at thy will on Launcelot and the Queen.

(*Balin and Balan.*)

He clasps the crag with crooked hands ;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls ;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

(*The Eagle.*)

Hope, a poising eagle, burns
Above the unrisen morrow.

(*Princess.*)

Follow'd a rush of eagle's wings.

(*The Last Tournament.*)

I found Him not in world or sun,
Or eagle's wing or insect's eye.

(*In Memoriam*, st. 124.)

Other allusions are to its cry :—

Again their ravening eagle rose
In anger, wheel'd on Europe-shadowing wings,
And barking for the thrones of kings.
(*Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington.*)

Let the wild
Lean-headed eagles yelp alone.

(*Princess.*)

But I
An eagle clang an eagle to the sphere.
(*Princess.*)

The keenness of its vision is referred to in *Harold* :—

My sight is eagle's.

Its ravening habits are thus referred to :—

Must their ever-ravening eagle's beak and talon annihilate us ?
(*Boadicea.*)

The story that eaglets are driven out of their nests is used by Tennyson in his reference to the War of the American Independence :—

Unprophetic rulers they—
Drove from out the mother's nest
That young eagle of the West
To forage for herself alone.
(*Ode on the Opening of the Indian and Colonial Exhibition.*)

The poet is not at his best in such lines as :—

Shall eagles not be eagles ? wrens be wrens ?
If all the world were falcons, what of that ?
The wonder of the eagle were the less,
But he not less the eagle.
(*The Golden Year.*)

All the passages quoted above probably refer to the golden eagle. Tennyson has one allusion to the sea or white-tailed eagle :—

> Many a carcass
> Left for the white-tail'd eagle to tear it.
> (*Battle of Brunanburh.*)

In the *Dead Prophet* Tennyson uses the expression " the red blood-eagle of liver and heart," and explains in a note that " blood-eagle " is an old Viking term for lungs, liver, &c., when torn by the conqueror out of the body of the conquered. The expression " blood-eagle " is unknown in this sense to the dictionaries, and it would be interesting to know from what source the poet obtained it.

The Vulture.—The vulture is not a British bird, and Tennyson's references to it are purely conventional, as in the passage :—

> For whom the carrion vulture waits
> To tear his heart before the crowd !
> (*To —— after reading a Life and Letters.*)

And

swoops
The vulture, beak and talon, at the heart.
(*The Princess.*)

In another passage from *The Princess*, Tennyson uses the expression "vulture throat," apparently to mean a long and lean or scraggy throat.

The line in the *Battle of Brunanburh* :—

Gave to the garbaging war-hawk to gorge it

probably refers to the vulture.

The Buzzard.—The buzzard is referred to in *The Foresters* along with the hawk, jay, mavis and merle as forming part of the "lusty life of wood and underwood." The only other reference to it in Tennyson is in *Queen Mary*, where Elizabeth expresses her dread of Gardiner's "buzzard beak," *i.e.*, aquiline nose ; the curve of the buzzard's beak having a strong resemblance to that of the eagle.

In the lines of the *Northern Farmer*,

A bummin' awaäy loike a buzzard-clock,

the reference is not to the bird but to the cock-chafer.

Falcons.—The *Idylls of the King* contain a number of references to falcons and falconry. There is a passage in *Merlin and Vivien* which describes how Launcelot and Queen Guinevere rode a-hawking to prove a "fair falcon" which Launcelot had trained and given to the Queen. The passage is full of technical terms from falconry which are familiar to readers of Shakespeare and most of which are probably taken from that poet :—

Yet while they rode together down the plain,
Their talk was all of training, terms of art,
Diet and seeling, jesses, leash and lure.
'She is too noble,' he said, 'to check at pies,
Nor will she rake : there is no baseness in her.'
* * * * *
. . . . and unhooded casting off
The goodly falcon free ; she tower'd ; her bells
Tone under tone, shrill'd ; and they lifted up

Their eager faces, wondering at the strength,
Boldness and royal knighthood of the bird
Who pounced her quarry and slew it.

(*Merlin and Vivien.*)

The word *seel* is explained by Harting ("Ornithology of Shakespeare," 69) as meaning "to sew a thread through the upper and under eyelids of a newly-caught hawk to obscure the sight for a time and accustom her to the hood." *Jesses* are the narrow strips of leather fastened to the legs of the bird, the ends of the jesses being fastened to the leash by which the bird was held (*Ib.*, 58). The *lure* was a piece of iron or wood to which were fastened the wings of some bird with a piece of raw meat fixed between them; it was used to recall a hawk (*Ib.*, 55). To *check* at means to fly at (*Ib.*, 60); to *rake*, to fly too far from the bird after which the falcon is sent. To *unhood* is to remove the cap or cover which was kept on the falcon till the prey was in sight. To *cast off* is to throw the hawk off the wrist;

"Our Falcon . . . .
. . . Lost the Hern we slipt her at, and went
To all the winds."

to *tower* is to rise spirally to a height (*Ib.*, 51); the bells were fastened on to the hawk's legs and their use was to guide the falconer by their sound to the places where the falcon was. *Quarry* means the game at which the falcon was flown.

Other references to "the pastime of hawk and hound" are in the following passages :—

> and prove
> No surer than our falcon yesterday,
> Who lost the hern we slipt her at, and went
> To all the winds.
>
> (*Lancelot and Elaine.*)

> Earl, wilt thou fly my falcons this fair day ?
> They are of the best, strong-wing'd against the wind.
>
> (*Harold.*)

> My Rosalind, my Rosalind,
> My frolic falcon, with bright eyes,
> Whose free delight, from any height of rapid flight,
> Stoops at all game that wing the skies;
> My Rosalind, my Rosalind,
> My bright-eyed, wild-eyed falcon, whither,

Careless both of wind and weather,
Whither fly ye, what game spy ye,
Up or down the streaming wind ?

* * * * *

Too long you keep the upper skies ;
Too long you roam and wheel at will ;
But we must hood your random eyes,
That care not whom they kill.

* * * * *

When we have lured you from above,
And that delight of frolic flight, ...
We'll bind you fast in silken cords.

(*Rosalind.*)

In the last-quoted passage the word *stoop* is a technical term in falconry used by Shakespeare, and means to make a rapid descent on the quarry.

The brightness of the falcon's eye is again alluded to in *Gareth and Lynette* :—

A damsel of high lineage, and a brow
May-blossom and a cheek of apple-blossom,
Hawk-eyes.

Again in the *Princess* :—

A quick brunette, well-moulded, falcon-eyed.

The praises of the falcon are again sung in the poem of that name :—

My princess of the cloud, my plumed purveyor,
My far-eyed queen of the winds—thou *that canst soar*
Beyond the morning lark, and howsoe'er
Thy quarry wind and wheel, swoop down upon him
Eagle-like, lightning-like — strike, make his feathers
Glance in mid heaven.

The lines in italics bear a curious resemblance to the passage from the Induction in scene 2 of the *Taming of the Shrew* :—

Thou hast hawks will soar
Above the morning lark.

Tennyson makes one specific allusion to the peregrine falcon :—

And hear my peregrine and her bells in heaven.

All these references are to the female bird, which " from her greater size and strength was always considered superior to the male, stronger in

flight, and more easily trained" (Harting, 54). To the female alone was the name of "falcon" given, the male being known as the "tiercel" or "tercel."

The peregrine falcon is found both in Lincolnshire and the Isle of Wight, and some of Tennyson's references to it may be based on personal observation.

The Sparrow-Hawk.—Of the other birds of prey, the "hedgerow thief," the sparrow-hawk, appears frequently in the *Marriage of Geraint*, it being the name assumed by Earl Yniol's nephew, whose insult to Queen Guinevere was avenged by Geraint. It also appears in *Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere* :—

> Sometimes the spar-hawk wheel'd along,
> Hush'd all the groves from fear of wrong.

The last-quoted passage well describes the silence which falls upon birds on the appearance of the "hedgerow thief."

There is a similar passage in *Pelleas and Ettarre* :—

And all talk died, as in a grove all song
Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey.

The lines from the *Poet's Song*,

The wild hawk stood with the down on his beak
And stared, with his foot on the prey,

apply equally well to any of the Falconidæ.

The Kite.—The kite, now the rarest of British birds of prey, is twice mentioned by Tennyson; once in *Boadicea* :—

Blacken round the Roman carrion, make the carcass a skeleton,
Kite and kestrel, wolf and wolfkin, from the wilderness wallow in it.

And again in *The Promise of May* :—

And the stock-dove coo'd till a kite dropped down.

The Kestrel.—The reference in the passage just quoted from *Boadicea* is a little unfair on the kestrel, which is not a bird that feeds on carrion but prefers a diet of field mice, caterpillars and frogs. In the only other passage in

Tennyson where the kestrel is referred to it is mentioned under the local name of windhover :—

> For about as long
> As the windhover hangs in balance.
> (*Aylmer's Field.*)

The reference here is to the bird's habit of hanging seemingly motionless in the air, whence it has derived the name of "windhover."

The line in the *Foresters*,

> To fright the wild hawk passing overhead,

may be intended for the kestrel.

The practice of all hawks to throw up pellets like the owl is referred to in *Aylmer's Field* :—

> And where the two contrived their daughter's good,
> Lies the hawk's cast.

The Raven.—The raven, though a rare bird in many parts of England, was not an unfamiliar sight in the neighbourhood of Tennyson's home at Farringford. However, the references to the raven in Tennyson's poems are purely conven-

tional. One of its chief features is the intense blackness of its plumage, which made the magpie in the Provençal legend say to it, "My goodness, how black you are" (Swainson, p. 88). The poet refers to this feature in the following passages :—

> Night, as black as a raven's feather.
>
> (*Harold.*)
>
> Let darkness keep her raven gloss.
>
> (*In Memoriam.*)

The black hue of the raven, its foul feeding and its dismal croak, have given it a bad reputation as a bird of evil omen. It is quick to scent out the approach of death; hence the passage in *Guinevere* :—

> A blot in heaven, the Raven, flying high,
> Croak'd, and she thought, 'He spies a field of death.'
>
> (*Guinevere.*)

Seebohm says, "Should a lamb fall sick or a sheep in browsing too near a cliff lose its footing and be dashed to pieces on the rock below, the

raven is perhaps the first bird to discover the prize. Nothing ever escapes his prying vision." According to another authority (*Zoologist*, vol. i.), "When they search in waste places for provision, they hover at a great height, and yet a sheep will not be dead twenty minutes before they find it." As a raven hovers round a dying sheep, so in legend he is thought to shadow the house of a dying man and to make his presence felt by flapping his wings against the window-pane or giving vent to his unearthly laugh or croak which forbodes death. Hence the passages in Tennyson :—

> For a raven ever croaks, at my side
> Keep watch and ward, keep watch and ward.
>
> (*Maud.*)
>
> Why do you vex me
> With raven-croaks of death ?
>
> (*The Foresters.*)
>
> Once at the croak of a raven who crost it
> A barbarous people
> Blind to the magic

And deaf to the melody
Snarl'd at and cursed me.

(*Merlin and the Gleam.*)

A person who brings bad news is often compared to the raven; thus :—

I am the raven who croaks it.

(*The Foresters.*)

A line which is perhaps a reminiscence of the passage from *Macbeth* :—

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements.

The presence of the raven on the battlefield is thus referred to in *Boadicea* :—

Bark an answer, Britain's raven! bark and blacken innumerable,
Blacken round the Roman carrion, make the carcass a skeleton. . . .

And again in the translation of the *Battle of Brunanburh* :—

Many a carcass they left to be carrion
* * * * *
Left for the horny-nibb'd raven to rend it.

With the expression "horny-nibb'd" in the last line may be compared Milton's "ravens with their horny beaks" (*Paradise Regained*).

Other references to the raven as a feeder on carrion are to be found in *Rizpah* :—

> The hell-black raven and horrible fowls of the air.

In the following passage from *Harold* the reference is to the raven standard of the Norse Vikings :—

> And therefore have we shatter'd back
> The hugest wave from Norseland ever yet
> Surg'd on us, and our battle-axes broken
> The raven's wing and dumb'd his carrion croak
> From the gray sea for ever.

The Shrike.—The ferocious shrike, or butcher-bird, is hardly perhaps a suitable subject for poetic treatment. Tennyson has one allusion to it :—

> The may-fly is torn by the swallow, the sparrow spear'd by the shrike.
>
> (*Maud.*)

"The Sparrow spear'd by the Shrike."

The shrike sometimes preys upon small birds, which it kills with its hooked beak and then impales on thorns in places near its nest, so that it has a kind of larder which it can draw upon for supplies of food. The bodies of hedge-sparrows, tits, robins, and thrushes, have been found in the shrike's larder. It is not a bird with which Tennyson could have had much acquaintance in his boyhood, for, though common in the southern counties, it is a very rare bird in Lincolnshire (Cordeaux, "Birds of the Humber District," 17).

CHAPTER V.

THE BIRDS OF SPORT.

Quail—Woodcock— Pheasant — Partridge — Corn-crake—Snipe—Ptarmigan—Lapwing.

TENNYSON had but little sympathy with the world of sport, and his allusions to game-birds are few and casual. He knows the quail only as one of the ingredients of :—

> A pasty costly made,
> Where quail and pigeon, lark and leveret lay,
> Like fossils of the rock, with golden yolks
> Imbedded and injellied.
>
> (*Audley Court.*)

His one reference to the woodcock :—

> We hold our Saxon woodcock in the springe,
> But he begins to flutter,
>
> (*Harold.*)

is probably inspired by Shakespeare's

> Springes to catch woodcocks.
>
> (*Hamlet*, Act I., sc. 3.)

And

If the springe hold, the cock's mine.
(*Winter's Tale*, Act IV., sc. 2.)

His references to the pheasant are contemptuous, as in *Aylmer's Field*, where he expresses his scorn of :—

These old pheasant-lords,
These partridge-breeders of a thousand years,
Who had mildewed in their thousands doing nothing
Since Egbert.

So in *Becket* :—

A doter on white pheasant flesh at feasts.

Tennyson is more at home in his description of the cries of the partridge :—

Like a rusty key
Turn'd in a lock.
(*The Lover's Tale.*)

Seebohm describes the call-note as " clear, loud and pitched very high " ; it can be heard at a great distance and is constantly uttered during the breeding season as well as during the shoot-

ing season ; the note resembles a sort of "kir-r-rick." Hurdis writes of :—

The cur
Of the night-long partridge.
(*The Village Curate.*)

The Corn-crake.—The corn-crake is twice referred to by Tennyson ; once in *In Memoriam*, when its fondness for the grass and low meadow-land bordering streams is referred to :—

And flood the haunts of hern and crake.

It is again mentioned in *The Princess* :—

The meadow-crake
Grate her harsh kindred in the grass.

The reference in the last passage is to the peculiarly harsh note of the male bird most frequently uttered after his first arrival in this country, when he is wandering about in search of a residence and trying to inform the other sex of his whereabouts.

The Snipe.—Tennyson's reference to

The swamp, where humm'd the dropping snipe,
(*On a Mourner.*)

"The Ptarmigan that whitens ere his hour
Woos his own end."

is remarkable as an instance of his accuracy of observation of natural objects. Chapman "Bird Life on the Borders" tells us that "snipe only drum head to wind and when falling." The drumming or humming of the snipe is a curious sound which the bird makes with its wings, and is only heard when it takes a downward course. Its flight is well described by Wordsworth, who in *The Excursion* speaks of the "darting snipe."

The Ptarmigan.—Tennyson, in a beautiful passage in *The Last Tournament* :—

> The ptarmigan that whitens ere his hour
> Woos his own end,

makes reference to the protective changes in the plumage of the ptarmigan, the colour of which in summer is dark brown and harmonises so well with the hues of the mountain sides which are its home that it is difficult to detect the crouching bird, while the plumage gradually changes during autumn till in winter it assumes the pure white colour which is just as much a protection amongst

the snow as the brown plumage was in summer. The ptarmigan that gets white before winter naturally attracts the sportsman's eye and so "woos his own end."

The Lapwing.—Tennyson's references to the lapwing, or green plover, are copious. He refers to the plaintive wail or cry which has given the bird its other name of "peewit":—

Why wail you, pretty plover? and what is it that you fear?

(*Happy*.)

And again:—

There let the wind sweep and the plover cry.

(*The Eagle*.)

The same bird is also referred to in *The May Queen*:—

And the tufted plover pipe along the fallow lea.

It is called here the tufted plover because alone of all the plovers it has at the end of the crown of its head a big crest of black feathers mixed with a few of metallic green; both male and female have the crest, but that of the female is

smaller. In the breeding season in the spring the greenish-black of the crest of the adult male bird is brighter and more noticeable; hence in the line from *Locksley Hall* :—

> In the spring the wanton lapwing gets himself another crest.

The movements of the peewit backwards and forwards afford the poet a simile to describe the frequent coming and going of a waiter :—

> To come and go, and come again,
> Returning like the pewit.
>
> (*Will Waterproof.*)

Mr. E. Selous, in his book "Bird Watching," thus describes the flight of the peewit. "One settles, the other skims on, then makes a great upward sweep, turns, sweeps down and back again, again rises, turns and sweeps again, and so on, rising and falling over the same wide space with the regular motions and long rushing swing of a pendulum."

It is a well-known fact in natural history that

the peewit with intent to deceive affects to show concern about a place where his nest is not. Hence Chaucer speaks of "The false lapwing full of treachery." Tennyson refers to this in *Queen Mary* :—

> What is weak must lie;
> The lion needs but roar to guard his young;
> The lapwing lies, says 'here' when they are there.

With this should be compared the passages quoted by Mr. Harting ("The Ornithology of Shakespeare") from the *Comedy of Errors* :—

> Far from her nest the lapwing cries away;

and from Ben Jonson's *Underwoods*—

> Where he that knows will like a lapwing flie
> Far from the nest and so himself belie.

The fact that the peewit frequents moorlands is referred to in *Becket* :—

> HENRY— Nay, I remember it well
> There on the moor.
>
> ROSAMUND— And in a narrow path
> A plover flew before thee.

The Great Plover.—A passage from *Geraint and Enid*—

> Till the great plover's human whistle amazed
> Her heart,

refers to the bird which, besides being called the great plover, is also called the Norfolk plover or stone curlew. This human whistle may be explained by the following passages from Yarrell: "In the vicinity of Scarborough they breed on the fallows and often startle the midnight traveller by their shrill and ominous whistle." This is supposed to be the note alluded to by Sir Walter Scott in his poem of the *Lady of the Lake*—

> And in the plover's shrilly strain
> The signal whistle's heard again;

for it certainly sounds more like a human note than that of a bird. Mr. Selous, in describing the notes of the bird, says, "They swell and subside and swell again as they are caught up and repeated in different places from one bird to another, and often swell into a full chorus of

several together. The note on the wing is not the same as that uttered whilst running over the ground. The ground-note is much more drawn out, and a sort of long, wailing twitter called the 'clamour' often pervades and leads up to the final wail."

The Curlew.—Closely allied with the lapwing is the curlew, the sound and sight of which must have been familiar to Tennyson in his boyhood. It appears in *Locksley Hall*, the scenery in which is that of Lincolnshire :—

'Tis the place, and all around it, as of old the curlews call,
Dreary gleams about the moorland flying over Locksley Hall.

It is curious that "gleam" is an old Lincolnshire word meaning the cry of the curlews, and it seems to have been thought by some of his admirers that he used the word in that sense, but being asked once if he knew of this sense of the word, he said "I never heard it, I wish I had,"

and explained that he meant "flying gleams of light."

The same reference to the curlew reappears in *Locksley Hall* sixty years after :—

Wander'd back to living boyhood while I heard
the curlews call.

The call of the curlew is wild and striking, and harmonises well with the rugged scenery of the moorland and the sea-coast.

CHAPTER VI.

WATER-BIRDS.

Coot—Heron—Bittern — Goose — Stork — Swan—Crane—Kingfisher—Seamew.

FROM his bringing up in Lincolnshire Tennyson had exceptional opportunities for the observation of the habits of the birds of the marshes and inland waters; the poet might say of himself what he says of the *Brook* :—

I come from haunts of coot and hern.

The Heron.—The heron, which is mentioned along with the coot in the passage just quoted and along with the crake in *In Memoriam* ("haunts of hern and crake"), is a bird with which Tennyson was familiar from his boyhood. The "Life" of the poet contains occasional references to the heron; the poet's honeymoon was spent on Coniston Water, and boating excur-

sions "by the islands where the herons built" are mentioned in his diary. On the first visit of the poet and his wife to Farringford we are told that they crossed the Solent in a rowing-boat on a still November evening and "one dark heron flew over the sea, backed by a daffodil sky." The frequent references to the heron in his poems shows an intimate knowledge of its haunts and habits.

The heron is fond of fishing on the flats and of following the receding tide to feed on various crustaceans and small fish left in pools of salt water. Thus we have in *Geraint and Enid* :—

Grey swamps and pools, waste places of the hern.

All lovers of country life will acknowledge the accuracy of the following passage from *Gareth and Lynette* :—

Nigh upon that hour
When the lone hern forgets his melancholy,
Lets down his other leg, and stretching, dreams
Of goodly supper in the distant pool.

The reference is to the habit of the heron of resting in meditative silence on one leg, the other being drawn up to its body and lost to sight amongst its feathers. It is in the evening that it seems principally to feed; its "goodly supper" comprises, besides fish, of which they are great destroyers, insects of all sorts, frogs, lizards and other unconsidered trifles. It is called the "lone heron" because the families, which keep together for many months after the young ones are fledged, break up on the approach of winter, during which season each bird generally keeps to itself.

A similar reference is found in *Happy*:—

The heron rises from his watch beside the mere.

The watch is thus described by Graham (Grey's "Birds of the West of Scotland"): "For a while the heron stands motionless, as if he were a bundle of withered sticks . . . . when an almost imperceptible motion of the head, a levelling of the bill for aim, and a moment

of extreme tension and suspense, precedes a lightning dart of head and bill under water, which emerges again holding some small writhing object."

The use of the heron as a quarry in falconry is referred to in a passage from *Lancelot and Elaine* :—

> No surer than our falcon yesterday,
> Who lost the hern we slipt her at, and went
> To all the winds.

The long horny bill of the heron is not an appetising subject for digestion; herein it appears along with half a tit in the "jokes and jerks" of the needy count's servitor in *The Falcon* as one of the contents of an almost empty larder.

The Bittern.—The bittern, which is now extinct in the British Isles as a breeding species, was once not uncommon in Lincolnshire, and Tennyson in his boyhood may have heard its boom sounding from some undrained marsh. Hence his

one allusion to the bird in the *Northern Farmer*, under the name of "butter-bump," which is the Lincolnshire name for the bird (Cordeaux, "Birds of the Humber District," p. 104).

D'ya moind the waäst, my lass? naw, naw, tha
was not born then;
Theer wur a boggle in it, I often 'eärd 'um mysen;
Moast loike a butter-bump, fur I 'eärd 'um about
an' about,
But I stubb'd 'um oop wi' the lot, an raäved an'
rembled 'um out.

The "boggle" is the bogey, or Jock of the mire, who was supposed to haunt the morasses; the boom of the bittern uttered at night and coming from some dreary swamp might easily give to the waste the reputation of being haunted by a "boggle." The popular belief that the bittern uttered its boom by blowing through its beak under the water is referred to by Chaucer:—

And, as a bitore bombleth in the myre,
She leyde hir mouth unto the water down.

Drayton, in his description of the "Birds of

Lincolnshire" in the *Polyolbion*, gives a description of the sound of the bittern :—

The buzzing bitter sits, which through his hollow bill
A sudden bellowing sends, which many times doth fill
The neighbouring marsh with noise, as though a bull did roar.

The drainage of the fens and marshes and agricultural improvements completely broke up the old haunts of the bittern. In the early part of the nineteenth century the bittern was of common occurrence in Lincolnshire, and a particular bend of the River Hull was formerly called the "butter bump" Hall, from the booming of these birds that lived around it (Boulton, quoted by Cordeaux, "Birds of the Humber District," p. 105). The name butter-bump also occurs in the name of one of the hamlets of Willoughby in Lincolnshire (Cordeaux, 105).

The Wild Goose.—The wild goose is probably

another bird which the poet may have seen in his boyhood, but he only refers to it, namely, in *Geraint and Lynette*, where, on Gareth asking his mother,

Sweet mother, do you love the child ?

She answers,

Thou art but a wild-goose to question it.

As the wild-goose is one of the wariest of birds, the reference probably here is not to the bird but to the phrase "wild-goose chase," which, according to Mr. Harting ("Ornith. of Shakespeare," p. 200), means "a reckless sort of horse-race, in which two horses were started together and the rider who first got the lead compelled the other to follow him over whatever ground he chose."

The Stork.—The stork, which is only an occasional visitor to our shores, is once mentioned by Tennyson, namely, in *The Talking Oak* :—

And all that from the town would stroll,
Till that wild wind made work
In which the gloomy brewer's soul
Went by me, like a stork.

The reference is to the storm of September 3rd, 1658, in the midst of which Oliver Cromwell died; but it is not clear whether the poet means to describe the soul as rushing past and making a noise as of wings or stalking past with a slow and solemn gait.

The Swan.—Tennyson is especially happy in his reference to the swan, and to the beauty of its movements and plumage. He speaks of the "swan-like stateliness" of Eleanore, and represents Cardinal Pole admiring the flocks of Thames swans:—

As fair and white as angels.
(*Queen Mary.*)

Extravagant compliment could go no further than the lines in which Lancelot, addressing Queen Guinevere, draws a contrast between the

pure white of the adult swan and the grey-brown of the cygnet :—

> A neck to which the swan's
> Is tawnier than her cygnet's.

A beautiful picture, not unfamiliar to those who know the banks of the Thames, is presented in the following passage from *Balin and Balan* :—

> Such a sound . . . . .
> . . . . . as makes
> The white swan-mother, sitting, when she hears
> A strange knee rustle thro' her secret reeds,
> Made Garlon, hissing.

To the long life of the swan, which is said to attain the age of forty years, Tennyson alludes in the line :—

> And after many a summer dies the swan.
> (*Tithonus*.)

The wild swan, which does not breed in the British Isles, but visits them on migration, is twice specifically mentioned by Tennyson. One

reference is to the height at which it flies, in *The Poet's Song* :—

That made the wild swan pause in her cloud.

The other reference, from the *Palace of Art*, is to the wide range of its flight :—

Far as the wild swan wings—

Wild swans fly, like wild geese, in an arrow-headed formation, with a leader in front (Cordeaux, " Birds of the Humber District," p. 156) ; hence the reference in *The Princess* :—

The leader wild swan in among the stars
Would clang it.

The legend of the wild swan " dying in music " is referred to in *Morte d'Arthur*, in one of Tennyson's finest passages :—

And the barge, with oar and sail,
Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs.

Equally beautiful is the description of the death-hymn in *The Dying Swan*, which, though one of the earliest, is perhaps one of the best of his poems.

The Crane.—The crane has long been extinct as a breeding species among us. Tennyson refers to it in a passage describing foreign scenery :—

I saw beyond their silent tops
The steaming marshes of the scarlet cranes.
(*The Progress of Spring.*)

In this passage the crane is called scarlet because of the scarlet warty patch on its crown.

Tennyson makes reference to its long thin legs :—

Now mocking at the much ungainliness
And craven shifts and long crane-legs of Mark.
(*The Last Tournament.*)

The note of the crane is described as a "loud trumpet-like note" (H. Saunders, p. 522), but Tennyson writes :—

The crane may chatter of the crane.

(*The Princess.*)

Beattie (*Pigmies and Cranes*) has the same expression :—

The proud crane her nest securely builds,
Chattering amid the desolated fields.

The Kingfisher.—The most brilliant in plumage of our resident-birds (Cordeaux) is referred to under its classical name of "halcyon" in *The Progress of Spring* :—

And in her open palm a halcyon sits
Patient—the secret splendour of the brooks.

These lines well describe the kingfisher, which loves retired spots, such as are to be found along the well-wooded banks of our brooks and rivers. Rarely can one get more than a hurried view of this rustic beauty as it flits past, "an indistinct gleam of bluish light." Hence it is referred to in the lines from *In Memoriam* :—

Underneath the barren bush
Flits by the sea-blue bird of March.

Tennyson makes but few references to sea-birds. The only one that he refers to is the mew or sea-mew, which, according to Swainson ("Provincial Names of British Birds") is the name of the common gull. Tennyson describes the cry of the gull sometimes as a wail, sometimes as a pipe, sometimes as a laugh, sometimes as a scream or shriek; *e.g.* :—

Here it is only the mew that wails.

(*Sea Fairies.*)

Our sea-mew
Winging their only wail.

(*Harold.*)

Or like a spire of land that stands apart,
Cleft from the main, and wail'd about with mews.

(*The Princess.*)

Where now the sea-mew pipes, and dives
In yonder greening gleam.

(*In Memoriam.*)

The myriad shriek of wheeling ocean-fowl.

(*Enoch Arden.*)

Nor mark the sea-bird rouse himself and hover
Above the windy ripple, and fill the sky
With free sea-laughter.

(*Harold.*)

Rough wives, that laugh'd and scream'd against
the gulls.

(*Pelleas and Ettarre.*)

The gull is taken as a type of loneliness in some of the passages already quoted and in the lines :—

And the lonely sea-bird crosses
With one waft of wing.

(*The Captain.*)

The last passage also contains a reference to the great power of the flight of a sea-gull, which seems to carry itself a great distance by the slightest motion of its wings.

The line from *The Voyage of Maeldune*,

A hundred ranged on the rock like white
sea-birds in a row,

describes with great accuracy the assemblage of young sea-birds not yet able to fly, which may be seen any summer in the breeding haunts on and off our coasts.

Mr. Harting (*Zoologist*, 1893, 146) takes exception to Tennyson's lines,

Where now the sea-mew pipes, or dives
In yonder greening gleam;

and says that no species of sea-gull possesses either of these attributes—that is, either pipes or dives. This criticism, it is submitted, is a little unjust. Mr. H. Saunders, one of the greatest authorities on gulls, speaking of the kittawake gull, writes that it "dives freely" ("British Birds," 684). When the poet writes that the sea-mew pipes, he probably refers to the shrill, wailing cry which both sea-gull and plover utter, though in different notes. Mr. Harting himself praises the line of the poet:—

And the tufted plover pipe along the fallow lea.

The meaning to be found in "Johnson's Dictionary" for to pipe is "to have a shrill sound," and to say that no sea-gull "has a shrill sound" is surely far from being accurate.

CHAPTER VII.

BIRD RIDDLES.

The poems of Tennyson have many passages which seem as if they were intended to test the intelligence or try the patience of readers. Tennyson, some of whose songs are admirable specimens of simplicity and clearness, seems to have occasionally had a fondness for what is hard and involved; his style is sometimes as obscure as that of his contemporary Browning. For instance, take such a passage as the following :—

Rose of Lancaster,
Red in thy birth, redder with household war,
Now reddest with the blood of holy men,
Redder to be, red rose of Lancaster—
If somewhere in the North, as Rumour sang,
Fluttering the hawks of this crown-lusting line—
By firth and loch thy silver sister grow.

(*Sir John Oldcastle.*)

This may be a poetic, but it is certainly a roundabout way of saying that the rumour that Richard II. was alive in Scotland alarmed the ambitious house of Lancaster.

The foregoing pages contain, it is believed, all the passages in which Tennyson makes reference by name to any bird. But there are several passages in which some bird or other is referred to without name, and in which the poet seems to delight in setting his readers riddles to which they have to find an answer. In some of these passages it is not difficult to say with some degree of certainty what bird is intended, but in others the riddle is too hard to answer. To the former class belong the lines from *In Memoriam* :—

> Wild bird, whose warble, liquid sweet,
> Rings Eden thro' the budded quicks,
> O tell me where the senses mix,
> O tell me where the passions meet,
>
> Whence radiate : fierce extremes employ
> Thy spirits in the darkening leaf,

And in the midmost heart of grief
Thy passion clasps a secret joy.

Here it is plain that the poet is writing of the passionate song of the nightingale.

So in the same poem the lines:—

And wheel'd or lit the filmy shapes
That haunt the dusk with ermine capes
And woolly breasts and beaded eyes,

clearly refer to the barn or white owl.

The passage from *Aylmer's Field*:—

As dawn
Aroused the black republic in his elms

is obviously intended for the gregarious rooks and jackdaws. A similar expression is to be found in Dryden (*The Hind and the Panther*):—

Choughs and daws and such republic birds,

that is, birds that build together in large communities.

The passage from a *Dream of Fair Women*—

And singing clearer than the crested bird
That claps his wings at dawn—

seems intended for the skylark.

The line from *Sea Dreams*,

Returning, as the bird returns, at night,

probably refers to the rooks or jackdaws, that are often to be seen wending their way homewards in the evening.

The passage from *In Memoriam*,

Underneath the barren bush
Flits by the sea-blue bird of March.

has given rise to some discussion and puzzled some of the poet's readers. Mr. Cordeaux identifies it with the wheatear ("Birds of the Humber District," p. 36); but the poet himself, in a letter to the Duke of Argyll ("Life," II., 4) explained that by "sea-blue bird of March" he meant the kingfisher; "that he was walking one day in March by a deep-banked brook, and under the leafless bushes he saw the kingfisher flitting underneath him, and then came into his head a fragment of an old Greek lyric poet, '*ἁλιπόρφυρος εἴαρος ὄρνις*.'" As he never saw the kingfisher on this particular brook before March, he concludes that in that

county at least they go down to the sea during the hard weather and come up again with the spring; for what says old Belon :—

> Le martinet pescheur fait sa demeure
> In temps d'hiver au bord de l'océan,
> Et en esté sur la rivière en estan,
> Et de poisson se repaist à toute heure.

The letter shows the accuracy of the poet's observation. His statement as to the partial migration of the kingfisher to the sea in the winter is borne out by Mr. Warde Fowler (" A Year with the Birds," p. 14), and by Mr. Seebohm (" British Birds," ii., 343). The passage is an interesting revelation of the working of the poet's mind, and shows how he wedded together in his poems the results of observation of nature and of the study of the best poetic models.

To the class of the obscure passages belong the lines from *Lancelot and Elaine* :—

> As a little helpless, innocent bird,
> That has but one plain passage of few notes,

Will sing the simple passage o'er and o'er
For all an April morning, till the ear
Wearies to hear it.

These lines, according to Dr. Bull in his "Notes on the Birds of Herefordshire" (p. 23), refer to the willow-wren, which sings a charming but monotonous song from April onwards all through the summer. The passage is perhaps better suited to the still more monotonous notes of the chiff-chaff.

A similar passage is to be found in *The Islet* :—

For in all that exquisite isle, my dear,
There is but one bird with a musical throat,
And his compass is but of a single note,
That it makes one weary to hear.

There is an obscure passage in *The Princess*, where the difficulty arises partly from the poet's allusive and intricate style and partly from the coining of a new word. It is a place in the poem where the Prince disguised as a girl has sung, "maiden-like as far as I could ape their treble,"

the song, "O swallow, swallow, flying south," and when the Princess said to him:

> 'Not for thee,' she said,
> 'O Bulbul, any rose of Gulistan
> Shall burst her veil: marsh-divers, rather, maid,
> Shall croak thee sister, or the meadow-crake
> Grate her harsh kindred in the grass.

Gulistan (the rose-garden) is the name of the work of the Persian poet Sadi; *bulbul* is the oriental name of the nightingale; the first part of the passage refers to the eastern legend of the love of the rose for the nightingale. "Marsh-divers" is a word unknown to the dictionaries except the "Century Dictionary," which only quotes this passage and gives for the meaning, "a water-bird, perhaps the bittern." Surely "moor-hen" would suit the passage better, for the bittern does not dive, and the word "croak" is more applicable to the harsh note of the moor-hen than to the boom of the bittern. It is by no means clear that by "marsh-diver" the poet

meant to refer to any bird at all; perhaps the reference is to frogs and their chorus.

Another passage which might give rise to considerable discussion is the one in *In Memoriam* (stanza cii.) :—

> Here thy boyhood sung
> Long since its matin song, and heard
> The low love-language of the bird
> In native hazels tassel-hung.

the reference may be to the lesser white-throat, which has a preference for the hazel, and is known in Lancashire as the hazel-linnet (Howard Saunders, 44), or perhaps to the soft notes of the garden-warbler.

More obscure still is the verse from *Early Spring* :—

> Till at thy chuckled note,
> Thou twinkling bird,
> The fairy fancies range,
> And, lightly stirr'd,
> Ring little bells of change
> From word to word.

This passage perhaps suits the song-thrush. Its note as described by Magillivray, "Tiurru, tiurru, chipiwi," might well be called "chuckled," while the quick movements of the birds in the bushes justifies the epithet "twinkling"; moreover, the subject of the poem is the beginning of spring, and the song-thrush is heard very early in the year. All this, however, is equally applicable to the blackbird.

Canon Ainger ("Tennyson for the Young") suggests that the sedge-warbler is intended, but the sedge-warbler is a late arrival, and is not heard in England before April.

The line from *The Poet's Mind*,

> In the heart of the garden the merry bird chants,

applies equally well to the song-thrush and the chaffinch.

In the following lines—

> And all talk died, as in a grove all song,
> Beneath the shadow of some bird of prey,
> (*Pelleas and Ettarre.*)

the "bird of prey" is probably the sparrow-hawk, which frequents hedgerows and woods, while the kestrel, the only other common English bird of prey, prefers the open country.

In the passage from *The Marriage of Geraint*—

> But when the third day from the hunting morn
> Made a low splendour in the world, and wings
> Moved in her ivy, Enid, for she lay
> With her fair head in the dim yellow light,
> Among the dancing shadows of the birds—

the birds referred to are probably sparrows, who are great frequenters of ivy.

In the passage from *Aylmer's Field*, where the country squire is telling with delight the story of the capture of the great "pock-pitten" poacher *in flagrante delicto*, the line—

> The birds were warm, the birds were warm upon
> him—

obviously refers to pheasants or partridges, or both.

The following passages contain references either

to birds which cannot be specifically identified or to birds in general :—

One morning a bird with a warble plaintively sweet
Perch'd on the shrouds and then fell fluttering down at my feet.

(*The Wreck.*)

Yer laste little whishper was sweet as the lilt of a bird.

(*To-morrow.*)

An', afther, I thried her meself av the bird 'ud come to me call.

(*To-morrow.*)

See, see, my white bird stepping toward the mare.

(*The Cup.*)

Like birds the charming serpent draws.

(*In Memoriam*, st. 24.)

Red berries charm the bird.

(*Gareth and Lynette.*)

The birds made
Melody on branch, and melody in mid air.

(*Gareth and Lynette.*)

Love may come, and love may go,
And fly like a bird, from tree to tree,

(*Edward Gray.*)

As the sweet voice of a bird,
Heard by the lander in a lonely isle,
Moves him to think what kind of bird it is
That sings so delicately clear, and make
Conjecture of the plumage and the form.
(*The Marriage of Geraint.*)

By the bird's song ye may learn the nest
(*The Marriage of Geraint.*)

And every bird of Eden burst
In carol.
(*Day Dream.*)

A pinnace, like a flutter'd bird, came flying from far away.
(*The Revenge.*)

Sing like a bird and be happy, nor hope for a deathless hearing.
(*Parnassus.*)

She wak'd a bird of prey that scream'd and past.
(*Death of Œnone.*)

I never breath'd it to a bird in the eaves.
(*Queen Mary*, v., 2.)

Slides the bird o'er lustrous woodland.
(*Locksley Hall.*)

Light
As flies the shadow of a bird she fled.

(*Princess.*)

A clapper clapping in a garth
To scare the fowl from fruit.

(*Ib.*)

Then o'er it crost the dimness of a cloud
Floating, and once the shadow of a bird
Flying.

(*Pelleas and Ettarre.*)

LIST OF
TENNYSON'S POEMS MENTIONED.

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