

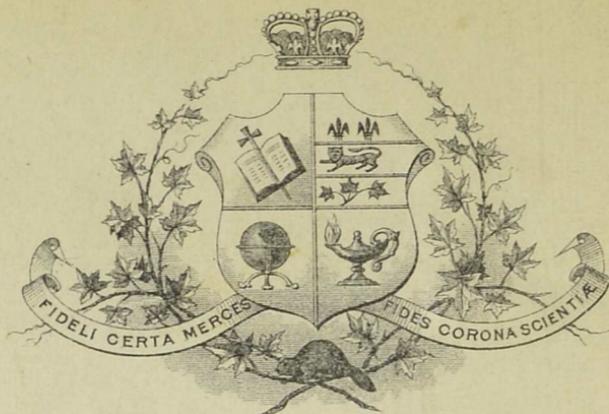
BIRDS OF GAY PLUMAGE

BIRDS OF PARADISE

SUN BIRDS



with
ILLUSTRATIONS



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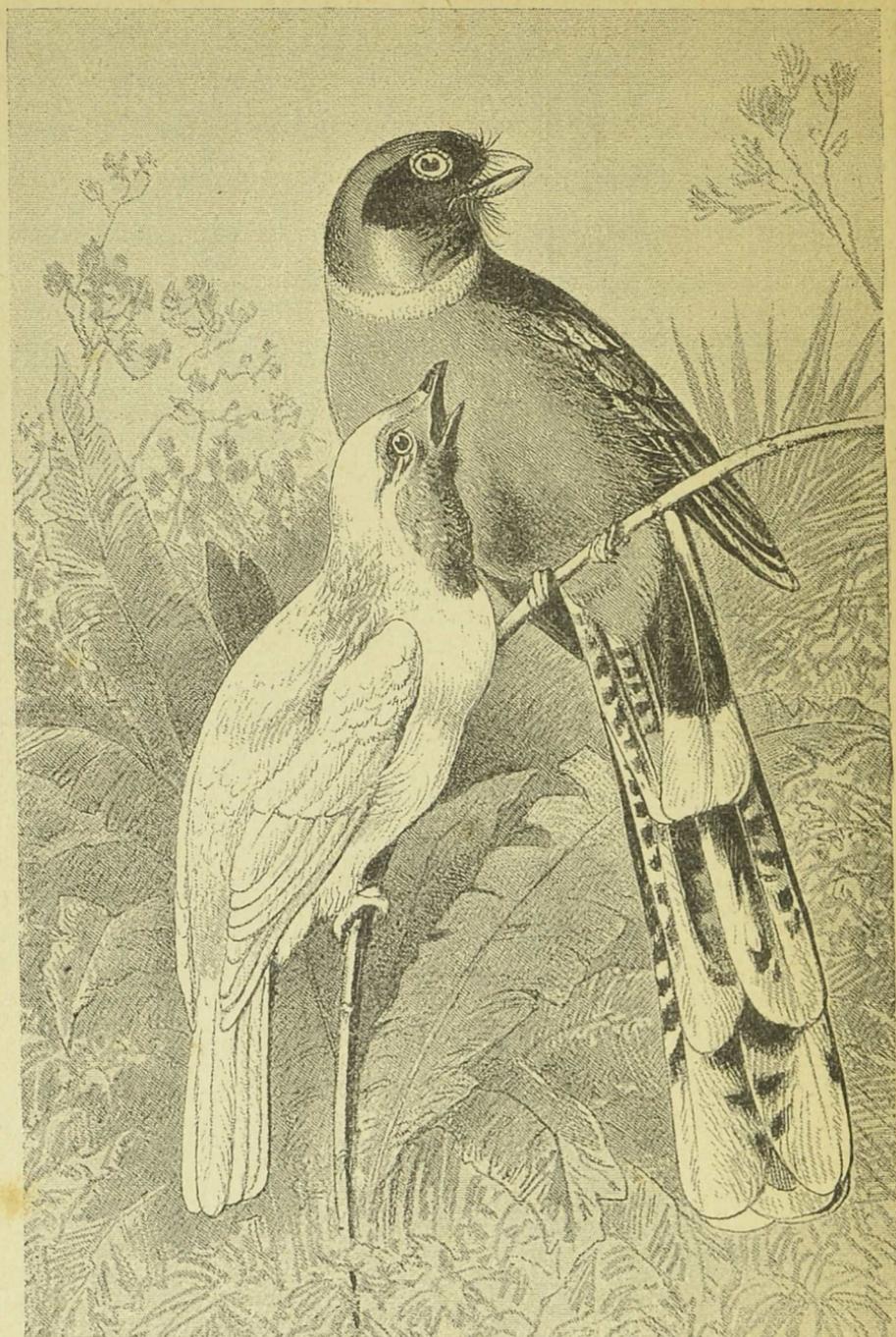
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Municipality of South Dunham

Apr 22 1896





MEXICAN TROGON AND BRAZILIAN BELL-BIRD.

BIRDS OF GAY PLUMAGE.

BIRDS OF PARADISE.
SUN-BIRDS.

By

MARY and ELIZABETH KIRBY,

Authors of "The World at the Fireside," "Things in the Forest."

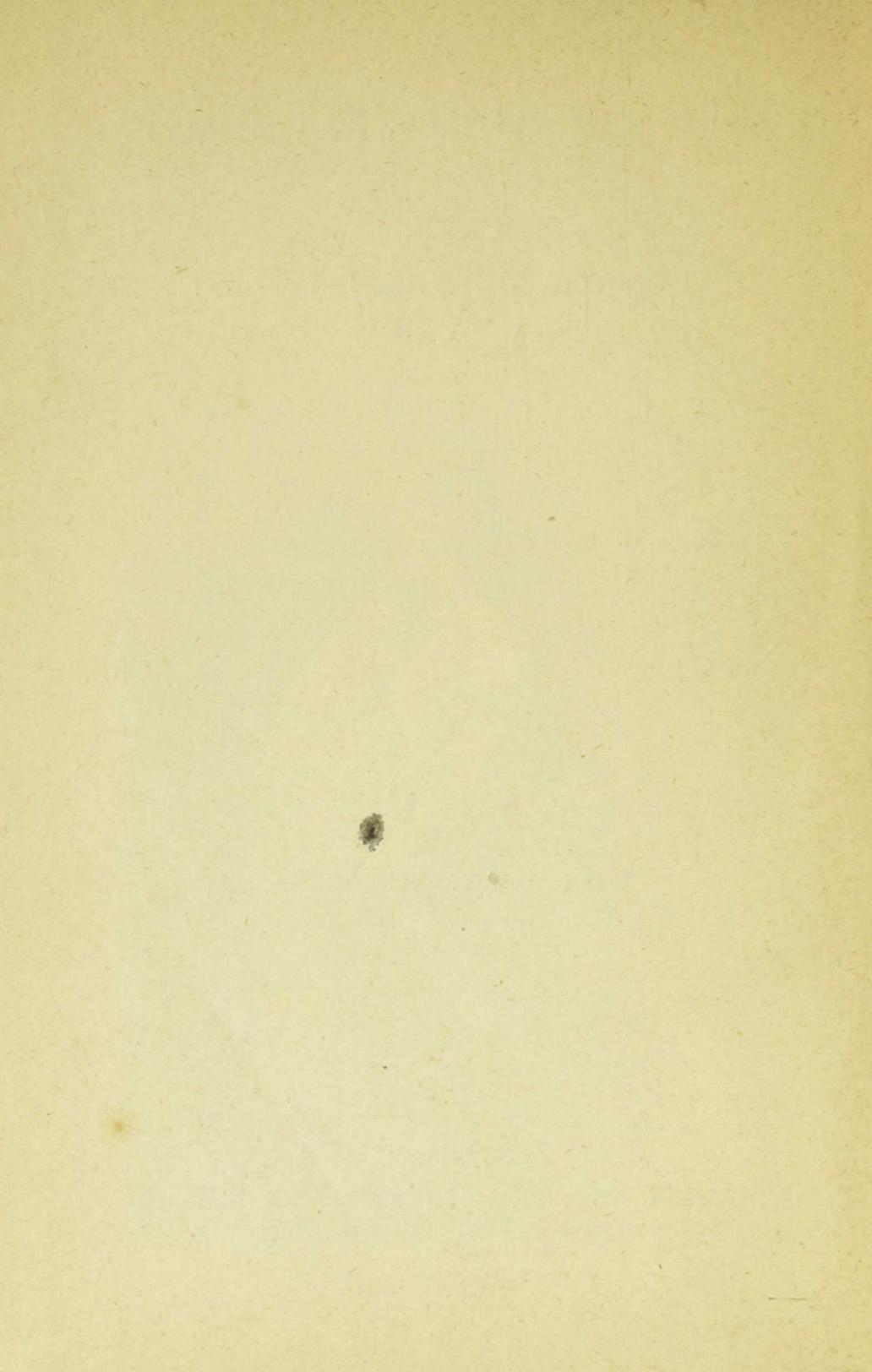
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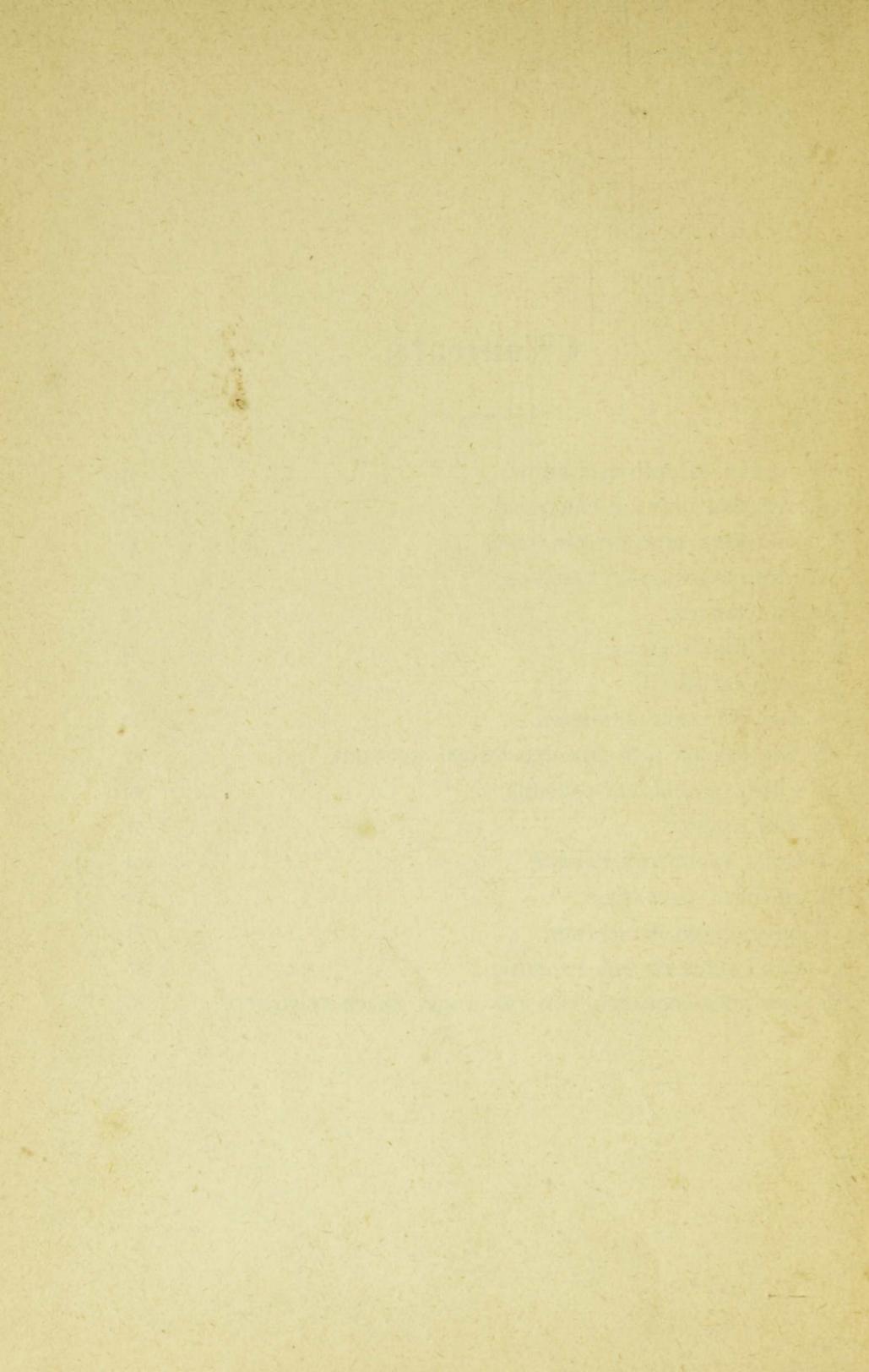
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BIRDS OF GAY PLUMAGE.

I.

WHERE TO FIND THE BIRDS.

IF you turn to the map of Asia, you will find a number of islands lying to the south of Malacca, and forming a link between Asia and Australia.

These islands are in the very midst of the Tropics. The warm tropical seas bathe their coasts, and dark dense forests cover many of them from the sea-shore to the top of the highest mountain.

Beautiful birds, and insects of wondrous size and rainbow hues, flit among the deep recesses, almost like creatures of another world.

Do you see the great island of New Guinea?

It is one of the largest islands in the world. The traveller might sail round its shores for weeks, and fancy he had reached a continent.

New Guinea is a very interesting place to the naturalist. Here are many curious insects, such as are found nowhere else. And here, and in the islands close by, called the Aru Islands, are found the Birds of Paradise. They live nowhere else.

India is the home of almost every beautiful bird, insect, and flower that exists within the range of the Tropics; and the scenery in many parts may well be compared to fairyland.

Here grow the trees and plants which are of such service to man, and the products of which are borne in merchant-vessels to every part of the globe. The cotton, the rice, the arrow-root, the indigo, all kinds of dyes, and spices, and fabrics of the finest texture, almost as fine as gossamer, come from India. And here are pearls, and ivory, and gold, and gems

—indeed, the riches of the world seem poured out in this favoured land.

Beautiful birds surround us on every hand. Each fairy bower and forest glade abounds with them.

When the morning sun shines on the crown of the palm-trees, a cloud of Parrots, like streaks or patches of vivid colour, fly forth in search of a stream in which to take their early bath. Humming-Birds of radiant hues sparkle in the sunshine, and gorgeous Fly-Catchers pursue the insects that flutter on every side; while Sun-Birds perch like tiny gems on the flowers, or climb among the branches.

The Cape of Good Hope and the southern parts of Africa are the favourite abode of many gem-like birds that adorn the groves and gardens.

Here they find every sweet they can desire. The rare plants seen in our hot-houses, and the rich exotic flowers that we admire so much, have most of them been brought from Africa. Turn where we will, in those fav-

oured spots some flower or blossom meets our gaze.

In Tropical America are great dark forests, where the trees grow so thickly together, and are so tall, that if you looked up you could hardly see the sky. Then, there are a great many climbing-plants, that twist themselves round and round the trunks and branches of the trees. They are called vegetable cables, because they are so much like ropes, and they reach from one tree to another, and almost fill up the spaces between. The white man has to cut his way with his hatchet, or else burn himself a passage.

Dangers of every kind lurk in the forest. The quick subtle Indian will not venture without his poisoned arrow, or the white man without the thunder and lightning of his gun. The venomous snake may lie coiled among the bushes, or traces of the savage jaguar be seen upon the path.

Birds, animals, and insects live undisturbed. It is their home; and on every side they are

at work, hunting their prey, or escaping from danger. Man is not there to wage war upon them; but these wild creatures of the forest wage war upon each other, and the weak are always using some contrivance to protect themselves from the strong.

Vast rivers run through the forest, and numberless streams and creeks wind along, twisting and doubling in every direction. On the banks is a complete wall of forest, that presents a firm, dense barrier.

This wall exhibits a wonderful spectacle. Often it is gloomy and dark, and the trees are of a uniform colour. But here and there a mighty tree has pushed its way up through the mass, as if resolved to get more light and air. Its splendid crown of flowers, red, white, or yellow, towers aloft.

Here are the palms in full magnificence—crowned in the season with beauty. And now and then the scene is like fairy-land. Brilliant blossoms of white and scarlet overhang the water, and flowering creepers hang around the trees, and droop from the branches like festoons.

Here, in the more open spots where the wall of forest recedes, are found the most beautiful birds. Flocks of Parrots glisten in the sun, clad in glowing scarlet, or green, or gold. Humming-Birds, like gems of beauty, come to seek honey and insects from the forest flowers. Fly-Catchers gleam and sparkle. Water-fowl of snowy plumage sport on the streams, and their white dresses contrast with those of the red Flamingo and the scarlet Ibis, that stand patiently fishing on the shore.

At times the mighty river becomes swollen by the rains. Then huge waves rise and march rapidly onward. It overflows its banks, and rushes through the forest with a terrible roar and crash.

The forest trees, gigantic as they are, become uprooted, and are carried away by the stream as though they were reeds or rushes. The monkeys, the jaguars, all the creatures of the forest are swept away. And the gloomy alligator swims where lately they made their home in the branches.

II.

THE RED BIRD OF PARADISE.

NATURE has not given to the Bird of Paradise any musical powers. His voice is curious, but not at all harmonious. Early in the morning a loud, harsh note is heard to resound through the forest, as though some one were crying out "Wok! wok!" It is the morning cry of the Emerald Bird of Paradise, as he wakes up to seek his breakfast from the trees.

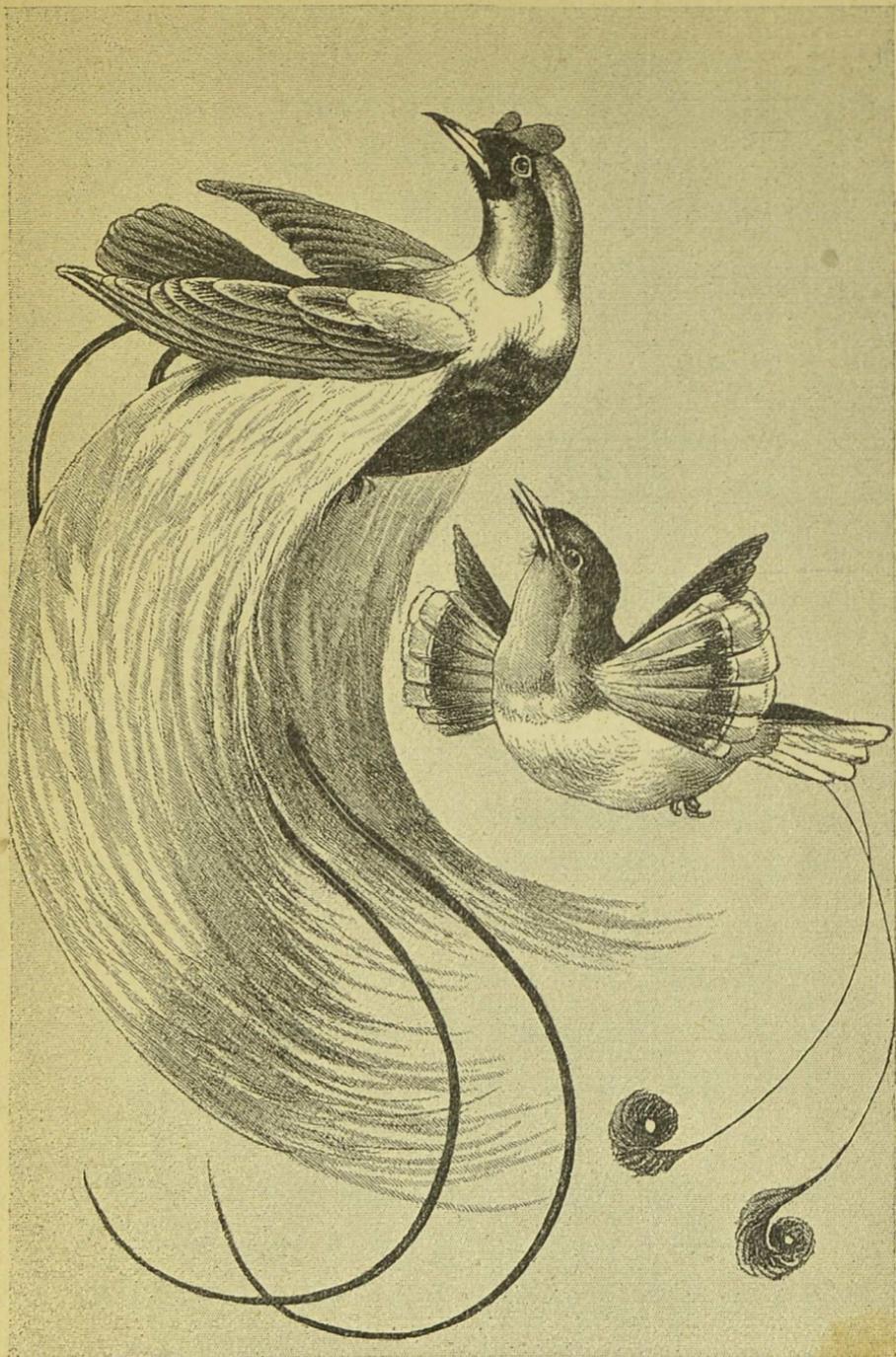
It is a signal for the forest cries to begin, and soon a chorus sounds from branch and bush. Parrots chatter and scream. All kinds of birds chirp or whistle, or utter their morning notes, until the noise is almost deafening.

The Bird of Paradise, with his golden plumage, has many relations. Some of these have never been beheld by Europeans. For

ages, successive generations of them have sported in the depths of the forest, and gladdened no human eye.

The Red Bird of Paradise has plumes of a rich crimson, tipped with white, and more gorgeous than you can imagine. His throat is of a rich green, and he has a little tuft of green feathers on his forehead. The most curious ornaments he possesses are two long, stiff quills, something like whalebone, that hang down with a graceful curve. When the poor bird is dead and lies upon his back, these quills form themselves into a circle and meet at his neck.

The hen-bird does not possess the gay colours or the flowing plumes of her mate. She is a plain-looking bird, and does not attract any attention. Nor did the various charms of the male bird appear at once. When he was young, his long quills were mere short feathers, and gave no promise of what they would afterwards become. And it was only by degrees that the lovely quills and wonderful plumes made their appearance.



THE RED AND THE KING BIRDS OF PARADISE.

The Red Birds of Paradise are only found in one spot. They live in a small island close by New Guinea. This is one of the islands where the traveller finds little comfort, and scarcely anything to eat.

The natives pay every year a tribute of Birds of Paradise to a neighbouring chief. But they will not take any further trouble. They neither plant nor sow. Each native has, if he can, a frizzly-headed Papuan for a slave, and lives himself in perfect idleness.

Even though the cocoa-nut palm grows in the island, it does not enrich the people. They do not cultivate any vegetables, but they cut down the green cocoa-nuts, and eat them instead.

In the forests of this island the Red Birds of Paradise have their home. They are not shot with a blunt arrow, but another mode of catching them is employed.

There is a great climbing plant that grows in the forest and bears a red seed. The bird is very fond of the seed, and when it is ripe comes to eat it. The hunter knows this; so

he gathers a bunch of seed and fastens it to a stick. He has a long piece of cord with him, and thus provided, he walks off into the forest.

He soon finds a tree on which the birds are likely to come and perch, and he climbs it with the agility of a monkey. Then he ties his bunch of seed to a branch, making it look as if it grew there, and leaving a noose to dangle in such a way that the poor bird is almost sure to get caught in it.

When all is ready, he gets down and sits under the tree, holding the end of the cord in his hand. Sometimes he has to wait a whole day, or even longer, before a bird will come. But he has great patience, and nothing else to do.

Presently a bird will come and perch on the bough where the ripe seed is displayed. It looks very tempting, and the poor silly bird goes to it, and begins to peck at the bait. Its legs soon get entangled in the cord; and then the hunter gives it a pull, and down comes the poor bird, and is caught.

III.

THE KING BIRD OF PARADISE.

CLOSE by New Guinea, at a little distance to the south, lie a group of islands called the Aru Islands. We seem here to have left the civilized world behind; and we should not have ventured to so remote a spot but for the beautiful birds we shall find in its deep, dark forests,—forests not yet explored, and with scarce any of their treasures brought to light.

What is that lovely creature which is flying from branch to branch? The place where we stand is not the dense part of the forest. The trees here are of moderate size, and the ground is more open. The bird is devouring the fruit of the tree on which it is perched. It flutters its wings and makes a curious sound, something like the whirring noise of a wheel.

And, like the rest of its tribe, it is always in motion ; you never see it still an instant.

Let us admire, for a few moments, its surpassing beauty. Its body is about the size of our English Thrush, but how different a costume has Nature given to it ! The white plumage underneath the body is soft and glossy as silk. And between the rich purple of the throat and the white of the body is a band or stripe of the most brilliant green.

But these exquisite colours are only part of the ornaments that Nature has bestowed. Do you see those two fan-like appendages on either side the body and beneath the wings ? They are tipped with the richest green, and can be spread out when the bird chooses.

Then you must notice the long tail-wires, as they are called, which hang down, and are tipped with two green feathers or buttons. These wonderful buttons are not found in any other species. They belong only to the King Bird of Paradise ; and it is a king bird that we see before us.

The naturalist, gazing for the first time on

this gem of beauty, is filled with delight. But the natives smile at his expressions of admiration. After all, what is it but a mere "goby-goby," as they call it,—a bird as common with them as the Thrush or the Robin is with us! They see nothing to wonder at; still less to come thousands of miles to obtain!

And it is a great mystery to them why the naturalist should fill his hut with all those stuffed birds, and insects, and butterflies as large as your hand, and dressed in green and gold and crimson. Large and splendid as they are, nothing can be more common. And surely the people who live in his country, and make knives and looking-glasses, and all manner of wonderful things, cannot care about butterflies and goby-gobies!

One day an old man made a guess on the subject that amused the naturalist,* and caused him to laugh.

The old man declared he had found out the secret. No doubt the birds, and all the stuffed creatures that the white man was going to

* Mr. Wallace.

carry away in his box, would come to life when they reached his country! Yes, that must be the reason!

At one time of the year the birds are very merry indeed. They hold what the natives call their dancing-parties. For this purpose they select a tree with a broad green top like a plateau. At a certain season, and when the birds are in full plumage, they come here in parties of twenty or more, and begin to play about, or, as the natives say, to dance. They put themselves in all kinds of attitudes, and wave their plumes about till the tree seems alive. This is the most favourable time for the naturalist: he can now behold the birds in their full beauty. At other seasons they moult, and lose their feathers, as other birds do, and are not worth preserving.

IV.

THE BLUE-HEADED TANAGER.

THERE is a tribe of birds very familiar to us all; they belong to a large, well-marked division in the great family of birds called Perchers and Climbers. They are seen hopping and perching and climbing everywhere, and they are known by the name of Finches.

The poor little Finch is often persecuted by the farmer with much injustice. It is found amongst the corn, and the owner of the field, seeing it very busy, thinks it is making havoc of the grain. But in reality the Finch is doing nothing of the kind; it is picking out the seeds from some tall, troublesome weeds that grow among the wheat.

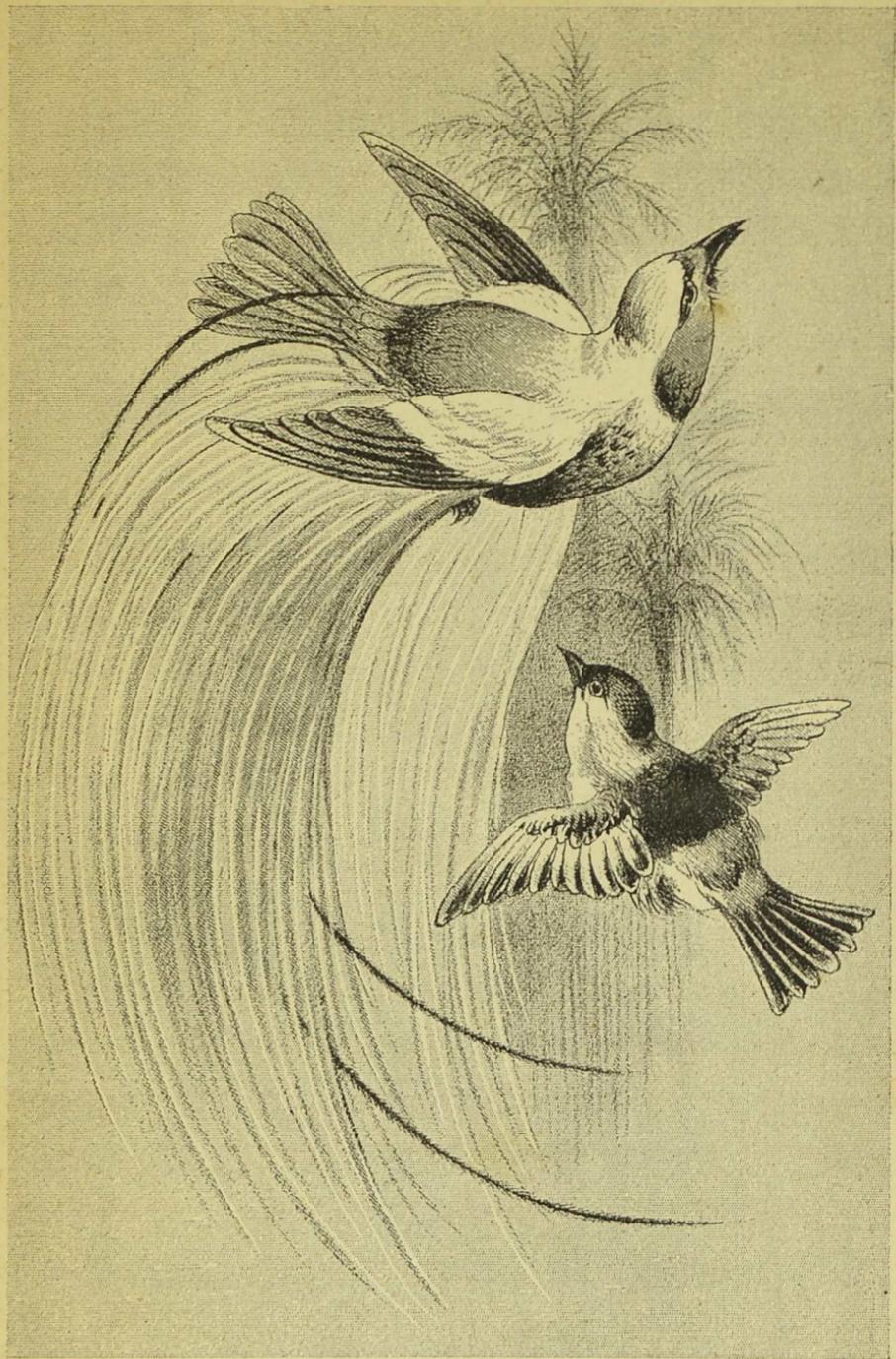
If the little Finches were let alone, they

would devour an immense quantity of these seeds, and prevent the weed from spreading.

There are vast numbers of the Finch tribe in England, and you know them well. There are the Goldfinch, the Bullfinch, the Chaffinch, and many more. It has been said that the number of weeds they keep under would cover many thousand acres.

How important it is to know our friends from our foes, and to spare the little birds !

The Finch has a relation that lives in the Tropics. He is much more gaily dressed than our humble birds at home. His colours are brilliant. He wears green, and red, and blue ; and his plumage looks like velvet. He is a very familiar bird in the Tropics, and fills the same place that the Sparrow does at home. He is to be seen everywhere, glittering and flashing among the trees in the garden or orchard. He is not afraid of anything, but hops, and perches, and chirps, and is quite at his ease. He is not called the Finch. He has another name in this part of the world. He is the Tanager. There is a brilliant little bird,



EMERALD BIRD OF PARADISE AND BLUE-HEADED TANAGER.

called the Scarlet Tanager, that is found in the forests of North America, and that has a glowing band of red on his wings. He is a very sociable bird, and ventures near the abode of man. He will come to the gardens to seek for fruit and insects, and will even place his nest on a tree by the roadside. But as soon as the young Tanagers are old enough, the parent birds will lead them away southward to escape the winter.

The old birds choose the night as the safest time for flitting, and glide through the woods followed by their little ones. Many families may be seen travelling in this way, on their route to a warmer spot.

The love of the parent birds for their young is very touching. Nothing will induce them to forsake their offspring. I can relate a little story to prove the fact.

A naturalist, who was very fond of studying the habits of birds, once caught a young Tanager, and carried it to his home. He then procured a cage, placed his prisoner within it, and hung the cage on a tree. There was a

nest on the tree occupied by a number of young birds called Orioles. The parent Orioles kept flying backwards and forwards to feed their brood, and the naturalist hoped they would take pity on the little Tanager in the cage, and give it something to eat. But no such thing seemed likely to happen. The parent Orioles were far too busy attending to the wants of their own offspring to notice the Tanager, though they flew close by it. And as the poor little captive refused to be fed by the naturalist, there was some danger lest it should die of starvation.

Such a fate would, indeed, have befallen it, but that a deliverer was at hand. A Scarlet Tanager, full-grown, and no doubt the parent bird come in search of its little one, arrived at the cage, and made an attempt to get in. This it could not do, and after many fruitless efforts it flew away. But very soon it returned, carrying an insect in its bill, which it offered to the captive. This time the hungry little Tanager did not refuse to be fed, and the parent bird continued to bring insects and other food until night. Then it took up its

abode in the tree close by the cage. The Orioles seemed offended at the intrusion, and treated it with the utmost insolence. But the Tanager bore their insults with patience, and seemed resolved that nothing should drive it to forsake its charge. Some time passed, and the young Tanager grew larger and stronger, and quite able to fly. The parent bird did all it could to coax the prisoner out of the cage, and made use of every note and gesture, as it appeared, of entreaty and persuasion. But the bars of the cage presented an obstacle not to be removed, and the poor birds were both of them in despair.

At length the owner of the garden, who had watched all this with great interest, felt his heart relent. He placed a ladder against the tree, and climbing up to the cage, opened the door. The scene that followed repaid his kindness and humanity. Out came the Tanager, and was received by the parent bird with cries of delight. Then both together, and still uttering notes of rapture, they took the way to the forest.

V.

THE TROGON.

IN the sunny regions of the Tropics, Nature seems to preserve her freshness and beauty without interruption. As one leaf withers, another takes its place, so that the green canopy is always full and compact. There is neither autumn nor winter, but perpetual summer reigns.

In some parts of South America, unbroken forest extends for an immense distance. Brooks and streams run hither and thither in the deep recesses, and are bridged over by Nature with the trunks of trees that have fallen across by accident. The ground is covered with a dense carpet of moss and of decayed leaves, and forest fruits lie scattered in profusion.

The trees are very lofty; but here and there in these deep forests you meet with giants. A mighty trunk will tower up, of a size and thickness that can scarcely be believed. This giant trunk takes up a vast space of ground. It will be sixty feet in circumference, and a hundred feet in height. Like a vast dome, its mighty branches stretch themselves abroad,—the dome of some cathedral built by the hand of Nature.

I have brought you to this part of the world to show you a beautiful bird called the Trogon. He has splendid green plumage and a crimson breast.

His foot is like that of the Parrot, and he clasps the branch on which he is sitting, as the Parrot does. His bill is stout and strong, and has saw-like edges. His beautiful plume of loose waving feathers—white, and black, and green—delights the eye.

But his wings, though so beautiful, are feeble. He does not keep on the wing, nor has he the agility of the Parrot. He sits quietly on some low branch in the gloomy

shade of the forest, eying the tempting fruit around him. The effort to obtain it is more than he likes; but presently, as if impelled by hunger, he makes a dart, seizes it, and conveys it to the branch, where he again settles himself while he is eating it.

He is very solitary and rather mournful in his habits. Now and then he utters a plaintive cry; but his greatest pleasure seems to be in dozing lazily on his branch.

You must not think that the Trogon lives only on fruit. He has no objection to insects; and he watches them, as they flit about, in the same grave and solemn manner. By-and-by he bestirs himself, and darts after them with surprising agility. But he will be sure very soon to return to his perch. He cannot fly far; his flowing plumes impede his progress. He will, however, migrate from one part of the country to another. He arrives at the end of his journey when some particular fruit is ripe of which he is fond. He remains till the fruit is over, and then goes back again.

VI.

THE KING'S BIRDS.

THE Trogon has some relations in India that have smooth bills, with no saw-like notches upon them. But near the tip of the upper part of the beak is a kind of hook. All round the eye there is a bare space without feathers, but of a rich colour.

In Mexico there lives a Trogon which is arrayed in a most gorgeous manner. Among the Humming-Birds and brilliant creatures in that tropical land, he shines and glistens with surpassing beauty.

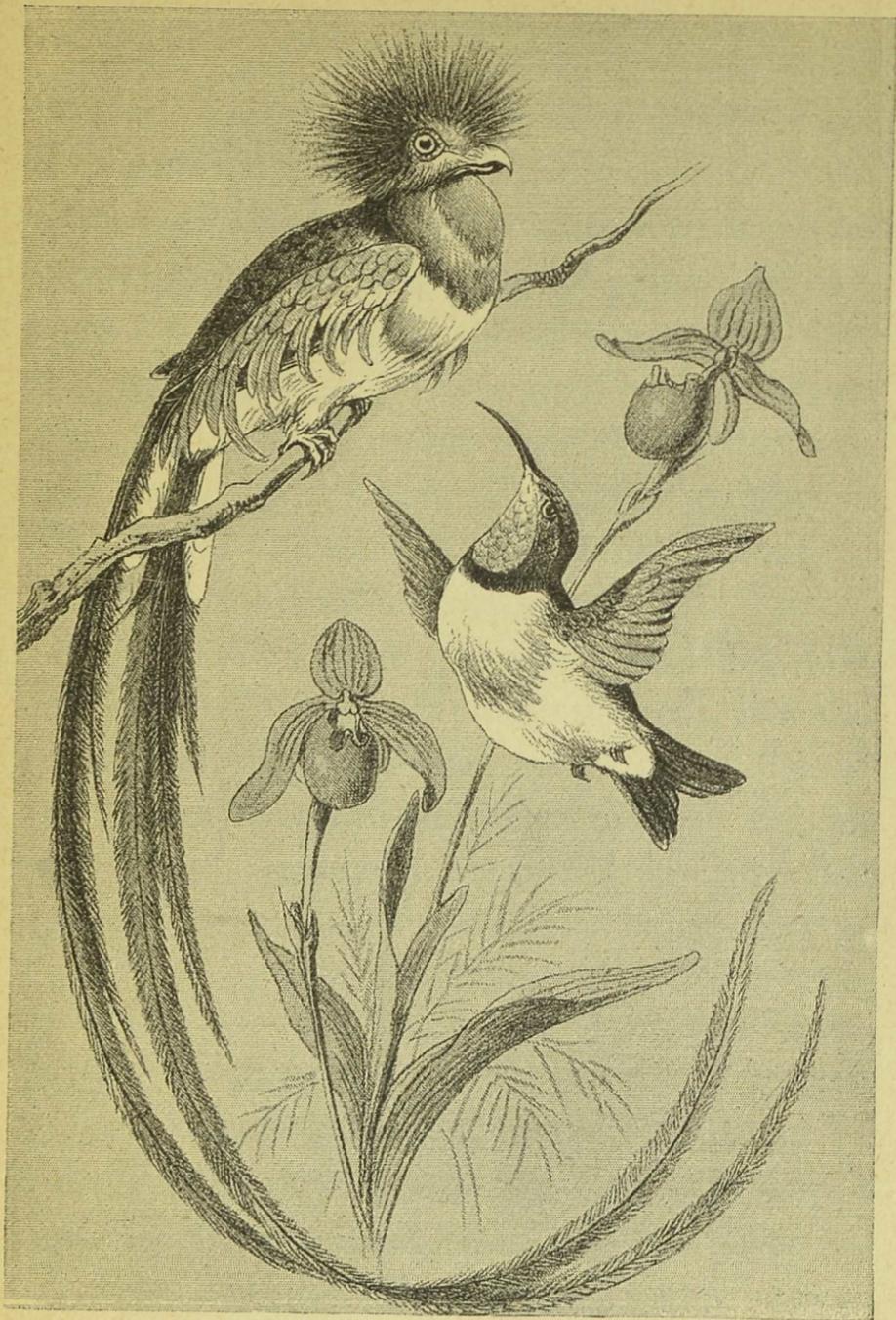
The lustre of his green plumes can hardly be described, and under his body is a vivid sheet of scarlet. Round his neck is a white ring, and his tail-feathers are barred with black and white and green.

Like the rest of his tribe, he is not often seen. He loves to hide in some deep, cool recess, where he watches patiently for his prey. His food consists both of fruits and of insects, which he catches with his bill.

He has a relation that prefers the fruits to the insects. This splendid bird is the most magnificent of the whole family, and well deserves his name—the Resplendent Trogon.

His costume is a golden-green, more beautiful than you can imagine, and the scarlet of his breast is dazzling. His tail-feathers, which are extremely long, make a curve, and on the under side are marked with black and white bars.

Age after age these superb creatures of the forest have lived in successive generations in the tropical and flowery land of Mexico. Long ago, Mexico was a kingdom ruled by its own monarch, and rich in gold and silver and precious stones. In those days the palace of the sovereign might almost be called a palace of gold; and the pomp and splendour of the court baffled description. But perhaps



RESPLENDENT TROGON AND CEYLONESE SUN-BIRD.

the fairest and loveliest among the palace possessions was the collection of beautiful birds kept there in all their living splendour.

The king had two great houses fitted up for this purpose, and the utmost pains and care were taken to supply the captives with food and every necessary. A staff of attendants was employed to watch over them; and you will smile when I tell you that a number of doctors were always at hand to give advice or medicine in case the birds were sick.

A brilliant assembly indeed were the birds. Here were Trogons, Humming-Birds, Parrots, Pigeons, and Sun-Birds. And here, distinct from these, were all the birds of prey and the water-fowl, and every feathered creature that could be procured; so that the Spaniards, we are told, were astonished and full of admiration at the sight. But not only the sight of the birds was marvellous; the use made of their feathers was equally curious and wonderful.

The ancient Mexicans thought no costume so lovely as that worn by the birds; and they took the gorgeous feathers and lovely plumes

and wove them into mantles, and all kinds of dresses, mixing the feathers with gold and silver.

The monarch himself chose the resplendent plumes of the Trogon for a head-dress. So highly were they esteemed in those days, that no one, unless he were of the blood-royal, was permitted to wear them.

Persons were appointed on purpose to look after the feathers of the King's Birds. And it was their office to pluck them, and also to weave them into the rich mantles and shining costumes worn by the grandees of the nation.

VII.

THE BELL-BIRD.

THE great tropical forest, with its wonderful array of trees, and plants, and living creatures, is the favourite spot where we look for beautiful birds. But at times the traveller may look for them in vain. They seem to have taken their departure, and silence reigns in bush and tree. This does not last long. All at once the bird life begins again with its usual activity. Tree and bush swarm with birds of the most brilliant costume. The Tanagers perch and climb gaily as ever. The solemn Trogon appears in his resplendent plumes seated on some branch in silent majesty. The Humming-Birds flash, and dart, and sparkle, with all the brilliance and beauty of the Tropics. The deserted

spot will be a scene of loveliness and of activity.

Among the bevy of beautiful birds now swarming around us, there are some adorned with the utmost splendour. They cannot live except under the full heat of the Tropics. The moist, hot parts of the forest are their home; and here they are seen shining in tints and hues that delight the eye of the traveller. One is dressed in the most vivid scarlet, another in blue and violet, a third wears a costume of varied colours harmoniously blended. They do not associate in flocks, but you catch sight of each one, apart from his companions, in the foliage of some shadowy tree, or by some creek or stream; for they delight in the water. Their food is the never-failing fruit of the forest; and their size is that of a small Pigeon. They are called Cotingas.

The Cotinga has no song. Among the forest's notes and sounds he is mute; the gift of music has not been bestowed upon him. But in the early morning, or in the

hush of noontide, the traveller may chance to hear a deep full toll, like the sound of a bell. He listens, and again he hears it, loud, clear, and distinct. Then he knows that some three miles distant, on the top of a lofty tree, the wonderful Bell-Bird is sitting. He is related to the brilliant Cotingas, but very unlike them. His plumage is snow-white, and he is about the size of a Jay.

The Bell-Bird is called by another name. The Spaniards speak of him as the Campanero. His place of abode is South America, and his habits and the mode of building his nest are not known.

The brilliant family of Cotingas are not noticed in any way by their curious relation. He is never seen with them, and might belong to a distinct tribe.

VIII.

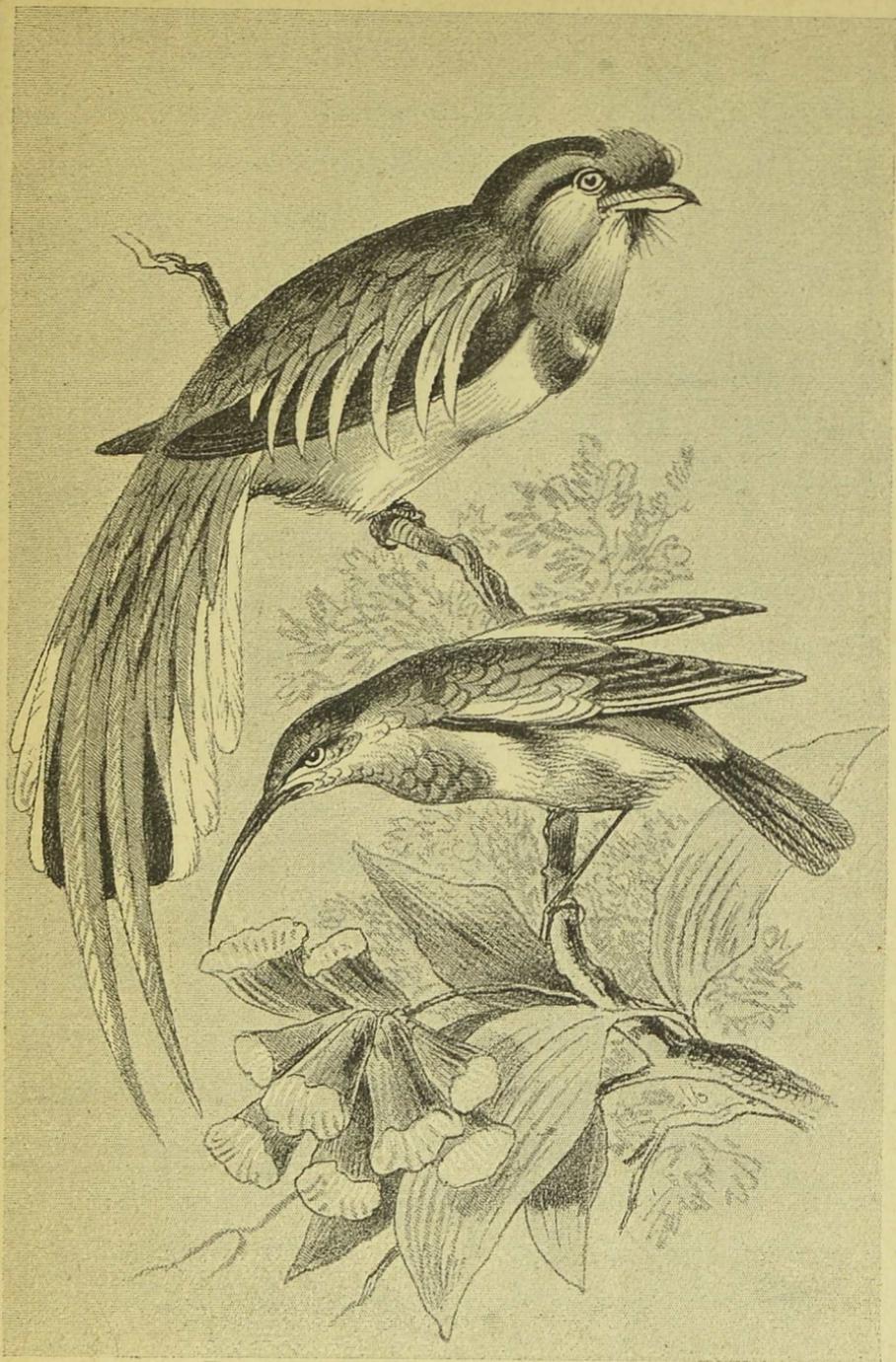
THE COLLARED SUN-BIRD.

THE Sun-Birds have been called by old writers the Humming-Birds of Africa.

Africa is the home of a vast variety of these beautiful birds. They are distinguished from each other by many marks and signs, pointing out the different species. But in all instances the plumage is brilliant, and the under surface of the body is adorned with bands or stripes of colour.

The name of the family is *Nectarinidæ*, and has been given them from their habit of sipping the nectar of flowers. Indeed they were once supposed to live entirely on honey; but this is not the case, since insects form part of their diet.

The other title, of "Sun-Bird," has been



BEAUTIFUL TROGON AND COLLARED SUN-BIRD.

given to this radiant little creature because of the effect of the sunlight on its feathers.

They change colour every moment, and flash and sparkle in a manner not to be described. This effect is produced by the bird itself. It has the power of changing the position of its feathers, and so throwing them into a different light, or exhibiting a portion of the surface hitherto concealed.

The Collared Sun-Bird is one of the most lovely specimens of its race. It lives near the Cape of Good Hope. Very little is known of its habits; but it is supposed to build in the hollows of trees, or, where the country is more open, in some bush or shrub.

It is a creature of exquisite beauty. The golden-green of its plumage changes every moment you behold it. Under the green of the breast is a band of steel-blue, and then a band of glowing crimson. On either side of the crimson band or stripe is a tuft of bright yellow feathers. The wings are glossed with green, and the upper feathers of the tail are violet. There is a relation of the Collared

Sun-Bird that is, if possible, more magnificent. It is called the Double-collared Sun-Bird, and is much larger than the bird we have been describing. It has the same arrangement of colours, but the blue band is of a deeper tint, and the crimson stripe is broader. It lives in Africa, and chooses the forests that clothe the eastern side of that continent. Now and then it descends into the plains; but it makes its nest in the hollow of some forest tree, and the mother-bird lays four or five eggs.

There is still another Collared Sun-Bird. It is so much like the one found at the Cape of Good Hope, that for a long time the two were thought to be the same.

The only difference between them is, that in the bird of which I am speaking the wings and tail are smaller, and the beautiful collar of blue is wanting. The upper feathers of the tail are of the same brilliant green as the head and back, instead of being violet. This beautiful bird is found in Africa, near the river Niger.

IX.

THE CEYLON AND THE RED-TAILED SUN-BIRD.

AMONG the lovely groves and gardens of Ceylon sports a dainty little Sun-Bird.

It is dressed in the gay attire of the beautiful birds. Its throat is a rich purple mixed with black, and the body is a glowing yellow; while the band across the throat, and the tail feathers, are a deep brown.

Nothing can exceed the beauty of this tiny gem, as it perches itself on the petal of some tropical flower, and feeds upon its juices, picking off, as it does so, the insects which have found a home there. Its note is quick and sharp and impatient, and it passes from blossom to blossom with great rapidity. The honeyed nectar of flowers is its favourite food, and when in captivity it will sip sugar and water with delight.

It builds a nest a little in the shape of a bottle with a long neck, and suspends it from the extreme branch of a tree. The nest is made of the very fine fibres of plants, and has a round hole on one side, through which the bird can enter.

These brilliant Sun-Birds, with their purple and yellow costumes, are found not only in Ceylon, but also in India. The gardens and groves abound with them, and the tiny nest is constantly seen hanging from the branches of the trees.

The mother Sun-Bird wears a grave and sober attire. The upper part of her body is a plain olive-green, and her throat is white. The colours of her wings and tail resemble those of her mate.

The Red-tailed Sun-Bird is a native of a part of India called Silhet, a province which borders on Bengal, and has a capital town of the same name.

He is clad in a glowing costume. The upper part of the head and the throat are blue, changing into violet. Then comes a patch, or

mark, of orange scarlet. The wings are purple, edged with green, while the breast is yellow.

The fiery tail is of the same orange scarlet; and two of the tail feathers reach to a considerable length.

Amid the wealth of flowers, and under the burning sun in which he delights, the Sun-Bird enjoys his little day. The trees of the forest are crowned with fragrant flowers, on which he loves to perch; or he visits the gardens, rich with tropical beauty. His tiny nest is composed of the finest down, picked, perhaps, from the cotton tree, and mixed with leaves.

A resident in India watched the little Sun-Birds build their nest.

They began by fixing some materials to the great web of a spider, that hung from a twig. The materials consisted of fragments of paper, threads of cloth, grass, and other substances; and when the nest was finished, it hung suspended from the web, like a little ball in the air.

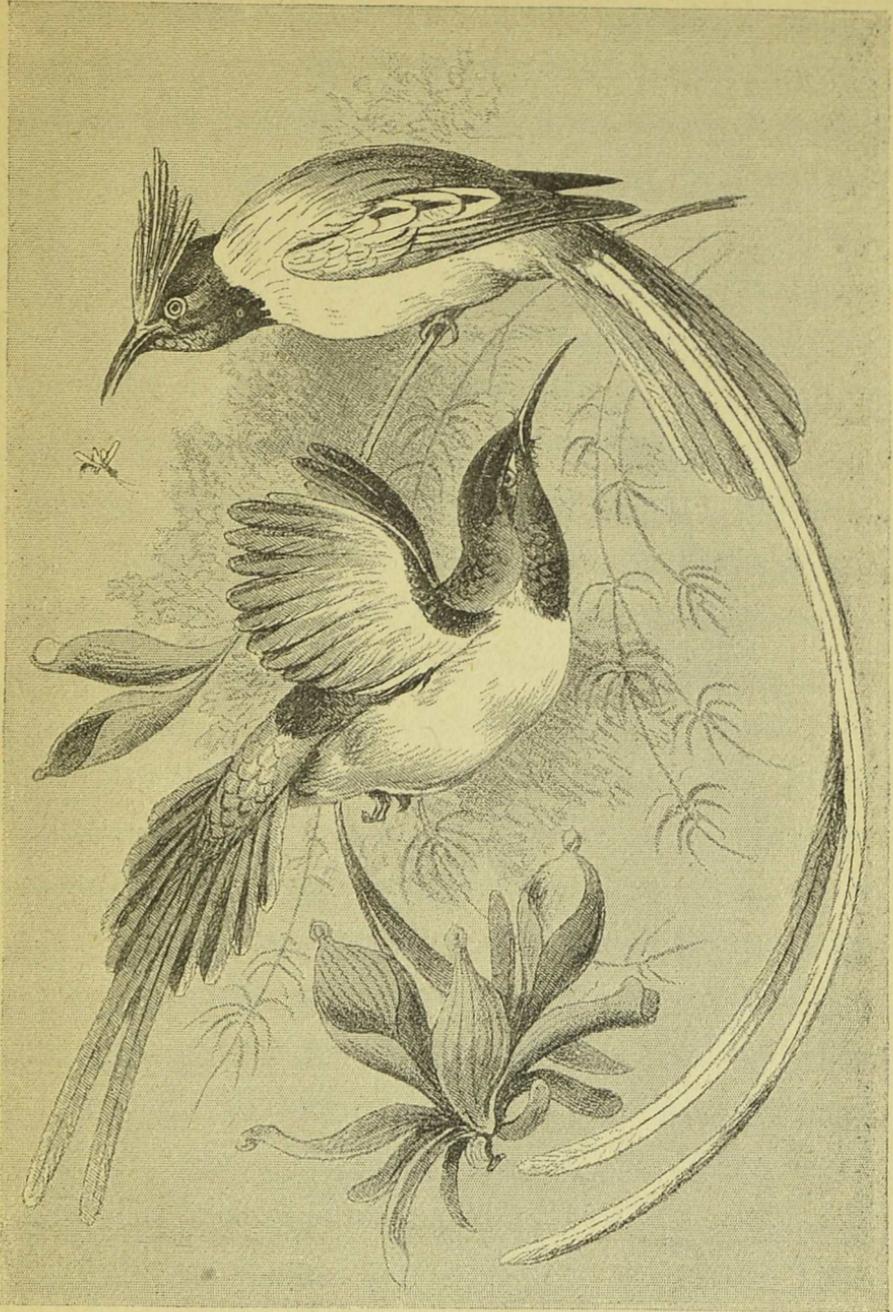
X.

THE PARADISE FLY-CATCHER.

THERE is a bird which comes and goes every summer, and is a bird of passage, like the Swallow and the Cuckoo.

It is not very common, but is more often seen in the northern counties of England than in any other part of our island. When August comes, and while the winter is yet a great way off, it takes its departure. The colours it wears are white and brown and gray. It has not the radiant hues of the Tropics, and yet it belongs to a tropical family. We call it the Fly-Catcher.

Its relations are scattered far and wide. One of them is found as far north as Siberia and Kamtchatka, and is called the Dun Fly-Catcher. But, as a rule, the Fly-Catchers



PARADISE FLY-CATCHER AND RED-TAILED SUN-BIRD.

inhabit the warmer parts of the globe; and, like the beautiful birds we have been describing, they revel under the burning sun of the Tropics.

They are called Tyrants. This is because of their fierce and combative temper, which, as we shall see presently, causes them to tyrannize over birds much larger than themselves.

One of these Tyrants goes by the name of the Paradise Fly-Catcher. He wears a green crest, while his bill is of a deep blue. The feathers of his head are green, and his body is white and gray. He has a wedge-shaped tail, and the two middle feathers are of a great length. He lives in very hot countries, in India and in Southern Africa.

In India the traveller will often come on a dense thicket of bamboo; for the bamboo, though really a grass, will grow to the size of a magnificent tree. It shoots up in clumps or clusters, rising to the height of eighty or a hundred feet. The stem is hollow, and at intervals forms the same knots or joints that are found in the grasses. From each joint

springs a set of branches, which strike out at right angles to the stem; and these divide into others, and so on, until the last branch ends in a leaf. In the thicket I am describing all these different branches form a compact mass, crossing and recrossing each other, like a gigantic piece of net-work. At the top of the stem there droop gracefully over the lovely plumes of the bamboo, which are of the brightest green, and curl like feathers.

A forest of bamboo is one of the most wonderful sights in nature.

The Indian uses the bamboo for every purpose. He makes his house, his bows and arrows, his furniture, all his possessions, in fact, of bamboo. And the glorious thicket of bamboo is like a vast awning for the beautiful birds of the Tropics. Under its deep cool shadow they can live and rejoice.

The Paradise Fly-Catchers make their home here, as in a bower.

They feed on the insects that abound on every hand. The bird perches on some lofty branch, and watches patiently till its prey

shall appear in sight. Presently some insect, perhaps a gorgeous butterfly, or one of the numerous insects of the forest, comes fluttering by. Then the Fly-Catcher makes a sudden swoop, and you hear, a moment after, a sharp snap with its beak. You know then that the poor insect is seized and devoured, and the Tyrant is on the watch for another. Sometimes it will hunt on the branch for the beetles or ants that may be crawling about, and pick them off with its bill.

It is not always content with its leafy home of bamboo. It will visit the gardens, and shrubberies, and plantations, in search of prey; and having made a circuit, come back again. There are numbers of Fly-Catchers, of different names, and wearing different costumes.

In the tropical parts of America they swarm in great numbers, as the Sparrows do with us. The trees are full of them, each bird intent on its own business of darting after insects, and taking little notice of its companions. At one season the great mounds of earth made by the ants send out colonies of winged ants. Then

the Fly-Catchers come prepared for a banquet, and assemble in thousands.

They do not always content themselves with insects; the larger species of birds will even feed on fish. A gentleman was once sitting at his window, and he heard a splash in a lake close by. Looking out, he spied a Fly-Catcher perched on a dead branch which overhung the water. A moment after, he saw the bird give a plunge, in the same manner as the Kingfisher does. Then it rose again to its branch, and sat, as if drying its feathers. The gentleman watched intently, and he saw the bird dive again into the water, and bring up a tiny fish, just after the manner of the Kingfisher. The dart was made with the rapidity of lightning.

The Fly-Catcher has even been suspected of devouring small animals, for a lizard was once found in its stomach.

XI.

THE PARROT.

THERE is a tribe of birds from far-off lands with which we are very familiar in this country. I mean the family of Parrots. In England we see them shut up in cages ; but in their native forests their splendid dresses shine and sparkle among the trees, until the branches seem alive with blue, and scarlet, and emerald.

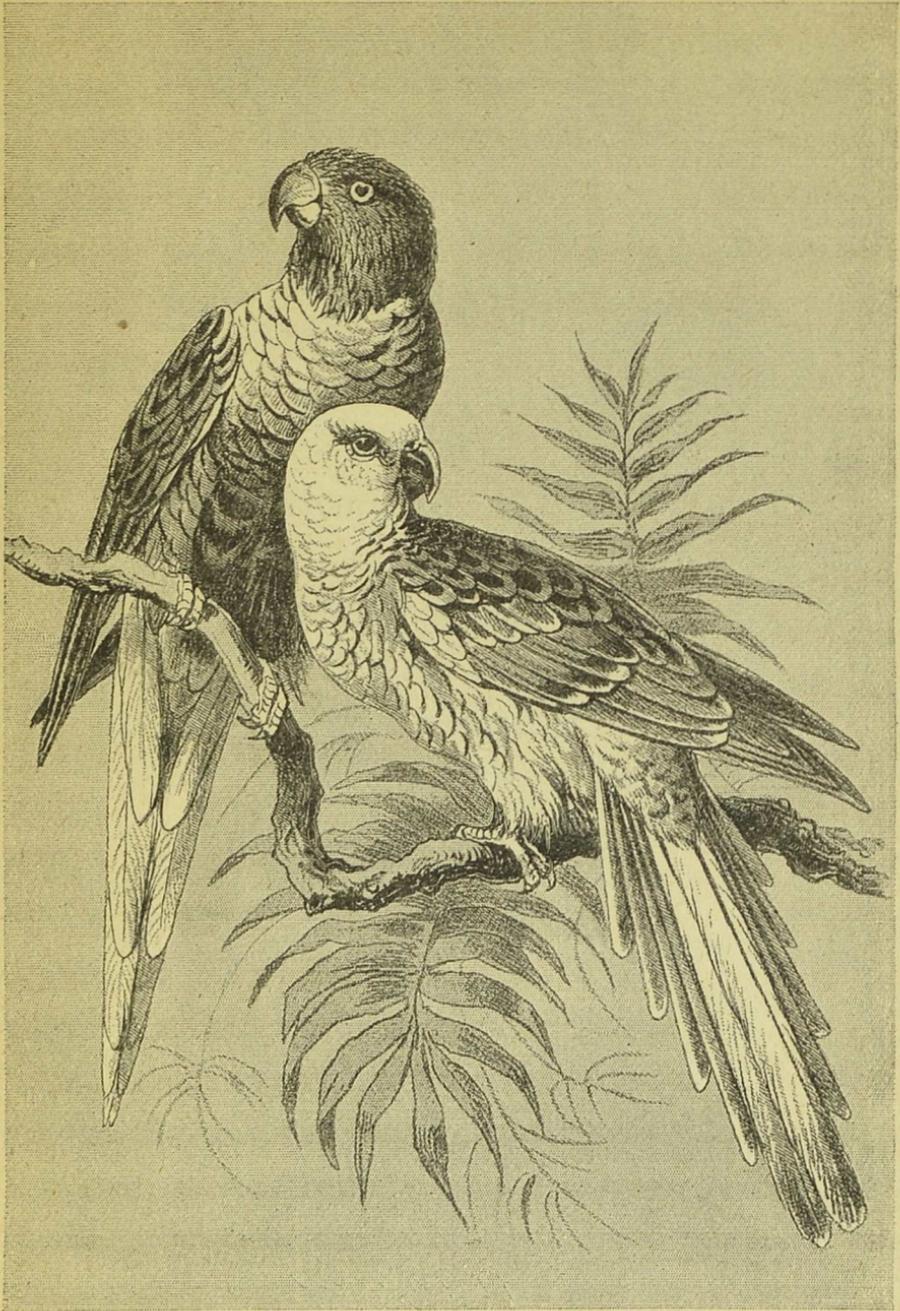
The Parrot has been said to resemble its lively neighbour the monkey. You rarely if ever see it attempt to walk. Like the monkey, it climbs nimbly from bough to bough, and swings itself about, hanging by its bill and claws. These useful members serve it both for hands and for feet.

As it climbs from bough to bough, the tender green twigs around are a kind of meadow or

pasture in which it delights. It will cling by its bill to the bough overhead. Then, with one of its feet, it grasps a branch by its side, and with the other foot it takes hold of a twig on the other side. Thus it makes its way through the trees as fast as it can.

The naturalist, who has carefully studied the subject, can tell by looking at the bill what kind of food the bird subsists upon. And the bill of the Parrot tells its own story. It is intended to do hard work, and to crack the forest nuts, and get out the kernels. It has, therefore, a peculiar form; and it would be worth our while to pause a moment and look at it.

It is a strong, sharp, hooked instrument, which the Parrot can drive into the hardest shell and make a hole in it. And it is worked by very powerful muscles indeed. The Parrot's large, full cheek is taken up with these great muscles. They work both jaws—the upper as well as the lower. The Parrot's upper jaw is not fixed as ours is. It never snaps its bill; but it can work its jaws together, and in a



BLUE-BELLIED LORIKEET AND PALE-HEADED PARROT.

way in which we cannot. This is why the Parrot's bill is so amazingly strong.

If you could see some of the forest nuts that it cracks, you would understand the reason of this great provision of strength.

The shell of the fruit is as hard as iron, but the Parrot can wrench it open with its bill, or drive a hole in it. While it does so, it holds the fruit in its foot, as in a hand, and puts it in the right position with its great fleshy tongue.

What with its strong foot, its powerful bill, and its jaws, the Parrot is amply provided for by Nature, and able to maintain itself in plenty.

Perhaps you would like to know how the Parrots spend the day when they are at home in their native forests.

Very early in the morning they rouse themselves from sleep, and begin to chatter, and scream, and make a great noise. Then they all fly into the sunshine, and settling on the top of a tree, begin to dress their plumage, which is rather damp with the dews of night. They next look about for their breakfast; and this is generally the wild-cherry, or some other

fruit. They break the stones with their strong bills, and pick out the kernels and eat them. Then they go in quest of clear water to bathe in; and this they seem to enjoy very much indeed. They roll over and over, and play about like children on the edge of the pool, and dip their heads and wings in the water, so as to scatter it all over their plumage. By this time the sun is getting hot, and they retire to the deep recesses of the forest, where it is always cool and shady. They give over screaming and chattering, and settle themselves on the boughs for a nap. And then the silence is so deep you might hear a leaf drop to the ground, although the trees overhead are crowded with Parrots.

But the stillness only lasts through the noon-tide heat. In the evening the Parrots wake up, and make as much noise as ever. They sup, as they breakfasted, upon the kernels of the fruits, and then go to the water to bathe. Again follows the business of dressing and pluming their feathers, and after this they go to rest. But they do not roost in the branches

where they took their afternoon's nap. Their sleeping-room is a hollow tree, scooped out by the Woodpecker. As many Parrots get in as the hollow will contain, and the rest hook themselves to the bark by their claws and bills, and hang there through the night.

The Parrot lays her eggs in these hollow trees. She does not make a nest, but lays them on the rotten wood ; and the whole flock lay their eggs together in the same tree.

XII.

MORE ABOUT THE PARROT.

THERE is a gift possessed by the Parrot which makes his society very amusing. You will guess what I mean. He has the power of articulating words ; in fact, he may be taught to speak.

The Parrots do not all possess this faculty. There is a splendid American Parrot that cannot be taught to say anything. But a relation of his, who is dressed in simple gray, can chatter away famously if he meets with any one to teach him. He will even appear as if taking the utmost pains to learn. He listens to his teacher, and repeats the sentences over and over until he is perfect, and can say them correctly. He will even talk in his sleep.

This power of imitation in the bird is very



RACQUET-TAILED AND COMMON GRAY PARROTS.

curious, if we take the trouble to think about it. His abode is far away from man, and it is only by chance that the faculty is awakened. But there it is, ready to develop itself at any moment.

The Indians make a trade of catching Parrots. Most of those you see in England were taken from the nest, and never knew what it was to be free. The younger the bird, the easier his education will be.

The Indian goes into the forest, and takes some little arrows with blunt points. He only wants to stun the birds, and is anxious not to injure them. He will often try another plan. He will make a fire under the tree, using for fuel a plant the smoke of which has a strong, pungent smell. The poor little birds are stupefied with the smoke, and fall to the ground. Then the Indian picks them up, and carries them away.

But now and then he has rather an unruly captive. A bird will be sullen, and refuse to eat or to be taught. The Indian has a sure way of punishment. He has only to blow a little tobacco smoke into the eyes of the Parrot,

and it is enough. The Parrot has such a dislike to the smell of tobacco that he will become as docile as possible.

The Indian will often subject his prisoners to very curious treatment. He will try to alter the colour of their plumage, and make it more showy. There is a Parrot, called the Amazonian Parrot, that is one of the best talkers in the whole family. The Indians value him highly, and try to procure him when he is very young and his feathers are only beginning to grow. They pluck the feathers from the neck and shoulders, and rub the parts with a colouring substance or dye called anotta. The feathers soon grow again; but this time, instead of being green, they are a brilliant red or yellow. In fact, the green costume is changed for one much more splendid. But the health of the bird suffers from the treatment he has received. He is feeble and melancholy, and without any of the sprightliness of his race. But the Indian can sell him for a good sum of money, since the transformed birds are very rare and much sought after.

There is but one species of Parrot a native of the United States. It is called the Carolina Parrot, and feeds upon a plant called the cockle-bur. The cockle-bur is as abundant as the Parrots. It grows in the fields along the banks of the great American rivers, and ripens after the harvest has been gathered in. It grows so thickly, and the burs stick so fast together, that a man can scarcely force his way through them. The burs stick to his clothes, and are very difficult to rub off. And if the man is on horseback, they will cling to the horse's tail, and make it a tangled mass, so that it has to be cut off. The poor sheep that chances to stray into one of these fields is in a sorry plight; the wool is literally torn from its back. And the worst of the matter is, that the cockle-bur does no good to outweigh all this mischief. It possesses no valuable property either as food or as medicine. But when I use the word food I am forgetting the Parrots.

The tiresome cockle-burs are a rich harvest on which the Parrots feed with delight.

The Parrot settles on the plant, and plucks the great bur from the stem, using his foot as a hand. He turns the bur about until he gets it in the right position. Then he strikes and tears it with his bill, and soon splits it open. He takes out the contents and eats them, letting the husk drop on the ground. A flock of Parrots will busy themselves in this manner until the field is almost stripped. But, alas! the cockle-bur is by no means destroyed. Up it comes the next spring, as abundant as ever!

Nor can we regard the Parrot as a benefactor. He is nothing of the kind. He is not content with usefully feeding on the cockle-bur. He eats any kind of fruit or of grain that he can get, and is not particular as to the way he procures it.

When the farmer has stored up his stack of corn in the field, you would think he had thrown over it a carpet of brilliant colours. But you are mistaken. What looks like a carpet is, in reality, a flock of Parrots, dressed in their gaudy plumes. They stick their claws

into the sides of the stack, and hold on while they pick out the straws and get at the grain. They waste more than they eat, scattering it on the ground all round the stack.

They are very fond of fruit, and they do not wait till it is ripe. They come in the same brilliant flocks, and fall, like a sheet of colour, on the trees in the orchard, while the pears and apples are young and green. They pick, and tear, and devour without mercy. They are quite at their ease on any kind of plant; for they can hook, or swing, or clamber, or put themselves in any posture. The boughs will be full of them, packed together as closely as possible.

If one of the flock cries out, the rest take fright and fly away, for they are timid just at first. They will not come again that day; but they will be here again to-morrow, and will not quit the orchard until the trees that looked so fair and flourishing are entirely stripped.

But the farmer is not likely to sit still and see all this mischief go on under his eyes.

He takes his gun, and walks into the orchard. The Parrots have overcome their shyness, and are eagerly devouring the fruit, passing from branch to branch, too much occupied to notice him. He begins to shoot, and down drops a Parrot, its bill full of seeds. The rest of the birds seem to lose their senses. They scream, and fly round and round, and are in a great commotion; but they never think of leaving the orchard, although the gun keeps going off every minute. They return to the fruit, even though their companions lie dead on the ground. Indeed, the farmer goes on shooting, until he begins to think he has used as much powder and shot as he can afford.

XIII.

MALACCA PARRAKEET.

THE family of Parrots is a very large one, and includes a great many species. They are chiefly confined to warm countries and the vicinity of the Equator. Here their gaudy plumage seems in harmony with the brilliant and burning sun of the Tropics. But no rule is without an exception; and the range of the Parrots extends further than was thought. They have been seen flying before a snow-storm along the banks of the Ohio, one of the great American rivers; and Parrots have been met with in Van Diemen's Land.

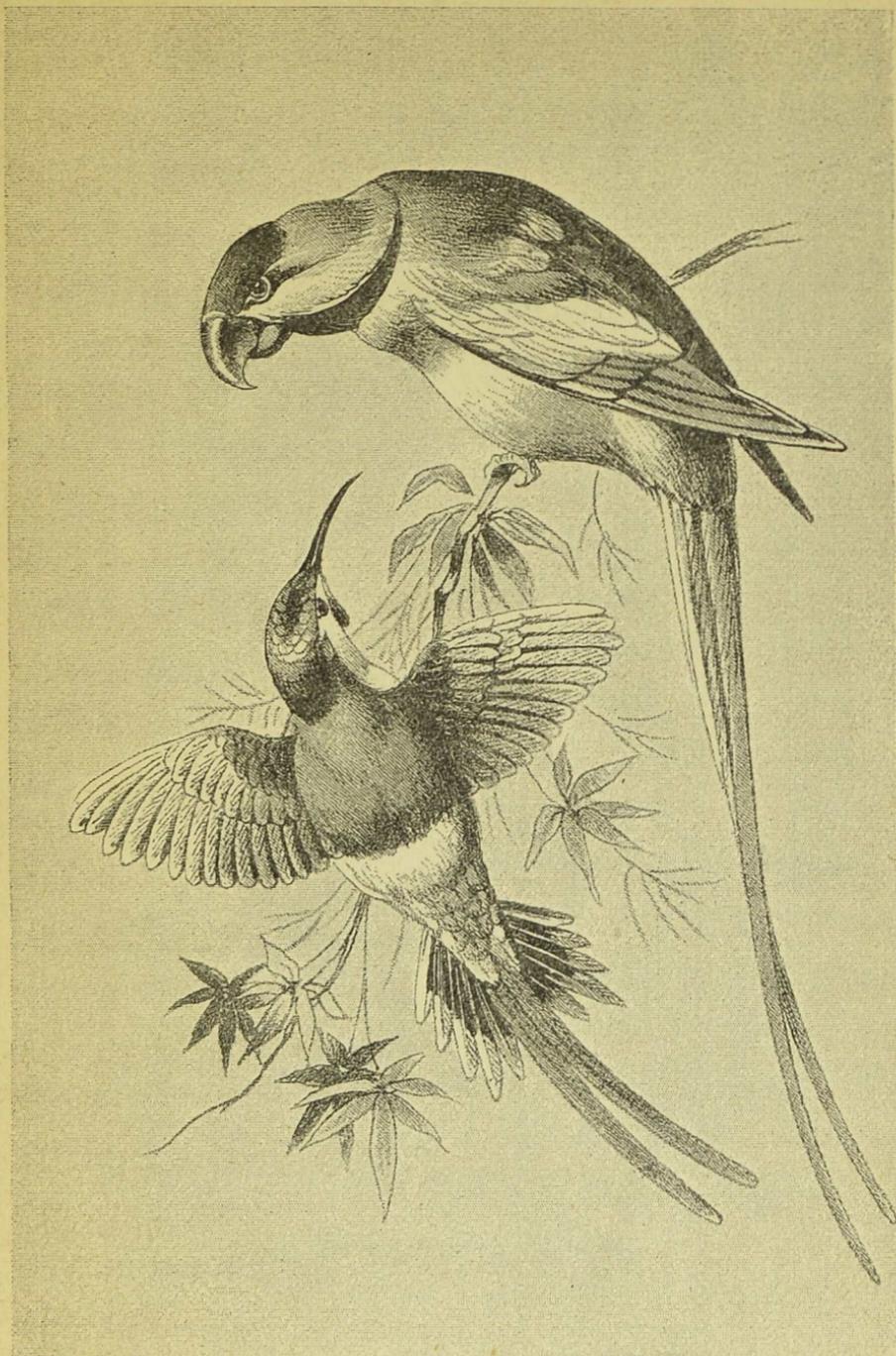
Naturalists divide this numerous and widespread family into groups, and found their divisions on the bill, the tongue, and the feet of the bird.

The bill is differently shaped according to the species. It is longer or shorter, or more or less curved, or its edges are either with or without notches.

The tongue may be thick and fleshy; or it may end in a kind of brush; or it may be merely a hollow and rather horny tube or gland. Sometimes the claws will be short and thick, and the Parrot can run along the ground, instead of always climbing.

There is a group of Parrots which are the most graceful and beautiful of the whole tribe. Their bodies are of an emerald green, and their bills of a deep ruby. Round the neck is a rose-coloured collar. The two middle feathers in the tail reach to a great length, and are of a beautiful blue. The bird itself has a moderately sized bill, the lower mandible short and notched. Its claws are rather weak and slender; and it goes by the name of the Malacca Parrakeet.

The home of the Parrakeet is in the very heart of the Tropics—a district or country full of beautiful birds and radiant insects. I



MALACCA PARRAKEET AND GOULD'S SUN-BIRD.

mean the peninsula of Malacca. There are Trogons, in their rich costume, and with their crimson breasts. There is the curious "Rain-Bird," clad in black and maroon, and with white stripes and a bill intensely blue. There are the Toucans, with their immense bills, which look so heavy, but in reality are so light, and carried with such ease. There are brilliant Kingfishers, some of which dart about like a flame of fire. The Kingfishers, I must tell you, have some relations in the islands close by, that are never found near the water. Two of their tail-feathers are immensely long, and spread out at the end like a spoon. These birds are called Kinghunters, to distinguish them from their neighbours that live upon fish. They do not eat fish, but they feed on snails and insects. The Kinghunter spies its prey on the ground, as it sits watching on some branch of a tree. It gives the same sudden dart or swoop that the Kingfisher does, and rarely fails in its object.

The rarest and most beautiful of the Kinghunters is called the Racquet-tailed Kingfisher,

and lives in the island of Amboyna. Its red bill and white breast, and deep purple wings, and blue spots, give it a lovely appearance. It bears the palm of beauty even here, where Nature is so profuse of colour, and seems never weary of decorating bird, insect, and flower.

Here, too, in Malacca, are found our friends the Cuckoos, in dresses of green and brown, and rejoicing in perpetual summer. And in the thickest part of the forest a Pheasant, called the Great Argus Pheasant, runs along the ground; but it is seldom seen and rarely caught.

Among the birds of gay plumage which live in Sumatra, an island to the south-west of Malacca, is one called Gould's Sun-Bird. It was named after the wife of Mr. Gould the naturalist. It wears a costume of blue, yellow, and red, and has light-brown wings which are always in motion. As it flutters in the sunlight it seems some fairy creature decked in gold and azure and all the tints of the rainbow.

XIV.

THE RINGED PARRAKEET.

PERHAPS the most favourite of our pet birds is the Ringed Parrakeet. You often see it in a cage. It is found over a very extensive range. You meet with it in Asia, Africa, and Australia. It is very beautiful. Its plumage is green, but the feathers of the head and neck change, as you look at them, into purple. The body is a brilliant red, and it has a ring or collar of ruby.

The Ringed Parrakeet is supposed to be the first of its tribe known to the ancient Greeks.

When Alexander the Great went on his Indian expedition, he opened the way for many discoveries. The Ringed Parrakeet was soon after brought to Greece. Like the rest of its tribe, it has slender feet, which enable it

to run along the ground. It can easily be tamed, and makes a very delightful pet.

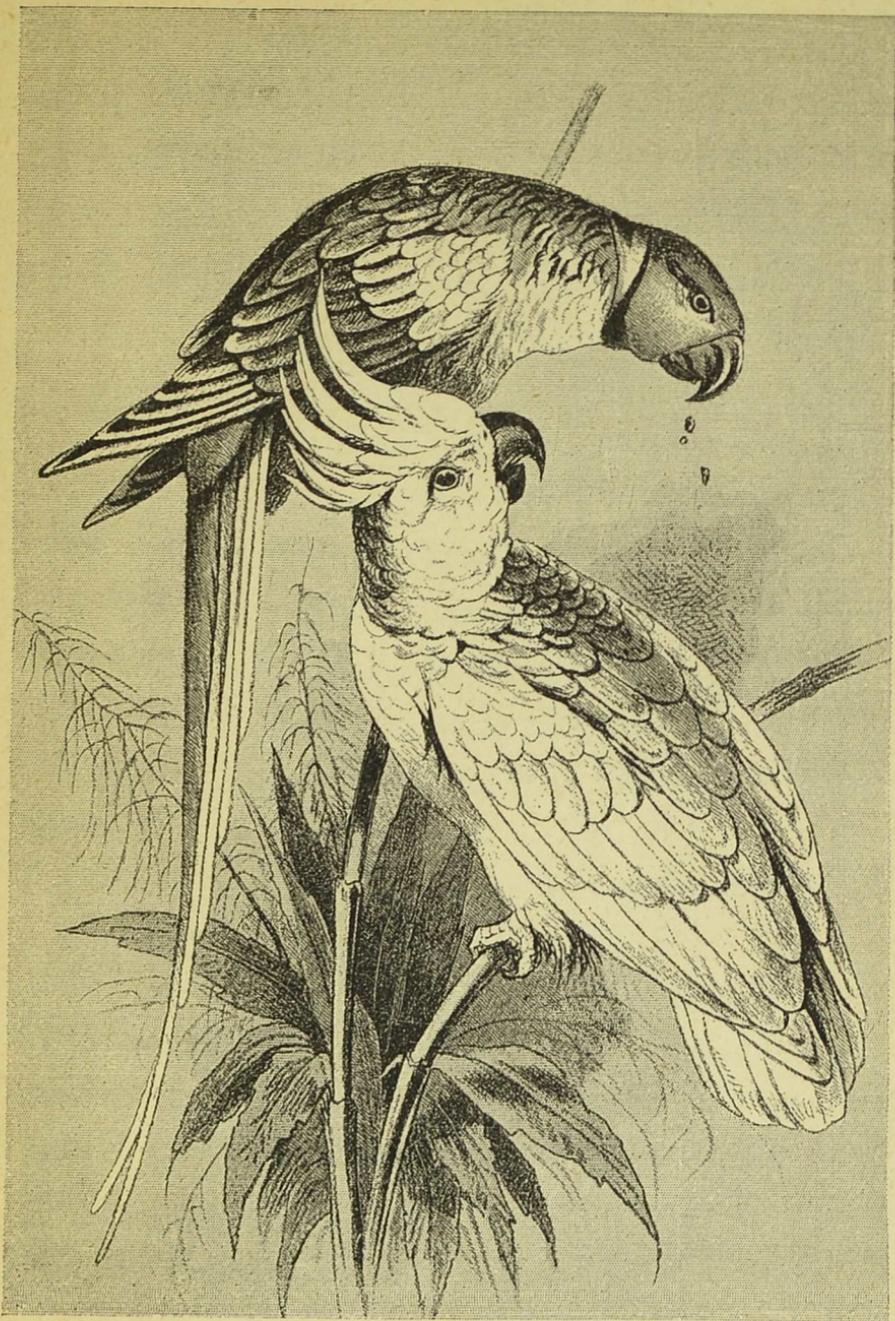
In Australia, Parrots and Parrakeets abound in great numbers. They are seen flying in brilliant clouds from tree to tree, or they will rise up before you like a sheet of gems or gold, as their plumage glistens in the sun.

They have as many tricks as the monkeys. A number of them will sit crowded on a branch, fluttering and sidling, and eying each other in the drollest manner. And the chattering and the screaming, and the various noises they make, can hardly be described.

Some of the houses in Australia have gardens filled with tropical flowers and fruits. There are the pomegranate and the oleander, and many others which are never seen with us except in a hot-house. And over the veranda the vine grows in full luxuriance. Tropical birds are often kept in the veranda in cages. Here you see the most lovely Parrakeets.

One of them is called the Painted Lady, and is a native of Australia.

On each cheek of the bird is a soft crimson



RINGED PARRAKEET AND SULPHUR-CRESTED COCKATOO.

spot, like the delicate bloom on a lady's face. The rest of the costume is lavender, and the breast is a pale primrose.

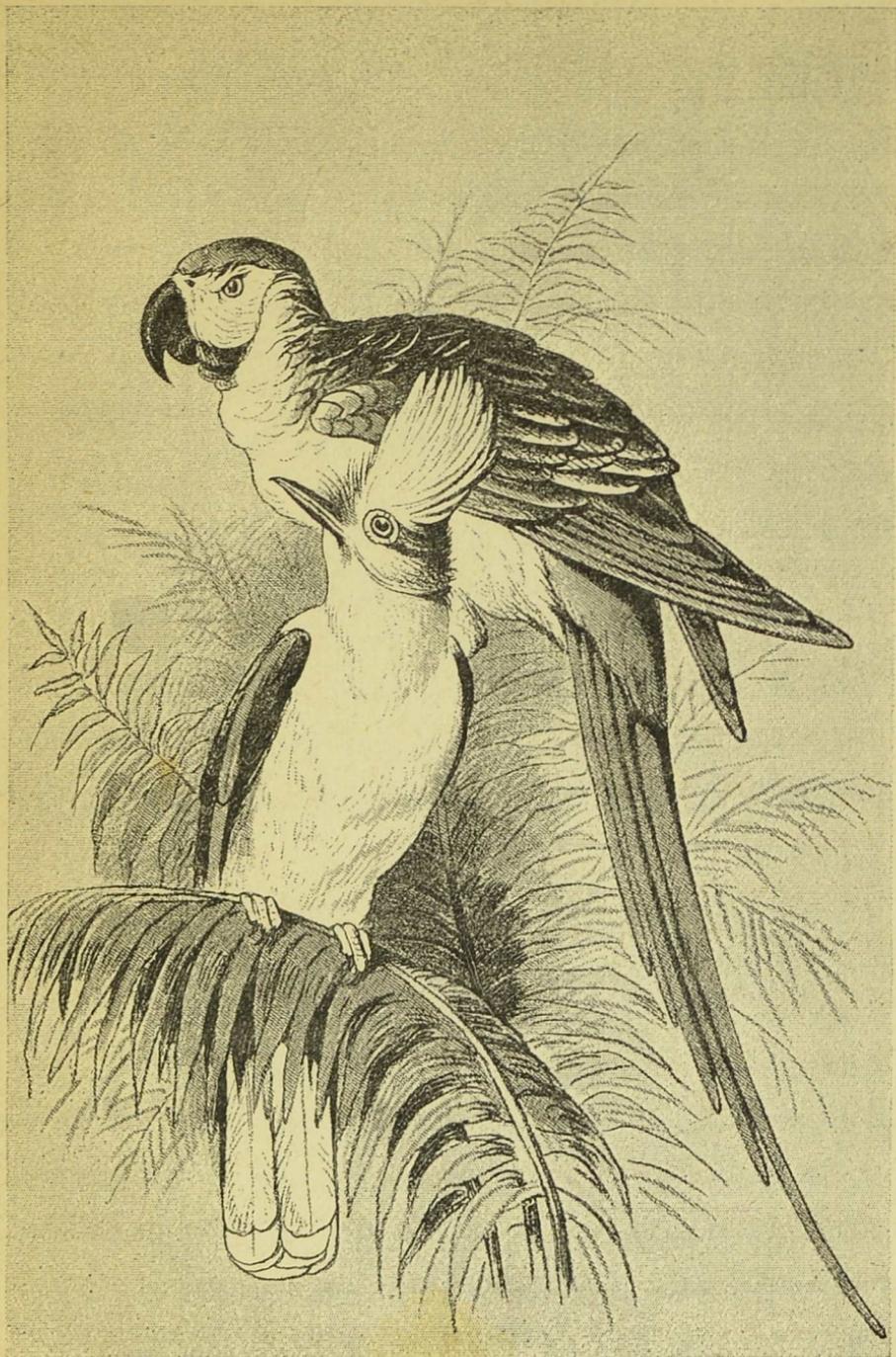
There is a Parrakeet, found in Van Diemen's Land, which is called the Black-spotted Parrakeet. Its plumage is green, but the middle tail-feathers are barred with green and black. The remainder of the tail-feathers are barred with black and yellow. Its legs and bill are black. This beautiful and rare bird is seldom seen. It does not perch on the trees, like the rest of the Parrots. It lives on the ground in moist places. When it is alarmed, it rises up from the grass; but when the danger is over, it soon drops down again.

I might mention many beautiful birds of this family.

There is a superb Parrakeet found in Otaheite, that wears a dress of entire and vivid blue. Another, found in India, is of the colour of a peach-blossom. And there is a red-winged Parrakeet, with legs and claws of a rich carnation.

Also, as a contrast to these, there is the

Black Parrot, in a costume of bluish-black ; and the Sapphire Parrot, dressed in green and scarlet, that lives in the Philippine Islands, and revels in the juices of the cocoa-nut palm. It makes a nest of a peculiar construction, and sets about it very cunningly. Its great enemy is the monkey, that is always on the look-out for plunder. But the Parrot is more than a match for him. The monkey sees the nest hanging from the tree, and makes his way to it with great glee, thinking to feast on eggs ; but when he takes hold of the nest, he finds the lower part not so closely woven as the upper. It gives way at once, and down falls the robber before he has done any mischief.



BLUE AND YELLOW MACAW AND WHITE-PLUMED SHRIKE.

XV.

THE PRINCE OF THE PARROTS.

THERE is a bird of the Parrot tribe that may be considered as the prince or emperor of the whole race. I mean the Macaw. He is of the family of the Parrots, but he is distinguished by having no feathers on the sides of his face; and he has a long tail, almost like a Peacock's.

He leads very much the same life, among the boughs and branches of the tropical forest, that the Parrots do. But though the plumage of the Parrot shines and glistens, that of the Macaw is much more splendid. He is larger than the Parrot, and the flaming scarlet of his body is more striking. His wings are red, yellow, blue, and green—all blended in the most beautiful manner, and as vivid as possible.

His long, splendid tail-feathers are scarlet and blue.

The traveller, when he comes in sight of this magnificent bird, feels compelled to stop and admire. And the Macaw would be courted and caressed, like the Parrot, and perhaps have his place in the houses of the great and the noble, but for his voice, which is a loud harsh scream, that almost deafens you, and forces you to keep him at a distance.

The Macaw loves to feed upon the fruit of the palm-trees. A flock of these splendid birds will cover the fruit-bearing boughs like a glittering carpet. The native takes his blow-pipe and his poisoned arrows, and kills as many of them as he likes. But their screams and their noise are scarcely to be borne, and are enough to drive the enemy away.

Their habits are those of the Parrots. They fly in flocks, and have their nests in the hollows of the trees.

The natives take the feathers of the Macaw to wear as an ornament, and they use the flesh as food.

XVI.

THE PINK COCKATOO AND THE GREAT BLACK COCKATOO.

THE Parrot has a number of relations, distinguished by the head-dress they wear. This is a tuft of beautiful feathers, which can be lifted up or allowed to fall down at pleasure. These elegant birds are called Cockatoos.

The Cockatoo is usually robed in white, with a rosy tint. But there is an exception to every rule. One of these birds has a coloured crest of red and yellow. He is called the Tricolor-crested Cockatoo, and also the Pink Cockatoo. When his crest is set up it is very beautiful, and looks like rays of crimson, white, and gold.

But he has a relation that is more wonderful and more rare than he is. I mean the

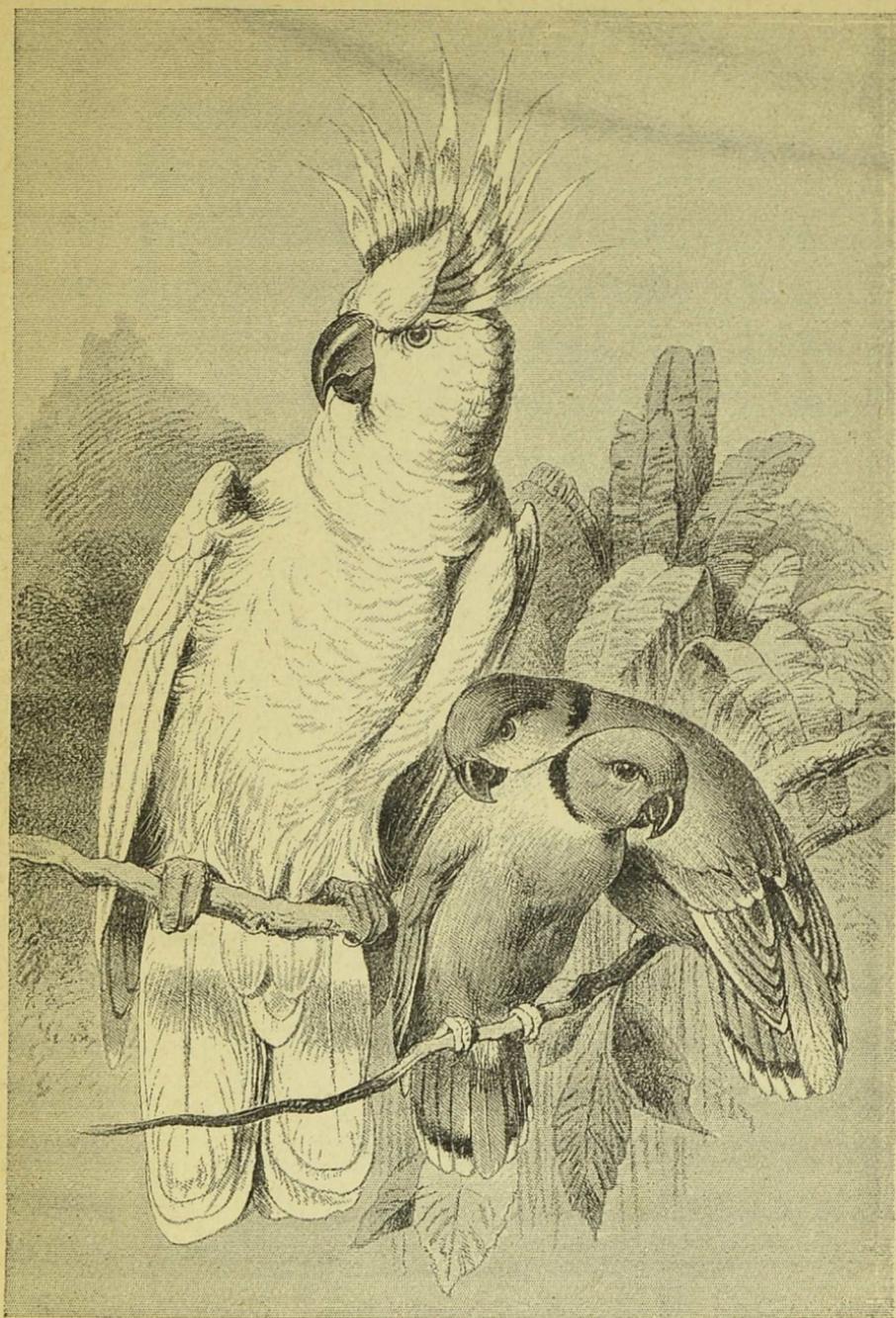
Great Black Cockatoo. He is the exception I spoke of. Amid the white-robed, rosy-tinted family, he alone is dressed in sable plumage.

He is found in Australia, the land of Cockatoos; and also in the Aru Islands, the home of the Birds of Paradise.

His body is weak and small, and his legs are feeble. But his wings are large; and he has a very large head, with a splendid crest of black feathers. His cheeks are a livid red; and he has a strong, sharp bill.

He does not make a screaming noise, like the rest of his tribe, but he has a low, plaintive whistle. His tongue is of a deep red colour, and is like a tube with a curious horny plate at the end of it. He can stretch or thrust out his tongue to some distance; and is altogether the most curious specimen of his race.

In Australia, the Black Cockatoos will settle now and then on one of the great gum-trees. There they sidle up and down the branches, after the true Parrot fashion, and move their handsome top-knots up and down, as if bowing to each other. But they are not



TRICOLOUR-CRESTED COCKATOO AND LOVE-BIRDS.

very common; indeed the Black Cockatoo is considered a rare bird, like a neighbour of his, also found in Australia—the Black Swan.

In the forests of the Aru Islands, the Black Cockatoo is more frequently seen alone, or with one or two companions. His flight is slow and noiseless. He feeds upon the forest nuts, and the fruits and seeds that abound on every hand. But he has one favourite article of food—the seeds of the kanary-nut. These nuts grow on a lofty tree, and have a smooth shell, as hard as iron.

The Cockatoo takes the nut, which is three cornered, in his bill, and holds it fast by means of his tongue, while he saws a slit with the lower part of his bill. Then he takes the nut with his foot, and bites off part of a leaf. The leaf is to keep the very smooth shell from slipping about, while he inserts into it the sharp point of his bill, and picks out the kernel bit by bit with his tongue.

The Love-Bird, too, is a kind of Parrot, and the most affectionate of any. The love of the Parrot for his companions is the best feature

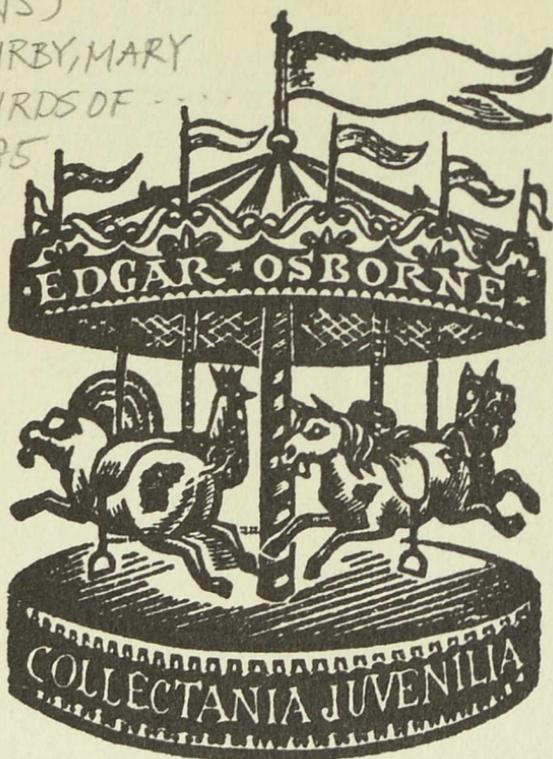
in his character. The Love-Bird has this trait in such a degree that he has earned the name he bears from his loving and caressing ways. He tenderly cherishes his companion during life; and if bereaved by death, nothing can exceed his grief. He pines away and dies.

His plumage gives him a place among beautiful birds. It is green, but touched and tinted with a deep rich blue. His tail-feathers are scarlet, with a band of black, and the tips of the feathers are green.

The appearance and manners of the Love-Birds are very interesting. They sit close together on a bough, nestling and caressing each other with the utmost affection.

Their home is in the southern part of Africa; but they are much sought after as pets, and are brought to England as the most elegant ornament for a lady's boudoir.

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