

MY PICT BIRDS



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THE BULLFINCH.

PRETTY little Bully! He is one of the gayest of our wood birds. He is much prized on account of the readiness with which he may be taught to whistle

different tunes. Germany is the chief place where these little birds are trained. They are caught whilst very young, and put into separate cages in a darkened room. There a boy plays to them, over and over again, the tune they are to learn. After a few days they begin to try to whistle it. Then light is let into the room, and they are fed, to shew them that their master is pleased with them. In a few weeks they grow quite expert in whistling the tune, and they will sing it as long as they live. But I have heard that they never can be taught more than three tunes. For although they may learn a fourth, they leave off singing one they knew before. It seems as if three tunes were as much as their little minds could bear at once. And I am sure it is very wonderful that they should learn even three, and whistle them note by note so correctly as they will. Gardeners do not like Bullfinches, as they peck at the buds of fruit-trees in the Spring. But I believe it is only the diseased buds that they attack.



THE THRUSH.

THERE are four kinds of Thrush in England: the song-thrush, the missel-thrush, the wind-thrush, and the field-fare. The song-thrush is the commonest, and I

THE THRUSH.

doubt not you have often heard his delightful song in very early Spring. He begins to sing as soon as the dark depth of winter has passed away, before there are any leaves on the trees. It seems as if he were ready to welcome with his sweet strains the very first thought of Spring. In France this bird does great damage in the vine-yards as the harvest of grapes, called the vintage, draws nigh. For he loves the taste of the sweet ripe grapes. The field-fare is caught for table, as the flesh of this bird is very good eating. This picture will give you a very good idea of the Thrush, so far as his shape and colour are concerned. His speckled breast is very pretty. But no words can describe his song. It must be *heard* to be admired as it deserves. In France this bird goes to some other climate when the grapes are all gathered, but it is not thought to be a mi-gra-tory bird in England. The Thrush is sometimes called the Throstle, or the Mavis.



THE CHAFFINCH.

THE Chaffinch is a pretty little bird, and his song is very sweet, though short. He always seems to say, at the end of every little song, "pretty dear!" But

whether it is to himself or his hearers that he speaks I cannot tell you. Most likely it is to his pretty mate, who listens to him from her soft nest close by. The Chaffinch is a bold little bird. In winter he may often be tempted round our houses. Many years ago, a pair of Chaffinches built in our garden, and they were very tame. They used to hop round about the open door, and peep in with their bright little eyes. And if they saw that the coast was clear, that Puss was not seated on the hearth (they did not mind us at all), they would hop in, and peck up the crumbs that we scattered at our feet for them. I never saw such fat little birds as these Chaffinches were, and I quite believe it was owing to their being so well fed. They always sang us a sweet little song after each meal, and we learned to love the little creatures very much. There are many birds gayer in their plumage and sweeter in their song than the Chaffinch, but there are few so cheerful and friendly.



THE GOLDFINCH.

THIS is one of the prettiest of our songsters, and has a very sweet warbling note. The nest, too, of this little bird is one of the most beautiful you ever saw. So soft,

so round, and so nicely woven together with horsehair and green moss. The Goldfinch is fond of building in apple or plum-trees, and he chooses the time when the trees are covered with pink and white blossoms. I remember, in the same garden that I have already told you of, a pair of Goldfinches once built in an old plum-tree. We watched their nest with great interest, until at last we heard some naughty boys planning to get over the garden wall and take the nest. Then we told the gardener to climb up a ladder to the upper branches and take the nest out and put it into a cage and hang the cage up, leaving the door open. And so he did; and the old birds came and fed their young ones through the open door. When the little birds were fledged we had the door shut up. Then the father and mother fed them through the wires, until they were quite ready to fly. And we took down the cage and let one of the little ones fly away with its father and mother, keeping the three others ourselves, and tame little pets they were.



THE BLACKBIRD.

SING on, sweet bird, till the woods re-echo with thy clear loud song. The Blackbird is one of our first and best song birds. He is a sad enemy to the gar-

dener in autumn, for he plunders the fruit-trees sadly. But then, what can the poor fellow do ! He must have food to eat. And I, for my part, would gladly spare him some cherries, and plums, in return for his sweet song. I think he well deserves to be paid for his music. The Blackbird may be easily tamed, and taught to whistle. I knew one that used to whistle just like the ringing of Church-bells. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, with all their sweet changes and chimings. Poor Blackey, I dare say he is dead now, long since. Many a morning, when I was a child, he woke me up at early dawn by this sweet strain, and I liked to hear the morning sung in by such warbling chimes. But though it is very pleasant to hear a blackbird singing whenever you like, yet I think it is very cruel to keep such wild wood-birds shut up in prison. Large birds like the blackbird must feel it very close to be im-pri-son-ed in a little wicker den ; above all, when they are kept in London.



THE MARTIN.

THE Martin, the Swallow, and the Swift are all very much alike. But they are not singing birds. The Martin has a low warbling note when feeding its young,

that is pretty, and the Swift has a sharp loud cry, not pleasant to hear, except so far as it is a joyous note and seems to say the bird enjoys its liberty as it darts through the bright evening sky. The Martin builds its clay nest under the eaves of our windows, and is a very bold fearless fellow. The Swallow often prefers the chimney for his nest, when fires are out. But the Swift likes church towers or some lofty lonely place for his young to be reared in. All live on insects, chiefly flies and gnats, which they catch as they fly in their open mouths. The beak of the Martin is very different from that of other birds who peck their food, as you may see in the picture. It is broad and flat, and seems to serve well as a mason's trowel for striking the bits of clay together, as the skilful little builder makes his nest. Towards the end of summer these little birds all migrate to some warmer land, and fly far away over the sea, till the return of Spring brings them back once more to their old haunts.



THE CUCKOO.

AH, this is a naughty bird. At least he certainly has some naughty ways, for which one feels disposed to quarrel with him. In the first place, whether because

he is lazy, or from some other cause, he never builds himself a nest. No, the Cuckoo prefers laying its eggs in the nest of some other bird; very often in that of the little Hedge-sparrow. Sometimes the eggs of the poor little bird are turned out to make room for those of the Cuckoo. Or, where this is not the case, when the young birds are all hatched, the young Cuckoo, which is much larger and stronger than the rest, contrives to get the chief part of the food brought to the nest, and when old enough throws its little companions out to perish. Then he remains "king of the castle." I call this not at all an amiable trick of master Cuckoo. But, as he knows no better, we will not judge him as we would a selfish little child in the nursery. Shall we? The Cuckoo seems to sing, or rather cry, cuckoo, for that is his only note, whilst flying. And it is rare to catch sight of one. But in the Spring and very long Summer there is a great charm in the strange voice of this wandering bird.



THE ROBIN.

AH, I need not tell you who this is, I am quite sure. You all know sweet Robin-redbreast too well to want any account of him, do you not? Poor little fellow,

he comes out of the woods when the leaves fall, and draws near to our houses, and begs charity of us, in the form of a few crumbs. Even in the coldest winter days Robin still sings us his sweet wild note. Everybody loves the Robin, and is ready to say a good word of him. Perhaps because everybody thinks, when they hear of the Robin, of that lovely story of the Babes in the Wood, when "Robin-redbreast painfully did cover them with leaves." And though wise men and women who write books on Natural History tell us long stories of Robins that fight, and say Bobby is a very passionate little fellow, and of Robins that peck worms to pieces, and say Bobby is a very cruel little fellow, we will not listen to their tales, will we? But we will go on thinking, as long as we live, that the Robin-redbreast is one of the dearest little birds and sweetest singers, sent by God to cheer the cottage of those who dwell in "solitary places" and sing cheerily when every other voice of music is hushed into silence.

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