

## BRITISH BIRDS AT A GLANCE.

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A WORD of apology is inevitable. Such first-rate observers as Dr. Charles W. Townsend and the late Henry Oldys have in past years brought to the Union their observations upon the bird-life of Great Britain; and all are acquainted with what John Burroughs has written. Two things remain still to be said, in justification of another paper on this subject: one is that each experience is unique; it must needs have some content peculiarly its own; the other is that the subject deserves to be kept fresh in mind, however feeble the presentation.

The first surprising discovery which the American ornithologist makes when he visits Great Britain is, that the bird life there is very much like the bird life at home. In a way, he may be prepared; he may have learned what to expect; but no amount of book knowledge can take away his first delight in the familiar aspect in which the birds appear. The Rook, the Jay, and the Titmouse; the Swallow, the Thrush, and the Swift; the Flycatcher and the Finch—each is the counterpart of a creature known and loved. As for the Blackbird—what is he but a dark-colored Robin? A finer singer, to be sure; but his form is the Robin's, his habit is the Robin's, and his speckled-breasted children look like the Robin's own—and cry like the Robin's own, too.

This likeness of the birds of another land to our own was for me a re-discovery; for, immediately, I remembered that I had made it before, when a few years since, after crossing the Pacific, I found myself in the October forests of Lake Chiuzenji, in Japan. There the scream of a Jay, the lisp of a Titmouse, the *klink* of a Woodpecker advised me in advance, what kind of bird it was that I should see. The fact is that, though we travel the world around, to east or west, we shall find less change in the aspect of nature, whether in bird or beast or flower, than in a range of a thousand miles or two thousand, southward into the tropics.

This has its explanation, of course, and its teaching; and the geographer and the geologist stand ready to aid our comprehension, for likeness in form and habit means nearness in relationship—a

nearness which is understandable, when we have been reminded that in the not-distant past, geologically speaking, the northern regions in which the continents approach and merge together enjoyed a salubrious and life-nurturing climate. It is from an arctic garden of Eden that these scattered but kindred races are sprung.

When once the visitor has grown accustomed to this likeness of the British avifauna to his own, immediately he begins to perceive, beyond a general likeness, particular and rather bewildering instances of disparity. I have in mind two. The first came to my attention late in May, when on a visit to a country seat in Wilts. There, in a forest of ivy-grown oaks—a forest of such richness and fullness of verdure as in America is not to be found northward of Virginia—I found the Tree Creeper at home, flitting from trunk to trunk, manifestly a summer resident. But in America the Creeper belongs to the Canadian fauna, and visits Virginia only in the winter-time. The second instance comes from southern Ireland. In a deep dell which opens to Bantry Bay, and in a lovely green translucence under the June sun, Gold-crested Wrens were moving through the holly trees. I could scarcely believe it, and was careful to verify my recognition of their thin, triple notes by sight through field-glasses of the little creatures themselves.

Cases might be multiplied; they are not far to seek; but these will serve to illustrate a contrast. The flora of Britain, compared with that of America, is full and varied; its luxuriance is a joy to the visitor. Plants and trees of differing species; plants which with us are distributed over wide ranges of latitude, here in the British Isles flourish in indiscriminate and equal profusion: the oak and the willow together, the birch and the holly. In the Irish dell of which I have spoken harts-tongue ferns and brakes were springing side by side; wild foxgloves were blossoming; and in dooryards not far away stood fuchias, ten, twenty feet high, hung with their bells. But with the birds the case is quite different.

The bird life of Britain, to American understanding, instead of being of correspondingly wide, is of narrow scope, and is northern, not to say boreal, in aspect. I have mentioned the Creeper and the Kinglet. I would add the Titmouse, the Linnet, and the Bullfinch; the Wheatear and the Tit-lark; the Mallard and the Curlew; in Scotland even a Ptarmigan is found; and along the coasts every-

where are the ocean birds of Labrador—Guillemots and Puffins and Black-backed Gulls. These all abound, and, along with their presence, the absence is remarkable of such resplendent forms of tropical association as in America are found in Tanager, Humming-bird, Oriole, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Cardinal. There is, then, this contrast: in America, beyond the northward range of plants of southern association, southern birds abound; in Great Britain, conversely, amid a flora inclusive of sub-tropical forms, the bird life is distinctly northern. The causes which have worked to such strangely unequal ends are not far to seek.

The British Isles lie subject to the gentle influences of both sea and sky; the Gulf Stream bathes their shores while in their high latitude, during the early summer, the hours of daylight are greatly prolonged. The American continent, along its eastern coast, though subject in its southern part to the same Gulf Stream, is in its northern part subject to the cold touch of an Arctic current. These dissimilar influences have doubtless had their part in bringing about such dissimilar results. Even in the dark winter, along the coasts of England and Ireland, it never grows very cold; throughout the wide summer it never becomes very warm; and there is much rain. In consequence, vegetation is lush and dense; and southern plant forms are not checked in their northward trend. It is the coolness of the summers, however, which seems to be a controlling circumstance in the distribution of the birds. Species which otherwise would retire northward to breed are content to remain in the relative coolness. On the other hand, there is no such inducement as the heat of the American summers seems to afford, to attract tropical forms northward.

In Great Britain the flow of migration is gentle. There is nothing comparable with America's May-time rush of Wood-Warblers, bright and parti-colored as butterflies, from the tropics to the northern forests. By way of contrast, the resident portion of the bird population is relatively great; a large number of species never leave the islands. Equibility of climate manifestly has tended to produce that state of affairs, and insularity has tended to the same end, for it is only under necessity that land-birds dare to cross wide expanses of ocean. And because of isolation through thousands of years, many of the resident species of Great Britain have grown

somewhat unlike their continental counterparts. It is rather interesting to find in Great Britain's avifauna twenty-five or thirty forms which differ sub-specifically from the general European stocks. There are, for example, the British Bullfinch, the British Tree Creeper, and the British Great Titmouse, each consistently different in some detail of form or color from birds of the same sort beyond the Channel. More than that, there are even varieties, as between island and island; there are the British Jay and the Irish Jay, the British Red Grouse and the Irish Red Grouse; there are the Hebridean Song Thrush, and the St. Kilda Wren, each a race apart, as the names indicate.

In accord with the northern cast and quality of the bird-life, the colors of the British birds are subdued. Instead of butterfly splendor, there is the cool beauty of contrasting black and white, clean gray and fawn color. The brightest note of color is that of the Bullfinch's breast, and it is like the glow of a ruddy cheek in winter. There are, besides, those jewel-like ornaments of the Kinglet's crown, the Chough's beak, and the Waxwing's beaded remiges.

It is an island country; great friths or loughs indent the coasts; the rivers widen and are lost in deep estuaries. No spot in all the land can be more than one hundred miles from salt water. And, in consequence, the water-birds and the maritime birds form a very large element in the bird life. In this sense, all the country is sea coast. Gulls everywhere follow the plow; Shore-birds and Ducks of many species nest throughout the land; even pelagic forms, such as we scarcely know by name, are acquaintances of every British bird-lover.

The quasi-domestic birds, the Pigeon, the House Sparrow, and the Starling, maintain in the British Isles substantially like status as they have achieved in America; and when I include the Starling in this generalization, I have in mind the Starling as it already has established itself in our eastern states, from Virginia to Massachusetts, and westward to the Mississippi. The Starling in Great Britain, though abundant, seems to be generally well regarded, nor could I discover any evidence that its abundance is prejudicial to other species, unless it be to the Woodpeckers. Though I made a list of ninety-four British birds, I saw no single Woodpecker. The smaller hole-nesting species—the Titmice, for instance—manifestly suffer nothing from the Starling.

The English Sparrow is, of course, not English; of that we are sure, even though we may not know with precision the spot whence he has spread over the earth. The accomodation which the Sparrow has made is an accomodation, not so much to the life of man, as to the life of the horse. The stall and the box-car have been his traveling quarters; and from our cities, where once his chattering thousands swarmed, with the horse he has disappeared. The recent observation that this bird's affinities are with the Weaver-birds invites the thought that in all likelihood with the horse he has come from a source in the Levant, a region well within the range of the Weaver-bird family.

That grouping of certain birds as quasi-domestic, however convenient, certainly is superficial, and cannot endure under closer observation. The truth is that practically all birds in greater or less degree, favorably or unfavorably, are responsive to the presence of and to the activities of their fellow mortal, man. Doubtless the Gulls in the harbors, the Rooks on the hillsides, the Corncrakes in the meadows, and the Swifts and Jackdaws in the towns, all abound today in numbers far exceeding those of their ancestors in the rugged and sparsely inhabited Britain of a thousand years ago; doubtless the Raven and the Chough and the birds of prey were then vastly more abundant.

The cause of bird protection, manifestly, has not been carried so far in Great Britain as in America; but, manifestly, the need for bird protection is there not so great. In Ireland particularly there was evidence of such laxity as could not in this country be tolerated. The practice of caging song-birds is universal. Goldfinches and Mistle Thrushes are favorite captives; to find them singing from dirty little cubicles hung high on the walls of the dreariest of the Dublin alleys was a moving discovery. Egg-collecting is indulged in without serious restraint. At Glengarriff I encountered a young fellow of twenty exhibiting his collection—not with scientific, but with purely acquisitive interest. Form, pattern, rarity were ends in themselves. I spoke to him of the Ravens, and of my pleasure in finding them in the neighborhood; but there was no responsive emotion. Instead, he began, as collectors will, to discourse on the destructiveness of Ravens: how they mount upon the backs of sheep and pluck out their eyes, and kill them by pecking on their

skulls. I happened a few days later, on a mountain overlooking Killarney, to fall in with a shepherd, and stopped to chat with him. I told him that I was interested in the birds and asked him what birds he found on the mountain. "Partridges," he said, "and Grouse; Hawks, Rooks, and Ravens." "Are the Ravens destructive?" I asked, "Do they ever attack the sheep?" "No," he replied, "I never saw such a thing. They do no harm at all." And he pointed where on a precipice beyond the heather-grown slope the Ravens had in the spring been nesting.

One Sunday afternoon on a great beach in County Leitrim I came on a band of children playing in the surf. Beside their scattered outer garments they had carefully deposited a little heap of lovely eggs, the treasure from a raid upon a Tern colony not far away. The children's faces were all bright with an eager excitement in which I could not but sympathize, but I doubt whether, for all my effort, the thought found lodgement with any of them that, if the eggs were taken, the time would come when there would be no Terns.

The laws of the Free State lie before me. In two counties—no more—five species of birds—no more—are protected the year round: the Goldfinch, the Siskin, the Linnet, the Red-poll, and the Skylark—all familiar as cage-birds. Elsewhere, even these five may at some season be taken and killed; and everywhere at some season, if not at all seasons, the other three hundred species may be taken and killed. In seven counties the nests of a few species are protected; but, beyond that, there is no protection. And in Great Britain, too, the general laws are, to our thinking, quite feeble.

It is not, however, for a moment to be supposed that the people of the British Isles are less responsive than we to the charm and to the value of the birds, nor less solicitous for their well-being. There is, for example, the case of the Swan.

As we travel about the British Isles, whether by rail or by motor, we find to our admiration this great, handsome bird in fair abundance; its form graces the lakeside landscape; its whiteness gleams from shadowy castle moats; there is hardly a pond or gently flowing stream in all the land where Swans are not to be found. The case of the Swan does not stand alone. There is the Moor-hen; it nests

even in London itself, in the gardens of Kensington Palace. And there are the Coot and the Corncrake, the Lapwing and the Wood Pigeon. All flourish and abound amid a population denser than ours; whereas our corresponding species have disappeared more or less completely. Again there is need of a word of caution. It is not sufficient to say hastily that Americans are inherently a more destructive people. In England there is an immemorial sentiment in favor of Swans and Moor-hens and Wood Pigeons; they are to be left alone. Lacking the tradition, there remains with us no restraint upon a primitive anarchial impulse to take and to destroy.

There is a disparity in social conditions, a disparity of which it is easy to give some hint, but exceedingly difficult to give an adequate statement. The Killarney Lakes are a beauty-spot of Ireland, one of the famous places of the world. Thousands of tourists visit them every summer, and yet to this day they continue part of the wilderness. Forested mountain sides and sloping pastures close them about, their shores are untrammelled. Ducks and Herons, Gulls and Cormorants wing over them; and great salmon are daily brought dripping from their waters to the market. Could such conditions exist in America; or, existing, could they continue? Let any one who doubts consider the case of Lake George, or that of Lake Chautauqua, or of Conneaut. Along the shores of the Killarney Lakes on one side extends the Muckcross estate, and on the other that of the Earl of Kenmare; and between, like a gem in a casket, Killarney lies guarded from spoliation.

With us, what with the cutting away of forests, the drainage of swamps, the wanton and unrestrained pollution of streams, wild life has been destroyed wholesale; and, in the extremity of alarm, some generous-minded people are doing what they can to restrain, to save, and to restore. In Great Britain, by way of comparison, the estates of the nobility, their parks and their pleasure grounds, their Grouse moors and their salmon streams, have been and are wild-life refuges of vast extent and of a potency easy to recognize, even though hard to measure.

These estates were to me a revelation. It was not the velvety terraces merely, the profuse and lovely flowers, the lakelets and the fountains which surround the castles; it was the great expanse of forests, too, the mountain slopes, and the silvery streams. I looked

out upon miles of forest, planted and arranged with the same exquisite intent as was manifest in the half acre at my feet; and I learned about the man who planned it all—Capability Brown, they called him. He lived in the eighteenth century. He planned what he knew he never should see; but I saw and enjoyed what he intended. Such merging of the individual in the life of society is strange to American ways. But it moves to admiration. It is because of these great estates, chiefly, that old England is today as rich in wild life as is young America; in them lies continuing sanctuary, such as America well may envy.

My praise of the British, however, in this respect is not unqualified. Her advantage is in some sense an accidental one; and, where opportunity has appeared for a show of idealism, selfishness has there, too, prevailed. W. H. Hudson has spoken with sufficient scorn of the system of game-keeping and of its effect in the destruction of the birds and animals of prey, and allusion to what he has said will suffice. I spent five weeks in the open. I saw a fair number of Kestrels, one Merlin, one Harrier, two or three pairs of Buzzards, two pairs of Peregrines—and no more.

The Eagle is gone, the Osprey is gone, the Buzzard is all but gone. The Raven clings desperately to the mountainous coasts and is said to be regaining some ground—perhaps in consequence of a betterment of the public mind. Rarest of all the Corvidae, I found the Chough still holding a place along the north coast of Ireland. In Belfast I sought out the ornithologist at the museum. In telling him of where I had been and of what I had seen, I spoke of Rathlin Island and of the sea-birds in their multitudes nesting there. “And did you see the Choughs?” he eagerly inquired. I was happy to reply that I had indeed seen the Choughs.

Compared with England, Ireland is less fortunate. More beautiful than England, Ireland has suffered more. Ireland ever has been the victim of ruthless war and of selfish ownership. In warfare one purpose has been active—to render the land uninhabitable; and through the centuries the chief concern of the owners of Irish estates has been to wring from them the last penny. In consequence, Ireland is a deforested and denuded land. Her forest-living birds are few; the large Hawks are gone; and, water-birds aside, the abundant species are the Buntings, the Larks, and the Pipits, birds of the hedgerows and of the open places.



It is fair to say, in comment upon the British game-keeping system, that it is effective. Even in the course of my casual wanderings I made acquaintance of practically all of the upland game-birds—of the Partridge, the Blackcock, the Red Grouse, both of England and of Ireland, the Snipe, the Woodcock, and the Curlew. The visiting Englishman could hardly do as well in America.

Birds of prey and game-birds aside, the bird life of Britain is vastly interesting to the visitor. Birds abound by the wayside and in the forest, along the shore and upon the heath, filling their place in nature, winning their way to the hearts of men of goodwill.

It is expected of the visitor from abroad that he shall say something of bird-songs. Inevitably he is asked what he thinks of British bird-songs, in comparison with those of America. But how can he answer? how can he make comparison? The delight in bird-song is so largely a matter of association that abstract valuation and comparison were quite impossible. The American Robin's song, for instance, is, musically considered, a feeble affair; nor is the quality extraordinary: a short phrase of rich notes, repeated with some variation, but disconnectedly. But is there in all nature a gladder sound than a chorus of Robins in the dawn? And how can one who his life long has heard that yearly chorus, and who hears it anew with emotions of well-being and beauty and peace—how can he lay all that aside, and evaluate the Robin's song as a stranger might? If I were to say that I found the bird-song of Great Britain on the whole less satisfying than our own, what would it signify?

The Blackbird's song—the British Robin's, as we should confusedly say—I liked best of all. His is a song, indeed. He is a Thrush, and his song is Thrush-like; it consists of phrases deliberately uttered. The phrases are varied, and the tones are rich and full and sweet; there is in them the wood-wind quality which we find in our Baltimore Oriole and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Unhesitatingly, I should place the Blackbird in the first rank of songsters.

The British Finches pleased me less; their varied lays seemed to me feeble and wiry, lacking in sweetness. The true Robin's notes are charming; and I was greatly delighted with the song of the Willow Warbler: it has a sweet cadence which gives more pleasure, the better one knows it. The Wren's song is a fine performance,

superior to our House Wren's; in pattern, it resembles the Winter Wren's (and therein is revealed again that northern association of which I have spoken)—but it is not so sweet.

Doubtless the most famous of all bird-songs is the Skylark's; even the Nightingale's, in the world's esteem, takes second place. It is possible to analyze the Skylark's song, somewhat as I have, in what I have said, analyzed our Robin's, and to say that, musically considered, it is not extraordinary. There are others finer. But the "rain of melody" which the Larks shower down from the open sky is incomparable, bewilderingly delightful. To hear it is to agree: this, all in all, is the finest, the most moving, of all nature's voices; to hear it, as I heard it, over Stonehenge, and to comprehend that through the ages this same sweet music has floated above the plain, is to add wonder to delight.

It remains to speak of the great pleasure of making new acquaintances. I suppose that I shall not again, in so brief an interval of time at least, add ninety-odd names to my personal list. There were particularly memorable adventures, at some of which I have hinted: Buzzards swooping and screaming above the precipice at Lynmouth; Curlew calling over Exmoor; Ravens croaking about the cloud-veiled Irish peaks; Terns, rosy as shells, hovering in the sunlight above their nesting-ground; the sea-birds thronging the cliffs of Rathlin Island, coming and going like people on city streets, and to and fro across their paths with easy, consummate agility, the Fulmars ever sailing and sailing. What man, bird-lover or no, could be insensible to these things?

Our interests are not limited to the little field of individual life; we, too, as well as the creatures we study, have a race experience, and Great Britain is the land of our fathers. Is it nothing to know that they trod these roads and tilled these fields? Is it nothing to note the "temple-haunting martlet," and to remind ourselves that this little bird's "loved mansionry" was loved of them? In Ann Hathaway's cottage I fell behind the trailing queue of tourists and allowed the endlessly repeated words of the custodian to fade wearily from my ears. Thinking that the capacity of response was dead within me, I turned to an open window, and would give my mind to other thoughts. A sunny garden lay beneath, apple-trees were in blossom, a Thrush sang; and in a sudden wave of

emotion I understood that here was Shakespeare's England: that I was sharing with the great man the eternal beauty of the world.  
*Sewickley, Pa.*