

TOPSELL'S 'FOWLES OF HEAUVEN.'

BY BAYARD H. CHRISTY.*

(Plate X.)

THOSE of us that are book-collectors and run through the catalogues have noted the name, Edward Topsell. But we have noted it, for the most part, only to pass it by. And for several reasons. Chiefly, because his are essentially European works, and because he had to do with quadrupeds and reptiles, but not at all with birds. We have gleaned the information that Topsell flourished at the beginning of the XVII century; that he was a disciple of Konrad Gesner; and that he was the redactor to his countrymen of his master's work. Now it appears that by a narrow margin he has missed a place among the fathers of ornithology, and even among the fathers of American ornithology. And by the same chance the booksellers do less with their Topsell items.

In the Huntington Library, at San Marino, California, lies a MS. which on examination proves to be the beginning of a treatise by Topsell on birds; and this, had it been completed, would, with his published work, have rounded out and completed a comprehensive review of natural history. The MS. was shown to me, a casual visitor to the library, for no other reason than that I was known to be interested in birds. Turning its pages, I came, to my surprise, upon a number of species from Virginia, and because here were early notes upon birds of our Atlantic seaboard, it has seemed worth while to review the matter with care. The courtesy of the Library was shown me: I had opportunity to examine the MS. minutely, to make transcript from its text, and to have reproduction made of one of its illustrations. Captain R. B. Haseldon, curator of manuscripts, and Miss Norma Cuthbert, head cataloguer, most generously aided me in study.

Edward Topsell (d. 1638 *circ.*), an English clergyman, and sometime curate of St. Botolph, Aldersgate, is chiefly remembered

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as the author of the works to which allusion has been made. His 'Historie of Four-footed Beastes' appeared in 1607, and his 'Historie of Serpents' in 1608. It now appears that, having projected a third work on 'The Fowles of Heauen,' he progressed with it so far as to complete a first part—perhaps one fifth of the contemplated whole. The dedication is to Baron Ellesmere, the Lord Chancellor; to him, as may be supposed, the MS. was transmitted; and from a descendant of his the Huntington Library, in 1917, acquired it. Resting today in the archives of that library, it forms part of the Ellesmere Collection, and bears identifying number, E L 1142.¹

It is a MS. of 248 leaves, bound in vellum, and is in perfect condition. The leaves are of rag paper, in size $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches x $12\frac{7}{8}$; both sides are written upon; the face of the writing is $6\frac{1}{4}$ x 11, more or less, and is framed in ruled lines in red. The illustrations, of which there are 124, are executed in ink and water-color upon separate pieces of paper, which vary in size, from 2 inches x 3 to 5 inches square, and they are neatly pasted to the pages of the book. There is internal evidence that the MS. is not a holograph, for the author alludes to his 'writer.' The dedicatory epistle, however, which is written in Italian script (the body of the MS. is in the crabbed ordinary script of the day) and signed 'Edward Topsell,' and the names of particular species, written upon certain of the illustrations, may, either or both, have been indited by Topsell himself. The date, too, is indicated. The author addresses his patron 'five or six years' after the two earlier works had been completed; and, since the second of these had been published in 1608, it follows that this, the first part of the 'Fowles,' had been written before the end of the year 1614, and perhaps a year or two earlier than that.

The arrangement (copied from Gesner) is that employed in the 'Four-footed Beastes' also, and in the 'Serpents:' the 'kinds' are presented in alphabetical sequence,—as good an arrangement as any available in 1614. This first installment of the 'Fowles' begins with the 'Alcatraz' (= Pelican), includes 39 'kinds,' and continues as far as the 'Cuckowe.' Some of the kinds are

¹ 'The Huntington Library Bulletin' for May, 1931 (I, 49).

THE AUK, L.

PLATE X.



TOPSELL'S PAINTING OF THE CHURRHEAD (= TOWHEE).

isolated species; others are groups of birds of recognized (and in most cases properly recognized) affinity. The total number of species treated in this first part approximates one hundred and fifty. In addition to the 39 kinds treated, the fragment ends with a list of 175 kinds more, which remain for future treatment. In a few instances spaces were left, for additional illustrations, to be supplied. Ordinarily a title is associated with an illustration and a description follows. One chapter, that upon 'The Cocke and Henne,' is elaborated into a treatise upon poultry-raising and fills nearly half the book—similarly as, in the 'Four-footed Beastes,' the chapter on the 'Horse' becomes an essay upon farriery. The 'Batte or Backe or Flittermouse' is included among the birds, and for that there is Scriptural authority.

In reality this is a work upon European, and particularly upon British, birds; but it is intended to be comprehensive, and it makes mention of such American birds as were known to the author. He names seventeen, and his work leaves one to suppose that he had at hand yet others, unnamed, but ready to be included in their appropriate places, in the 'kinds' still to be described,—in the chapters on the Eagle, for example, on the Grosbeak, and on the Owl.

Of the nine drawings of American birds, that of the Towhee is the best; and it is reproduced in the accompanying plate. It came to him, Topsell says, from Richard Hakluyt. Of the remaining eight, four show the subjects lying dead upon their backs—a position approved by Gesner. The colors are lively, as clear and strong, manifestly, as ever they were. Excepting 'The Crane of Virginia,' Indian names only are given; but in each instance the phrase 'of Virginia' (in one, 'of Brasilia') is added; and, with one or two uncertainties, all identifications are sure. These American birds are:

- The Aushouetta (= the Thrasher—?)
- The Aupseo (= the Bluebird)
- The Aiussaco (= the Flicker)
- The Artamokes (= the Blue Jay)
- The Chugwareo (= the Red-winged Blackbird)
- The Chuwheeo (= the Towhee)

The Chowankus (= the female Towhee—?)

The Tarawkow Konekautes (= the Sandhill Crane)

These all are 'of Virginia.' In addition to them, there is pictured, with the blackbird kind, 'a Black-macke of Brasilia' which manifestly is a tanager.

The prospectus at the end, of birds to be treated in subsequent parts, includes eight species more, seven of which, designated by their Indian names, are stated to be of Virginia, and an eighth, the 'Turkey Cocke,' was already known widely in Europe as a barn-yard fowl. These additional eight birds are:

Kaiuk, Virginia

Manasscneau, Virginia

Meessenouns, Virginia

Pockway,

Poogueo, } Virginia

Poppogattuweo, }

Teauh, Virginia

Turkey Cocke

Throughout all his works Topsell relies upon his predecessors, chiefly upon Gesner (1558). In the case of the American birds, however, with the exception of the Turkey, he is a pioneer; for Gesner gives no more than a few vague and fabulous notes about macaws and hummingbirds.² Topsell gives to his American novelties names which manifestly are Indian, and some of these are onomatopœic; as, for example, *Chugwareo*, the Red-winged Blackbird; and one of them continues in our established nomenclature,—*Chuwheeo*, the Towhee.³

A few quotations will serve to show that the man knew how to write, and they will afford the first vague glimpses of a few familiar birds. The title-page reads:

² Aldrovandus, to be sure (1599), pictures some twenty-odd birds to which he applies the somewhat vague adjective, *Indicus*. Some of these are fabulous; others manifestly are drawn from specimens; but it would be generous to say of them that as many as a half dozen are recognizable:—the Turkey, yes, and the Cardinal; the Mourning Dove, perhaps; and the Tufted Titmouse, doubtfully.

³ We have other bird-names derived from bird-notes—Kildeer, Whip-poor-will, Bobolink, Pewee, Chickadee. Some of these names, familiar to our ears, might perhaps be traced back to Indian sources. It interested me, a few years ago when on a walk through the Great Smoky mountains, to discover that the Cherokee Indians called the Chickadee, *Chick-a-lee-lee*.

'The Fowles of Heauen

OR

History of Birdes conteyning their
true and liuely figures with the whole
description of their natures in rea-
dings Gramaticall Logically Phi-
losophicall, Theologicall, Hyero-
glyphicall Medicinall and ciuill.
Together with the Coate armes
of noble Persons who beare
in their Escutcheons
Fowles or any parte
of a Bird.

'The first Parte.'

The dedication is 'To the Right Hon: Lord Elsmere Lord
chauncelloꝛ of England one of his highnes most Hon: privy
Councell the most noble patron of all good Artes and Father of
the *Church* and Comon-weale.' And the dedicatory letter contains
the following passage of historical interest:

'My writings, especiallie of the living Creatures haue nowe
passed in the world to a *non plus*. I considered that almost all
Nations had bred some learned men, that with industry, Labour
and charges, & especially for the glorie of the Grand Creatour,
and the benefitt of their Countrymen, had pressed, and written
somethinge both of the figures and natures of Gods liuinge Crea-
tures. Although I were the least able of 5000 in England (beinge
oppressed in suits of Lawe, & therby empouerished, charged
with preachinge an hundred times a yeare for twentie yeares
together, and sometimes enfeebled to write thorough a para-
liticke righte arme, euen from my birth, yet for the benefitt
of my Nation, and the glorie of him, to whome the glorie of all
workes, witts, and natures are due, did undertake the taske, and
five or six yeares agoe finished the Histories of Beasts and Serpents
in some fashion, to my great trauaile, & charges diuulginge
them to the world to the Stationers great profit, and my owne
empouerishinge. For (I beseech your Lordship, giue me leaue to
say it) they are the men which are rich by makinge schollers
poore: and schollers are poore by makinge them riche. And if I

had respected either reward from Patron or Printers, I had utterly failed, and neuer gone further. But my first resolution being whetted on, by the daylie verball encouragements of some Lords, Gentlemen, and men of worth, hath prevailed with me, to undertake the third part of liuinge Creatures, The fowles of Heauen, and this greater then both the former by a third parte. The first fructs whereof I most humblie here offer to your Hon: viewe not printed, but written, neither soe exactly written, figured, and compiled, as I could wishe; but as I could; and yet fitted with all that I had read or obserued, after manie miles trauailes and two yeares labours about these, and a hundred more, which I haue readie beside me to be pressed or suppressed at your LoP^s pleasure. I am bold to presume of your Honors leasure to reade these thinges, for I read this historie of Saint John the Euangelist in Fulgosus, He delighted manie times to play with a tame quaille, and one day a yonge man espyinge him at this recreation, founde fault wth the holie man for an action of such leuitie. The Apostle perceuinge the yonge man had a bowe at his backe, (for a readie answer) bad him shoote twice or thrice at a marke he appointed him, which the yonge man did accordinglie first bendinge his bowe, & then after he had discharged it twice, or thrice he did unbend it againe, The holie man asked him the reason of lettinge downe the bande, He answered. *Vt cum eo uti necesse fuerit, agitationi non ineptum inueniat*, Euen so replied the Euangelist, *Nos honesto studio interdum relaxamur, ut maioribus viribus orationi, et ieiunio sufficere possimus, q^d fieri nō posset si semper eodem tenore viueremus*. Pardon me, I beseech you my good Lord allso, for that with Pharaohs Butler I do so late remember Joseph. My former Labours, nor these are worthy of your Patronage: yet, *Insuaues esse solent foetus primi, amoeni magis, & iucundi subsequaces*. The Swan singeth sweetest when he is old, and whitest, and peradventure my last labours wilbe sweeter then the former; howsoever I am sure the subiect is more excellent. And therefore both labour and Author do cast themselues at your Honors feete.'

The Aushouetta (= Thrasher—?), the Aupseo (= the Blue-bird), the Auissaco (= Flicker), and the Chowankus (= female Towhee—?) are not described. They are depicted as lying dead. The Artamokes (= Blue Jay) is, in portrayal, the most grotesque

of all: the crest is shown to be divided, and the two parts are directed, one forward, the other backward—a mistake due, it may be supposed, to mutilation incident to the packing and transmitting of the specimen. The description of the Artamokes is as follows:

'This is a Virginia bird, the description whereof I had from Dr. Bonham. It is the thirde kinde of woode-spikers, hauinge a loftie Combe or Creste arisinge highest at the two Corners behinde and before: The colour of the feathers for the most part blewe from the toppe of the Creste unto the rumpe, there are some browne blacke feathers, and it hath also diuers white spotted, the belly is white, the beake and feete blacke. It is not good for meate, bycause it liueth like other Woodspikers, upon flyes spiders and oakewormes. For this thinge onelie the people of the Countrey admire it, and I doubt whether there be any Creature in all the Worlde to paralell it: for it imitateth readilie, all the seuerall voices of other birdes, so as Cleopatra Epiphanius, or Kinge Mithridates. Wch had three and twentie languages, are not to be compared to this siely⁴ birde, that can singe wth the thrushe, croake wth the Rauen, crowe wth the Cocke, mourne with the turtle, hisse wth the peacocke, and soe imitate the residue: for wch cause our Countrymen in Virginia doe call it a Linguist, as if it had skill in many languages, and the people of the Countrey call it Artamokes.'

Of the 'Black-macke of Brasilia' (= a tanager) we read that it is 'brought by Marchaunts out of that Country. The body is bigger than the vulgar, hauinge nothings black upon it except the winges and the taile: and a few black mano feathers. The other partes are more redd then the dye of any scarlett, for no arte of man is able to expresse so perfect and deepe a colour. The feathers are all redd at the bottome. the feete and legges are browne or blackishe ashe colour: the taile very longe, The beake crooked beinge browne on the outside, and of an earth colour in the inside, the claws short and crooked colored like the legges.'

The Chuguario (= Red-winged Blackbird) receives the following notice:

⁴ *siely*. Changed slightly in form and utterly in meaning, the word is current still: *silly*.

'This is a Virginia bird resemblinge our owsell or blacke bird in quantitye & qualitye: for the beake is of a clay colour & the whole body blacke except the fore part of the winges wch are a deepe scarlett colour as by the picture you may perceiue.'

The Chuwheeo (= Towhee) has been chosen for illustration (see plate X). Of it Topsell says,

'This is also a virginia bird, whose picture I receiued from that worthy, industrious, & learned Compiler of nauigationes, whose prayses will remaine to the worlds end, in the monument of his owne labours, I meane Mr. Hackluyt. But before I sawe this picture I recieued this breife description from Dr. Bonham. Yt is the greatest Virginian pye, hauinge an ashe coloured beake, but all the body head and necke blacke, except the belly & legges, wch are a compound of white & chessnut. The taylor is very longe, like our english comon pyes, & haith underneath two white featheres, wch because it is proper to that countrye, I have expressed by that proper name whereby the people there call it.'

And, finally, in connection with 'Tarawkow Konekautes, The Crane of Virginia' we read,

'Peter Martyr writinge of America and the new found Worlde, affirmeth that the Spanyards founde Cranes in Cuba twise so bigge as our vulgar Cranes. and Columbus also, that he sawe Cranes in Lordesta of redd and scarlett couloures in greate abundance.'

The Appendix includes an introductory paragraph which reads,—

'These Birdes followinge doe also beseache you^r Lordshippe, that they together with the former may haue their Natures emblazoned to the worlde under your honorable Name. And their unworthy Heralde shall endeauour with his uttermost skill to expresse in them the wonderfull workes of God, to his unspeakable praise, and the contynuanee of you^r Noble Loue-Learninge vertues amonge all posteritye.'

And a list of names which follows includes the eight American birds noted above.

In vain these birds bespoken the Lord Chancellor's patronage; their herald, unworthy only for politeness's sake, is long since

dead and turned to clay; and now, after three centuries, it becomes a matter of curious discovery that, within seven years following the settlement at Jamestown, a considerable number of American birds had been collected and had received scientific attention.

Sewickley, Pennsylvania