

OUR MULES, PARROTS, COCKATOOS, &c.



TOM'S great ambition was to train a piping bullfinch, and during our first summer at Redland he and a schoolfellow of similar tastes used to go off on half-holidays down to the ferry, cross the river to the Leigh woods, and there prosecute their search for nests. They began early in the season, as Tom's friend wanted to collect eggs in the first place, and to supply himself with some young goldfinches in the second. Bullfinches were rather scarce, but two or three nests were "spotted" in the thick bushes, and from one an egg or two were taken, while Tom set his affections on another containing four eggs, which he watched jealously from time to time till the young brood were about half fledged, when he took possession of them and brought them triumphantly home. Father told him it would never do to put them in the aviary, for if they heard other birds singing their attention would be distracted and they would never learn to pipe a tune. So Tom begged an old basket, in which he deposited his nest, and carried it off to his own sanctum up in an attic, and there he persevered with the education of his family, feeding them every two hours or so, and covering them up after each meal while he whistled, "Home, sweet Home" several times over. Two of them really did credit to his tuition, but the third appeared to be afflicted with a bad memory, and after singing the first two or three notes would relapse into its natural soft low whistle, or utter its plaintive little cry of "tui, tui," and the fourth was manifestly a hen as she did not attempt to sing at all. The consequence of this was that she and her forgetful brother were given to us girls, and in due time received a great deal of our attention and respect, as I will tell you by-and-by. For the benefit of any one who may wish to emulate Tom's example, I must here say that while his birds were young he fed them with chopped egg and Bechstein's German paste, and when they were able to shift for themselves he gave them canary seed, millet, buckwheat, and shelled oats, with occasionally a few apple-pips, a morsel of apple or pear, a lettuce-leaf, some groundsel, or ripe plantain, just by way of a treat. German paste is so invaluable a food for caged songsters that I must tell you how it is made. Take one pound of pease-meal (or flour if the former cannot be had), two ounces of fresh butter, four of moist sugar, and three eggs boiled hard and chopped very small. Put all these ingredients together into a wide saucepan

over a slow fire, and keep stirring the mixture to prevent its burning; it will speedily become dry, and the stirring process must be continued till it crumbles. Then take it off the fire, add a pint of bruised hempseed, mix all well together, and keep in a dry cool place. It will remain good for months; but great care must be taken not to burn it, or it will do the birds more harm than good.

The two comrades saw a goldfinch's nest in a hedge, and counted the dusky whitish eggs with their red spots, but the next time they went that way it was gone. Meantime, however, Jenny's sharp eyes had discovered one in a plum-tree in the middle of our garden, and we watched it with the greatest interest till the third week in May, when the five nestlings were well feathered. Father had told us to keep them warm, so when we took the nest we covered it up with an old shawl, lest the east wind should chill our captives between their native tree and the house. A cage was ready for them in the conservatory, and we fed them on white bread soaked in milk and then mashed into a paste with well-scalded rape-seed. They proved to be but delicate creatures, pretty and sweet as they were, and two of them in spite of all our care fell down and died in fits before the summer was over. The others were healthy and thriving, and as they grew up towards maturity father pointed out to us that two of them being brighter in colour, and the red on their heads extending beyond the eyes, were certainly cocks. He directed us to supply them always with plenty of water for washing, to give them when full-grown a mixture of rape and canary seed, and sometimes a bit of groundsel, and when moulting a nourishing diet of chopped egg and crumbled sponge-cake.

When we had had them nearly a year, that is to say, in April, each of the cocks was placed with a mealy canary hen in a breeding-cage away from the rest of the birds, and the result was that we had several broods of beautiful pied goldfinch mules, which sang the sweetest little songs without any head-splitting notes, were very regularly coloured, and fetched fair prices when sold, as several of them were, both to private friends and to the dealer. We discovered that the delicacy for which our hybrid couples cared most during the breeding season was a fresh ripe dandelion-head. One of the gentlemen was a restless, active fellow, and gave us a great deal of trouble; he kept on pulling the nest to pieces, and as soon as the first egg was laid, pecked



NEST OF GOLDFINCH.



"WE WERE ALSO SUCCESSFUL IN MATING OUR BULLFINCH WITH A MERRY CANARY."

it; so we had to make up the nest ourselves every morning, that the poor canary might not miss any of her comforts, and father told us as soon as each egg was laid to take it away, keep it in a warm place, and substitute a bone one (some of which he bought for us); and when four had been laid Mr. Goldfinch was caught and caged separately, the eggs restored, and the mother supplied with plenty of food. She proved herself to be a good nurse and brought her youngsters up very creditably. The other cock was a capital parent, as steady and attentive to his family as he was handsome, and that is saying a great deal.

We were also successful in mating our hen bullfinch with a merry cock canary, but they only reared two of their children, who were, however, beautiful singers and very much admired. Time would fail me to tell of all our experiments—of the starveling greenfinch that Tom bought for a penny of the milkman's boy, and tamed till it would sit on his finger, or on mother's sewing and try to pull her thread out of the needle, but who obstinately refused to become a wife and mother, although we introduced her to the most fascinating yellow-coats in our collection. But in spite of this utter absence of domestic instincts she was a great pet, very sociable, and as whimsical as she was beloved. She had a cage of her own to retire to, and a common blue saucer for a bath, but if that identical saucer were taken away would absolutely refuse to bathe, however many white ones might be offered to her in its place. At meal-times she hopped on the table and pecked from the dishes, but she always distressed our mother by a plaintive little cry, and once when she was very ill she begged that Greenie might be taken away. So, with heavy hearts, Jenny, Tom, and I took our favourite into the fields about a mile distant, opened the cage-door, covered her with kisses, and saw her fly into a thicket, after which we tried to think what a good

deed we had done, and turned slowly homeward. The next morning the little dear flew in at the open window and lighted on my head, and then we took her cage down into the old quarry for a few days, leaving the door open so that she could always return to roost. When mother was well again Greenie was brought back to the house, but from that time she liked to fly abroad during the day, and would give a gentle tap on the window with her beak if it were closed when she came home, followed by fast and furious ones if the first were not heard.

This went on for a long time, but at length our favourite disappeared, and we thought she must have fallen a prey to some strange cat, for our own felines were far too well-bred to raise a paw or even cast a covetous eye on any of the pets of the household.

We all grieved very much over the loss of our poor Greenie, and it one day happened that father came across a couple of Australian grass paroquets, which he fancied would to some extent fill her place and divert our thoughts.

He was told at the Sailors' Home, where he bought them, that they were the survivors of twelve which left Sydney for England a few months previously—the other ten succumbed under the miseries of a rough voyage soon after leaving port; and these two, having paired, appeared very restless for some days, and were accommodated with half a cocoa-nut shell, into which one of the lady passengers, who seemed to know something about their habits, kindly put a little wadding. In this some eggs were laid, on which the hen sat diligently, but one stormy night the vessel



OUR NIGHTINGALE.

pitched and rolled so terribly that she was thrown from off her nest, the eggs also rolling out, and the cocoa-nut shell careering backwards and forwards about the cage, while its late occupant and her mate surveyed the ruin of their hopes from the highest perch they had. When calmer weather came the shell was secured by some stout wire in one corner to prevent the recurrence of a similar disaster, but the paroquet had learned wisdom from experience and refused to occupy it again, but collected the husks of her seed in one corner of the floor of the cage, where she laid her next eggs and hatched her young. One unlucky day, however, a great wave broke over the ship, reaching even her little corner, and so thoroughly wetted the young ones that they did not recover their drenching, and died.

"They may hope for better luck next time," said father, as he paid for the birds and summoned a fly, in which he brought them home, to be received in the hall with all manner of delighted exclamations and thanks. The newcomers were hung in a quiet corner of the conservatory and supplied with canary seed, and the next morning we found father very busy carpentering. He made a kind of rough box about eighteen inches high and seven inches square, covered it with dry moss so that it might bear some small resemblance to an old stump, and in one side he half cut and half broke away a hole large enough to allow the birds to go to and fro easily. Then he set me to make as good an artificial nest as I could with moss, grass, and wool, and gave me part of the outer husk (not the shell) of a cocoa-nut to put it in. He fastened his imitation stump in the farther corner of the paroquet cage, and put the husk containing the nest inside it, scattering some cocoa fibres and some more dry grass on the floor, so that the birds might re-line and finish off their abode as they chose. It was very pretty to see them darting in and out of the hole prepared for them, with beaks full of the material for this purpose, and in a few days we found that the hen had taken up her residence within. We gave her a diet of egg, millet, maw seed, and she hatched four juveniles and brought them up successfully, but did not offer to lay again that season, though she and her spouse always seemed partial to their little house. When the grass grew tall and ripe in the neighbouring fields, we used to gather bunches of it and suspend in the cage, and this was as great a treat to the paroquets

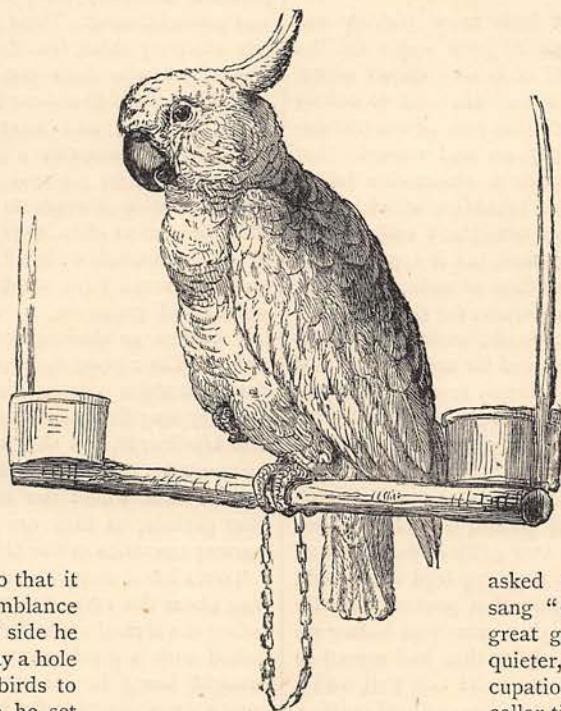
as groundsel and chickweed are to canaries. These birds are frequently called shell parrots, on account of the shell-like arrangement of variegated feathers under the beak and on the head. People who are not very wise on the subject sometimes mistake them for love-birds, but the latter are green all over.

The next foreign bird added to our family was a beautiful white cockatoo with a lemon-coloured crest, and this was brought as a present to mother by one of her brothers who lived and had made a large fortune in New Zealand. Cockie was certainly very much of a spoiled child, and had proved a troublesome travelling companion to his master. He had not been

domesticated many days in our uncle's family before starting on his long voyage, but had, during that time, been very sociable, and shown a great dread of the cage prepared for his transit from the Antipodes to England, for when put into it he screamed so vigorously that there was no peace till he was taken out again. The first stage of the journey had to be performed in the coach from Christchurch to Canterbury, and as soon as uncle had taken his seat he was obliged to let Cockie perch on his shoulder, where he looked very knowing,

asked repeatedly for kisses, and sang "God save the Queen" with great gusto. After awhile he grew quieter, having found another occupation in biting his owner's shirt-collar till he had reduced the upper edge of it to something like a fringe, and peering round into his

face every now and then with the ejaculation, "Ain't you a pretty dear?" His familiarity deepened into positive affection on board ship, and uncle became so much attached to him that I believe he could have found it in his heart to have taken Cockie back with him. But fond as he was of his pet, he did not know how to manage him. He had always been told that parrots and cockatoos did not require any water, and that even sopped bread would produce the disorder known as "scouring," and ruin the health of the bird. Long before reaching England Cockie began to pick out and suck his feathers, and could not be cured of the habit in spite of the pain he inflicted on himself, for he bit many of them off so close that the stumps bled and disfigured him dreadfully. Uncle hardly liked to give him to mother in this condition, but she maintained that he must be taught better, and despatched Tom to the old dealer



"HE USED TO CALL US ALL BY OUR NAMES" (p. 146).

on the quay, who continued our firm ally, with a note, in which she begged him to come up and inspect her new acquisition. He arrived the next day and commiserated the poor cockatoo for being the victim of the popular fallacy that birds of that tribe ought not to have water. He asked for a watering-pot with a fine rose, had it filled with lukewarm water, and poured it gently over Cockie, who called him a "pretty dear," and seemed to enjoy his shower-bath wonderfully. The old man inveighed against the ignorance or carelessness of persons who imagined that parrots required neither drink nor bath, and told us to repeat the process we had witnessed about once a week, and to let Cockie have some water near his perch so that he could drink if he liked.

After this there was but little more picking out of the feathers, which gradually grew again till the bird became quite a marvel of beauty, snowy white, and as sleek and soft as possible. He used to call us all by our names, and would often join in our conversation with such apposite phrases and remarks that we looked upon him as quite a reasonable being. Mother usually gave him his breakfast, which, under the new *régime*, consisted of bread and milk; occasionally he had a little hemp-seed, but it appeared too stimulating for him. He was fond of nuts; and cook, when preparing cabbages or lettuces for table, used to cut him a dainty morsel of stalk, which he greatly relished. He lived much beloved for seven years and then died in an epileptic fit, "deeply regretted," as was duly set forth on the little tombstone placed over his last resting-place, down in the quarry part of the garden.

Mother missed her talkative friend so much that we subscribed to give her a grey parrot, who is still alive and flourishing. We gave two guineas for her, and were assured that she was a young bird and would soon learn to talk, a prediction that proved perfectly correct, for she could say eighty sentences before we had had her a year. The *régime* that had agreed so well with the cockatoo did not quite suit Poll, and a friend advised us to treat her to an occasional chicken bone, but this seemed to make her feverish; and at length we found that the best diet for her was canary seed, dry bread, plain biscuits, a little bit of tapioca or sago pudding when there was one, an occasional couple of white peppercorns, and bread just dipped, but not soaked, in milk. She is particularly fond of a ripe cherry, and does not despise a raisin or currant when fresh fruit is not obtainable. We give her some tepid water in a soup-plate every morning, and to judge by her antics and the spluttering she makes, she must enjoy her bath amazingly. A light covering is always thrown over her cage on cold nights, and we find it necessary if the sun be very hot either to move her out of its direct rays or to shade the top of her abode. Once or twice she has drooped a little, and a tea-spoonful of moist sugar mixed with her sop has restored her usual vivacity. In spite of her frequent ablutions we have sometimes seen her with a feather in her beak, and have then sprinkled her with a weak solution of alum, which seems to have allayed the

irritation of her skin, and perhaps made the taste of her feathers unpalatable.

Among our experiments we tried some Java sparrows one year, but gave them up on account of their quarrelsome propensities.

Two of our most beautiful pets are a couple of Cardinal birds, frequently called Virginian nightingales or thrushes. They were brought to us by a young relative, whose fate had led him to spend some years on an *estancia* near Rosario, and we prized them for the sake of the youth who had shown that it was possible to be a high-bred English gentleman while wearing a leather jerkin and putting his hand to every "chore" that offered, as well as on account of their personal brilliancy, their cheerfulness, and their frank and powerful song. Their warbling is not preluded by any chirping notes, but they burst forth into melody like a girl who does not want twice asking before singing her best to amuse her friends. They are not at all delicate, and have hatched several broods, building their nests in a large box-tree which father has wired in on purpose for them. Their greatest treat is a slice of apple to peck at, and so hardy are they that father often says if he had known as much about them when we lived in our old home as he does now, he would have tried to naturalise them in the woods and preserves, as they delight in frequenting low bushes or shrubberies in the neighbourhood of water. Their beautiful scarlet plumage would render them attractive points of colour among the trees; they are very long-lived, eat the same food as our thrushes and blackbirds, and they must be quite indifferent to temperature, as in their native continent they are quite as abundant where the snow covers the ground for long periods, as they are in South America and the warmer countries of the United States.

Tom's latest acquisition is a nightingale caught in a trap about the 18th of April, when he was a bachelor, before the arrival of the ladies. I believe the trap was baited with a meal-worm, and the pretty fellow was brought home in his captor's hat. There was an empty cage available for him, and as soon as a glass was filled with water he drank greedily. His habitation was covered up so that he had only light enough to discern his food and perch, and the first nutriment offered to him was in the shape of a dozen black-beetles in a basin, all alive. He ate them three or four at a time, and they seemed to whet his appetite, for in half an hour or so he despatched some more; but as Tom did not mean him to live on them always, he prepared a paste of bread and milk and crushed hemp-seed, into which he stuck some beetles (killing them first) by their heads, as well as a few scraps of raw beef. Mr. Nightingale speedily pulled out the insects and ate them with a considerable share of paste sticking about their bodies, then he went to the beef, and finally betook himself to the paste, with which he had afterwards to be content, though he had one meal a day of hard egg and lean under-done beef, chopped fine and well mixed. No sooner was he reconciled to his artificial food than he sang splendidly, and Tom has been twice offered a high price for him,

as a caged nightingale in full song is somewhat of a rarity. I must add that his cage requires keeping very clean, and has two false bottoms, that each may be well purified out of doors when not in use. This is

strewn with sifted river sand and pounded mortar, which he very much enjoys pecking at, and which father says is the secret of his good health.

ELIZA CLARKE.



FRANK ROSS AT OXFORD.

BY A RESIDENT M.A.

CHAPTER THE THIRD. THE FRESHMAN'S TERM.



STROLLING towards the Lodge on Monday morning—because everybody seemed to be strolling in that direction—Frank met his friend Crawford, who called his attention to various notices posted in the gates. One was to

the effect that “the Master would see the gentlemen that morning between 10 a.m. and noon, the freshmen on Tuesday, between the same hours.” Another that “the Dean would be glad to see the freshmen at 10, the other gentlemen after.” There was also a list of places in Hall; announcements of the meetings of the College Debating Society, Boat Club, Cricket Club; Greek Testament Lecture, *sine ulla solemnitate* (i.e., without cap and gown), at Mr. Wood’s house every Sunday evening at 9. He was one of the married Fellows, a hard-working, energetic man.

Without quite knowing what “seeing the freshmen” meant, Frank got his gown, and as it was five minutes to 10, made his way to the Dean’s rooms. In the passage outside he found about twenty freshmen cooling their heels, and engaged, some more and some less, in questions or chaff with George, the Dean’s scout. George usually had the best of it. In fact, the freshman who dared to argue with him on matters of custom or local politics, and especially local politics, found himself considerably “shut up.”

A door opened, and a sort of snort from within indicated to George that the Dean was ready to see the freshmen. One by one they filed in, and were greeted by the Dean with a smile that was naturally

faint but tried to be sweet, and a grasp of the hand that was meant to be cordial but was unmistakably flabby. There were seats for all, but it took some minutes to get into them. The interview did not last long: just long enough, in fact, to enable the Dean to make one remark to each of the freshmen. To one, without waiting for an answer, “How is your father?” To another, “Does Mr. St. Leger intend coming forward for Slowcombe?” To another, “Have you been in Devonshire this vacation, Mr. Jones?”—Jones being, of course, a Yorkshireman who has never travelled further south than Oxford, when he matriculated in February last. To one or two a faint question as to their intentions. “Were they going to read for Honours or for a Pass?” an affirmative answer to the latter being expected as a matter of course by the Dean; to the former, being received with half surprise, half contempt. On the whole, Frank left the room depressed and disheartened as to his work. He had expected to be questioned as to what he had done at school: what form he was in: what books he had read; to be advised as to the turn his reading should now take; whether he should read for Honours in one examination or in more than one; or whether, in short, reading for Honours would be beyond him, and therefore waste of time. The only piece of practical information he gained was that Mr. Wood was his tutor, and to him he must apply for all particulars as to Lectures and Examinations.

The plan at Paul’s was similar to that at most colleges. The undergraduates were distributed among the tutors, a certain number being apportioned to each. They were not necessarily to attend their lectures, but they were to go to them for advice and private assistance in their work. In many colleges, battels were paid by the undergraduate to his own tutor. The tutors together draw up a scheme of lectures, which the undergraduates attend simply according to the necessities of the examination for which they are reading, and not according to the particular tutor to whom they are attached. For example, Mr. Wood was Frank’s tutor, but the lectures he was giving in Frank’s first term were for more advanced men, and therefore Frank had nothing to do with him as far as lectures were concerned. He learnt all this when he went to him at the Dean’s direction. What he failed to find in the Dean he found in Mr. Wood, who met him cordially, took him into his inner room, made him sit comfortably on