

lowlier soul content to listen thereto, this tributary of art offers a means at once delightful and satisfactory. No music is more beautiful than that born in the quiet and even mysterious atmosphere of the chamber. And its effect! No harmonies surpass the exquisitely tempered tones of a quartet for strings by a master-hand. No sweeter stream of melody exists than that of Mozart or Beethoven in their chamber compositions, or in music for violoncello and violin such as Boccherini and Spohr loved to compose. Truly in this realm of art the active musician and the passive

listener are admitted to a perfect region of musical pursuit and highest artistic enjoyment. Greater reaches of the tonal art open out to master and student, but in no atmosphere of sound are musical effects more finely drawn, or more deftly conceived, than in this. And what emotional fervour all this music assumes and demands! One sweep of such a genius as Beethoven's and the forces of string music develop into a mighty mental and psychological study, to grasp which is impossible to other than the tried servitor of art. And what a company of such servants there be!

FREDERICK J. CROWEST.

AMONG THE TITMICE.

BY THE REV. M. G. WATKINS, M.A.



Few sights are more enjoyable to the country-lovers than a family party of tits. This can only be seen when the leaves are off the trees, for during summer the tit and its mate are busy with their nest and their little ones. Directly the trees begin to be stripped, the old birds and their brood, with several

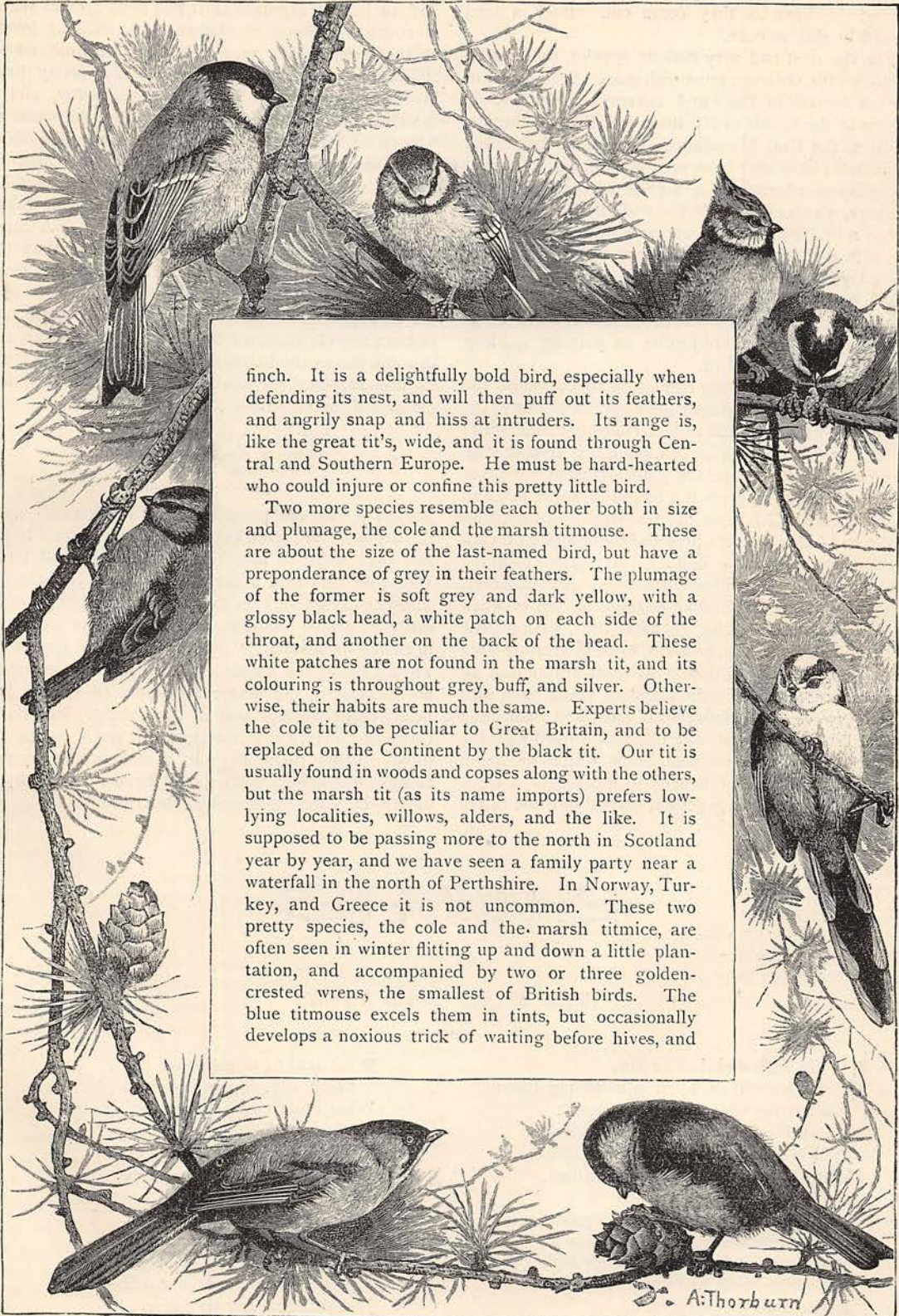
other families, draw together, and then is the time to see them in the larch plantations on the edge of a thick wood, twisting in and out between the twigs, hanging head downmost, lightly flitting from tree to tree, and all the time softly chirping and uttering their call-note to keep the flock together. Even more characteristic are they during deep snow in the woods, when no strength of frost seems able to chill their little forms or subdue their dauntless spirits, though much bigger birds, blackbirds and redwings, are found dying and emaciated under the hedgerows, or miserably dead, a mere heap of feathers covering a little bag of bones. The titmice and their associate, the golden-crested wren, fear nothing, and are apparently as blithe as in summer, still splitting off fragments of bark and fir-cones, and strewing them over the snow under their favourite trees. Every one must know a titmouse who has ever noticed country birds. It creeps up and down a tree like a mouse in its method of progression. And yet the bird's name has nothing whatever to do with mice. Philologists tell us it comes from an Icelandic name for a small bird, (we call a small horse a "tit,") and an Anglo-Saxon termination of the same meaning.

Titmice are chiefly found in temperate regions. Nineteen European species have been enumerated, of which the Boreal, the Lapp, and the Siberian titmice tell their own tale. With us the so-called bearded titmouse, a most beautiful moustachioed creature, found in England only in the fenny districts of Norfolk and

Cambridgeshire, and not very abundant there, is not a true titmouse, and may be omitted from our survey. Six well-marked species remain, and any one with an eye for colour can easily distinguish each of these in the hedgerows without taking their lives to compare them with book descriptions. The true naturalist shoots no small birds. All the titmice, it may be added, are fearless, and if the observer stands still, they will allow themselves to be watched through an opera-glass, which is much more humane than shooting them. A very easy mode of seeing them to perfection is to hang a bone with a little meat on it from the bough of a tree opposite the window. The birds will soon find it out, and their vivacity and activity will be well displayed.

The great tit, from its name, ought to come first, although it is rather smaller than a sparrow. Its predominant tint is greyish-blue, while the head is a glossy black, and a line of the same colour passes under the bird, strongly contrasted against the rest of its plumage. This bird is found through the whole of Europe. It is a bold and strong bird for its size, with the reputation of killing and eating other small birds at times. Professor Newton, however, thinks that it is not often a cannibal, save when caged with others. Insects and seeds ordinarily form its food, and it extends its range even to Turkestan and Persia.

The next to be mentioned ought to be the blue titmouse, or blue-cap, the most abundant, perhaps, and certainly the most sprightly of its family in the British Isles. It even visits town gardens, and is as beautiful as it is lively and active, being much smaller than the last, and thus better able to hang head downwards and perform kindred acrobatic feats. Its predominant tints are blue and yellowish-green. This is a bird much dreaded by the lovers of orchard and garden fruit, as it tears open blossoms, wantonly as many think, but really in order to obtain the insects that would otherwise speedily ruin the trees, blossom, and fruit. The blue tit must not, therefore, be classed with that wholesale bud-destroyer, the bull-



finch. It is a delightfully bold bird, especially when defending its nest, and will then puff out its feathers, and angrily snap and hiss at intruders. Its range is, like the great tit's, wide, and it is found through Central and Southern Europe. He must be hard-hearted who could injure or confine this pretty little bird.

Two more species resemble each other both in size and plumage, the cole and the marsh titmouse. These are about the size of the last-named bird, but have a preponderance of grey in their feathers. The plumage of the former is soft grey and dark yellow, with a glossy black head, a white patch on each side of the throat, and another on the back of the head. These white patches are not found in the marsh tit, and its colouring is throughout grey, buff, and silver. Otherwise, their habits are much the same. Experts believe the cole tit to be peculiar to Great Britain, and to be replaced on the Continent by the black tit. Our tit is usually found in woods and copses along with the others, but the marsh tit (as its name imports) prefers low-lying localities, willows, alders, and the like. It is supposed to be passing more to the north in Scotland year by year, and we have seen a family party near a waterfall in the north of Perthshire. In Norway, Turkey, and Greece it is not uncommon. These two pretty species, the cole and the marsh titmouse, are often seen in winter flitting up and down a little plantation, and accompanied by two or three golden-crested wrens, the smallest of British birds. The blue titmouse excels them in tints, but occasionally develops a noxious trick of waiting before hives, and

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seizing the bees as they come out. Such a bird should be shot at once.

For the next and very curious species, the crested titmouse, the observer must visit some of the oldest of Scotch forests in Ross and Inverness. It extends thence to the forests of Northern and Central Europe, as far as the Ural Mountains. Only some half-dozen individuals have ever been seen in England. Its most conspicuous adornment is a crest of black and grey feathers, which is larger in the male than in its mate. It has a brother, also with a crest of fine black feathers, but with a yellowish body and dark stripe on it, in the Himalayas, whereas our bird is of greyish plumage, touched with black. Unluckily, no one but a professed ornithologist who will take the trouble to make a journey to the northern forests on purpose is likely to see our rare crested tit.

The last of the British titmice is to our mind the most beautiful, and certainly the most interesting of the family. The long-tailed tit is a charming little bird; indeed, with the exception of its tail, it is smaller than any British bird except the golden-crested wren, but adding its tail to it, gives it a length of some five and a half inches. To begin, its plumage is dusky, with white and black feathers here and there, and a prevailing tint of pink, or rather dull red. It is quite a common bird, and a very trustful one, allowing a quiet observer, especially when it is feeding in large parties or when engaged in nest-building, to draw near, taking little notice. But its nest is, perhaps, more interesting than the little bird. It is certainly the most beautiful of all the nests to be found in the kingdom, being oval, with a hole on one side, compacted of moss and wool hung over with grey lichens, and the inside filled with the warmest and softest feathers. One which we found looked like a bunch of lichens dropped into a thick bramble-bush, and to get it out several of these briars

had to be cut through, as it was built around them. It contained fifteen or sixteen eggs, each as lovely as the mother bird, very small, of a lustrous white, slightly speckled with light red. This pretty little bird is found also in France and Germany, and it is well known to all country boys under the name of "bottle tit," from the form of the nest just described. There are, therefore, only five species of tits likely to be met with in England, but all of these should be readily found by every bird-lover, and can be easily discriminated, as we have tried to show. A more charming family to study cannot be chosen than the great, the blue, the cole, the marsh, and the long-tailed tits.

Few superstitions attach to the tits. They are said to have been held sacred by the ancient Germans, and in some places the harsh saw-like notes of the great tit are supposed to foretell rain. Wordsworth has celebrated the blue tit—

"Where is he, that giddy sprite?
Blue-cap, with its feathers bright,
Who was blest as bird could be,
Feeding on the apple-tree!"

But, as a rule, our poets have not dwelt much upon the titmice. We have known a fox condescend to kill and take them to her cubs, with other small birds. White of Selborne acutely says of all the species, with one exception, that they frequent buildings, especially in severe weather, and are fond of searching in thatch for insects. "One species alone spends its whole time in the woods and fields, never retreating for succour in the severest seasons to houses and neighbourhoods, and that is the delicate, long-tailed titmouse." Here may well end our notes on the titmice. From them, he who wishes to know something of our British birds should have no difficulty in identifying each titmouse here described.



THE STORY TOLD ANEW.

IN the dusk and down a lane
Two walked, hand in hand, together:
Blew the wind and fell the rain:
Little heeded they the weather.
Cold March winds might storm about:
Warmth within mocked cold without.

Had the road been paved with gold,
They had never seen a shimmer;
Had the stars left heaven's high fold,
Night to them had grown no dimmer.
Earth, unto its widest hem,
Consisted of four feet for them!

What said he to make her start,
Flush and glow with sudden pleasure?
What could cause the woman's heart
Then to beat a faster measure?
Why did eyelids, prone to rise,
Hide the light of glowing eyes?

'Twas the story told anew,
Old, yet never antiquated:
Just the same words—just as few—
Just the case so often stated—
Just the same in every wise,
As once was told in Paradise.

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