

## RIVER BIRDS.



KINGFISHER AND OUZELS.

TOWNSMAN — even a dweller in the country who has not specially studied ornithology—has little idea of the diversity of birds on different rivers. Such persons would expect ducks and water-hens to frequent every river, and there in all probability their knowledge would end, just as the proverbial bride can only order legs of mutton and beef-steaks. The lover of birds must first be told the character of a stream and its locality, when he will be able to

form a tolerably accurate list of its birds; for the birds which haunt an estuary or tidal water are quite distinct from those found on midland rivers, and both, again, are different from those which affect a mountain stream in Wales or the Borders.

The season makes another important difference in the number and species of birds found by the river's brim. In summer swallows and immigrants enliven the copses which skirt a river; while in autumn all these are gone, and northern species have replaced them, ducks and waders being conspicuous, and snipe flying up from every marsh or wet corner. His walk down the river-side is at every time of the year delightful to the naturalist, and in the autumn he easily finds fresh friends to supply the loss of those which have of late succumbed to the laws of bird-life and sought sunnier lands. The robin succeeds the swallow—the teal ousts the robin in its turn. In a severe winter the teal is replaced by wild geese, perhaps by wild swans. There is then a lull in the tides of bird-life during the dead part of winter, and the succession begins again.

During the winter months the estuaries of many rivers, where immense mud-banks are left bare by the receding tide, offer a congenial home to countless multitudes of waders. Immense activity prevails among these at morning and evening, while flights of ducks and of night-feeding birds seek the estuary from the neighbouring country with early dawn. These love frequently to ride off the mud-stretches on the waves, first taking the precaution of setting a careful watch, and at evening again fly inland to haunt ponds and ditches.

Gulls generally pass the night at sea, and fly past these flights of returning ducks at dawn, as they, in their turn, seek the ploughed fields, to return about four in the afternoon to their beloved waves. Stints, dunlin, and the like, haunt the shore in amazing flocks, which fly, like those of starlings, as by one common impulse, now wheeling to the right, and then again circling towards the left, while their white feathers flash as they turn like drifting snow-flakes. That cunning marauder,

the greater black-backed gull, beats up and down such estuaries, and all manner of flesh is grateful to its maw.

On the eastern coast the Royston crow, in little parties of six or ten, frequents these muddy flats and industriously devours all it comes across, from the stranded star-fish to the carcases of wretched sheep which have been flung overboard from some ocean-sailing steamer. A daily visit to such an estuary with a good glass will teach a man more ornithology than all the sages and their books. Even then, unless he be a wild-fowl shooter, he cannot realise the suspicion and timidity of all these birds at the presence of man. They almost seem to be in a retreat here, and to dread the very sight of man. With the breeding season and their own softened feelings, confidence returns. Alas! that often it should be so misplaced.

Birds of prey are seldom seen at a river side. The hen-harrier may quarter the adjoining marshes like a well-trained pointer; but as a rule the reeds and brush-wood near water afford too much shelter to small birds, and their rapacious foes wheel off in disgust. Marsh titmice may be seen among the alders and willows in such localities. In spring the trout-fisher marks the wren, justifying its name of *troglydites*, by creeping in and out of the tangled rods on the river bank. The



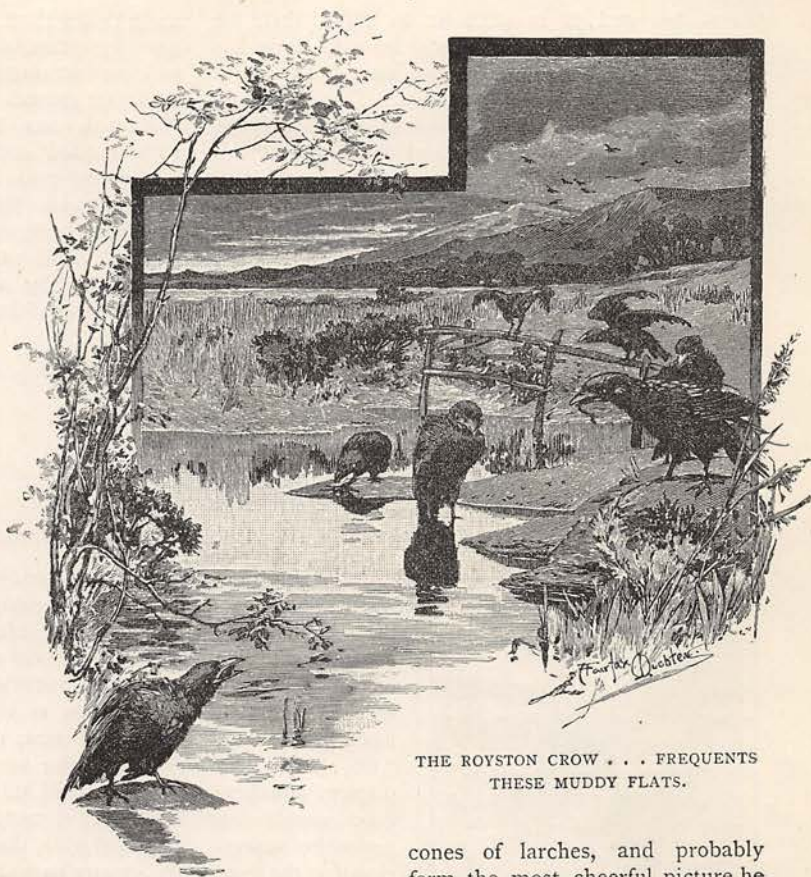
THE HERON AND REED SPARROW.



chaffinch in such situations, on a warm day, turns into a fly-catcher for the nonce, and can frequently be seen fluttering off the willow branches to catch flies hovering over the stream; while from an adjoining hedge the tree-pipit rises and falls during early summer in its exquisite ecstasy of song.

That throughout the spring and summer flights of swallows and martins succeed each other as they dash down the streams goes for granted; the swifts swoop down upon the water with their unearthly cries (which in Nottinghamshire have earned them the *soubriquet* of "devilins"), while the sand-martins, having a colony in the red clay bank, are naturally more domestic, flutter round their holes, and do not appear to take such long rambles in search of food as their *congeners*. The carrion crow struts on the narrow margin of the river or over the far-reaching flats at low water—an object of deep hatred to the keeper.

During summer the night-jar and cuckoo are heard, especially towards evening, from the copses near water, while the green woodpecker every now and again seeks the decrepit willows by the banks, and, much to its satisfaction, extracts grubs from the decayed wood. Of course, writers of fiction invariably plant bitterns in the marshy ground by rivers. As a matter of fact, the bird is now very rarely seen in Great Britain—perhaps in a severe winter only. As for its "booming"—though it undoubtedly can do so, and has thus earned its bull-like name, *botaurus*—very few living Englishmen have ever heard it. Sir Walter Scott is said to have been the last literary man who could from actual knowledge describe the bird's unearthly note. During open weather in winter there are few prettier sights for an ornithologist than a party of siskins flitting in and out of a group of alders in the low ground by a river. They chirp and flutter round each other as they feed off the seeds of the alder and crack open the

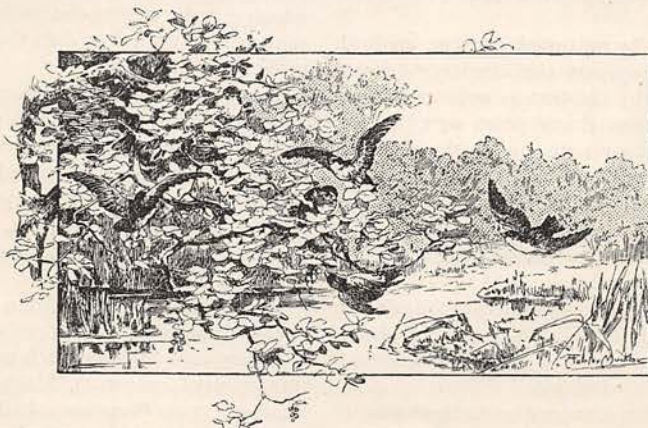


THE ROYSTON CROW . . . FREQUENTS THESE MUDDY FLATS.

cones of larches, and probably form the most cheerful picture he will see during his walk.

Characteristic and beautiful as are all these birds, winter brings a few more to most river sides which are eagerly sought by the sportsman. Thus the wood-pigeon and pheasant are fond of searching for late berries and seeds by running water. Little grebes often dive at the corners where the river forms a pool, and bushes dip down to it. The common sandpiper is a summer bird; but snipe, golden plover, and lapwings constantly haunt open spaces by a river's bank, while wild duck, widgeon, and teal flap up and offer hasty shots until frost has somewhat dulled their activity.

The birds usually associated with river scenery are few in number, but all of them possess striking plumage and singular habits. The water-rail, coot and moor-hen are found on most rivers—perhaps the last-named in all. Like a flash of emerald light the kingfisher



MARSH TITS ON ALDER BUSH.



darts by, and it is pleasant to think that the Act establishing a close season for wild birds has benefited this bird. Many more have been seen of late years in their favourite haunts. The heron and the dipper are the birds of the river side *par excellence*, the former always eating trout and eels and any hapless small fry that approach its dreamy watchfulness; the latter singing amid the broken water from some boulder, and slandered by keepers as a destroyer of trout-spawn. Why it should perpetually wag its tail is a mystery—which it shares, however, with the wag-tail family. The most familiar of these about the water-side is undoubtedly the grey gaitail. It is far

more yellow than grey, and is a good example of a partial migrant, being found on one stream one month, and the next migrating to a far distant one—probably on higher ground.

Enough has been said to show that a river with wooded and shrubby banks forms a delightful hunting-ground to a lover of birds. How many additions to his pleasant "History of Selborne" would not White have written had a river flowed near that village! And perhaps at no time is there so much to observe by a fair-flowing river, and nowhere such a feast of beauty to be obtained, as in golden autumn.

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## CHEAP DELICACIES.

BY A. G. PAYNE, AUTHOR OF "CHOICE DISHES," ETC.



IT is a question well worth asking, Is it more economical to dine off two dishes than off one? We often hear people say, "Oh, we live very plainly;" and these good people are under the impression that the more plainly they live the more economically they live. Of course, everything depends upon what we

mean by "plain living." Suppose we have a roast leg of mutton for dinner, with a dish of boiled potatoes, followed by a suet pudding. This is plain living. But suppose the family consists of husband and wife and eight healthy children, then the income of the master of the house must be fairly good to put up with this "plain living" daily.

In the present day, by universal consent, medical men seem to be of the opinion that the large quantities of meat consumed by children as well as adults, that was customary some thirty years ago, is not necessary for health and strength, but on the contrary has an injurious tendency.

There are many households who dine daily off one dish of meat. There are also many households where it is the custom to have two dishes placed on the table—what is called top and bottom.

We will not now enter into the subject of the advisability of commencing dinner with some kind of cheap soup or fish, but will endeavour to give a few practical hints in reference to what we may call the second dish, which in households where economy is practised should assist, but not rival, the first. We shall perhaps better

explain our meaning of "assisting" and "rivalling" by giving an example. Suppose there is a small piece of roast beef left over from the previous day. The dinner consists of a dish of minced beef with sippets at one end of the table, and a piece of boiled neck of mutton and turnips at the other. Very often, by a sort of mutual consent, the family all have a help of mince first, in order to "finish it up," although everyone present would have preferred to dine entirely off the fresh joint of mutton and turnips, which they see getting cold while they eat the mince. The result is that the greater part of the boiled neck of mutton is not eaten hot, but is sent downstairs to get cold, and has to be served up the second day, probably as haricot of a very inferior kind. Is this true economy? We have no hesitation in answering—No! True economy does not consist in having a superfluity of cold meat; but on the contrary it will be found that the less cold meat we have left upon our hands the less will be our butcher's bill.

When two dishes are served, true economy consists in making one dish a sort of damper to the appetite for the second dish, which second dish we will suppose to be a small joint of butcher's meat, which may be sent to the table smaller in size in consequence of the other dish than if it were sent to the table by itself.

It is obvious that if this second dish consists of meat which originally cost as much per pound as the joint, there is no saving whatever; but if, on the other hand, we have our second dish, composed of some cheap material which partially satisfies the appetite and enables us to do with less meat off the joint, then we effect a saving, not merely in money, but, if medical men are right, we benefit in health as well.

We will endeavour to give a few dishes that shall be cheap, wholesome, and appetising.

A very nice and too much neglected form of food in this country is macaroni. Macaroni is now sold by large retail grocers at threepence-halfpenny per pound. It is extremely nourishing, and when cooked increases very