

OUR PETS.

FOREIGN CAGE BIRDS, AND HOW TO TREAT THEM.



SOME nine or ten years ago, the writer of the present paper was cruising in a British man-of-war, on the shores of Eastern Africa, between Delagoa Bay on the south of the equator, and Brava and Magadoxa on the north. North of the line, I may tell you at once, there was little to tempt on shore even the most enthusiastic naturalist.

The natives are far from friendly, and would certainly accord one a warm reception. Besides, there are no woods and forests, only hills of heated sand for ever baking in the tropical sun. But south of the line it is far different: here are the most beautiful forests that one could wish to see, not always dense and dark and deep, like those around Sierra Leone on the west, but more often lovely woods, covering a country of rolling hill and dale, and surrounding many a rock-girt little bay. It used to be my great delight to land on these shores, and traverse the voiceless woods all alone. To have had a companion would have entirely spoiled the charm. There was but little danger in this. Human beings I seldom saw, and when I did they always turned out to be friendly natives. So near the sea, there were few wild beasts, and those I did see were more afraid of the silent stranger than he was of them. But there were many kinds of snakes—these I shot and bagged when I had the chance—and monster lizards, many ugly enough in very truth, and just as inquisitive as a Greenland seal, for at a safe distance some of these would follow me for miles, merely to get a look at me; there were Johanna cats, and flying foxes, and many other curious animals in hairy jackets, too numerous to mention, and which I never killed, because I did not care to carry them. The beauty of the plumage of the birds I used to see in the bush and up in the tall spreading trees I can no more describe than I could paint you, to life, the radiant wings of a tropical butterfly or the gorgeous splendour of an Arctic aurora, but many of them so impressed me that I see them even yet in my dreams. They were unusually silent, though, those beautiful birds, and they did not sing with such passionate joy and jubilant glee as the birds of our native land.

Some of them were quite as inquisitive as any wild creature I have ever known, and this trait in their characters often lost me good specimens, which I should otherwise have shot and stuffed. For instance, I was looking up one day at a curious but pretty specimen of a kind of finch. He was a very comical fellow, and somewhat dowdy in shape. He was perched on a branch, and looking full of business, blowing out his throat, shaking his body, and shifting his head every second. As I raised my gun he spied me, and stopping his "song," hopped down a branch or two. "Hullo!" he seemed to say, as he cocked his head and craned his neck, "whatever are you?" I was about to fire, when down he came a little nearer, repeating the self-same ridiculous motions. Well, who *could* shoot a finch that was trying to peep down the barrel of his gun. When I tried to wave him off he seemed highly indignant, gave a nod and a little saucy "chick-chick"—as much as to say, "Like your impertinence. It's my tree, and I don't mean to budge." So I was fain to laugh and leave him.

A great many of these splendidly plumaged birds are imported into England every week, and may be seen at the shops of the naturalists, and purchased at far from high prices. Kept in an aviary or conservatory, and properly fed and attended to, they soon, as a rule, make themselves very much at home, and become charming pets.

The African wax-bills may be kept in cages, and are exceedingly pretty, without being in any degree gaudy, and very affectionate and taking. In a warm conservatory they will build and lay, but the eggs are seldom, if ever, productive.

The Australian wax-bill is easily kept, is very happy and very hardy, is a very beautiful and interesting bird, and does excellently well as a pet. The best time to secure them is about the end of June, when they arrive in London and Liverpool, and are sent to the dealers. They breed easily in confinement. Food: seeds and insects.

The cut-throat, so called because the male bird has a circle of crimson around his throat, is a very lively and very prettily plumaged bird; he is an African favourite of mine, and very common in the shops of England. These birds, especially the male, are, when tame, very interesting, and it is funny to watch their manoeuvres and goings on. They breed readily enough, but they are just as full of fight as of fun, and this reminds me to tell you that in buying birds for a large aviary you should inquire whether or not they are likely to agree.

Cut-throats are, when once acclimatised, very

hardy, and *one* pair will build and breed in a roomy cage. Feed on insects and egg food, meal-worms, ant's eggs, &c. The cut-throat belongs to the finch



PARRAKEETS.

tribe, and this leads me to say a word or two about some other very lovely finches.

The lavender finch is a native of Africa. It is a charming bird, with a delicate, bloomy lavender back, brown feet, and red tail and beak. Once seen it isn't easily forgotten. They are somewhat rare, but breed well in single pairs, and are to be recommended, if only for their great beauty.

There are the African fire-finch and the Australian crimson-finch, both very beautiful, but liable to serious illnesses.

The white-headed finch from India—there, I am out of Africa at last—will breed in large aviaries if you allow it to choose its own nesting place. I can recommend the bird as interesting, funny, and affectionate, and well suited as a cage pet.

The mannikins are charming, most loving, and tame cage birds, perhaps the pretty little bronze-wing is as nice as any.

Finches, in addition to millet and canary-seed

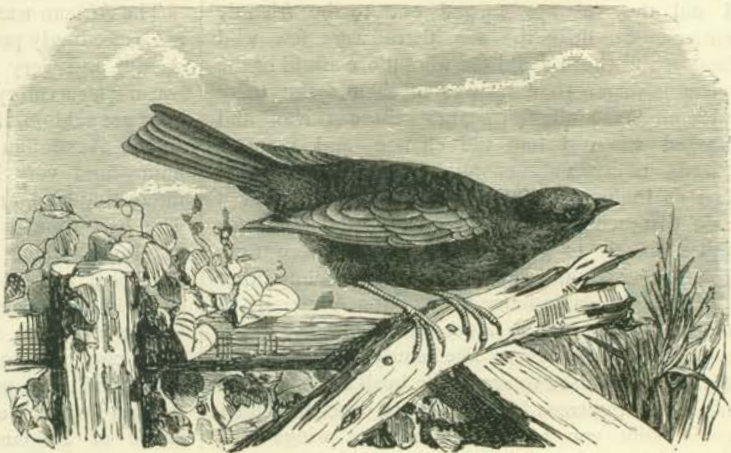
ought to have a supply of insect food. I am convinced they will not thrive well without it.

In Northern Africa you find that most lovely of birds, with its sweet melodious voice, the golden oriole. If you can get one of these you will have a pet worth looking at and listening to as well. They require good living, egg and bread-crumbs, worms, fruit, &c.

Although space almost forbids, I cannot forget the mino, nor one especial mino who was my comfort and delight when lying sick in an Indian hospital. Minos are musical and talk well. Like our own starlings, they will eat anything that is put before them.

And now, what shall I give you to finish up with? Some birdie from Afr—No, I have it: the grass parrakeet, zebra parrakeet, or budgerigar, a native of Australia. They are very common in England, very popular, and deservedly so. They are beautiful, as doubtless you know, and the male bird is a delightful warbler. They breed in winter, and that being the case, I need hardly caution care and freedom from draughts. They ought to be allowed to fly about the apartment if they are to breed successfully, and a rotten log of wood should be given them wherein to build. During the breeding season they ought to be kept as quiet as possible, and have all the sunshine you can give them.

The staple diet is canary-seed, with bread and milk for a change, and a little green food now and then. Contrary to the belief of some unsophisticated people, *they do need water.*



THE BALTIMORE ORIOLE.

Perfect cleanliness, good food regularly served, pure water, and gentle treatment are essential to the health and comfort of all birds in confinement.