

GOULD'S HUMMING-BIRD.

BEAUTIFUL BIRDS.



THE humming-birds are all natives of America. As we recede from the tropics on either side, the numbers decrease, though some species are found in Mexico, and others in Peru, etc., in South America. They are also found in Barbadoes, San Domingo, Honduras, and various parts of Central America, and a few in the North American continent.

The velocity with which the humming-birds glance through the air is extraordinary, and so rapid is the vibration of their wings, that the action eludes the sight; when hovering before a flower, they seem suspended as if by some magic power, rather than by the vigorous movement of their rigid pinions, which, however, produce a constant murmur or buzzing sound, whence the English title by which we designate these birds, and the Creole epithets in Cayenne and the Antilles—viz., Murmures, Bourdons, and Frou-frous.

It has been frequently and justly observed, that in their mode of flight the humming-birds closely resemble the sphinx-moths, or the dragon-flies. Mr. Darwin, in his "Journal," states that while at Bahia, he started early one morning and walked to the top of the Gavia, or Topsail Mountain.

"The air was delightfully cool and fragrant, and the drops of dew still glittered on the leaves of the large lilaceous plants which shaded the streamlets of clear water. Sitting down on a rock of granite, it was delightful to watch the various insects and birds as they flew past. The humming-birds seem particularly fond of such shady, retired spots; whenever I saw these little creatures buzzing round a flower, with their wings vibrating so rapidly as to be scarcely visible, I was reminded of the sphinx-moths; their movements and habits are, indeed, in many respects very similar."

There are, however, exceptions to this rule; Mr. Darwin, describing the

Trochilus gigas, which, as he observed, had arrived in the neighbourhood of Valparaiso in numbers a little before the vernal equinox, adds—"It comes from the parched deserts of the north, probably for the purpose of breeding in Chile. When on the wing the appearance of this bird is singular. Like the others of the genus, it moves from place to place with a rapidity which may be compared to a syrphus amongst dipterous insects and a sphinx amongst the moths; but whilst hovering over a flower, it flaps its wings with a slow and very powerful movement, totally different from that vibratory one, common to most of the species, which produces the humming noise. I never saw any other bird the force of whose wings appeared so powerful in proportion to the weight of its body."

These brilliant creatures are an intrepid, daring race, and extremely pugnacious, and cannot endure the approach of one even of their own species, still less of any other bird, near their breeding-places.

The nests of the humming-birds are most beautiful, compact structures, with exquisite finish and nicety of arrangement. We have seen one composed of the finest silky down, or cotton, of a delicate straw-yellow, soft, light, and compact, attached to the end of a twig, and concealed by leaves. In some cases the outside is formed of fine moss, lichens, etc., investing a compact bed of the down of plants, cotton, and even spiders' webs. These are covered on the outside with bits of lichen, leaves, moss, etc.

The forehead, throat, and upper part of the breast of Gould's humming-bird are of the most brilliant green, the feathers being of a scaly form. From the crown springs a pyramidal crest of bright chestnut colour, and capable of being raised up or depressed at pleasure. The back and upper parts are golden green, crossed upon the rump with a

whitish band. The wings and tail are brownish-purple, the latter having the centre feathers tinged with green. The sides of the neck are adorned with tufts, producing a chaste but brilliant effect; these tufts consist of narrow feathers, arranged so as to form a fan, which are of snowy whiteness, each having at its tip a spot of bright emerald-green surrounded by a darker border.

The great stronghold of the lyre-bird (*Menura superba*) is the colony of New South Wales. It inhabits equally the brushes on the coast and those that clothe the sides of the mountains in the interior; on the coast it is especially abundant at the Western Port and Illawarra; in the interior, the cedar brushes of the Liverpool range, and, according to Mr. G. Bennett, the mountains of the Tumat country, are among the places of which it is a denizen.

"Of all the birds I have ever met with, the menura is far the most shy and difficult to procure. While among the mountains I have been surrounded by these birds, pouring forth their loud and liquid calls, for days together, without being able to get a sight of them; and it was only by the most determined perseverance and extreme caution that I was enabled to effect this desirable object; which was rendered more difficult by their often frequenting the almost inaccessible and precipitous sides of gullies and ravines, covered with tangled masses of creepers and umbrageous trees; the cracking of a stick, the rolling down of a small stone, or any other noise, however slight, is sufficient to alarm it, and none but those who have traversed these rugged, hot, and suffocating brushes, can fully understand the excessive labour attendant on the pursuit of the menura.

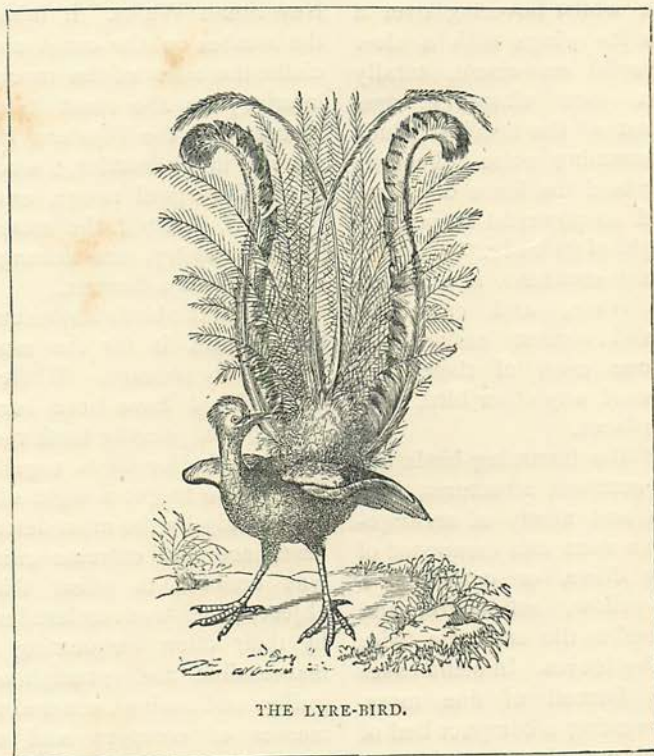
Independently of climbing over rocks and fallen trunks of trees, the sportsman has to creep and crawl beneath and among the branches with the utmost caution, taking care only to advance

when the bird's attention is occupied in singing, or in scratching up the leaves in search of food; to watch its action it is necessary to remain perfectly motionless, not venturing to move even in the slightest degree, or it vanishes from sight as if by magic.

At Illawarra it is sometimes successfully pursued by dogs trained to rush suddenly upon it, when it immediately

the apparent intrusion of another of its own sex, it will be attracted within the range of the gun.

The menura seldom, if ever, attempts to escape by flight, but easily eludes pursuit by its extraordinary power of running. None are so efficient in obtaining specimens as the naked black, whose noiseless and gliding steps enable him to steal upon it unheard or unperceived,



THE LYRE-BIRD.

leaps upon the branch of a tree, and its attention being attracted by the dog below barking, it is easily approached and shot.

Another successful mode of procuring specimens is by wearing a tail of a full-plumaged male in the hat, keeping it constantly in motion, and concealing the person among the bushes, when the attention of the bird being arrested by

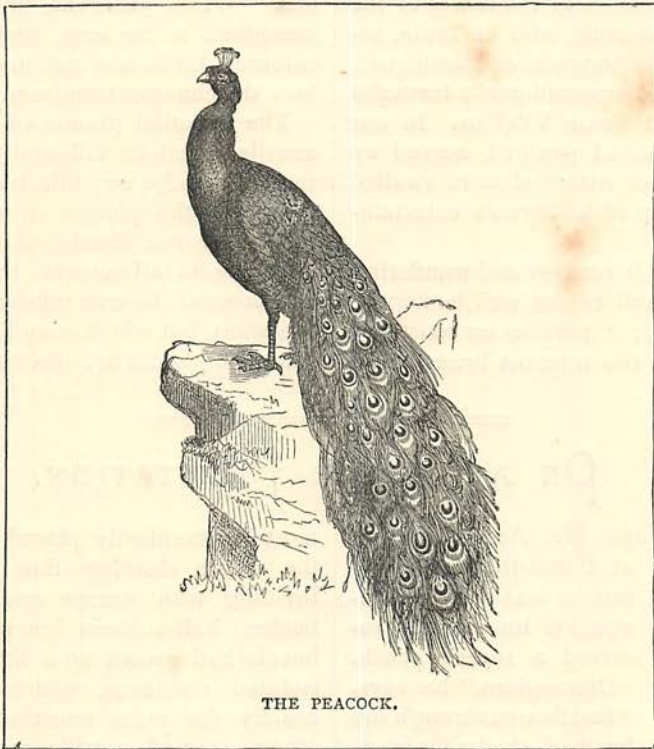
and with a gun in his hand he rarely allows it to escape, and in many instances he will even kill it with his own weapons.

The lyre-bird is of a wandering disposition; and although it probably keeps to the same brush, it is constantly engaged in traversing it from one end to the other, from the mountain base to the top of the gullies, whose steep and rugged sides present no obstacle to its

long legs and powerful muscular thighs; it is also capable of performing extraordinary leaps; and I have heard it stated that it will spring ten feet perpendicularly from the ground.

Among its many curious habits, the only one at all approaching to those of the *Gallinacæ* is that of forming small round hillocks, which are constantly visited during the day, and upon which

It may truly be said that the beauty of this bird lies in the plumage of his tail, the new feathers of which appear in February and March, but do not attain their full beauty until June: during this and the four succeeding months it is in its finest state; after this the feathers are gradually shed, to be resumed again at the period above stated."



THE PEACOCK.

the male is continually tramping, at the same time erecting and spreading out its tail in the most graceful manner, and uttering its various cries, sometimes pouring forth its natural notes, at others mocking those of other birds, and even the howling of the native dog (Dingo). The early morning and the evening are the periods when it is most animated and active.

The gorgeous peacock, which is too well known in its domesticated state to need description, is a native of India. It is common in many districts, and abounds in the jungles along the banks of the Ganges, in the forests of the Jungleterry and Baughulpore districts, and in the dense woods of the Ghauts. When taken young, it is easily domesticated, and many Hindoo temples in the Dukhun

have considerable flocks attached to them. The peafowl was known to the ancients. We find it noticed in the Scriptures as being one of the importations from India in the time of Solomon, and a forcible allusion to the splendour of its plumes is made in the Book of Job.

To the Romans it was very familiar; and indeed must have been common in Italy at an earlier period. Admired as the peacock was, its beauty did not protect it from slaughter, for it was killed to add to the delicacies of the tables of the great and luxurious; and its brain, together with the tongues of flamingoes, entered into the composition of a favourite dish of the Emperor Vitellius. In our country, a roasted peafowl, served up with the plumes attached to it, swelled the rude pomp of a baron's entertainment.

The peafowl is restless and wandering in its habits, and cannot well be kept in a small space; it perches or roosts by preference on the topmost branches of

trees, and indeed is fond of any elevated situation. It seeks its food, however, and also constructs its nest, on the ground. In its wild state it chooses a retired spot, among close brushwood, as the place of incubation, making an inartificial nest of sticks, twigs, and leaves; the eggs are from twelve to fifteen in number.

In domestication its habits are the same; indeed, domestication has effected but little alteration in these points; nor has it degenerated into numerous varieties. White peacocks, it is true, are sometimes to be seen, and imperfectly coloured birds are not uncommon, but here the changes terminate.

The beautiful plumes of this bird are usually called its tail, and by many are supposed to be so; this, however, is not the case; the plumes of the peacock, which are not developed till the third year, are its tail-coverts; they overhang and conceal the true tail-feathers, which are short, but which may be easily seen when the plumes are elevated.



ON A COFFEE PLANTATION.

WHEN Mr. Arnold arrived at Pardagherry, the estate he was to help manage, his imagination received a severe shock. "Dim notions," he says, "had floated through my head of shady fig-trees, with wide-spreading branches, and white tents under their shelter, with rows of neat native huts down by a neighbouring stream half-hidden in verdant cool foliage, with horses and cattle grazing *ad libitum*, and laughing children and noisy dogs to welcome the traveller." Instead, the first view of the settlement reminded him of nothing so much as the wild African village so often described by Stanley. "The underwood had been cut down, together with a few of the

most inconveniently placed trees, and in the rough clearing thus formed (all bristling with stumps and remains of bushes) half-a-dozen low reed-thatched hovels had grown up a little below an isolated residence, which, though of exactly the same construction as the others, seemed a trifle more carefully finished." This latter was the habitation which he was to share with the superintendent and his son "Charlie." The hut, for it was nothing better, was about thirty feet long by twelve broad, and was divided in two by a partition of Palghant mats. One half was the dining-room, and boasted of a round table, a meat-safe, two or three chairs, a safe, and "a stove with an exceedingly obtrusive chimney." The other half formed the sleeping quarters, and when a washing-