

## The Music of Birds.



AT this season of the year there is no necessity to say one word in praise of our song birds. Their notes are to be heard on every hand, in delicious profusion. Whether it is the rich warbling of the thrush and blackbird, the thrilling song of the skylark, the sweet, low voice of the wood-pigeon, or the "link'd sweetness, long drawn out," of the nightingale, there is a charm of rich variety, which is always pleasing. It is difficult to put their melody into music. The timbre of the tone cannot be actually approached by any musical instrument. Then, again, they are mostly very untrue—musically—in their singing. The thrush is

the great exception. The first three notes of his song descend in perfect seconds, with a purity of tone unsurpassable—a quality strikingly absent amongst most of the feathered songsters. They find a response (the principle of true melody) in the ascending tones immediately following.

What has been attempted here is to give an idea of the construction of the songs of the chief British birds, showing that there is a certain method in the singing, and that it is based on melodic principles. No satisfactory result will be obtained by playing them on a piano, the piano being the least realistic approach to a bird-note. But whistled "under the breath," it gives a good imitation in proper tonality.

### THE BLACKBIRD.

The blackbird's song is distinguished from that of the thrush by being pitched in a lower key, by less abruptness, and an



Blackbird

apparent want of freedom in delivery. It is the baritone among birds. The strain is, nevertheless, rich and mellow. On being disturbed, it utters a sharp, chattering, long-continued cry, which ceases when it has gained a place of safety. In captivity it can be taught to whistle a variety of tunes,

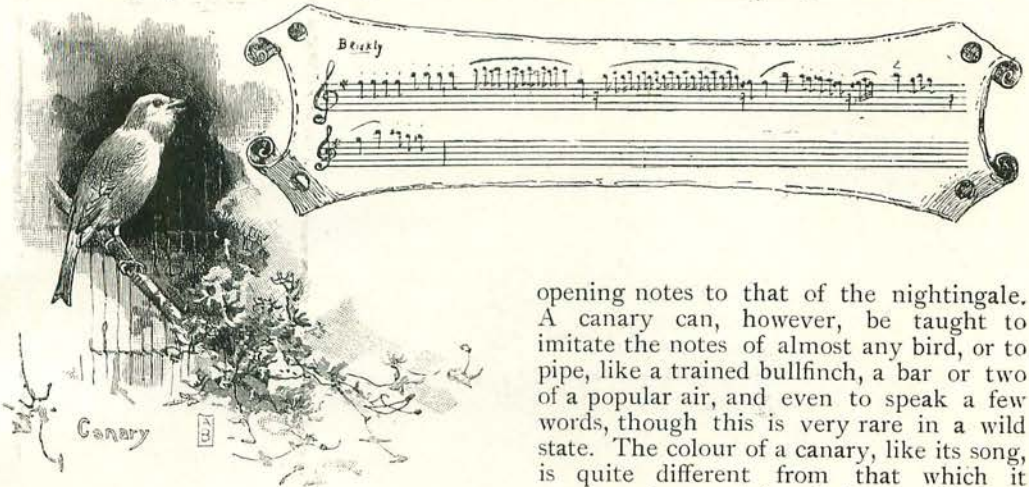
and even to imitate the human voice. It is astonishing what amount of variation of emphasis and tone it can give to the same note. Even in its native state the blackbird is something of a mimic, and will imitate the notes of other birds with remarkable accuracy, even teaching itself to crow like a cock, and to cackle like a hen.



THE CANARY.

The canary has much of the nightingale's and skylark's song. In freedom each flock has its own song. In captivity the quality varies largely, some uttering soft and

borne in mind that no caged canary sings a natural note—that is, the habitual strain of the wild race. In the illustration given can be traced a similarity of method in the



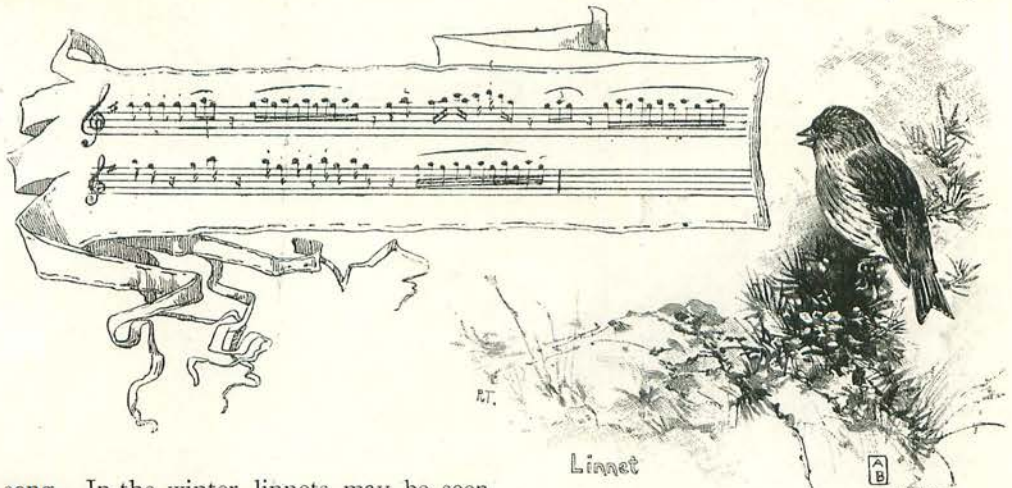
agreeable notes, and others indulging in a succession of noisy bursts. Those are most valued that introduce most passages from the song of the nightingale. It should be

opening notes to that of the nightingale. A canary can, however, be taught to imitate the notes of almost any bird, or to pipe, like a trained bullfinch, a bar or two of a popular air, and even to speak a few words, though this is very rare in a wild state. The colour of a canary, like its song, is quite different from that which it acquires in captivity, being a kind of dappled olive-green; but the bird-fanciers, by careful selection, are able to produce canaries of almost every tint between black, green, and yellow.

THE LINNET.

The linnets song is lively and varied, and no bird is so easily tamed. When confined with other birds it readily learns their

then bursting simultaneously into one general chorus, then again resuming their single strains, and once more joining in



song. In the winter linnets may be seen congregating towards the close of a fine winter evening, pluming themselves in the last rays of the sun, chirruping the commencement of their vesper song; and

chorus. In the caged linnets the strain is rapid and varied; often a prolonged extemporising most difficult to represent accurately.



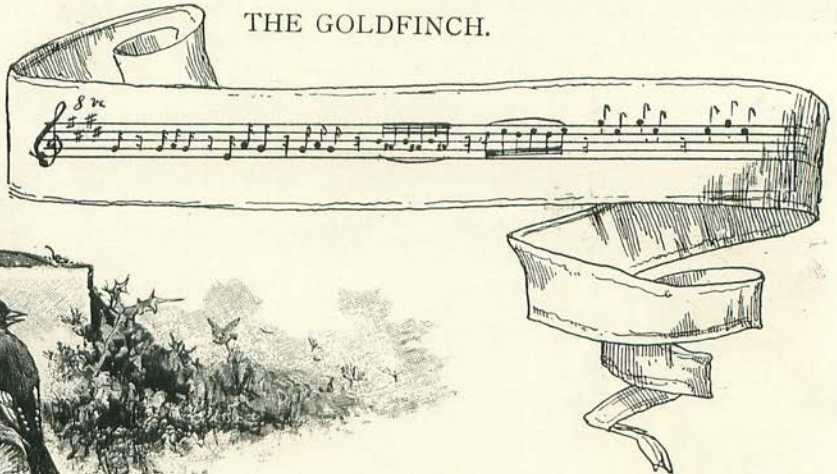
## THE SKYLARK.



The skylark, or laverock, is deservedly conspicuous among our singing birds, and is the only one that warbles while on the wing. As it leaves its ground nest and almost perpendicularly, by successive jumps, rises higher and higher, it indulges in a gush of cheerful song unequalled by any

English bird. It is a fact not generally known, that as it rises it makes a corresponding crescendo, not, however, sufficiently marked to counteract the natural diminuendo of increasing distance. Then, after passing out of sight, the bird drops as if exhausted, only to mount and sing again.

## THE GOLDFINCH.



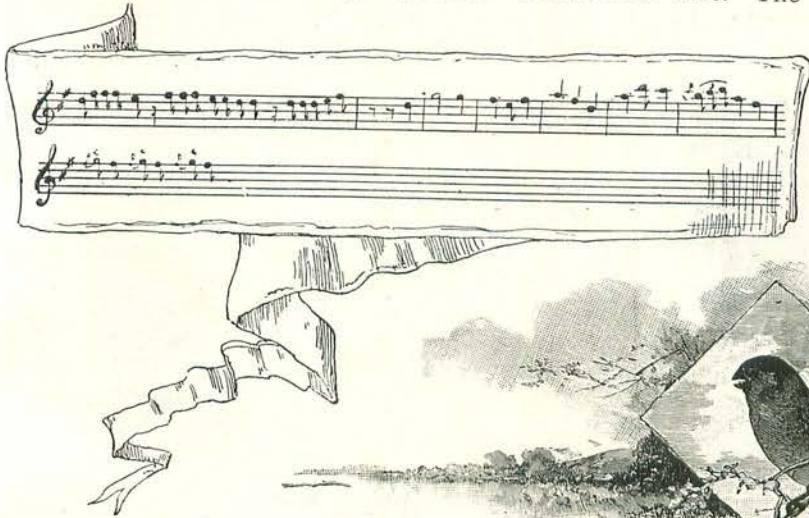
The goldfinch is a rapid singer, and can be taught to pipe like the bullfinch. It has, however, a natural song of its own, of

which an indication is here given. Goldfinches delight to sing in chorus, and there are few prettier sights than a cloud of these birds fluttering along a hedge, chasing the thistle-down as it is whirled away by the breeze, and uttering all the while their merry, sweet notes.

THE BULLFINCH.

The bullfinch in its natural state is by no means remarkable as a songster, but its and these the birds will pipe perfectly as to time and tune. The teacher keeps his

birds separate, and plays the tune to be learned on a flageolet or a bird-organ—preferably the former, as the bird-organ,



Bullfinch

power of imitation is so remarkable that it can be taught to pipe tunes with the sweetness and intonation of a clarionet. In Germany, where the finest piping bullfinches come from, boys are employed to pipe to the birds the whole day long. The consequence is that most of the bullfinches heard here pipe German airs. The two "free" tunes mostly affected in this country are "The Mousetrap" and "Polly Perkins,"

while giving a mechanical precision of note, gives also a total absence of feeling. If they are permitted to hear other birds while being taught, they are apt to jumble up foreign notes with the air which they are learning, in a most absurd manner.

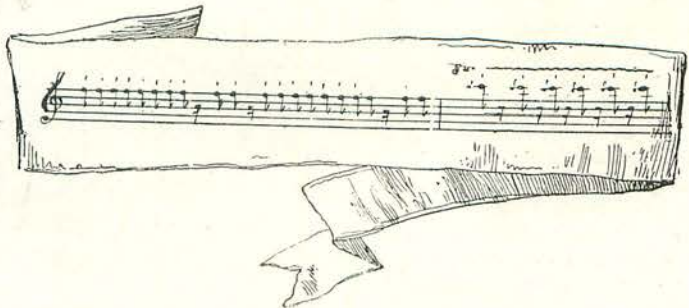
THE SPARROW.

The sparrow is by no means a contemptible songster, its strain being soft, sweet, and varied. Its lively chirp is heard from

first thing in the morning; and they often unite in a chattering chorus. It is but a note and a grace note, uttered first by one and then another; but the *ensemble* is pretty and musical.



Sparrow





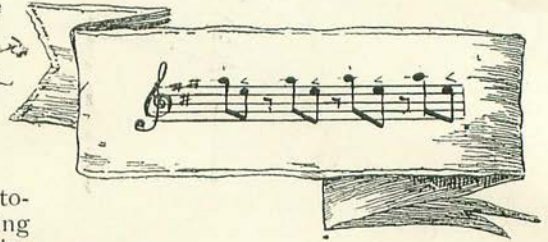
## THE CUCKOO.

The peculiar note of the cuckoo is well known, but it is not always recognised that the note changes according to the time of

been compared to the sound made by pouring water out of a narrow-necked bottle. Robert Browning, in one of his poems speaks of

"That one word  
In the minor third  
There is none but the cuckoo knows."

It will be seen, however, from the music here given, that the



year, being at first full and clear, but towards the middle of August becoming hesitating, hoarse, and broken. The voice of a female cuckoo is quite distinct from the well-known note of the male, and has

cuckoo's "one word" is not a minor third, but a major fourth.

## THE THRUSH.

The thrush, or throstle (called by the Scotch, mavis), is distinguished among British singing birds by the clearness and fulness of its note. Its song is exceedingly sweet, and wonderfully varied. Moreover, it begins earlier in the year, and continues later than any other songster, while vieing with the nightingale in the lateness of

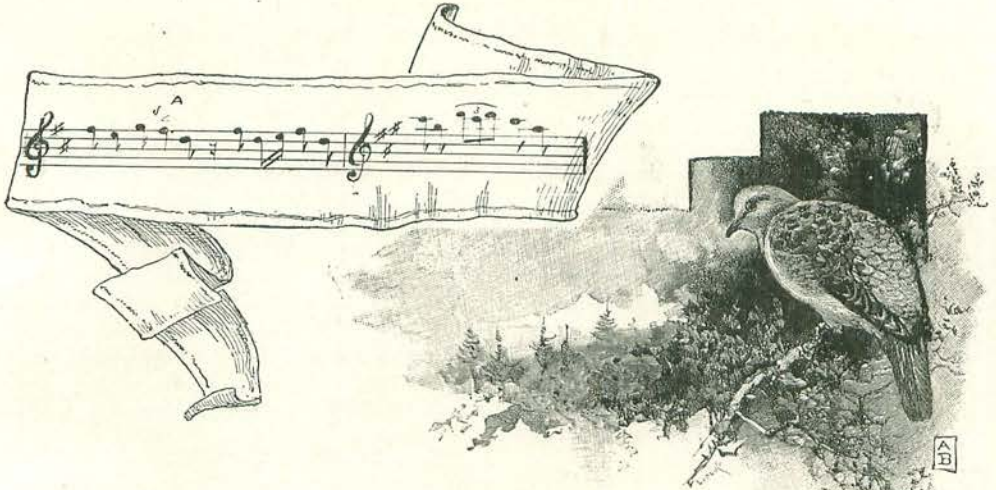
losing its liberty, generally forfeits its originality, being easily influenced by and adopting the notes of other birds, and, what is still more remarkable, their style and attitudes when singing. Thus, a thrush has been seen singing like a robin, and imitating, not only its notes, but its manner of drooping its head and tail.



its daily song. It will be found that there is much more freedom of style, as well as of originality of treatment, in the song of the wild bird than in that of the caged one; yet, in both instances, the purity of tone is, perhaps, the most remarkable feature. The caged thrush, in



THE DOVE.



DOVE

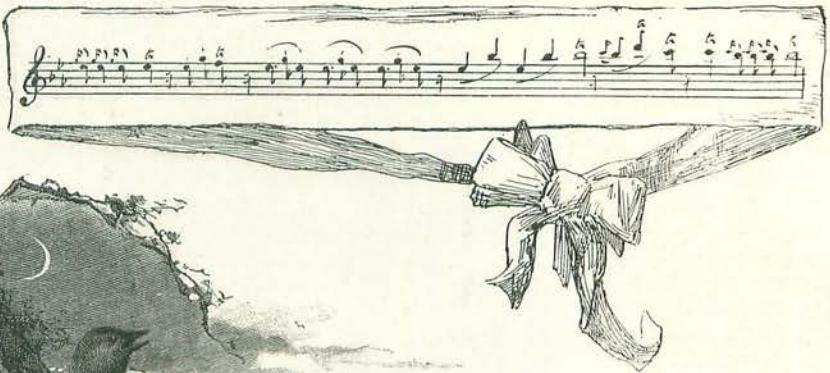
The illustration of the "coo" of the dove may not be uninteresting. It is not at all unmusical, but shows that the word generally used does little justice to the

musical sound. Its laugh—which frightens other birds—is very amusing.

THE NIGHTINGALE.

The nightingale shares with the lark the honours of poesy. Though sometimes dwelling for minutes on a strain composed of only two or three melancholy tones, beginning with a *mezza voce*, it swells gradually, by a most perfect crescendo, to the highest point

of strength, and ends with a dying cadence. Sometimes a rapid succession of brilliant sounds terminates by detached ascending notes; while, again, as many as twenty-four different strains may be reckoned in one song of a fine nightingale.



Nightingale