

brink of dissolution. Cannot the English still do something towards building it up again? At least liberty of conscience is now guaranteed it, and cannot sufficient life-blood be poured into its veins to enable it to cast off the excrescences and disfigurements of Nestorianism, Jacobitism, Jesuitism and Romanism, and to take its place in the great federation (now forming) of non-Roman, Christian Churches?

F. MEYRICK.

ART. IV.—THE BIRDS OF DANTE.

AMONG the many aspects of Dante's writings which have received attention of late years, there is one point which has not been treated with the fulness it deserves. We refer to the study of Dante's bird-life, which reveals to the student the divine poet's love of nature.

The "Commedia" is an autobiography. We see in it the life's history of the great Florentine. We recognise in its scenery "the gorges of the Alps and Apennines, and the terraces and precipices of the Riviera." Indeed, the whole idea of the poem was conceived, as Dean Church well puts it, "not under the roof-tree of the literary citizen, but when the exile had been driven out to the highways of the world, to study nature on the sea, and by the river, and on the mountain-track." And it is impossible to read the "Commedia" in the most perfunctory manner without being struck with the poet's marvellous faculty of observation. His eye is everywhere. He notices every passing phase of nature. The minutest details of natural history are taken in and made use of in the composition of his poem. The fire-flies, or perhaps glow-worms, fitting to and fro in the twilight of a summer's evening; the frogs escaping from the water-snake on to the bank, or croaking in a pool with only their heads visible; the lizard darting like a lightning-flash from hedge to hedge; the snail drawing in its horns; the dolphins arching their backs before a coming storm; the ants meeting in the way; the bees busy among the flowers—all are noted with the eye of a naturalist, and furnish the poet with some apt similitude. Or, take his picture of the sheep in the third canto of the "Purgatorio," the most perfect passage of the kind in the world, so at least Lord Macaulay thought it, the most picturesque and the most sweetly expressed. Or his description of forest scenery in the twenty-eighth canto, of which Mr. Ruskin says that "the tender lines which tell of the voices of the birds mingling with the wind, and of the leaves all turning one way before it, have been more or less copied

by every poet since Dante's time. They are," he adds, "so far as I know, the sweetest passage of wood description which exists in literature."

We find in the "Commedia" some thirty-seven ornithological allusions: of these ten occur in the "Inferno," sixteen in the "Purgatorio," and eleven in the "Paradiso." Dante mentions fourteen different species of birds, if we may reckon his reference to Christ as the mystic Pelican.

The most striking, as well as the most numerous, of Dante's bird-similitudes are those which he draws from the art of falconry. The sport was exceedingly popular in Italy and throughout Europe in the thirteenth century. The elaborate treatise of the Emperor Frederick II. is striking evidence of the favour in which it was held. That Dante was intimately acquainted with every detail of the art may be taken as beyond dispute. Some ten times he alludes to it in the "Commedia," and in a manner which marks an enthusiast in the sport. Take this picture of a falcon, unable to find its prey, and returning tired and sullen:

E'en as a falcon, long upheld in air,
Not seeing lure or bird upon the wing,
So that the falconer utters in despair:
"Alas, thou stoop'st!" fatigued descends from high,
And whirling quickly round in many a ring,
Far from his master sits—disdainfully.

Inf., xvii., Wright.

Or this, baffled by the diving of a wild-duck:

E'en thus the water-fowl, when she perceives
The falcon near, dives instant down, while he
Enraged and spent retires.

Inf., xxii., Cary.

And a few lines further on, the falcon, furious at the escape of the water-fowl, turns his talons on his comrade:

O'er the dyke
In grapple close they joined; but the other proved
A *goshawk*, able well to rend his foe,
And into the boiling lake both fell.

What species of hawk Dante intended by "sparvier grifagno" it is impossible to determine; the "goshawk" of Cary is, of course, only a guess: it seems probable that the terms *falcon* and *sparvier* were used by the poet indiscriminately. In illustration of the above passage, the following story, told by Mr. Harting, may be quoted:

"In October, 1172, Henry II. was at Pembroke, *en route* for Ireland, where, says Giraldus Cambrensis, he amused himself with the sport of hawking. He chanced to espy a noble falcon perched on a crag, and making a circuit round a rock,

he let loose upon it a large high-bred Norway hawk, which he carried on his left wrist. The falcon, though its flight was at first slower than the other bird's, having at last mounted above it, became in turn its assailant, and stooping from aloft with great fury on the Norway hawk, laid it dead at the King's feet."

In the second circle of Purgatory Dante sees the shades of the envious, clad in sackcloth, and leaning blind and helpless against the cliff:

For, through the orbs of all,
A thread of wire, impiercing, knits them up,
As for the taming of a haggard hawk. xiii. 63-5.

This method of taming a "haggard hawk," *i.e.*, a full-grown hawk taken "on passage," as distinguished from a young bird taken from the nest, was common in Dante's time, and is mentioned by the Emperor Frederick in his book on "Falconry." It was known as *seeling*, and seems to have been a custom of great antiquity. It is often alluded to by Shakespeare, as in the well-known quotation from "Antony and Cleopatra":

The wise gods seel our eyes.

This method, now happily superseded by the use of a hood, was also practised in Ceylon. Sir E. Tennant tells us that where the goshawk was trained for hawking, it was usual to "darken its eyes by means of a silken thread passed through holes in the eyelids."

It is impossible to quote all the passages in which Dante alludes to the art of falconry, but the following references may be consulted: "Inferno," iii. 112-117; "Purgatorio," xiv. 147; xix. 61-66; "Paradiso," xviii. 42; xix. 34-36. In after years Dante seems to have regarded the time spent in falconry as little better than wasted. At any rate he begins the twenty-third canto of the "Purgatorio" with the lines:

On the green leaf mine eyes were fix'd, like his
Who throws away his days in idle chase
Of the diminutive birds.

Cranes are three times mentioned in the "Commedia." In the second circle of the "Inferno" Dante sees the souls of carnal sinners driven with restless fury by the warring winds, and uttering their wailing cries:

As cranes
Chanting their dolorous notes, traverse the sky,
Stretch'd out in long array; so I beheld
Spirits, who came loud wailing, hurried on
By their dire doom. v. 46-50.

The cries of the lost reminded him of the loud clanging notes of the crane, which he had often heard, sometimes at night, as the birds on their spring migration passed overhead to their

northern breeding-places. An interesting parallel will be at once remembered in the famous lamentation of Hezekiah, where the king says, "Like a crane or a swallow, so did I chatter." The flight of cranes twice supplies Dante with a simile; once in the twenty-fourth canto of the "Purgatorio," and again in the twenty-sixth, where, strange to say, his facts are not in accordance with nature. He represents the birds as migrating in opposite directions at the same period of the year, some to the Ural mountains, and some to the deserts of Africa:

As cranes
That part towards the Riphæan mountains fly,
Part towards the Lybic sands, these to avoid
The ice and those the sun.

The error is curious as being the only instance in the "Commedia" of a bird-similitude not strictly accurate. It may be that Dante had in his mind, consciously or unconsciously, a passage from Virgil's "Georgics" (i. 240); but the more probable explanation seems to be that the sight of spirits moving in opposite directions suggested the simile, and he was not careful as to its scientific accuracy. While on the subject of the migration of birds, on which careful observation has of late years thrown so much light, it is interesting to notice the following passage from Dante's *canzone* on "Winter," which shows that the fact of migration was quite familiar to the poet. We quote from Dean Plumptre's translation:

Fled far is every bird that loves the heat
From Europe's clime, where evermore are seen
The seven bright stars that are the lords of cold;
And others cease awhile their warblings sweet,
To sound no more until the spring be green.

The stork, sacred in Europe as the robin in England, is several times mentioned by Dante. He had often seen their nests perched on the housetops, and on the towers and belfries of churches, if not in Italy, at least on his travels in Central Europe. Their habits furnish him with several similitudes. During the breeding-season they keep up an almost constant clapping with their bills. Dante had noticed this; and in the frozen circle of the "Inferno" he compares the chattering teeth of the shivering shades to the noise made by storks:

Blue-pinch'd and shrined in ice the spirits stood,
Moving their teeth in shrill note like the stork. xxxii. 34.

In the "Purgatorio" Dante likens his desire for knowledge and at the same time his timidity in questioning his guide, to that of the fledgling longing to escape from the nest, and yet fearing to leave the housetop:

E'en as the young stork lifteth up his wing
 Through wish to fly, yet ventures not to quit
 The nest, and drops it. . . .

xxv., 10-12, Cary.

While in the "Paradiso" (xix. 91-94) he notices the eager gaze of the nestlings as they look up at the parent bird :

Even as above her nest goes circling round
 The stork when she has fed her little ones,
 While they with upward eyes do look on her.

It is a moot question whether the stork nested in Italy in the thirteenth century. At the present time it seems to be of irregular occurrence, passing over the country at the spring migration, but never staying to breed there. This, however, cannot be due to climate, as it breeds freely in the parallel latitudes of Spain and Asia Minor. And it is quite certain that the stork bred in ancient Italy. In a most interesting article on "The Birds of Virgil," an Oxford tutor quotes a passage from the "Satyricon" of Petronius, which is conclusive on this point. I venture to make use of his forcible translation: "A stork, too, that welcome guest from foreign lands, with its long, thin legs and rattling bill, the bird that is banished by the winter, and announces the coming of the warm season, has made his accursed nest in my boiler." Further evidence to the same effect is furnished by the story told by Gibbon, on the authority of Jornandes and Procopius, that at the siege of Aquileia, in A.D. 452, Attila was encouraged to persist by the sight of a stork preparing to leave her nest in one of the towers, and to fly with her infant family towards the country. He seized, says Gibbon, "this trifling incident which chance had offered to superstition, and exclaimed in a loud and cheerful tone that such a domestic bird would never have abandoned her ancient seats unless those towers had been devoted to impending ruin and solitude." It is, therefore, not improbable that the stork continued to breed in Italy as late as the thirteenth century, and that Dante's descriptions were the result of local observation. In France, owing to persecution, the stork is now only a migrant; the same cause may have produced a like result in Italy.

The Latin and Greek poets have many and beautiful allusions to the swan, which was once far commoner in Europe than it is now. Dante only mentions it once. As he and Virgil are led upward to the fifth circle of "Purgatory," his eyes are caught by the splendour of the angel's wings, which "like a swan's did shine." Starlings, too, are once mentioned. In the second circle of the "Inferno" are found the souls of sensual sinners, whose punishment is—

To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world.

Whirled in the stormy blast, their movements recall to the mind of the poet the flight of starlings in winter-time, when in large flocks they sweep across the stormy sky :

As in large troops
And multitudinous, when winter reigns,
The starlings on their wings are borne abroad ;
So bears the tyrannous gust those evil souls. v. 40-3.

In the eighteenth canto of the "Paradiso" we have another simile from the flight of birds ; and again in the twenty-first canto, where the movements of the blessed are compared to those of rooks at break of day.

Dante's lines on the skylark are among the most beautiful in the "Commedia." They occur in the twentieth canto of the "Paradiso," where the souls of the righteous are represented as resting in "the sweetness of contemplating the Divine righteousness, as the lark rests on the sweetness of its own song":

Like to the lark
That warbling in the air expatiates long,
Then trilling out his last sweet melody,
Drops, satiate with the sweetness.

"All the verses that ever were written on the nightingale," says Landor, "are scarcely worth the beautiful triad of this divine poet on the lark. In the first of them do you not see the twinkling of her wings against the sky? As often as I repeat them my ear is satisfied, my heart, like hers, contented."

Another beautiful simile—in Mr. Lowell's estimation perhaps the most exquisite in all poetry—is that of doves in the fifth canto of the "Inferno." It occurs in the well-known scene where Dante, at the command of Virgil, calls on the shades of Francesca and Paolo as they are whirled along in the infernal blast to stay if possible and speak. And then—

As doves
By fond desire invited, on wide wings
And firm, to their sweet nest returning home,
Cleave the air, wafted by their will along,

the sad souls draw near. To what particular species of pigeon Dante here alludes it is impossible to speak with certainty. The description both here and in the twenty-fifth canto of the "Paradiso" would seem to point either to the ring-dove or the stock-dove. It must, however, be allowed that the passage calls to mind the famous lines in the fifth book of the "Æneid," where Virgil evidently refers to the blue-rock. And modern

naturalists assert that the ring-dove and stock-dove, so abundant in England, seldom or never breed in Italy, being only seen on the spring and autumn migrations. But from certain passages in Virgil and Pliny it seems to be beyond question that in their time one or both species habitually nested in Italy. Had this ceased to be the case in Dante's days? If so, his *colombo* is perhaps the blue-rock; though the more probable conclusion seems to be that he used the word generally, without any thought or even knowledge of the different species. Once again, in the second canto of the "Purgatorio," does Dante draw a simile from a flock of pigeons, perhaps here of wood-pigeons, feeding with their accustomed wariness in the corn-fields after harvest during the autumn migration.

Once only does Dante allude to the nightingale ("Purgatorio," xvii.), and once to the swallow ("Purgatorio," ix.), in each instance with reference to the story of Procne and Philomela. Another classical allusion may be found in the opening canto of the same poem, where reference is made to the transformation of the daughters of the King of Thessaly into magpies—"wretched birds of chattering note." In the thirteenth canto Dante puts into the mouth of Sapia, a lady of Siena, whom he finds among the envious in the second circle, the following words:

And like the blackbird, cheated by a gleam,
Cried, "It is over, Heaven; I fear thee not!"

The words, says the late Dean Plumptre, "more or less analogous to our proverb that 'One swallow does not make a summer,' imply a fable. A blackbird had found shelter in a house during winter. When a fine day came at the end of January—such days are known in Lombardy as *giorni della merla*—he began to sing out, saying to his protector, 'Now, master, I care not for thee, for the winter is past.'" The reference to Christ as "our mystic Pelican" comes under the same category of allusions. The story of the pelican feeding her young ones with her blood is of considerable antiquity, but its origin is much disputed. The mystical interpretation of the passage in Psalm cii. may have suggested the symbolism as applied to Christ. The allusions to the eagle in the "Commedia" are of course many, but they are either symbolical or classical. The bird of Jove is with Dante the symbol of Roman power, as with Ezekiel it had been of Nebuchadnezzar. The grand similitude of the starry eagle of many souls, in which splendid constellation David occupied

That part which sees and bears the sun
In mortal eagles,

need only be mentioned. The classical story of Ganymede is graphically made use of in the ninth canto of the "Purgatorio." In the limbo of the unbaptized, Dante meets the great poets of antiquity ; among them Homer—

The monarch of sublimest song,
That o'er the others like an eagle soars.

As our last picture—in Dean Plumptre's estimation perhaps the most beautiful in Dante's bird-gallery—we have reserved the exquisite description of the bird waiting for the dawn in the opening lines of the twenty-third canto of the "Paradiso." The following is Wright's translation :

E'en as the bird that resting in the nest
Of her sweet brood, the sheltering boughs among,
While all things are enwrapt in night's dark vest—
Now eager to behold the looks she loves,
And to find food for her impatient young
(Whence labour grateful to a mother proves)
Forestalls the time, high perch'd upon the spray,
And with impassion'd zeal the sun expecting,
Anxiously waiteth the first break of day.

It is quite possible that this picture may have been drawn from nature ; but, as the Dean has pointed out, interesting parallels may be found in Dante's favourite poets, Virgil and Statius.

In concluding this brief notice of the birds of Dante, which we trust may not be without interest to students of the "Commedia," we desire to express our obligation to the article, already alluded to, on "The Birds of Virgil," to Dean Church's celebrated essay, and to the suggestive notes and studies by the late Dean Plumptre in his admirable volumes on "The Commedia and Canzoniere of Dante Alighieri."

JOHN VAUGHAN.

ART. V.—THE CHURCH IN WALES.

THE Welsh Church question is just now a burning question, and it behoves those who are called upon in any way to deal practically with it to survey the situation carefully, and with due regard to the important issues that are at stake. Those who are interested in maintaining the Church in her present position should spare no pains in discovering and removing whatever may be prejudicial to that position, and all those who place the moral and religious welfare of the people above party politics and mere sectarian interests, should pause well before committing themselves to a policy the aim of which