

CYGNUS OLOR.

Mute Swan.

- Anas cygnus*, var. β , Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 38.
— *olor*, Gmel. edit. Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 501.
Cygnus gibbus, Bechst. Naturg. Deutschl., tom iv. p. 815.
— *olor*, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 563.
— *mansuetus*, Flem. Hist. of Brit. Anim., p. 126.
— *sibilus*, Pall. Zoog. Ross.-Asiat., tom ii. p. 215.
— *immutabilis*, Yarr. Proc. Zool. Soc., 1838, p. 19.

Of the members of the beautiful genus *Cygnus*, comprising among others the Whooper of Europe, the Trumpeter of America, the black-necked Swan of Chili, and the “*rara avis in terris*” of Australia, the Mute Swan is at once the most majestic, stately, and graceful of the whole. Whether it be or be not indigenous in Britain, or whether the numerous individuals which now grace her waters are the descendants of birds introduced in times gone by, is not easily ascertained; it will therefore be desirable to dispense with the doubt and deal with the subject as now presented to us. This pride of our waters has a noble bearing during the season of love, which is only equalled by the beauty of its spotless plumage and the display it makes while in company with the female. Its natural home is the water, for traversing the surface of which its body, and indeed its whole structure, is so admirably adapted that the hand of man has never been able to improve upon such a model of buoyancy, a model unequalled in this respect by any other feathered creature. On the water its movements are elegant and graceful in the extreme; on the land they are just as awkward. Its flight is laboured, and its great wings appear to battle with the wind in its progress through the air. Its voice is harsh and inharmonious, and is wanting in the softness of the notes of some of the other species.

“The Swan,” says Mr. Yarrell, “is, perhaps, of all others, the most beautiful ornament of our rivers and lakes. Poets of all ages and countries have made it the theme of their praise, but none with more characteristic expression than our own Milton, who, in his ‘Paradise Lost,’ says:—

‘The Swan with arched neck
Between her white wings mantling, proudly rows
Her state with oary feet.’

The works of the painter would often be tame and spiritless without the addition of its portraiture; kings and potentates have framed laws for its protection, an infringement of which was regarded as a felony and punished accordingly; and its flesh was considered worthy of forming a chief viand at great feasts.”

“To expatiate,” says Swainson, “upon the graceful and majestic movements of this noble bird when slowly sailing upon the water, is quite unnecessary; it may literally be said to sail upon the glassy element; for at such times its wings are gently raised and the feathers sufficiently ruffled to catch the wind and to perform the office of sails,” an attitude which appears to be peculiar to it.

“The countries inhabited by this majestic and well-known species in a wild state are the genial provinces of the continent of Europe, but more particularly the inland seas and lakes bordering upon Asia, where, according to modern travellers, it is still found in its native freedom. At what period it became domesticated is wholly uncertain; but it has for many centuries been spread over all the parts of civilized Europe; and of all the natatorial birds yet domesticated it is justly esteemed the most graceful.

“The docility and gentleness of the Swan is well known to all those who have witnessed the confiding manner in which it will receive food from the hand; but if treated with cruelty or harshness it is by no means a despicable enemy; the strength and muscular power of its wings is very great, and might endanger the fracture of a limb to those who wantonly assail it. The males at the breeding-season, like all other animals, whether docile or savage, will fight desperately, and frequently to the destruction of one of the combatants. Dr. Latham affirms that he has known full-grown boys injured by the attack of one; and he must be a powerful man who is able to withstand an encounter with an enraged male.”

The tame or Mute Swan is very numerous on the river Thames; “and,” says Latham, “they prove a delightful ornament to the whole length of that river from the point where the traffic of the metropolis ceases quite to its source. We see on the river Trent and many other waters often great numbers; but the most noble swannery is, we believe, near Abbotsbury, in Dorsetshire, where, in the open part of the Fleet, are to be seen six or seven hundred.” And the numbers do not appear to have decreased; for