

HERODIAS GARZETTA.

Little Egret.

Ardea garzetta, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 237.

—— *nivea*, S. G. Gmel. Nov. Comm. Petrop., tom. xv. p. 458. tab. 17.

Herodias garzetta, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 560.

Egretta garzetta, Swains. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 354.

Erodias garzetta, Macgill. Man. Nat. Hist., Orn., vol. ii. p. 135.

Garzetta egretta, Bonap. Tabl. de l'Ordre des Hérons, Compt. Rend. de l'Acad. Sci., 1855, tom. xl. p. 772.

To examine a neatly made skin of this immaculate Heron, or to look upon a well-mounted specimen in a cabinet, is very pleasing; but to view the bird in all its beauty my readers must visit the Little Egret in one of its native homes—a swamp or a wet and gloomy morass; for there, among the green-tinted reeds and other aquatic plants, he will see it to the greatest advantage, and be astonished at the extreme elegance and lightness of the object before him, the spotless purity of its plumage, and the gracefulness of the flowing hair-like feathers with which its back is adorned. To view all this, however, the breeding-haunts of the species must be visited; for at all other times it is simply a plain white bird, the ornamental plumes being thrown off as soon as the duty of reproduction has been performed. It is in this latter state that wanderers from their proper homes occasionally visit us. Such visits are, indeed, “few and far between,” yet they have been paid sufficiently often to obtain for the bird a place in the avifauna of our islands. It also occasionally occurs in Germany, France (Provence), Switzerland, Genoa, Sardinia, Sicily, and the Grecian Archipelago; and the Russian naturalist Hohenacher includes it among the birds of the country lying between the Caspian and Black Seas; but in the warm countries of Italy, Turkey, and Spain this fairy-like species is met with much more frequently; and in the opposite country of Algeria, and in North Africa generally, it breeds in all situations suitable for the purpose. Beyond this, its range extends throughout the whole of Africa, from north to south, all over the Nile-district, Asia Minor, Persia, India, China, Japan, Java, and Australia. If it is not as numerous in all those countries as it is in Italy, Spain, and North Africa, it certainly occurs in and is considered by all ornithologists to form part of the avifauna of each country. It is not found in America, but is represented therein by a nearly allied species, *Herodias candidissima*.

Macgillivray states it has never been met with in Scotland; Thompson, that it is of extremely rare occurrence in Ireland; and the same may be said of England, very few instances of its being killed here being mentioned by any author, though, could we give credence to the assertion that one thousand were served up at the celebrated feast of Nevil, Bishop of York, in the reign of Edward IV., it would seem to have been very numerous at that date; but, with Dr. Fleming and Mr. Selby, I suspect the bird intended must have been the Lapwing (*Vanellus cristatus*), which then, as now, is abundant with us.

However this may be, the bird has been of very unfrequent occurrence in our islands during the present century, not more than seven or eight instances being on record in the works of Yarrell and others; to these I may, however, add another, for a knowledge of which I am indebted to Lord Hotham, who kindly obtained me the following particulars from the possessor of the specimen, James Hall, Esq., of Scarborough, Beverley, in Yorkshire:—“The Little Egret in my possession is a most beautiful specimen; it was killed by a labourer with a stick, in Ake Carr, near Beverley, about 1840, and was brought to me, tied up in a pocket-handkerchief, covered with black wet mud and blood, in which state it was sent to Mr. Reed, of Doncaster, and restored by him in a most marvellous manner.”

Numerous brief notices of the Little Egret are dispersed over the various volumes of that valuable ornithological record ‘The Ibis;’ and from these I shall now proceed to cull such extracts as may appear to be interesting.

Dr. H. Giglioli, in his notes on the birds observed by him in the neighbourhood of Pisa in 1864, says “*Herodias egretta* is very rare, and I have not seen it; but the smaller *H. garzetta* is abundant, and on the 15th of April I saw a flock of ten lazily flapping over the Arno in front of our house, their snow-white plumage making a fine contrast with the dark foliage which borders the river.”

At Malta, according to Mr. C. A. Wright, the Little Egret is common in spring and autumn, when large flocks are often seen passing in company with *Ardea purpurea*.

Mr. F. Du Cane Godman saw some examples in a collection at Terceira, one of the Azores, which were said to have been killed in that island.

Lord Lilford states that the Little Egret is very common in winter on the coasts of Epirus, in which province some few remain to breed; he observed “this species on the Bajona river, and the lake of Scutari, in Albania, in great numbers in August, 1857. Those which frequent the shores of the Bay of Butrinto