CUCULUS CANORUS, Linn.

Cuckoo.

I know of no circumstance that raises such joyous emotions, that has given rise to so much speculation, or is coupled with so many pleasing associations as the arrival of the Cuckoo. The Nightingale has doubtless many charms by which to recommend itself to our notice, and has justly many admirers; but it is known comparatively to few persons, the countries and the situations it affects being very circumscribed. On the other hand, this herald of summer (for so the Cuckoo may justly be designated) is so widely spread, that there is no portion of our country but resounds with its well-known cry; from the Land's End to the outermost Hebrides, from the beautiful woods of Killarney to the Giant's Causeway, its gliding flight may be observed. The ancient Briton, the Gaul, and the Celt probably included it among their superstitions, a remnant of which, in connexion with this bird, exists among country-people to this day. The nurse and the child both stop to listen to its voice; the boy mockingly cries "Cuckoo!" as he wends his way to the village school; the southern squire and his ploughman, the Scotch laird and his gillie, alike greet it on its arrival; the Lapp turns out of his hut, and the nomad Kirghis from his tent, at the sound of its welcome note. Not being choice as to locality, the Cuckoo, immediately after arriving in April, disperses so generally, that the marsh and the mountain, the woodland district and the heathery waste, the green lane and the village garden, all seem suited to its habits and mode of life. What are these habits? I feel that I am now entering into a part of the bird's economy which distinguishes it from all others, that is fraught with the highest interest, and which is still involved in the greatest mystery. It has been the theme of the naturalist, from the days of Aristotle to the present time; still, after the lapse of so many centuries, and notwithstanding the close attention which has been paid to the habits and economy of the bird, many points connected therewith remain as obscure as ever. To say that the Cuckoo is a parasite, and that it confides its eggs to the care of various little birds who hatch them and bring up its young, would be merely a repetition of what is universally known, while the why and the wherefore, and the mode by which the eggs are deposited, we can none of us understand; nor are we any wiser with regard to the instinctive power which enables it to find the nests best suited to its purpose, or the fascination which it exerts over the whole of the smaller kinds of birds. All these features in the habits of the Cuckoo have occasioned me much thought and patient research, without my arriving at any satisfactory conclusions. To give all the details that have been published on the subject, from Gilbert White to the last number of the 'Zoologist,' would occupy too large a space; I shall therefore content myself with giving my own observations, and a few extracts from the writings of others which may seem to be of the greatest interest.

If we exclude from the European list of birds that accidental visitor the Oxylophus glandarius, our fauna will be adorned with but a single species of a very extensive family, comprising many diversified forms, and distributed over almost every part of the Old and New World, including the islands. Nearly all the various forms of the Cuculidæ of the Old World, from the huge Australian Scythrops to the diminutive Chalcites, are parasitic, and entirely depend upon other birds for the fostering of their young. The Scythrops is said sometimes to lay its egg in the nest of the Piping Crow (Gymnorhina tibicen), and I have known many instances of the eggs of Chalcites being deposited in the dome-shaped nests of the Maluri. Our well-known European bird evinces a preference for those of the Wagtail, the Titlark, the Black-headed Bunting, and the Reed-Wren; and thus the migratory as well as the stationary, the hard- as well as the soft-billed species are alike called upon to take their part in nurturing the offspring of another bird. Nor do either fail to answer to the demand made upon them—a demand which seems the more unnatural, since it leads to the destruction of their own young

The influence exercised by the Cuckoo over the smaller birds is one of the most inexplicable things in nature. No sooner does it arrive on our shores, than it is followed by a string of Swallows and other small birds; and when it alights or descends to the ground, these little followers settle in close proximity, and do not rise until the Cuckoo again takes wing. In heathy and open moorlands the same inquisitive attention is carried on by the Titlarks, the Buntings, and the Linnets. On the willowy aits of our beautiful Thames, it is the Sedge-Warbler and the Reed-Wren which are raised to consequence by being selected to perform the important office of fosterparent to so grand and mysterious a creature as a young Cuckoo; in the gardens it is the Wagtail, the Robin, and the Wren. Mr. Smither, of Churt in Surrey, informs me