ERYTHACUS RUBECULA.

Robin, or Redbreast.

Motacilla rubecula, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 95.

Sylvia rubecula, Lath. Ind. Orn., vol. ii. p. 520.

Curruca rubecula, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 25.

Erithacus rubecula, Macgill. Hist. of Brit. Birds, vol. ii. p. 223.

Erythaca rubecula, Swains. Faun. Bor.-Am., vol. ii. p. 488.

Dandalus pinetorum et foliorum, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 360.

—— septentrionalis, Brehm, ib., p. 351, tab. 21. fig. 3.

—— rubecula, Boie, Isis, 1826, p. 972.

Ficedula rubecula, Boie, Isis, 1822, p. 553.

Lusciola (Erythacus) rubecula, Keys. & Blas. Wirbelth. Eur., p. 58.

Lusciola rubecula, Schleg. Rev. Crit. des Ois. d'Eur., p. 32.

Rubecula rubecula, Brehm, Isis, 1828, p. 1280.

Or all the birds inhabiting our islands the Robin is the one most universally known, and the one which receives protection from every hand. The villager in his garden regards its presence with favour, and the lady in her greenhouse likes to see it hop before her from flower-stem to flower-stem. Its name is a hallowed one in our memories, from the pleasing associations imprinted thereon by the nursery rhymes and tales of our infancy. "Who killed Cock Robin?" and the "Babes in the Wood" are never forgotten.

The universal acquaintance with the Robin is mainly due to its general distribution; for there is no bird that is more widely spread, or that frequents such varied situations. The garden, the shrubbery, the neatly mown lawn, the hedgerow, the green lane, the gully, and the centre of the most extensive woods are alike resorted to by this familiar bird. In each and all of these situations, he evinces no fear and no excitement at the approach of intruders; his curiosity is soon appeased; and if a picnic luncheon be spread, he hops from his twig for a crumb, or waits to take his turn of the spoils after the party has left. The presence of dogs gives him no uneasiness, and the strangeness of the scene excites but little surprise. Always alone and always quiet (for the silkiness of his plumage renders his movements noiseless, and the rustling of his wings is never heard—any more than his tread on the earth, over which he bounds with amazing sprightliness), but little difference is seen in the manner of the bird in the wood from that of the one which, having become the familiar pet of the garden, has been allowed to enter the breakfast-room for his share of the meal, or has been fed in company with the Sparrow, on the snow in the midst of winter. Is it not, then, evident that in disposition, habits, and economy the Robin differs very considerably from other birds? Compare it for a moment with the gregarious Sparrow, or, if you will, with the Wheatear, the Whin-, or the Stone-chat (birds to which it is more nearly allied), and it will be seen that they have scarcely one trait in common. The Robin has no associates, not even of its own kind, the company of the female not being tolerated except in the breeding-season. Every Robin has a limited area over which it reigns supreme, until a stronger one either kills or drives it away and takes its place; and its general conduct towards other birds is that of a tyrant rather than a friend. Pugnacity is indeed one of the remarkable features of its disposition. The Robin not only fights with its own species but tilts with the Sparrow and every other bird over which, by activity and daring, it can gain mastery. Even its own young are not allowed to live peaceably, but are beaten off as soon as they are able to shift for themselves, and compelled to begin the world on their own account.

The foregoing characteristics of the Robin are not, however, sufficient to account for its being so great a favourite. He is clearly not a courtier; for he is as much at home with the poor as with the rich, equally at ease on the settle where sits the old man of the village and in the verandah of a palace, and will receive contributions from the tenants of both without regard to rank or distinction. Not even his bright bold eye or his showy breast can claim so much admiration or call forth the many poetic effusions of which he is the theme. What, then, is it that renders the Robin so popular? It is the pleasing character of his song, and the charm which it gives to solitude at the fall of the leaf—a song which increases in sweetness and intensity as the day wanes towards the end of autumn; even in winter, if the weather be open, its clear and sharply terminated strain may be heard both in the morning and the evening. At the period of the year's decadence all other birds are mute; and hence, having no competitor, his voice attracts exclusive attention, and his strain, tinged with melancholy, harmonizes with the wintery scene around, and seems, as it were, to foreshadow the close that awaits us all.

The food of the Robin principally consists of insects, to which worms, caterpillars, and a fair share of