PARUS MAJOR, *Linn.*

Great Tit.

Parus major, Linn. Faun. Suec., p. 96.
—— *fringillago*, Pall. Zoog. Ross.-Asiat., tom. i. p. 555.
—— *robustus*, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 461.

The *Parus major* is the largest species of Tit inhabiting the British Islands, and is so generally dispersed over all parts of the three Kingdoms that it must be regarded as indigenous and very common everywhere therein. On the continent of Europe it appears to be as universally spread as with us; for if we look into Magnus von Wright's 'Birds of Finland,' Bailly's 'Ornithology of Savoy,' Loche's 'List of the Birds of Algeria,' Salvin's 'Five Months' Birds'-nesting in the Eastern Atlas,' or Tristram's 'List of the Birds observed in Palestine,' we find it enumerated in every one of them; the late Mr. John Wolley obtained a specimen at Muoniovara, in Swedish Lapland; and I have a skin from Erzeroum, in Persia. Still these wide-spread localities must be regarded as the outer circle of its range of habitat; for I have never seen an example from any country south of the Equator in Africa, or to the eastward of Persia; it certainly is not found in India; at least I have never seen specimens even from the western parts of that country, where it would occur if at all; and it is scarcely necessary to say that it does not inhabit America, neither has it any immediate representative therein, as it has in the Himalayas and China, countries abounding in species very similar to it in structure, size, and colour, among which I may mention *Parus minor*, *P. monticolus*, and the three crested species figured in my 'Birds of Asia' as *P. xanthogenys*, *P. spilonotus*, and *P. jerdoni*.

That the Great Tit is a spirited, cheerful, sprightly bird is known to every person who has lived in the country, all of whom must have observed its richly-coloured tints as it pried about their gardens, and have heard its loud, metallic, ringing voice while walking in the wood or beside the coppice-hedge. Some people liken the spring notes of the bird to the sharpening of a saw, while others state that it resembles the words "sit-ye-down," "ox-eye," &c. The truth is, that sounds uttered by birds strike the ear so differently that what would be music to one person is discordance to another. Many of my readers have doubtless sauntered quietly and alone through the woods during the stillnesss of a hot summer's day, or have waited by the coppice-side for the approach of the beaters during the autumnal season of sport. If they have, they must frequently have heard a little tapping noise overhead, or at a short distance among the trees, and may have supposed it to be the sound made by the Woodpecker or the Nuthatch. But it does not always proceed from the latter, and very seldom from the former; it is mostly made by the Great Tit hammering away to obtain the kernel of a nut it has placed in a chink, or a stone of the wild cherry which it holds firmly within its claws with the same end and object—to secure the contents within. Many sounds not universally known are heard in the stillness of the forest; and the tapping of the Great Tit is one of them. The Rev. Mr. Morris gives it as his opinion that "the provincial name of 'Oxe-eye' given to this species has no reference to a derivation from 'glaucopis Athene,' but has been assigned to it from its note, which in the spring resembles this word often repeated—a low and high note in succession; and it has also, in addition to a chatter, another which resembles the word 'twink.' I know no bird whose voice, though monotonous, is more cheerful and exhilarating in connexion with the returning spring. It begins its merry 'Ox-eye, ox-eye, ox-eye,' about the beginning of March, and continues it till the beginning of May." "It has, however," says Mr. Thompson, "been heard as early as the 23rd and 24th of December, the 5th and the end of January, when at the latter date there was ice an inch thick on the ponds. It is so loud that it may be heard at the distance of half a mile."

In many respects the actions and habits of the Great Tit offer a striking resemblance to those of the Jay—a fact which has been noticed by most writers; and so strongly are some persons impressed thereby that the sight of one vividly calls to mind the other. The activity which both birds display among the branches of the trees, the peculiar carriage of the tail, their prying inquisitive manners, the retraction of the head, their mode of feeding, and the nature of the substances upon which they subsist are strikingly alike. Their alliance, however, is more fanciful than real; for the colouring of their plumage, their size, and the number and colour of their eggs are very different.

The Great Tit is said to be no friend to the gardener, and is charged with destroying the buds of trees and with picking holes in the ripening fruit. I believe the first of these accusations to be untrue, and that, unlike the Bullfinch, which really does eat the buds of trees, the Great Tit attacks those only that are infested with insects and their larvæ, and consequently does effect an incomparable amount of good. With regard to its other propensities, that of killing bees &c., I must be silent, if I wish, as