

INTRODUCTION.

IN the olden time when the wolf and the wild boar roamed over the primitive forests of Great Britain, when the beaver held its own in our silent and undisturbed streams and lakes, when the red deer followed our mountain-tracks in all the vigour of its pristine condition, when our marshes and great sedge-covered watery wastes were yearly visited by the Crane and the Spoonbill, the earliest dawn of natural history which was to herald the light of future ages had not yet broken upon the untutored Celt, who alone shared with those animals the possession of our islands. With the progress of civilization that obscurity has been gradually dispelled; and, happily for our country, from the time when Gilbert White wrote his charming account of Selborne, the study of natural history, more particularly with reference to our native birds, has gradually increased, until its pleasures have become widely known to both young and old. The talented Bewick rendered the subject still further attractive by his inimitable and truthful drawings; then followed in the same path Selby, Macgillivray, Thompson, and Yarrell, whose writings have made this branch of science so popular that it now engrosses the minds of thousands. Of the truth of this statement ample evidence is afforded by the numerous works (both great and small) which have been recently published, by the many local faunas which have lately appeared, and by the establishment of naturalists' clubs and associations in many parts of the country. Such has been the impetus given by these means to the study of natural history that it will scarcely be presumptuous in me to foretell that a period is not far distant when our native birds will be far more familiarly known to the people than they now are. For, although it may appear surprising to many of my readers, I assert that at the present time there are but few persons who could enumerate by name even a fourth part of the birds by which we are surrounded. Country people are familiar enough with the call of the Wryneck, the voice of the Cuckoo, and the crake of the Landrail; but few, very few, would recognize those birds if placed before them. Will it not, then, be well to encourage the formation