



The interior of the Abbey church, London.

RC. 45. 60
IMPERIAL LONDON

BY
ARTHUR H. BEAVAN

AUTHOR OF
'MARLBOROUGH HOUSE AND ITS OCCUPANTS,' 'POPULAR ROYALTY,'
'JAMES AND HORACE SMITH,' ETC.

WITH SIXTY ILLUSTRATIONS BY
HANSLIP FLETCHER



"That great Babylon, that mighty city"

LONDON: J. M. DENT & Co.
NEW YORK: E. P. DUTTON & Coy.

1901



IMPERIAL LONDON

account of the palms in Kew Gardens, it is stated that the majority are natives of the tropics, and therefore require a high temperature for their cultivation. The greater number are natives of the New World. A few are found in extra-tropical countries, and to these the gardens of Southern Europe owe much of their striking character and beauty. In this country, of course, they require the protection of glass.

The number of palms catalogued at Kew is over 400, probably the largest assemblage of species of the order to be found in any one place in the world. In 1820 the palms occupied a "lean-to house called the Palm House, only 50 feet long, 16 feet wide, and 15 feet high at the back." In 1828, to accommodate the increasing size of the specimens, the house was enlarged. The present building was completed in 1848, from the designs of Decimus Burton, Esq. The length of the structure is 362 feet; its width in the centre 100 feet, and height 66 feet; the wings are 50 feet wide and 30 feet high.

Palms in cultivation are slow in developing the full size of their crowns. But when once this stage is achieved, the upward growth of the stem is rapid; and in time the dome of the Palm House is unable to accommodate their height, and it is then necessary to cut them down and replace them; a vast pity, as the roof could easily be raised.

If, in the recent census, the children of London had been asked to record their favourite pleasure-resort, they would probably have unanimously selected the Zoo, a choice that would have been endorsed by a great number of their elders. It never fails to win popularity, and last Easter Monday, out of the five chief places of public resort—the Crystal Palace, the Tower, the Natural History Museum, and the Victoria and Albert Museum—it alone showed an increase in the number of visitors. From its situation on the northern border of Regent's Park, the Zoo is somewhat difficult of access from the greater part of London, involving long railway, or tiresome omnibus journeys. But despite

PICTURESQUE, BOTANICAL, ZOOLOGICAL LONDON

this, almost everybody contrives to visit the place at least once a year, and many children can hardly remember the time when they were not familiar with the elephants, and with the monkey-house, the latter being especially attractive to children.

In any other country, such a magnificent collection of living creatures would be officially maintained; but our Zoo is "run" most successfully and efficiently by a private society, founded in 1826 "for the general advance of zoological science," its offices being in Hanover Square. The grounds, about forty acres in extent, have become too restricted for any up-to-date development of the Society's objects, and it has been said that to give the desirable space for all the animals, at least a quarter of the adjoining park should be incorporated with the Gardens. The average number of animals in the collection is 3000, of which about one-half are birds, and a census is regularly taken at Christmas, but the number is always varying through fresh arrivals and deaths.

Housekeeping on a liberal scale is necessary to keep this big family in health and comfort. For the carnivora alone, a horse is killed every morning, representing about 142 tons of cut-up meat a year, and for the more fastidious of the flesh-eaters, four goats a week are required. For the hawks and other smaller animals, the heads and waste parts of no fewer than 9500 chickens are used per annum. The greengrocer's bill is a prodigious one. Under the heading of "greens," the tortoises and deer put away annually close upon 8000 bunches; of carrots, the smaller rodents use up 1250 bundles, and 113 cwt. in sacks; of watercress, 2000 parcels; 7000 lettuces, and a few wagon-loads of vegetable-marrows and melons. Fish is a very heavy item, no less than 41,400 lbs. being required; while of milk some 7000 quarts are used per annum; and of eggs, about 500 a week.

So large a number of living creatures require many attendants; the staff, all told, numbering over 100 men. Many of the animals are very costly; for instance, the Society paid £1000 for one giraffe; but the income from all sources is good, £700 per annum

being brought into the exchequer simply by the fees paid for riding on the elephants.

An interesting feature of the Zoo is the nursing of the "invalids," and the performing of "operations." Luckily there are few cases of illness among the animals, their health being really excellent, but the remedies for ailments are rather drastic. Some years ago, a rhinoceros appeared very poorly, and a few gallons of soap-suds had to be given him, but as this seemed to depress him, his spirits were revived by a bottle of whisky in plenty of water. Surgery has seldom to be resorted to. Occasionally a tooth has to be extracted, which operation, in the case of so bulky a creature as the hippopotamus, is a tough job. Periodically, the lions' and tigers' claws have to be cut. This is done by lassoing the animal, pulling it towards the bars, where each foot is securely strapped, and then by means of specially-made pincers the necessary clipping takes place. The animals fight desperately and roar with all their force, but the cutting must be done, because in captivity the claws grow too long and enter the flesh.

Additions by purchase or by gift are constantly being made to the Zoo. The gifts are from all classes, from Royalty downwards; the latest notable present being in April last, when the King presented the Society with some of the rare wild animals and birds sent to the late Queen by Royal donors and others. Among them is the beautiful zebra (the gift of King Menelik of Abyssinia), fifteen hands high, and the only specimen of its kind in England. The other Royal presents included two Australian kangaroos, two fine South African ostriches, a couple of Spanish cattle, and an American bison. The bison, however, came to an untimely end, for during the necessary preparations for its removal from Windsor, it suddenly fell down and expired.

The decease of well-known animals in the Zoo is always recorded with befitting gravity in the daily papers; for instance, when the monster python, twenty feet long, one of the oldest inmates of the reptile-house, died, a long paragraph was devoted to

the event; when the polar bear lost his mate a year or two ago, the public regret was duly voiced by the Press; and visitors to the Zoo were inconsolable when they learnt through the *Daily Telegraph* that their favourite "Daisy," the gifted chimpanzee, had succumbed to cold and foggy weather, despite every possible care and attention. "Daisy" was docile and clever to a degree. She would open a pocket-knife, cut an apple into four parts, and when requested to give the largest—or smallest—piece to one of its admirers, would do so without hesitation.

All tastes in the natural history of birds and beasts can be satisfied at the Zoo. For lovers of birds, there are the splendid aviaries, and the wading-birds in open-air cages. Admirers of quadrupeds find in contemplating the lion-house, the elephants', hippopotamuses', and giraffes' chalets, the bear-pits, the monkey-houses, the splendid house for the reptilia, the sheds for marsupials, and the new pavilion occupied by interesting but deafening parrots, enough for a week's enjoyment. Entomologists can, in the curious insectarium, pursue their favourite study with the advantage of having living specimens before them; while the aquarium, or fish-house, though on a small scale, is one of the most perfect of its kind in England.

There are two kinds of bird-life in London; one consisting of wild birds that come and go at their own sweet will and pleasure; the other, of tame water-fowl on the park lakes. Both are interesting to the ornithologist, the wild birds especially, for one does not expect to meet with them in a great city. Yet London is a very paradise for many of the shy and retiring denizens of field and coppice.

Most prominent of town birds are the sparrows that seem to have monopolized London for generations past, to a degree that I believe is unknown in other British cities. They are to be seen everywhere, and throughout the year, and no edifice is secure from their nest-building operations, remarkable for bulk rather than neatness. London sparrows are much-maligned creatures, looked

down upon as "radically plebeian," and ignored for their supposed homeliness and the "sootiness" of their plumage. They do not merit this lack of appreciation. Should a bird be despised that is sacred to Venus Aphrodite, and the subject of verse?—

"Ye cupids, close your silky wings,
Drop from your heads the festive curl;
Let freely flow the lucid pearl
That from the heart of sorrow springs;
My Lesbia's bird no longer sings;
He's gone, the favourite of my girl!"

True he is sociable and fond of company, highly domesticated, an admirable husband, and a devoted parent; he is also a radical and no respecter of rank and fashion, but these qualities do not make him a plebeian. His plumage, if examined downwards, is always attractive, and in spring is an effective and glossy "arrangement" of deep chestnut-brown, grey, and black; while as to "sootiness" he is for ever dusting himself or bathing, even in the depth of winter, and is as clean as any other bird. As an advocate of equality and of representative government, he likes to make himself heard in public, and thus have originated what are called Sparrow Parliaments, held in certain localities.

In the churchyard of St. Dunstan's-in-the-East is a large plane-tree, whose branches towards evening are laden with sparrows, each endeavouring to talk down the other. The noise is tremendous, but as darkness descends, or some Speaker calls the assembly to order, there is dead silence, not broken until the following morning. Other smaller parliaments—borough councils we may suppose—can be seen and heard in various places; one in a tree in Church Street, Chelsea, west side; a small one in a holly tree in the grounds of St. Mark's College, King's Road, Chelsea; another in a couple of trees at the side of the High Road, Kilburn; and one in the garden of the Observatory House, Honor Oak, packed every evening.

Wary as London sparrows are, they become wonderfully fearless

when once they are sure; and even street-boys have learned to welcome rather than to molest them. They can be seen even in crowded Seven Dials sitting quite unconcerned in the road, looking at a distance like stones that might be kicked; but near cab-stands, particularly the large one in Piccadilly, where hundreds of perfectly tame sparrows congregate along the railings for nearly a quarter of a mile, or in the parks, in Lincoln's Inn Fields, the Law Courts, Temple Gardens, the British Museum, etc., they almost let one touch them with the hand.

Next in tameness to the sparrow are the pigeons that have colonized every suitable portion of our chief buildings:—the Custom House; the London Institute, Finsbury Circus; the Royal Exchange; St. Paul's Cathedral, nesting in the north side; the Guildhall; the British Museum, where they roost amidst the allegorical figures on the tympanum of the pediment; Palace Yard, Westminster, nesting on the north side of the Abbey, and outside Poets' Corner; Charing Cross and other railway-stations; the National Gallery and the Nelson Column; Somerset House; the Law Courts; and the Temple, where they muster some four hundred strong (not counting casual visitors from the Law Courts who are dropping in and out all day); they are tucked away in cosy nooks and under wonderful old eaves, where you may see them casting a curious, bright eye upon the busy world beneath. There must be some thousands of pigeons in London calling no man their master, and no place their home. These ownerless, semi-domesticated pigeons are probably descendants of "blue rock," crossed with ordinary tame birds that have strayed away, and must not be confounded with the park ring-doves, popularly known as wood-pigeons.

In these places referred to, one sees all day long the pigeons being fed, often too lazy or indifferent to get out of one's way. Greedy they are to an alarming extent, and if sharing any favourite food with the sparrows, say at a cab-stand,

the pigeons are certain to be the last to rise and escape any threatened danger.

Bigger, and of a different kind, are the ring-doves now so plentiful in Hyde Park, Kensington Gardens, and St. James' Park, where they nest, and where they seem to be thoroughly at home. Though the shyest and most unapproachable of birds in their native woods, they come to be fed on the lawns in flocks, and appear to have lost every trace of fear; and one of the prettiest sights is the assemblage of these pigeons in the dip by the Hyde Park cascade near Albert Gate, and while sympathetic children assiduously feed them and wonder at the iridescent jewel in their gleaming collars, it is interesting to note the frantic efforts made by these feathered individuals to swallow crusts much too large for birds twice their size.

Another kind of wild bird has of late established itself in astonishing numbers in London, though only as daily residents. These are the sea-gulls that have taken to journey from the saltings at the mouth of the Thames—an easy flight for them—to settle down in the river and in St. James' Park lake, where in severe weather they will actually snatch a sprat if offered to them, out of the hand. This excursion to town appears to have originated with the cold snap of 1895, when flocks of frozen-out and destitute gulls took up temporary quarters in London, singling out Westminster Bridge as a good "pitch," where they received the doles willingly bestowed upon them. In the following year they again made their appearance upon and about the Metropolitan waters, and I am inclined to believe that they did so, not so much as harbingers of a coming severe winter, as out of gratitude for the kindly reception they had previously met with, for birds have excellent memories of human kindness, and are keenly and sensitively watchful for its signs and tokens, and eager to profit by them. During the north-east gales that prevailed at the close of last year, an extraordinary sight could be witnessed on the ornamental water of St. James' Park. Hundreds and hundreds of tern and gulls (chiefly black-headed), kittiwakes,

a few herring-gulls and lesser black-backed gulls, appropriated the area reserved for the water-fowl. It was blowing half a gale, and a miniature sea resulted, so this multitude of wild gulls settled down in the midst of London without a particle of fear, riding head to wind in the most nautical fashion; but their presence so disturbed the regular tenants of the park waters, that they vacated the precincts, and retired disgusted to the bank. Some of the Thames gulls, being well fed at the park, and finding sustenance about the bridges, settled down inland for the winter, and every evening great flights might be seen making their way across the reaches of the Thames, towards Richmond, in detachments of from ten to two hundred.

Starlings are present in London nearly all the year round in greater numbers than would be imagined, and seem to be as much at home as the sparrows. Most church towers have communities of them. They build regularly, and only when autumn comes do they leave town temporarily for the open country, gathering together like swallows in large flocks. They also nest in any convenient hole in ordinary dwelling-houses where bricks have been removed, and are perfectly at their ease, even running up to the back doors to pick up food that is thrown out to them. Starlings appear to excite the jealousy of sparrows to a remarkable extent, and writs of ejection are constantly being served by the latter, relating to tenements whose possession is in dispute. The sparrow is apparently envious of the vocal powers—such as they are—of his brother bird, and perhaps he covets his beautiful colouring, and envies his power of floating gracefully with motionless wings when about to alight. In St. James' Park, many starlings, evidently not householders, come to roost with much chattering in the evergreen oak-trees. Most of the London parks, gardens, and cemeteries, where there is ample cover, conceal robins and black-birds, and occasionally the thrush may be heard singing, reminding us of Keats' lines—

IMPERIAL LONDON

"O fret not after knowledge; I have none,
And yet my song comes native with the warmth;
O fret not after knowledge; I have none,
And yet the evening listens."

Less familiar birds than these have been seen or heard, and have even roosted in the parks. There are records of blackcaps, and even of nightingales, blue-tits and cole-tits, bramble-finches, sedge-warblers, chiff-chaffs, wrens, crested wrens, chaffinches, redstarts, redpoles, and kingfishers, while swallows and swifts are common enough hawking over the water or flying at top speed, the latter shrieking in mid-air.

Rooks have largely deserted London. A few nests are kept up here and there, more as a matter of form than anything else; but in the outlying suburbs—Richmond, Wimbledon, Roehampton, Streatham, Greenwich, Finchley—there are some fine rookeries left.

In Kensington Gardens the show of peacocks is magnificent. In hot weather they are fond of lying about the lawns that border the Serpentine. Their blue heads and necks rise snake-like from the reeds, the tail and body completely hidden, or they stretch themselves out flat on the warm grass, their trains outspread and glittering in the sunlight like the gorgeous skirts of some grandly-dressed dame at a Royal garden-party.

All our parks have collections of tame water-fowl, but the most perfect and notable for variety and numbers is that in St. James' Park, where a portion of the lake is strictly reserved for them. The care of this valuable collection devolves upon the Government; and the Swiss cottage of the ex-Ornithological Society is the residence of the bird-keeper (as he is officially termed), who looks after the well-being of the large feathered family which literally surrounds him. On the little tree-covered peninsula, where his pretty chalet stands hidden from public gaze, some of the shyest of wild-fowl in existence regularly breed within hearing of the ceaseless traffic of mid-London.

PICTURESQUE, BOTANICAL, ZOOLOGICAL LONDON

Close to the chalet is a weeping-willow, and in spring, the keeper, who shows one round, will probably draw attention to something that looks like a bunch of drifting weed caught by the branches that dip into the lake. Presently, a dabchick in a violent hurry paddles up, and disappears; then another appears, and likewise vanishes. In a minute or two, the pair rise to the surface some distance off, trying to make believe that they are in no way concerned with the construction of the curious nest moored to the willow.

In the middle of a piece of water reserved for his accommodation sits a cormorant in full spring plumage of resplendent glossy bronze-green, his wings outstretched, displaying the white oval spot on his thigh, seen only at the nesting season. He jealously watches over his more sober-coloured mate, as she sits, without trace of nervousness, on a nest of sticks, plentiful enough to fill a wheelbarrow. He is not a favourite here, because of his propensity for swallowing young ducks at a gulp whenever he can get a chance. So he and his wife are kept in dignified seclusion.

On a rock, in the middle of the water-fowl's portion of the lake, usually sits when he is not vainly fishing, a pelican, and re-arranges his toilet (his wife was unfortunately killed by an irate swan last year). When paddling about, dipping his monstrous pouched beak into the water, he is a strange-looking object to those ignorant of wild-bird life, however well they may be acquainted with his species in the Zoo.

Like sentinels, watchful storks strut about outside the cormorant enclosure, and sundry herons stand "at attention," waiting for the evening to fall before they try their luck at fishing, an utterly hopeless task, there being nothing in the lake to catch!

Some of the most beautiful tenants in St. James' Park lake are the tame gulls, whether flying in graceful curves above it, head to wind, at anchor on its surface, or standing on its margin chattering like so many querulous children. The silver-grey herring-gull

and the slender black-headed gull are permanent residents, condescending also to lay eggs and hatch them out.

The Canadians, considered by the inhabitants of the Dominion to be "the premier geese of the world," with their black bills, feet, and necks, are much in evidence, and floating with dignity in squadrons they look not unlike ancient carracks with elevated stern and forecastle. In their wild state, these fine members of the *Anatide* family, journeying southwards from the far north-west, may be heard at most hours of the day, and often in the night, high in the air enlivening the solitude of some lonely wold with their trumpet-like note.

Their musical powers surpass those of the swan, of which graceful bird there are three kinds in the park—the *black*, with snake-like neck, and beak looking as if it were tipped with red sealing-wax, and the *white*—both the whistling and the mute—all duly laying their eggs and rearing their young.

A stroll—it must be a very quiet one—round the peninsula in nesting time, under the guidance of the bird-keeper, shows how much the refuge is appreciated by the water-fowl.

The birds are regularly fed, and are not dependent upon the public doles, the cormorant having whiting, and, occasionally, sprats. Out of a total of nearly fifty different kinds of water-birds, over thirty breed here; and from the Swiss cottage one may perhaps take away as a trophy, a swan's or a goose's egg laid the year before!

Approaching the underwood at the edge of the peninsula, one disturbs some geese, Canadian, Chinese, Egyptian, Sebastopol, and Magellanic, quietly sitting on their eggs; but they do not resent it. Not so quiescent are the swans engaged in the same absorbing occupation; an ominous hiss now and again is a warning to keep out of the way.

Circumspice! On the margin of the lake water-hens run with surprising swiftness, chasing the sparrows that they imagine are robbing them of bread-crumbs, leaving their little black puff-balls

of offspring to trot about independently, learning to catch flies with their red sealing-wax beaks in admirable style. Here come two little teal swimming quietly by, intent on their honeymoon, the spangle or beauty-spot on the husband's wing glistening in the sun, and as his neatly-shaped head moves from side to side, one can admire its rich chestnut-brown tints. Ducks of all sizes and every colouring are in profusion, diving and chasing one another in joyful frolic. Look at this mallard with his speculum of rich shining purple, and the lay of his head-feathers so perfect and unruffled that his beak and neck seem to have been painted by the cunning hand of an Apollo or a Zeuxis.

And all this beautiful and entertaining bird-life is to be seen for nothing every day in St. James' Park.

