



The Literary Gem.

THE ENGLISH AND CANADIAN ROBIN.

It is our intention from time to time, in future numbers of this magazine, to give short sketches of the habits and history of our Canadian birds, insects, shrubs, and animals. We have by us, collected since the year 1828, in Canada, some useful written observations on these subjects.—No subject is more interesting to us, and we hope to all, than that relating to the natural history of our beautiful Province. We are pleased to add our mite towards the development of its resources, and to unfold its geological and natural history. There never has been as yet, any good account written, of the birds, quadrupeds, insects, fishes, shrubs, and plants of our Province. We intend to give a series of sketches on these various subjects, including the geological appearances of Canada and the American Western States, as the work progresses. Many suppose that our Canadian Robin is in all respects similar to the English Robin. This is a mistake. The Canadian bird is different in many respects from the English bird of that name. In the first place the English Robin is only about half the size of ours. It differs also in its notes, and something in its colour. Doubtless it is a bird of the same species but by no means the same bird. We do not know the colour of the eggs of the English bird. The Canadian Robin lays, generally, four dark blue eggs. It builds its nest early in May contiguous to some settlement. A thorn or low tree is preferred for the nest, which is made of grass and small sticks. The Robin is one of the first birds that hatches its young. We have known them to do so before the leaves were out. It feeds its young on worms. The young when full grown are nearly of the colour of the thrush; having a brownish breast with black specks upon it. The male bird of mature age is larger than the female, and its colours brighter. The breast and abdomen of a bright ochre or brown colour. The head, wings, back, and tail of a dark dun or slate colour. The lower part of the abdomen is whitish. The feet and bill are black. The Robin is not a regular song bird. It has a long and melodious whistle, heard in a still day at the distance of near a mile. Whilst its young are in process of hatching, and whilst they are still

nestled, it will sit upon some neighbouring bush or tree, and whistle away most beautifully. Two Robins will often answer each other at some distance in this way too. The Robin will feed on worms, seeds, or berries. During the autumn robins congregate in small flocks, and feed upon the common berries of the country, and are then esteemed good food. In length it is near a foot, and in breadth of wing more. This bird is loudest in tuning its throat early in the morning, or before an approaching storm; which it seems to enjoy. We have often been awakened by its loud and pleasant notes, sent forth in a constant repetition whilst perched on a tree near our bedroom, at early dawn. Its song is the harbinger of May and June showers. In the gentle rains of June it may be seen in our fields hopping about on the ground; frequently running before us, searching after the common red angle worm. They leave Canada late in the fall, and appear early in March. Some of them remain in the cedar swamps during the winter. The robin is a hardy bird and one dear to Canadians. It frequents our gardens—sings on our apple trees—hops over our green meadows—leaves us last and visits us first like good friends. Our earliest recollection is of the pleasant song of the red breasted robin. Its sweet carols are loved by Canadian youth, and the good wives of Canada are cheered on in their household duties by its ever present notes, about their gardens and orchards.

SPRING BIRDS.

On the 30th of March we noticed the pleasant sounds of many of our spring birds. The notes of the hedge sparrow, wild canary, phoebe, robin, the golden-winged woodpecker or wake up, as it is sometimes called, were all sounding familiarly in our ears. We welcome their sweet voices again as we do long absent friends. How beautiful is this alternation of the seasons. The human mind dislikes sameness. No climate is so congenial to the mind of man as one having this alternation. The winter glides gradually into spring—the spring into summer—the summer into mellow autumn with its many coloured leaves—and at last autumn into hoary and ice-bound winter. This change braces the constitution, invigorates the mind, and banishes ennui. These changes are much more agreeable than six months rain and fog, and six months dry, scorching weather, with an absence of all rain. We have an agreeable alternation of the seasons in Western Canada. The greatest defect in our climate is the coldness sometimes felt in the air in May. To make our climate what it should be, we would desire to see

no frosts in May. Last autumn was an unusually open and mild one. The past winter has been rather mild though not unusually so. Spring seems to have set in early, but we must not be deceived like the spring birds. The ice-fraught winds of the north west will yet cool our April and May weather. Navigation is now generally opened. The little birds that have been absent, now many months, again greet us with their sweet notes; the echo of the gladsome voice of nature, pure holy and rejoicing. There is something cheering in the “sweet carol of a bird.” No heart is unbenefitted by it. It makes us love that Being whose goodness is seen in all of this. It drives sorrow from the heart and chimes in unison with the aspirations and virginity of the soul of childhood. Children love the voice of the spring birds. Ah there is something lovely and sublime, in the sweet and gentle chirping of the spring birds—the opening flowers—and the fresh budding of the leaves and forests!! The birds that first appear in our climate are those that can live on seeds and berries, such as the robin and the sparrow, the meadow lark, and such as live by hunting worms in the barks of trees, like the woodpecker tribe. The swallow tribe often appears early in April; but they suffer greatly at first on account of the absence of flies and insects, which are driven to their winter hiding places, by the cool breezes of April. The robin is the earliest of our spring birds. We saw a beautiful and large butterfly on the 30th March. How soon the genial rays of the sun bring to life and activity the beautiful creatures of nature! This butterfly with its golden tints and glossy coat must have lain in a torpid state since October last, in appearance an ugly senseless worm; yet a few sunny days in March have set its powers in motion and made it a thing of beauty floating on the air.

THE AMERICAN WOLF.

An account was given a few weeks ago, of a wolf that was killed near Toronto, by a farmer named Sullivan. Sullivan lives on the Kingston road, near a village four miles from Toronto. He was awakened by the loud barking of his dogs. He got up and his dogs followed something at a distance, which seemed to run off. About 4 o'clock he was again awakened by his dogs, and he and his brother got up and went out. In a corner by his barn, he found his two dogs were keeping at bay a large animal, which they seized upon his approach, and threw upon the ground. His brother approached and killed the wolf (for such it was), with a pitch fork. The wolf was an old one, and had broken off or lost one