

CANARIES AND THEIR CULTURE.

BY KATE BREWSTER.

The entire civilized world prior to 1478 was in the dark as to the existence of canaries. In that year the islands upon which these birds dwelt in their native mountain forests and from which they take their pretty name, were conquered for Spain. Like other discoverers and conquerors Henry the navigator carried home spoils of conquest and among these were the lovely native birds.

They were eagerly sought for and Spanish bird fanciers soon began to breed and import the dainty, but at that time hardy, and long-lived favorites. In 1622 they found a historian in Olinia whose book was published at Rome. Earlier writers utter their praises but Olinia gives an account of a shipwreck that was of immense importance to the thousands of feathered captives on board. A Spanish ship en route for Leghorn and having thousands of these birds on board went to pieces on the Italian coast.

Away flew the birds to the island of Elba. They liked the climate and went to house-keeping, but the Italians saw their opportunity and instead of paying exorbitant prices any longer to Spaniards, they went to work without a knowledge of the secret Spanish methods of breeding and training, and kidnapping numerous Island-of-Elba immigrants, set themselves up in the trade. To the Tyrol, to Germany, and then far and wide the bird winged its way, or was transported in the peculiar baskets of the increasing traffic.

With a scale of prices to suit all purses he was found everywhere, not only in the wealthiest homes but also in those of a much less pretentious character, among all classes, singing his sweetest songs for rich and poor alike.

THEN AND NOW.

I think we would scarcely have recog-



nized our pet could we have seen him before the period of domestication, when happy and free in his own bright Canary Isles he carolled forth his choicest songs, although not in the cultivated tones with which he is wont to delight us to-day. During the three hundred and fifty years of his domestication, in consequence of careful artificial selection and of crossing with allied species, the canary differs widely, not only in color but a few even in size from the original wild bird. There, in his native land, he is of a dark brown or grayish color, occasionally varied, it is true, with brighter tints, but never equalling in beauty of plumage the domestic bird.

The color most generally admired in the latter is yellow. Sometimes it approaches to orange and again to almost white. There are said to be others more robust, who, in the dark green of the surface of their plumage, show a slight resemblance to the wild bird.

The canary originally is not more than five and one half inches in length, while it is said there is another variety (Belgian) which usually measures eight. There are others also, feather-footed canaries, hooped and bowed canaries and canaries with top-nots, too. There were no less than twenty-seven varieties at the beginning of the last century.

THREE DISTINCT BREEDS.

At the time of their dispersion abroad by the shipwreck, a mild sort of Tower-of-Babel confusion of tongues resulted. The Dutch, the English and the Germans developed three quite distinct breeds, and these breeds have their multitudinous varieties of cross breeds. The bird has the most remarkable genius for adaptation.

The Dutch canary, yellow, with a little head and dull, expressionless face, is a third higher however than the German canary. His merit is chiefly in his clothes, which are especially grotesque and imposing.

The breast and back feathers are long and grotesquely curled and open feathers from throat to breast form a *jabot*, while the curled shoulder feathers look like epaulettes, and sometimes he has a neck-ruff. When he sports all these attractions he is called Lord Mayor, and the French have so adopted him that he is also called the Parisian canary. His songs are but as twittering compared with the melodious, melting music of the German canaries.

ENGLISH BREED AND ITS VARIETIES.

The English have bred canaries which few would imagine could be the most distant relations of the other breeds. They are considered regular patri-cians in their extreme elegance, and some of them are as large again as a German canary. But, like their Dutch cousins, they are exponents chiefly of what physical culture can do, and though they warble in a fairly respectable way, their song is no song at all in comparison with that of the peerless German songsters.

The English adopted a small variety of the comical and wonderful Dutch canary, distinguished as the Belgian or Brussels variety. These Belgians had a certain peculiarity denominated, "cats-back." Fanciers considered this arched back very beautiful, and, by breeding together the birds of extreme length having a certain development of neck and shoulder, a very peculiar conformation was obtained in the Belgian variety. The English changed and modified this breed and obtained elegance of form and variety of plumage, including tints of copper, green, yellow, black, brown, olive, and red. The Manchester breed is the largest and the Norwich is crested.

THE GERMAN BREED.

The Germans take the palm for songsters, and to the people of St. Andreasburg in the Harz belongs



ENGLISH BREED (NORWICH MARKED).

the praise for developing the most remarkable singers. A Harz bird will bring fifty dollars and those of specially trained powers will bring more. Still an untrained Harz bird can be obtained for as little as three dollars.

It was not until something more than fifty years ago that the musical powers of the canary were brought out by the painstaking Harz trainers. The captivating trillings, warblings, soft flute tones and waver of melody were evolved by a special process of great effort. Neither night nor day did the trainers leave the birds. From the nest the birds were transferred to a flying room for exercising and widening the chest.

After moulting the birds sit quietly on poles and listen with great intentness to the music leader. Thus, like a class, they are said to break forth in imitation of the exercise.

The birds with the best voices are selected for special training. To get low soft tones the little songsters are now put into narrow space and darkness. Thus, it is claimed, hearing but not seeing one another, the bird musicians have more fully learned to concentrate attention upon one song, and the indomitable perseverance with which these tiny creatures work to master a difficult lesson is pathetic as well as interesting. It is claimed that exquisite songs learned in darkness are expressions of bodily satisfaction and that the birds shriek and scream if placed suddenly in the light. But marvellously intelligent as the birds of this breed are they have not as yet learned to sing in the new universal language, Volapuk, and cannot tell us through that transparent sound medium whether they are indeed so cosy and irrepressibly rippling over with content in their dark bowers, as enthusiastic trainers would have us believe.

The adaptation of this exquisite little creature to various lands, various training and modes of existence is remarkable. He is a born traveller, healthy, long-lived, and a regular cosmopolitan. Canaries feed upon a variety of seeds; oleaginous varieties are the best. Sugar is a luxury of which they are most fond and chickweed is considered very healthful for them. A small quantity of the yolk of hard-boiled egg, about what can be put on a knife point, with a little biscuit given a singing bird occasionally, say about three times a week, is strengthening, indeed one that sings steadily cannot well do without it, but, as with all else, it should not be given in excess, but used judiciously. Our "chamber musician," as an eminent writer has aptly termed the canary, is grateful and affectionate. That kind friend of every living thing that cannot speak for itself, Mr. George T. Angell, sympathizingly enters into the needs and condition of a canary's life and under the

title "How to make your canary happy," writes as follows:

"A lady of our acquaintance, suspecting her canary might have lice, took it in the early evening after it had gone to roost and sprinkled it well with the insect powder usually sold at bird stores. She then covered the top of the cage with a towel. In the course of the evening she picked 115 lice from the towel. She made that bird happy by killing 115 lice that were living upon it. We have found by experience that nothing adds more to the happiness of our canaries than to buy little ten-cent mirrors and hang them on their cages in such position that neither the sun nor lights shall dazzle the birds. They apparently take as much pleasure in looking at their pretty selves as any young lady or gentleman who reads this article."

Some of these affectionate little creatures are exceedingly sensitive. A well authenticated instance is on record of the death of a canary from a harsh word. The lady who reared it was singularly amiable, and had always treated the bird with great tenderness. Addressed harshly by her husband, in order to give him an object lesson the lady turned to her bird and spoke in the same angry, violent manner. The little creature, full of vigor before, fluttered and died, slain by a harsh word. So there are shades as well as lights to our subject. Nevertheless "happy as a bird" is and will continue to be an easily comprehended illustration of light heartedness.

One fact more and our paper is ended. The joyous carol of the wild bird is still to be heard in its native abandon, and experts say that the Harz bird sings "in the speech of his people." The Harz trainers have simply wonderfully developed the natural freshness and richness of our favorite's song. The canary is a bird of character, and it is with regret we make our parting bow to his little lordship.—Illustrated Christian Weekly.

WHAT BEER DOES.

A German woman recently said: "You temperance ladies think you know about the evils of intemperance. Could you see what my eyes have seen, and what I have known of my own knowledge in these things, you might talk. The half has never been told. Oh, the brutes that beer makes of men! How their wives run from them and hide themselves! how the children that have been born are idiots and deformed! how women have learned to drink, and were so subjugated by the habit that they felt their souls were lost! I have seen a decent, respectable woman counting her beads, saying her prayers, but the picture of despair. Haven't I told you, Annie" (her eldest daughter), "that if you could vote, we women, we would soon put a stop to these things?"—Union Signal.