

PARROTS.

BY THE REV. THEODORE WOOD, F.E.S.,

Author of "Our Bird Allies," "Our Insect Allies," "Life of the Rev. J. G. Wood," etc., etc.

PARROTS deservedly take a very high rank among cage-birds. They are easily obtained, easily kept, easily fed, and easily educated. At the same time, there is a wrong way as well as a right way of managing them; and these few remarks are intended for those who desire to avoid the former and adopt the latter.

First, for a word or two about the bird itself.

Parrots, as I have already said, are easily obtained. But those who wish to purchase one will have to decide two questions with regard to their future pet—(1) Of what species shall it be? (2) What shall be its age? With regard to the first point, the choice practically lies between two species, the Grey Parrot and the Green. The latter of these, when it does learn to speak, is usually the better talker of the two; but many Green Parrots never get beyond ear-piercing screams and various inarticulate sounds. Grey Parrots, on the contrary, nearly always talk; and, if a little care is paid to their training, the results are pretty well sure to be satisfactory.

The age at which the bird should be bought is a more difficult matter to decide. On the one hand, young birds are easily trained, but are very apt to die; on the other hand, old birds are more hardened to our English climate, but have frequently picked up a choice collection of bad language, which they always bring out at the most inappropriate moments possible. Between these two evils I will leave the intending purchaser to judge for himself, only remarking that the eyes of an old parrot are straw-coloured, while those of a young one are grey.

Now for a little advice about the three chief conditions of the parrot's life in captivity.

1. ITS CAGE.—In the first place, this should be roomy. To keep a parrot in a cage in which it can scarcely turn round is simple cruelty. The bird likes plenty of

exercise, and must have it, if it is to remain in health. So the cage should *never* be less than three feet in height and two in diameter.

In the second place, it must *not* be made of brass wire, and there should be no brass work of any kind about it. No matter how much attention may be paid to cleanliness, verdigris is sure to form upon brass sooner or later; and the parrot, which uses its beak in climbing quite as much as its feet, is more than likely to die an untimely death by poison. Galvanized iron wire is by far the best material for a parrot's cage; but it must be very stout, in order to bid defiance to the bird's beak.

In the third place, the cage should be provided, not only with at least a couple of perches, made of hard wood, and placed at different heights, but also with a circular metal swing, suspended by a short chain from the top, and the upper part of the cage should be sufficiently wide to allow the bird to swing without damaging its tail.

This last will be a very favourite seat with the bird when once it has learned to use it; but sometimes the process of learning is amusing. I shall never forget the first time that a parrot of our own entered its ring. It was as proud of itself as possible, but at the same time terribly frightened; and there it swung, alternately screeching with terror and congratulating itself upon its boldness with divers chuckles and exclamations, while we all stood by screaming with laughter.

The best way to prevent the bird from gnawing its perches is to supply it with two or three pieces of stout hard stick from which the bark has not been removed, and to replace them as often as may be necessary.

If the bird is sufficiently tame, and on friendly terms with the cat, it will not need a cage at all, but may be kept on a "crutch perch," to which it can be fastened by a long chain attached to a metal band round one leg. This arrangement will give the bird plenty of exercise, and at the same time will reduce the labour of cleaning very considerably. But care should be taken to put the stand well out of reach of the neighbouring furniture.

2. ITS FOOD.—This must be of a strictly vegetable character. Polly will be pleased to pick a bone at intervals, but is sure to pay the penalty for doing so in an annoying skin irritation, which will cause her to peck and pull at her feathers, and even to pluck herself in parts perfectly bare. Hemp-seed,