

THE OTTAWA COLONY OF CHIMNEY SWIFTS  
(*CHÆTURA PELAGICA*).

By A. G. KINGSTON.

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Among the many different physical powers exhibited by animal life in its endless variety of forms there is none which has so much impressed the mind of man in every age as that one so widely characteristic of the feathered class, the gift of flight. In the systems of the ornithologists a bird may take higher or lower rank according to the development or simplicity of its internal structure; but in the eyes of mankind at large, let but the power of rapid and untiring flight be shown in a high state of perfection, and just in that measure will its possessor approach the ideal bird. Throughout the whole class there are few, if any, families which in this respect can rival the Swifts.

The Albatross and the Frigate Bird can indeed sweep over immense stretches of ocean in an hour's time, but, after all, the sea and the earth enter largely into the life of these birds. Their food is sought amid the waves, their nests are placed among the rocks along shore; but the home of the Swift is in the upper air where he delights to spend every moment of the long summer days. By him every function of life, except sleep and the incubation of the egg, is performed upon the wing; and every organ of the body, as we shall see, is specialized to fit it for this purpose, almost to the disregard of all others.

In most parts of Eastern Canada and the United States the Chimney Swift is one of our most common city birds, often an uninvited guest within our houses and spending the short summer nights within a few feet of our beds.

Here in Ottawa every stroller upon Parliament Hill during the pleasant evenings in spring, and again in the later summer months, is amused by the merry twittering and rhythmic whirling motion of that countless cloud of little birds circling round one of the towers of the Government Buildings. And in the height of summer no better example can be found of the power and grace of motion than to see one of these same swifts, after soaring for some time high in the air, descend and, hurrying along just over the roofs of the houses, wheel once or twice about the chimney where his nest is hung, and suddenly arresting his