IMITATIVE FACULTY OF FINCHES—THEIR VALUE—THE LINNET.

He is a sociable little fellow among other birds, and has a good ear for music. Accordingly, bird fanciers sometimes teach him to whistle a tune; and of course this musical accomplishment greatly increases his value. His term of life extends from six to eight years.

Then there is

THE CHAFFINCH,

A merry little fellow, whose piping cry, “Spink! spink!” often breaks the silence of the autumn fields and hedgerows. This bird, like the bullfinch, can be taught to pipe a melody, and the patient German trainers take great pains to develop this talent. Such great value, indeed, is attached to this artificial song, that Bechstein mentions an instance in which a cow had been given in exchange for an accomplished chaffinch; hence the German proverb, “A chaffinch is worth a cow.” Bechstein also says, “It is remarkable that the song of these birds varies according to the district they inhabit, so that different songs are sung in the forest from what are sung in the Hartz; and by this the task of amateurs is regulated.” Those birds which can execute the “double trill” are most highly valued. In England we have not yet become so critical, and a chaffinch is cheap enough to be within the means of purchase of most schoolboys.

THE CITRIL FINCH (Plate xx., e)

Is most like the canary in form and plumage. It is found chiefly in the south of Europe, and many are said to be sold for green or grey canaries, the difference being so small that unpractised purchasers may readily mistake a good citril for a real canary.

THE SISKIN, OR ABERDEVINE (Plate xx., d),

Is another of those birds whose song can be much improved by education. In an aviary it will frequently imitate the notes of the canary and of other exquisite songsters. Indeed, nearly all the finches are in one respect like children, namely, in being much influenced, so far as their manners and accomplishments are concerned, by the company among whom they are thrown by circumstances. They will adopt a good clear note as readily as they will catch up a bad and defective one. In Germany the aberdevine breeds freely, building its nest on a lofty pine tree, and attaching the tiny structure firmly by means of moss and insect cocoons to the extremity of a waving bough. It lays five or six grey eggs, sprinkled with purple dots. Its colour is generally a mixture of greenish yellow and black. The aberdevine is a migratory bird, and only stays in England from April to September. It feeds chiefly on seeds of trees and wild flowers, preferring those of the fir and beech, the thistle and dandelion.

The most general favourite among the English birds of this class, after the goldfinch, is, however,

THE LINNET (Plate xix., c.)

This well-known little songster is found all over England and Scotland, and stays with us all the year. It has but a plain brown coat, though some of the males are prettily tinged with red on the head; but its voice is so sweet and mellow, that it is rightly preferred to many a gorgeously-attired but harsh-voiced competitor. When the male linnet has become thus marked, which occurs in the third year of its little life, it is known as a redpole. Linnets are often found in flocks, in the autumn, about rick-yards, which they visit in quest of the seeds on which they live. The female does not exhibit the red tinge displayed by the male.

But the king of all the finch tribe is undoubtedly