



Notes and Queries

RELATING TO BERKS, BUCKS AND OXON.

Communications are invited upon all subjects of Antiquarian or Architectural interest relating to the three counties. Correspondents are requested to write as plainly as possible, on one side of the paper only, with REPLIES, QUERIES and NOTES on SEPARATE SHEETS, and the name of the writer appended to each communication.

Notes.

BERKSHIRE CHILDREN'S GAMES.—The following game, which does not seem so well known as some that have been mentioned in the "Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archæological Journal, we played as long as I can remember in our nursery. Our nurse was a Wiltshire woman, but nursery-maids, to whom one is indebted for this sort of lore, came generally from the neighbourhood. The players divide into two parties; one sitting down in a row, the others retire to hide somewhere about their persons, a ball; and as this gives scope for some dramatic dissembling, the game was a lasting favourite. When the ball is satisfactorily concealed, the players advance before the seated row, saying:—

"Here come, here come, three Midsummer Men,
Sailing, sailing from the King,
To ask forgiveness."

2nd party seated: "Forgiveness, forgiveness, we grant you none,
Unless you brought your message home."

1st: "Brought it home long ago,
And many pretty things also."

2nd: "Turn Ladies, turn."

(The 1st party here turn slowly round, saying)

1st: "The more we turn, the more we may;
Queen Anne was born on Midsummer Day;
She sent you three letters desiring you to read one."

2nd: "We can't read one but we must read all,
So we pray (here they name the one they think has the ball) deliver the ball."

(If they have made a wrong guess, the others retort)

1st: "The ball is ours it is not yours,
And we fine ladies go and come,
While you brown gipsies sit in the sun.
We eat meat, and you pick bones;
We eat cherries, and you eat stones."

and dance off to hide again; but if successful, the seated row jump up and say this part, and the others take their place.

"Beer or Porter" was another; where the parts are, a mother, a daughter and the barrels in the cellar, who buzz every time that the daughter goes for beer or porter, she runs back saying "Mother, mother, there's bees in the cellar;" but are "as quiet as quiet as bees," when the mother herself goes and taps their heads. "Nonsense child go and try again," repeated with any variations that can be thought of, until the buzzing ones jump up, and in the scramble a fresh one takes the mother's seat and the game goes on anew. Neither of these had any tune, but "Green Gravel" is sung in Binfield to a rather pretty sort of chant.

"Green gravel, green gravel, your grass is so green,

The fairest young damsel that ever was seen.

Oh (name of one of the players), Oh—your true love is dead,

He sent you a letter to turn round your head."

The players *named* turn and face *outward* in the ring, in the same way as in "Wallflower," until all have turned. "Hot beans and butter, Ladies and Gentlemen come to supper," always went to a chant like "Oranges and lemons"; and announced when an article fixed on had been hidden somewhere in the room, and you were "cold" or "hot," as you were far or near.

"Blind man's buff" invariably began with "How many horses does your father keep"? (Answer) Three. "What colour are they"? "Black, white and grey." "Turn you round three times and catch who you may." And the blind man is turned round till he is giddy.

A "Courting Game" must be:

"Here come three knights from the land of Spain,

Come to woo your daughter Jane.

My daughter Jane is yet too young,

She cannot bear your flattering tongue."

I cannot remember more of this and should like to know it.

I have heard other and longer forms of picking by lot; the one we used was:

"Oney, twoery, dickory, seven,

Eightery, ninery, ten or eleven.

Bi, jar, bull, snout,

O U T spells out."

French children in Normandy had an equivalent, beginning:

"Eremy, deuremy, troiremy, clou."

K. E. CASWALL, Binfield.

BIRDS IN BERKSHIRE.—Natural History has always a peculiar fascination. Every kind of beast, bird and insect interests the naturalist. Berkshire from its diversity of scenery and soil is rich in specimens of all kinds. The situation of the country, central yet not far from the coast, brings occasionally rare sea birds inland; but of these I will not speak, but instead write only of those of which I have found the nests in our own gardens. The rarity of a species is caused probably chiefly by the lack of its particular kind of food. All birds have special fancies in food, some live on grubs, some on caterpillars, some on flies, others again on seeds. An instance of this is the Goldfinch common with us, because the great thistle and sow thistle are plentiful. The Bullfinch frequents places where there are thick hard thorn hedges and bushes, its favourite food is soft grubs or very young caterpillars, unfortunately of the kind to be found in apple and pear buds, hence the Bullfinch is hated by gardeners and destroyed. It is a shy bird seldom seen, but its mournful whistle is unmistakable though difficult to locate in the thick foliage. I once found a Fire Crest Wren's nest also

a Gold Crest both hung loosely to the branches of cedar trees. The Fire Crest's nest was smaller and firm in make and higher up, some 10 feet above the ground. Some nests are seldom found because they look deserted, *i.e.* are mistaken for old deserted nests. The Redback shrike nearly deceived me once; it was low down (about 3 feet) in a thick box bush in the rookery quite close to the house, yet I never caught sight of the birds whom I suspect crept to the nest through the bushes. The Hawfinch had another dreary home, something like a Wood Pigeon; it was in a thick patch of rhododendron, a dirty shabby sort of nest, but each day I found a fresh egg there, the only sign of occupation. Cuckoos are scarce of late years; with us they lodge with the poor little Black and White Wagtails who nest in the pear trees against the garden walls. The Yellow Wagtail is fairly plentiful, chiefly to be seen in autumn catching flies on the conservatory roof, so evidently this is its favourite diet. The Grey Wagtail I have not seen for years. All the Titmice are plentiful, but the Blue Titmouse less plentiful for two years. The Long Tail Titmouse I have only found near Sulhamstead Abbots. The Redstart had a nest once in a holly tree, the eggs looked like bad eggs of Hedge Sparrow. Nightingales are very plentiful I have never yet found the nests, so well concealed are they in dead leaves or coarse bents. Red-leg Partridges persist in breeding though keepers destroy every nest they can as the birds run, so are poor sport for shooting. I am certain White's Thrush is the bird which I have noted occasionally in our Park. It was so strongly marked and so different to the Song Thrush and Missel Thrush, both of which are common. The Missel Thrush is locally known as the Storm Cock, and its sad note portends rain. South African Blue Ring-neck Doves nest by Sulhamstead and Upton doubtless escaped from captivity. Swallows frequent the wooden bridges on the Kennet, but Martins seem to have disappeared. Tree Sparrow I have not found for years. There was one once in the orchard. Plover and Whistling Plover, the former common the latter rare. Tree Creepers plentiful, and Woodpeckers and Owls. Grass birds, such as Wood Wren and Willow Wren, rarer the last few years. Chiff Chaffs I often hear. Both Whitethroats nest here, they prefer thick brambles. The Nightingale arrives at Sulhamstead on or about the 12th of April, about two days before the Cookoo, whose arrival varies between the 12th and 17th. This year the Pie Wagtails came on the evening of April 6th. I saw a very tired little Wagtail just arrived resting in the wall-garden. The common Flycatcher nests very late. If its eggs are taken it goes on laying. Its clutch is about 12 or 14 eggs, namely, two broods per season. The Spotted Flycatcher is also a late nester; to be found high up on the wall pear trees. This year I found a curious thing, a Thrush's nest with two squabs in it, one egg and two Black Bird's eggs. It is said these birds sometimes inter-breed but this was not so as the eggs were most distinct. Now my life is spent half in London I have less opportunity for regular study in natural history, but my interest is keen, and I know every bush and its inhabitants year by year the birds nest in or close to their old home. Surely the particular bushes are heirlooms in certain bird families, and left entailed on eldest sons, for you never find two of the same kind nesting near together.—EMMA ELIZABETH COPE.

