

# MISTAKEN IDENTITY

(12) *The Sparrows*

EVER since we learned to recite "A little cock-sparrow sat up in a tree," the name of this small brown bird has been as familiar to us as that of robin redbreast. Yet, as we have found with other birds and animals in this series of talks, familiar names can often lead to mistaken identity when we meet the wild creatures in the field. Our only British robin has an unmistakably red breast, but we have three birds which bear the name of

is the little bird which has taken kindly to our largest cities and is to be seen congregating in their squares and parks, food-hunting in gutters and on pavements, and chirping in noisy fussy companies on window-ledges, roofs, and chimney-stacks. Even in the country it favours human dwellings, nesting in village streets and clustering in stack-yards and poultry-yards of farms.

Stouter in general build than the accentor, the house-sparrow has a distinctly stouter bill, though the brown upperparts and greyish-white underparts are similar. The female is modestly coloured in this way, but the male has a jaunty dark-grey crown, black bib at the throat, and white wing-bars.

THE tree-sparrow might be called the house-sparrow's country cousin, for although house-sparrows are also to be found in the country it is usually in villages or around farm buildings, while tree-sparrows prefer quieter haunts by riverside pollard willows and old hedgerow trees. If, therefore, we see unmistakably sparrow-like birds in such tree-shaded corners



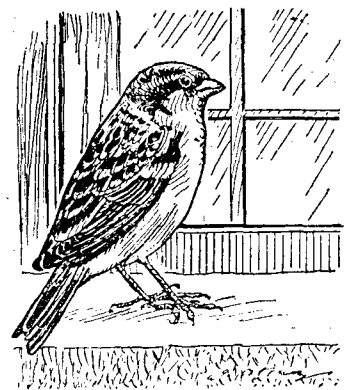
Hedge Accentor

sparrow, and unless we are careful we may confuse one with the other.

Two of them, the house-sparrow and the tree-sparrow, are true members of their family; but the third, the hedge-sparrow, is more closely related to the robin and is not a sparrow at all. Its correct name is hedge accentor, the word "accentor" referring to its attractive, musical, warbling song, an accomplishment far beyond the ability of either of our sparrows.

In appearance, too, and in habits, the hedge accentor is not really sparrow-like. A slimmer bird, with a slender bill, warm brown upper parts and greyish throat and breast, it slips quietly through the undergrowth, and, although not shy, dines quietly apart from other birds. At the bird-table it avoids the jostling throng of sparrows, starlings, and tits, hopping on the ground below and picking up a plenteous dinner from the crumbs thrown down by the roisterers overhead.

Of our two true sparrows, the house-sparrow is by far the most numerous and best known. This



House-sparrow

we may have found the rather uncommon tree-sparrow; but a close and careful scrutiny will be necessary, for our two sparrows look very much alike.

In the tree-sparrow there is no difference between male and female; both are brown birds with greyish underparts, and both resemble the male house-sparrow in markings. Rather smaller and

Continued in next column

# LITTLE VENICE OF THE FAR EAST

A CN correspondent here describes a visit paid by him to the little Venice-like town of Kottayam, in the southern Indian State of Travancore—the scene of the Third World Conference of Christian Youth, which opens this week and continues until December 27. Hundreds of young people from many parts of the world are now gathered there—the chosen representatives of some 50 nations—and they are demonstrating sense of unity among various branches of the Christian Church.



A street in Kottayam

THE country around Kottayam is a fantastic area, half water, half land, inhabited by a semi-aquatic race, dotted with high-prowed sailing boats which might have been transplanted from a Chinese picture book, and garnished with buildings of distinctly Chinese appearance.

The waterways carry a heavy traffic of wallams or cargo boats, which were introduced to the Malabar Coast centuries ago by Chinese traders. Nearly flat-bottomed, they comprise heavy planks sewn together with string,

curving upwards at each end so that their stems and sterns end in graceful scrolls.

At each end, on small platforms stands the man who poles the wallam over the shallow water with a long bamboo—much as a Norfolk wherryman quants his wherry—and amidsthips is a long, rounded hut of woven coconut fronds. These wallams carry big loads of copra, coconut husks, seashells for burning into lime, corral rock cut into blocks for building, and other merchandise.

It was evening when I arrived at the town of Alleppey, on the coast, where I spent the night.

I wanted to go to Cochin, but my pronunciation of this place name was such that I was shown to a boat bound for Kottayam!

After a few miles of canals we came to a shallow lake so large that one could not see the farther side. Some of the wallam men were poling across this; other were sailing before the wind with little sprit-sails made of matting.

After five or six hours we entered a narrow canal into slightly higher country, green and fertile, with the mellow red roofs of houses showing through the coconut palms.

And then we came to a town, an attractive town, built on hilly, closely-wooded country. This was Kottayam, a town which, in spite of dirt, disease, and poverty—the usual trappings of the East—is yet a charming place. The streets run up and down the hills and, if you follow them long enough, gener-

ally seem to end up at a river or canal.

Kottayam is almost Venice-like in its dependence upon water transport. Down in Old Kottayam where I stayed with a priest, are the remains of ancient city walls and palaces, for Kottayam was once the seat of rajahs. Now it is the centre of the Christian Syrian Orthodox Church.

Commercially, Kottayam is quite an important place. It is the inland port connecting the tea, rubber, and timber country of the Western Ghats to the backwaters which lead to Cochin and the Indian Ocean. Four out of five of its population of 80,000 are Christian, and this is the reason for the World Congress of Christian Youth being held there.



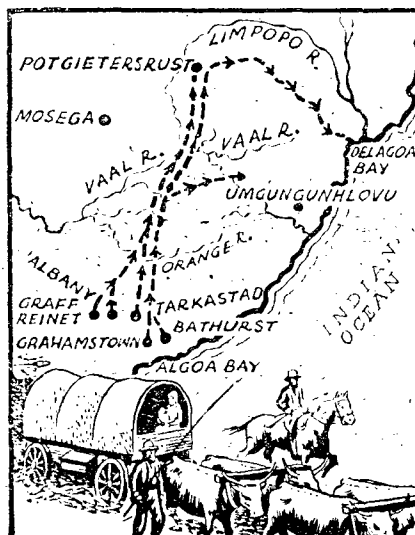
The Protestant Cathedral in Kottayam

Kottayam is so far off the beaten track—it can only be reached by water, or by a long car journey over deplorable roads—that foreigners are not often seen there.

I was told that few of the children have seen a white man before my arrival there. They will undoubtedly be thrilled by the arrival of a host of young people representing practically every nationality in the world!

## Empire Mosaic—22

by Ridgway



### THE GREAT TREK

Seeking lands in which to settle under laws of their own, Dutch farmers called Boers would trek north from British-ruled Cape Colony. This movement was at its strongest from 1835 to 1837, when, under such leaders as Potgieter and Retief hundreds of these Voortrekkers, or Pioneers, packed all their goods into canvas-covered waggons and crossed the River Vaal. They beat back attacks by native tribesmen and won recognition from the British Government.



**SIR ALEXANDER MACKENZIE**

Fur-trader, explorer, and author, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, when seeking a route through Canada to the Pacific Ocean, discovered the river which now bears his name and paddled down it to reach the Arctic Ocean on July 12, 1789. Three years later he was the first European to cross the Rockies to the Pacific.

### NAMING OF WAGGA WAGGA

A crow forms the crest on the arms of Wagga Wagga in New South Wales. This city was named after the aboriginal pronunciation of the cry of the crow, Wah-gar Wah-gar.