



**BIRD-CATCHING;**

OR, THE

**NORTHERN ADVENTURERS.**

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**London;**

PRINTED FOR HARVEY AND DARTON,

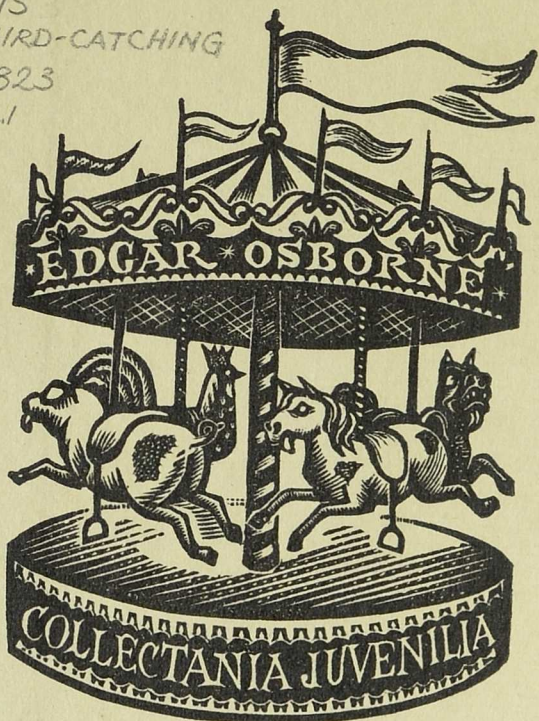
GRACECHURCH STREET.

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1827.



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See page 4.



See page 2.

Mode of catching Birds in the Feroe Islands.

London, Published by Harvey & Darton, May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1823.

# BIRD-CATCHING ;

OR,

## The Northern Adventurers.

BEING

AN ACCOUNT

OF

*Several Methods of taking Birds in the Feroe Islands, and in  
some other Places.*

INTENDED FOR CHILDREN.

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ILLUSTRATED BY COPPER-PLATES.

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1823.





## P R E F A C E.

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HAVING found the following account very interesting, to a little boy to whom I related it, I thought it might afford equal pleasure to others. The curiosity and enquiry natural to children, should be properly directed and gratified: by this means they gain much useful information, and are furnished with a constant source of pleasure. I hope all my young readers will be as much gratified in this account, as the little boy, whose pleasure in hearing it, suggested the idea of offering it to the public.



# Bird-catching, &c.

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## CHAPTER I.

“**H**ow I do enjoy winter evenings,” said little Robert, as he drew his chair to the table, one dark evening, when candles were brought in: “I like summer evenings very much, because we can take long walks, and that is certainly very pleasant; but I like winter evenings better, because we can read, and hear entertaining stories; and sometimes mamma lends us her great book, to look at the pictures, and explains them to us: I really think winter evenings are the happiest time of the year.”

“My little boy seems very happy, just now,” replied his mother, who had been listening to what he said: “I, too, am particularly fond of winter evenings: no time of the day is more settled or more comfortable. I hope this winter we shall find this to be the case, and that your evenings will not only afford you pleasure *now*, but for years to come.”

ROBERT. Oh, yes, mamma; for when we do any thing we like, there is the pleasure it gives us at the time, and the pleasure of thinking about it afterwards. I remember, when I used to read to you in Frank, last winter, I was very happy; and I enjoy thinking of it now, mamma. I am glad that pleasure lasts a long time.

MOTHER. And I am glad that you have a disposition to be pleased, my love, and I hope you will always cherish it. Nothing will contribute more to your happiness; and really the springs of pleasure are so various, that, with a mind disposed to enjoy them, you may always find some rational amusement, and can scarcely fail to be happy. How do you intend to spend this evening?

ROBERT. I should like to look at the picture of bird-catching, in your book, mamma, if you will be so good as to lend it to me. And will you, dear mamma, explain it to me? for I am sure it must be very entertaining to know what the men are doing on those steep rocks. I suppose they are trying to catch the birds, but I think they will find it hard work. Only look, how the rocks hang over, and what danger this man seems in, who is only hanging by a rope. Poor creature! if the rope were to

break, he might fall down, and be dashed to pieces. How very dreadful that would be. I wonder any person should be so silly, as to hazard his life for the sake of a few birds.

MOTHER. It may appear strange to you, Robert, because you are a little boy, and have every thing provided for you, without any trouble of your own; but there are thousands of persons who are forced to endure daily perils to obtain a livelihood.

ROBERT. But, mamma, they might find other employment. Why do they not work in the fields, or do something that is not dangerous?

MOTHER. The cultivation of their fields, alone, would scarcely procure them the necessaries of life; but Providence has bountifully supplied them with other means of support. The natives of the Feroe Islands would have but a scanty subsistence, if it were not for the gulls, and other birds, that build their nests on those rocks.

ROBERT. Do they eat gulls, mamma? I thought they were very disagreeable. Do not you recollect, a lady who was here lately, told you that her brother once caught one, but it was so unpleasant they could not eat it? I am sure I should not like them.

MOTHER. I do not expect you would, for they have a very rank, disagreeable flavour; at least, 'in the opinion of those who have been used to more delicate living; but it is well that our tastes differ, and that most prefer that kind of food to which they have been accustomed. What is thought unpleasant by one, is considered a dainty by another; and the natives of those countries that afford but little variety to gratify the appetite, are as contented as the inhabitants of more fertile regions. Perhaps a pheasant or a woodcock is not a greater delicacy to an Englishman, than a gull or a penguin to the northern islanders; and if that is the greatest dainty, which is procured with the most difficulty, their food must be considered very superior to ours; for it is dearly earned.

ROBERT. They deserve it for their trouble, and I hope they enjoy it. But now, mamma, please to begin your account of the bird-catchers, and tell me what the man at the end of that long pole is doing.

MOTHER. He is endeavouring to reach the top of the rock, which is so steep that he cannot ascend without help. His companions, at the bottom, are, therefore, thrusting him up by that pole.

ROBERT. I think it is a very awkward way: I should not like to be pushed up in that manner. Besides, it looks very dangerous: I wonder he does not slip down.

MOTHER. There is not so much danger of his slipping, as you imagine; for at the end of the pole, which is five or six yards long, is an iron hook, which is fastened to his girdle, and prevents his falling. When he has reached a place where he can gain firm footing, others are helped up in the same way. As soon as several are together, they go in search of the birds; and when they have taken as many as they can get in that part, ascend higher, to seek for more. If the rock is so steep as to prevent their climbing, they again thrust each other up with poles. Sometimes, when one has ascended higher than the others, he fastens a rope, which he took with him for the purpose, round his waist, and lets it down, for one of them to take hold of, whom he then draws up to him. When they get to the places where the birds build, they go about as well as they can; one holding the rope at one end, and fixing himself on the rock, whilst the other goes about to look for the birds.

ROBERT. But the rock is so very steep, that, if his foot were to slip, he might fall

down, and, perhaps, pull his companion after him.

MOTHER. That sometimes happens, my love, and in that case they are both killed. Some of them perish in this manner every year.

ROBERT. I wonder that does not frighten the others, and make them afraid of going up such dangerous places.

MOTHER. Perhaps it may deter some; but others, who are more adventurous, are not thereby discouraged from making the same attempt. Accustomed, from their childhood, to climb the steep and craggy rocks that border their shores, the hardy natives become inured to enterprise, and fearlessly encounter the greatest difficulties. Animated with the hope of obtaining a large supply, they venture to the edge of the most dreadful precipices and overhanging rocks; and enter caverns, that, at a distance, were concealed from their sight, and which, on a near approach, strike the beholder with astonishment; and would deter any, but the bold and daring, from venturing to enter.

ROBERT. Are there any birds in these caverns, mamma?

MOTHER. Yes; they go there to build, as



though they would have chosen a place where they might bring up their young in security, and maintain undisturbed possession; but the command given to Adam, "Thou shalt have dominion over the fowl of the air," has been fulfilled; for no art of their own can secure them from the hand of man. When the fowlers are come, in the manner I have been describing to you, to the birds within the cliffs, where people seldom venture, the little creatures, not suspecting their danger, readily suffer themselves to be taken. They continue quietly on their nests till the hand is stretched out to seize them; but in those caves that have been frequently visited, they seem aware of their danger, and endeavour to escape. The usual method then adopted, is to throw a net over them, and entangle them in the meshes, by which means they are readily caught. They are then cast into a boat, at the bottom of the rock, which is soon filled.

ROBERT. Then I suppose the men come down, and row them home.

MOTHER. One or two men remain at the bottom, to take care of the boat, and to convey it away when it is filled; but the bird-catchers remain in the cliffs, and when the weather is fine, and there is good fowling, stay there for

seven or eight days together, resting safely at night in the cavities of the rocks.

ROBERT. How cold and uncomfortable they must be, without any bed to sleep on, or any blankets to cover them; and I wonder what they do for food, but I suppose they eat some of the birds.

MOTHER. No, my love; you forget that they would have no means of cooking them. They furnish themselves with a store of provisions, before they set out, which those who stay at the top of the mountain let down to them by a line.

ROBERT. That is right; for they should be kind, and do what they can for each other. But what is this man in the basket doing, mamma? He seems fixed between two rocks. I am sure he cannot find any nests there.

MOTHER. He has left his companions, and is crossing to the opposite rock, many parts of which you see project, and hang over the sea, rendering the ascent from below impracticable. They have, therefore, devised another method of getting there; for, with contrivance and perseverance, almost every object may be accomplished. As the two rocks are near together, planks are laid across, from one to the other, and firmly fastened down at the ends. Be-

tween these planks is a basket, so fixed as to glide along between them. The fowler sits in this, and with a stick, which he has in his hand, pushes himself along to the opposite rock.

ROBERT. Thank you, mamma: I understand it now. But I think it must be worse than being thrust up by poles; for there is no one to help him, if the basket should overturn. He would either be dashed against the rocks, or fall into the sea.

MOTHER. I think it is an excellent contrivance, although attended with much danger; but, from frequent practice, the natives become so expert in the basket-excursion, that they drive themselves along with almost as much ease as a Laplander travels in his sledge.

ROBERT. Now, mamma, let us look at this man who is hanging by a rope. I suppose he has been let down to look for nests, and the others are now pulling him up.

MOTHER. Yes, my love; where the rocks hang over, or are so steep as to prevent the possibility of climbing them, this method is commonly practised.

ROBERT. But if it is impossible to climb up to the top, how can the others get there to let him down?

MOTHER. Have you forgotten how the man in the basket gets there?

ROBERT. I was not thinking of that. Then I suppose, when he has crossed, he pushes the basket back, and another gets in, and goes across; then another, and so on with the rest. Is that the way, mamma?

MOTHER. I believe it is frequently, though not always. There are some rocks that may be ascended on one side, although it may be extremely difficult, and perhaps impossible, to climb up the other, or to get to those parts where the nests are. In that case, they have no occasion to use the basket.

ROBERT. No; they can clamber up the easiest side, and so get to the top; and I dare say many like that better than going in the basket; for no doubt, as they are used to it, they are excellent climbers. Now, mamma, be so kind as to tell me how the poor man is let down.

MOTHER. For this purpose they have a rope, nearly two hundred yards long, and about as thick as three fingers. This is generally made of hemp or straw.

ROBERT. I should think hemp would do best; because straw is stiff, and very apt to split.



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MOTHER. True, my love; and another inconvenience attending it, is, its aptness to untwist.

ROBERT. Then I suppose they only use it when they cannot get hemp.

MOTHER. I believe they use it because it is cheaper than hemp, and more easily obtained. Their country produces abundance of barley, the straw of which they readily manufacture. In some countries, where herds of swine are kept, the ropes are made of hogs' bristles.

ROBERT. I think they must be very clever to make ropes of hogs' bristles. Are they not very stiff and hard?

MOTHER. Ropes of this kind are preferable to any other sort, as they are very strong, and not so liable, as those made of other materials, to be cut by the sharpness of the projecting pieces of rock; for although a piece of wood is laid on the brink of the rock, for the rope to glide upon, to prevent its being worn to pieces by the rough edge of the stone, it cannot prevent its rubbing against the projecting parts below. The fowler fastens the rope round his waist, and between his legs, so that he can sit on it; and is thus let down with the fowling-staff in his hand. A small line is also fastened to the man's body, which he pulls, to give

notice to those who are letting him down, how to manage the great rope; as he sometimes wants to stay a little while where he is, or to be shifted to some other place.

ROBERT. I think moving about with the rope must make him very dizzy.

MOTHER. It frequently happens so, my love; but his greatest danger now is from the stones, which are loosened from the cliff, by the swinging of the rope, and which fall on all sides. He receives many violent blows from them, and is often severely bruised by the sharp projections of the rock. But he is most afraid of the stones falling upon his head; and in order to defend it, as well as he can, from their violence, he usually wears a seaman's thick and shaggy cap; but notwithstanding this precaution, he is often dreadfully wounded.

ROBERT. Poor man! how I pity him. Are any ever killed by the stones, mamma?

MOTHER. Yes; numbers are killed in this manner, and others so dreadfully hurt as never to recover; yet to these dangers do the poor men continually expose themselves, trusting in the mercy and protection of Providence, to whose care most of them devoutly recommend themselves before they begin. It requires great skill, and frequent practice, to manage the



rope properly; for those who are not used to it, turn about, and soon grow dizzy; but he who is skilful in the art, considers it as a sport, swings about on the rope, sets his feet against the rock, and casts himself to whatever place he likes.

ROBERT. Really that must be curious sport, but I should be afraid of trying it: the fear of being killed would take away all my pleasure.

MOTHER. Be thankful, my dear boy, that you are not exposed to such dangers; but that, happily, you were born in a country that affords ample means of subsistence, without having recourse to so hazardous a method of obtaining it. It appears strange, that, notwithstanding the fatal accidents which frequently occur, and to which, probably, many are eye-witnesses, yet the daring spirit of the adventurers is still undaunted, and they fearlessly perform the same exploits; but that an enterprise, attended with so much danger, should be considered a diversion, is indeed surprising. Yet this is said to be the case. The skilful, bold adventurer, understands how to sit on a line in the air, and manages it with as much dexterity as a dancer on the slack-wire. He knows where to find the birds, and how to hold the fowling-staff in his hand, so as to strike those that come

or fly away; and when the rocks project, and there are holes underneath, he darts into them, and there takes firm footing. He then loosens himself from the rope, (which he fastens to a crag of the rock, that it may not slip from under him to the outside of the cliff,) and goes about to get the birds, which he either catches with his hand, or strikes with the fowling-staff. When he has killed a sufficient number, he ties them up in a bundle, and fastens them to a little rope, which he takes with him for the purpose, and then gives a sign to have them drawn up. He next fixes himself once more on the great rope, and gives a new sign, which his companions at the top, understanding, draw him up; or else he works himself up, climbing along the rope, with his girdle full of birds.

ROBERT. That must be harder than climbing up rope-ladders, as I saw the sailors do when I was at the sea-side; and I used to wonder how they could be so quick. But cannot you tell me a tale about some of these poor men, mamma; for I am very fond of a story.

MOTHER. I will relate an anecdote, then, that will interest you. The inhabitants of one of the mountainous parts of Scotland, having been much troubled by an eagle, which had committed great depredations, wished to have it

destroyed; and were willing to reward any person who would kill it, and take the young ones. Few were adventurous enough to engage in so hazardous an undertaking; but at last, one man, who possessed more courage than the rest, and was of an enterprising disposition, resolved to make the attempt. He accordingly told several others of his intention, who went up the mountain with him; from whence they let him down by a rope, to the part where he expected to find the nest. The old eagle flew out, when, stretching out his hand, he endeavoured to strike it; but, unfortunately, instead of killing the eagle, he cut the rope almost in two.

ROBERT. Oh! mamma, how frightened he must have been. Did it break, and let him fall?

MOTHER. No, it did not break; but when he saw himself hanging, as it were, by a thread, he was very much alarmed, and, instantly springing up, he caught hold of the upper part of the rope, and was quickly drawn up by his companions, who had witnessed his danger; but how great was their surprise to find, that his hair, which was black when he went down, was now grey.

ROBERT. Is that really true, mamma? I

never heard any thing so strange, as for the colour of the hair to change all at once.

MOTHER. I believe it is true, my love; and it is a wonderful instance of the effect of sudden fear. Grief has been known to change the hair in the same way.

ROBERT. Really, mamma, if some people had told me, I should have supposed they thought me a silly little boy, who would believe any thing, and I should not have believed what they said; but I am not afraid of your trying to impose upon me, because you always tell me the truth, mamma.

MOTHER. It would be very wrong of me, or any other person, to tell you what we knew to be untrue. I am glad to find that my care, in this respect, has given you a love of truth; and I hope you will always detest and avoid falsehood.

ROBERT. Yes, mamma; for you have always taught me that it is very wicked to tell stories. I do sometimes make a mistake, but I do not mean to deceive you. But I hope, mamma, you have not told me all you know about bird-catching. Cannot you recollect something else?

MOTHER. As you seem interested in the account, I will relate another method practised

in those islands. When there are not persons to let the fowler down by the great rope, he drives a post, sloping, into the ground, and, fastening a rope to it, lets himself down without any help, and then works like the rest. Sometimes the fowlers are seen climbing where they can only fasten the ends of their toes and fingers; not avoiding such places, though there are often a hundred fathoms between them and the sea.

ROBERT. What is a fathom, mamma?

MOTHER. A fathom is six feet. Do you recollect going to see the monument, when we were in London?

ROBERT. Yes, mamma, very well. It was a high building, and reached a great way above the tops of the houses, though some of them were very high.

MOTHER. The monument is two hundred and two feet in height. Now, as a fathom is six feet, a hundred fathom must be six hundred feet, which is nearly three times the height of the monument.

ROBERT. That is very high, indeed. What a great way the poor men would have to fall, if they were to lose their hold: they could not possibly save themselves from being killed.

MOTHER. It is difficult for those who have

never seen a mountain, to form an adequate idea of its height. Even when we contrast it with other objects, we have but an imperfect conception. Many of the cliffs, on which the birds build, are two hundred fathoms above the sea.

ROBERT. Do they catch these birds at all times of the year, mamma?

MOTHER. No, my love: the birds forsake them in winter, and are supposed to migrate to more southern countries.

ROBERT. What do the people live upon, then, mamma?

MOTHER. Upon the salted fowl which they prepared in the summer. They are unlike the savages of America, who, when they have procured a quantity of game, feast on it till it is all consumed, and afterwards almost perish from hunger, before they can obtain a fresh supply. The inhabitants of the Feroe Islands are prudent and industrious: they salt what fowl they can spare, and lay them by for the winter season; and, when they are plentiful, export some to other countries. Their best time for taking them is in thick and foggy weather, for then the birds stay in the rocks; but in clear, sun-shiny weather, they seek the sea. When they prepare to depart for the winter,

they mostly keep near the sea-shore, when the natives get at them in boats, and take a great number. Those that escape, collect together, and steer their course to some warmer climate.

ROBERT. Indeed, mamma, it is a very entertaining account. I have quite enjoyed hearing it; and I should now like to know something about the Feroe Islands. I suppose, as they are in the north, they are very cold and dreary.

MOTHER. I will willingly give you a description of them; for I like to gratify a rational curiosity, and am glad to find that you wish to gain knowledge. I believe you know where the Feroe Islands are situated.

ROBERT. Yes; I have often seen them on the map. They are in the Northern Ocean, a little above the Shetland Islands.

MOTHER. You are right. They are a numerous group, belonging to the king of Denmark. Seventeen of them are supposed to be habitable; each of which is a lofty mountain, rising out of the waves, and divided from the others by deep and rapid currents. All are steep and rocky; some are deeply indented with secure harbours, and most of them exhibit tremendous precipices. The soil is shallow, but remarkably fertile: the only corn

grown there is barley, which yields an abundant crop. The grass affords good pasturage for sheep; but no trees above the size of a juniper, or a stunted willow, will grow there.

ROBERT. Then they have no beautiful groves to walk in, as we have. I dare say they would think our oaks and elms very fine trees. Can you tell me any thing more about them, mamma?

MOTHER. The climate is intensely cold in winter; but the inhabitants wear warm clothing, to defend themselves from the severity of the weather. The women knit a great number of woollen waistcoats, caps, and stockings; many of which are exported to other countries; besides salted fowl and mutton, tallow, feathers, goose-quills, and eider down.

ROBERT. What is *eider down*, mamma?

MOTHER. It is the down or feathers of the eider ducks.

ROBERT. Are eider ducks different from our ducks?

MOTHER. They are nearly twice as large, and very different in their habits. Our ducks, you know, do not confine themselves to their nests, but carelessly lay their eggs in various places.

ROBERT. Yes; I have sometimes found



them among cabbages, and very often on the grass. When my sister and I went to the farm-yard, a few days ago, one of the ducks was in a coop. Sally said she had put it there to lay; because, when it was loose, it laid its eggs any where, and then she had a great deal of trouble to find them. We then went to look at the other fowls: some of them had such pretty little broods. One hen had nine young ducks; and when she clucked, they ran to her, and hid themselves under her wings. But why do hens sit upon ducks eggs, mamma? and why cannot the ducks sit upon their own?

MOTHER. Ducks are very heedless; and if eggs are placed under them, often forsake their charge, and leave them to spoil. Should they, indeed, have patience to sit the whole time, and hatch a brood, they let the young ones go about as they like, or paddle in the water, without taking any further care of them; and, as they are too weak to defend themselves, the poor little creatures often fall a prey to rats, or other vermin, that infest the water.

ROBERT. And even when they are placed under a hen, mamma, they will go to the pond, though she clucks, and tries to keep them away. I have often pitied her, she seems so unhappy;

for, as she cannot swim herself, she does not know why they should.

MOTHER. The hen is a tender and careful nurse, and much more solicitous about her young charge than the original parent would have been; whose carelessness and inattention justify us in depriving her of her natural right, and transferring it to another. The hen, it is true, cannot hinder the ducklings from going into the pond; but she anxiously keeps on the brink, and watches for their safety. When they come out, she guards them from danger, and protects them with the greatest tenderness. Her faithful attention is often a subject of poetry. In the fable of the shepherd and the philosopher, it says:

“ The hen, who, from the chilly air,  
With pious wing, protects her care;  
And every fowl that flies at large,  
Instructs me in a parent’s charge.”

Whilst the duck is alike regardless of its eggs and young, the hen is careful of both, and often rears a bird from every egg placed under her.

ROBERT. Are eider ducks careful of their young, mamma?

MOTHER. Yes, my love: no birds surpass

them in providing warm and comfortable nests, or in their parental care of their offspring. They dig holes in the earth, which they line with long grass and reeds; within this, is another lining of moss; and to guard them still more from the intense rigour of the climate, they add a third lining, made of the softest and warmest materials imaginable. This is the down which the female plucks off her breast, and which, in warmth and lightness, surpasses every other substance with which we are acquainted. Thus are their young brought up on beds of the softest down.

ROBERT. And is this the down which they send to other countries?

MOTHER. Yes; and it is reckoned very valuable.

ROBERT. What is it used for, mamma?

MOTHER. For stuffing beds, and making quilts.

ROBERT. They must rob a great many nests, before they get enough for one bed.

MOTHER. Yes; and to obtain a sufficient number, they watch the place where the duck begins to build, and suffering her to lay, take away both the eggs and nest. Not discouraged, however, by this disappointment, she builds and lays in the same place a second

time; and this they in the same manner take away. Still persevering, she builds a third time; but the drake must supply the down from his breast, to line the nest with; and if this be robbed, they both forsake the place, and build there no more. The natives carefully separate the down from the dirt and moss, with which it is mixed; and though, in their cold nights, a bed of down would be a luxury, they gladly exchange it with the inhabitants of more fertile regions, for brandy and other necessaries.

ROBERT. Do not they keep any for themselves, mamma?

MOTHER. Indeed, my dear boy, their necessities compel them to relinquish such indulgences. Satisfied, if they can procure coarse, but warm clothing, barley-bread, fish, and occasionally some mutton, and a few gulls or ducks, either fresh or salted, and a hard bed to lie on, they envy not the refined natives of the south; but are as contented in their huts, as the rich amongst us can be in their mansions. The only indulgence they wish for is a little brandy and tobacco; (for they are fond of smoking;) and after the danger to which they expose themselves, this is an enjoyment, of which, surely, none would wish to deprive them.

ROBERT. I have been thinking, mamma, how many things we get from other countries. Do you think the feathers in my bed came from the Feroe Islands?

MOTHER. We are, indeed, greatly indebted to other countries, and, in return, supply them with many things which they stand in need of. Many goods, manufactured in England, are yearly exported to other parts of the world.

“ Each climate needs what other climes produce,  
 And offers something for the general use:  
 No land but answers to the common call,  
 And, in return, receives supplies from all.”

The feathers of your bed are, however, the produce of our own country. Our water-fowl, particularly geese, yield excellent feathers; and though not equally soft with eider down, yet we sleep as soundly on them.

ROBERT. Indeed we do; for I fall asleep very soon after I go to bed, and I seldom wake till it is time to rise in the morning. But will not the feathers of cocks, and hens, and turkeys, do to stuff beds with, mamma?

MOTHER. The feathers of land-fowl are of but little value; but those of water-fowl are

worth a great deal, from their tendency to resist moisture, and their property of not matting together.

ROBERT. What is the reason of this, mamma?

MOTHER. Do you not recollect my once telling you, that oil would not readily mix with water?

ROBERT. Yes, mamma; and to prove it, you poured some drops of water on a nasturtium leaf; and when you had held them on a little while, you let them drop off, and I was surprised to see that they had not wetted the leaf.

MOTHER. But how did that prove that oil will not mix with water?

ROBERT. You told me, that the nasturtium-leaf was oily, which was the reason that the water would not wet it: you then rubbed the leaf in your hand, to get the oil off; and afterwards poured some water on it, which wetted it, the same as it would have done any other leaf.

MOTHER. Then you will now understand what I am going to tell you. The feathers of water-fowl are all furnished with oil, which glazes their surface, and prevents their stick-

ing together. It also prevents their imbibing moisture; and in this consists their particular use. How many would otherwise suffer from damp beds. But although we thus make them subservient to our use, we are not to suppose that it is to *our* convenience, merely, that they are conducive. Can you find out, of what benefit the oil of their feathers is to the birds themselves?

ROBERT. I suppose it prevents their taking cold, from being so much in the water.

MOTHER. That is one of its uses, though not the most essential. Oil is a very light substance, and floats on the top of other fluids. The oily feathers of the birds are light and warm, and, by protecting them from wet, enable them to support themselves more easily on the water.

ROBERT. I think I know what you mean, mamma: if the feathers were not oily, they would get very wet, which would make them heavier, and then the fowls would sink. But oil is so greasy, and smells so disagreeable, that I wonder people like to use the feathers.

MOTHER. For that reason, those of some species of water-fowl, having too great an abun-

dance of oil, are totally useless for domestic purposes. Indeed, the unpleasant smell of the feathers of all kinds of water-fowl, when new, is extremely difficult to remove. Neither exposure to the sun and air, nor drying them over an oven, will entirely effect it. To be quite free, they must be lain upon for some time.

ROBERT. Then old feathers are better than new ones.

MOTHER. Yes; and they are worth nearly twice as much.

ROBERT. Is there any other use in the oil, besides what you have told me?

MOTHER. It contributes materially to the animal's warmth; and as many of the species inhabit the coldest regions in the north of Europe, serves to defend them against the inclemency of the weather.

ROBERT. How many things I have learned this evening. I did not know before, that ducks and geese were so useful. I shall think of them to-night, when I lie on my nice, comfortable bed, that is so soft and warm.

MOTHER. You may now go and enjoy it. I have a letter to write this evening, and cannot attend to you any longer.



ROBERT. But will you promise to tell me something else to-morrow?

MOTHER. I cannot tell what engagements I may have to-morrow; but, if I am at liberty, I shall have no objection to comply with your wishes.

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CHAPTER II.  
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ROBERT.

Now, mamma, as my sister is gone to bed, I hope you are at liberty to attend to me. I have a great many questions to ask you. I should like to hear something more about gulls; and what sort of birds penguins are; and whether you can tell me any other ways of bird-catching.

MOTHER. I find, my love, that when I enter upon a subject, you like to hear all I can tell you respecting it; and as far as is proper, and you are capable of understanding, I mostly endeavour to satisfy you. But I hope, as you grow older, you will not always look to me for information; but read and search for yourself. I sometimes think you ask questions to avoid the trouble of thinking; or because you think it easier to hear me relate a circumstance, than to read about it; but this arises from indolence, which I wish you to overcome.

ROBERT. But you know I am a little boy, mamma, and I cannot always understand what I read. But when you tell me about any thing that I do not quite understand, you explain it, and that makes it easy. So do, mamma, be so good as to talk to me this evening, and tell me about these things.

MOTHER. What things, Robert?

ROBERT. First of all, I should like to hear about gulls, mamma; because we were talking of them last night, and I remember once seeing one. It was when I was at the sea-side with you, last summer: at a distance I took it for a pigeon; but, as it came nearer, I found I had been mistaken, and my father told me it was a gull. Presently it darted down to the water, and seized a fish, which had ventured too near the top.

MOTHER. They live chiefly upon fish, and this gives their flesh a rank, unpleasant flavour. Sometimes they are seen following the ploughman, in fallow fields, to pick up insects; and when living food cannot be obtained, they will even eat carrion.

ROBERT. What is carrion, mamma?

MOTHER. Flesh that is become putrid and unwholesome.

ROBERT. Then I do not wonder at their

being disagreeable food, if that is what they live on. But I interrupted you, mamma. Please to go on.

MOTHER. The gulls are a very numerous tribe: there are twenty different species. Those that frequent our shores are of the smaller kinds. They may be seen in almost every part of the kingdom; but they chiefly frequent bold and rocky shores, and are found in the greatest abundance on the coast of Norway, and the steep, craggy islands of the Northern Ocean. There they build, and bring up their young; and millions may be heard screaming, with discordant notes, for months together. Their nests are formed of long grass and sea-weed, and are built either on the ledges of rocks, or in holes in the cliffs; and as they sit one above another, with their white breasts forward, the whole group has been compared to an apothecary's shop.

ROBERT. How droll they must look.

MOTHER. Yes, it is an amusing sight. None of the gull tribe lay many eggs; seldom more than three, and frequently only one, being found in a nest. From this cause, and the destruction made among them, their number, in many places, is yearly diminishing. They are a very quarrelsome race, and have frequent

contests with each other, particularly in the breeding-season. One bird, who has no nest of her own, tries to dispossess another, and put herself in the place; and if she happens to be the stronger of the two, often succeeds in her attempt. But she does not long retain the nest she has thus unjustly acquired; for the instant she flies away, to seek for food, the rightful possessor returns, to claim her property, and always ventures another battle before she will again relinquish it.

ROBERT. I do not blame her for that. When she has been at the trouble of building, it would be very cowardly to give up her nest to another, who is too lazy to build for herself; and who does not deserve to have one, since she will not be at the trouble of making it.

MOTHER. I am quite of your opinion, Robert, and am glad the little sufferer regains her right. Will you like to hear of some of the other species of gulls?

ROBERT. If you please, mamma.

MOTHER. The gannet, or solan goose, is one of the largest species. It is a very singular-looking bird, chiefly white, but having under its mouth a narrow slip of bare, black skin; and beneath this another, which will stretch out

like a pelican's pouch, and is large enough to contain five or six herrings, which it carries at once to its young ones. These birds chiefly resort to islands uninhabited by man. Vast numbers are found in the islands to the north of Scotland, and those in the North sea, off the coast of Norway. Bass Island, in the firth of Edinburgh, abounds with them; and as the gentleman to whom it belongs will not suffer them to be disturbed whilst bringing up their young, they are so confident, that, if a person goes on shore, they will come and feed their young close beside him.

ROBERT. Will not the gentleman suffer any of them to be killed, mamma?

MOTHER. Yes; when the breeding-season is over: and, as the Scotch consider them a dainty, he makes a great profit by their sale. During the months of May and June, the island is so covered with their nests, eggs, and young, that it is almost impossible to walk without treading on them. The flocks of birds on the wing are so numerous, that they seem to darken the air, like a cloud; and their noise is such, that a man can, with difficulty, be heard to speak by the person next him. They are also very numerous on the rocky island of St. Kilda. It is said that nearly twenty-three

thousand are yearly consumed by the inhabitants, besides a great number of eggs.

ROBERT. Then, I suppose, they eat hardly any thing else.

MOTHER. They subsist almost entirely on them. Both the eggs and fowls are preserved in small stone buildings, in the shape of a pyramid; and covered with turf-ashes, to prevent the evaporation of their moisture.

ROBERT. What is a pyramid, mamma?

MOTHER. A building that is large at the bottom, and ends in a point at the top.

ROBERT. Do gannets go to other countries in the winter?

MOTHER. Yes; they migrate to the south of Cornwall. Sailors often see flocks of them at sea, and have a curious method of taking them.

ROBERT. What is that, mamma?

MOTHER. As these birds are very fond of herrings and pilchards, the sailors fasten one to a board, and leave it floating on the water. The gannet instantly pounces down upon the fish, and is killed by the violence of the shock against the board. When fishermen have been taking herrings, the gannets are so bold as to come down, and snatch them out of the boat.

ROBERT. I think sailors must often want

some amusement. I suppose they catch birds, as much for pleasure as for the sake of eating them.

MOTHER. They, no doubt, take pleasure in it; but they live so much upon salt meat, that they are very glad of a change. All are fond of variety, and find it irksome always to be confined to the same mode of living. During a calm, sailors have a great deal of leisure; and frequently stand, for hours together, watching the birds and fishes that come in sight. The cormorant affords them much amusement: it is a species of gull, and surpasses all other birds in its dexterity in fishing. It hovers about in the air, watching for its prey; and the instant it sees a fish come near the surface, pounces down, and seizes it; but if it happens to catch it by the tail, and cannot swallow it that way, because of the fins, it tosses it above its head, and very dexterously catches it as it drops, by the right end, and swallows it with ease.

ROBERT. What a cunning creature!

MOTHER. The Chinese train these birds to fish for them; and one man can easily manage a hundred. He takes them with him, in his boat, into a lake; and when he arrives at the proper place, gives a signal, upon which they fly off, each in a different direction. They



portion out the lake with great sagacity, and each keeps to his own part. As soon as one of them finds a fish, he seizes it by the middle, and carries it to his master. When the fish is too large for one to carry by himself, another helps him; and one taking hold of the head, the other of the tail, they carry it together to the boat; and perching on one of the oars, which the boat-man stretches out, they give it to him, and fly away to seek for more. When they are tired, he lets them rest a little; but never feeds them till he thinks they have caught enough.

ROBERT. That is very hard, poor things. I wonder they do not eat some of the fish, when they are hungry, instead of taking them to the boatman.

MOTHER. To prevent their doing so, he fastens a string round their throats; which is a necessary precaution, as they are very greedy and voracious. This is almost the only water-fowl that sits on trees.

ROBERT. You surprise me, mamma! I did not know that any water-fowl sat on trees. The skins between their toes must make it very awkward to clasp hold of the boughs.

MOTHER. I do not wonder at your surprise, my love; but you will readily account for this

seeming inconsistency, when I tell you, that the middle toe is toothed, or notched, like a saw, which, doubtless, assists it in catching hold, and keeping itself firmly fixed on its perch; and also enables it to keep firm hold of its fishy prey.

ROBERT. You say it is *almost the only* water-fowl that sits on trees. Can you tell me of any others?

MOTHER. The pelican is another instance, and the only one that I at present recollect.

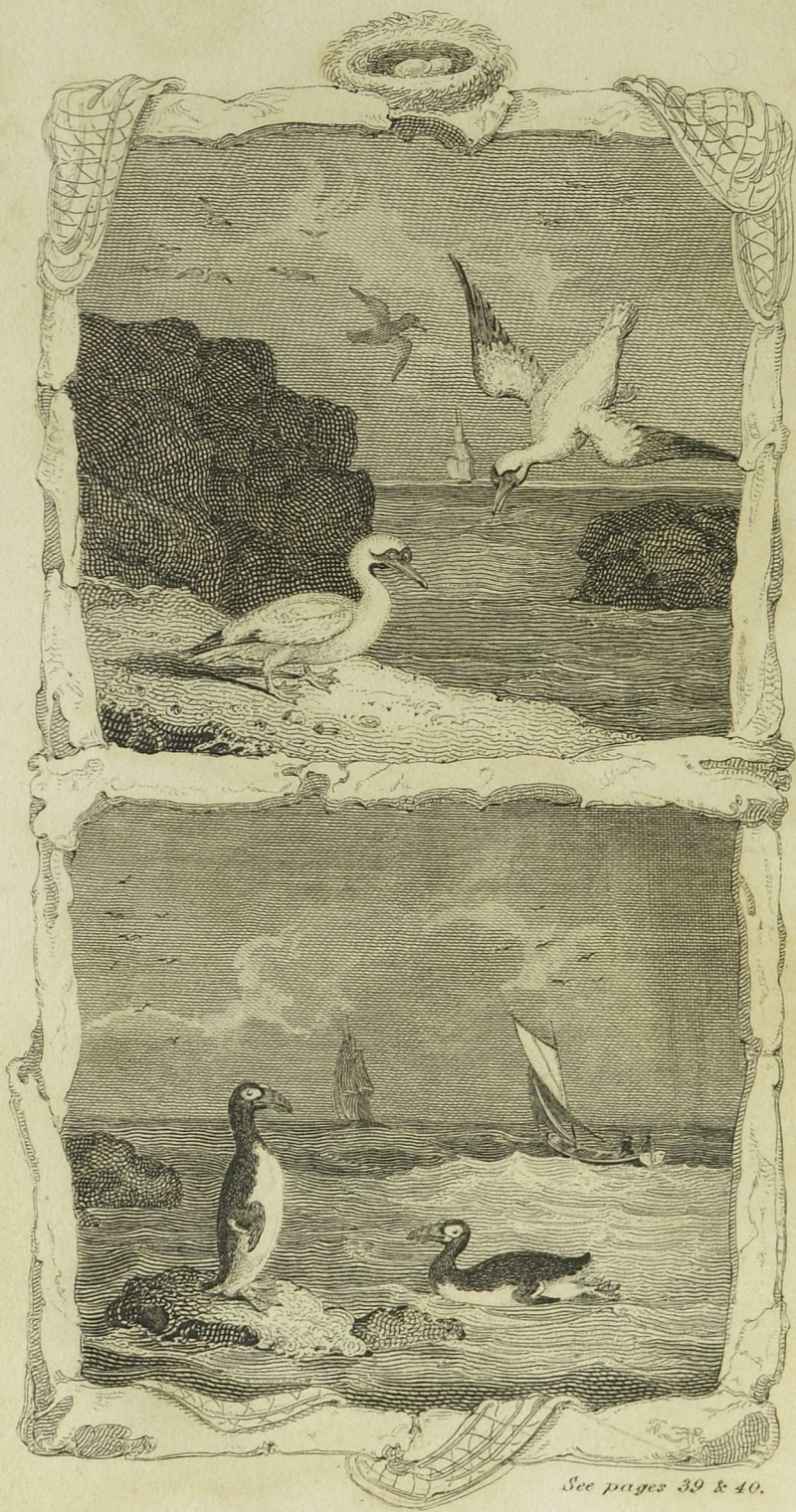
ROBERT. Do cormorants build their nests on trees, mamma?

MOTHER. Yes, very often; but they do not confine themselves to them: they frequently build on the cliffs of rocks. They vary their habits as occasion requires: sometimes fishing by night, as well as by day; and in fresh-water lakes, as well as in the ocean.

MOTHER. As they are so very greedy, I suppose they soon clear a lake of fish.

MOTHER. Not only lakes, but the mouths of fresh-water rivers, are nearly drained of their inhabitants, to supply the unceasing gluttony of these birds; and were not the fishy tribe very prolific, there would, in time, not be a fish remaining. Their appetite appears never satisfied.





*See pages 39 & 40.*

ROBERT. What greedy creatures! Do not you think, mamma, their flesh must be very disagreeable? but, perhaps, no person has ever tasted it.

MOTHER. I think nothing but dreadful hunger would induce any one to eat it; since even the smell, when in its healthful state, is more offensive than that of meat that has long been putrid.

ROBERT. I wonder eating so much does not make the birds ill.

MOTHER. Their food is suddenly digested, and does not afford them much nourishment; so that, soon after a meal, they are as hungry as before, and are ever craving food.

ROBERT. I do not wish to hear any thing more about them, mamma. They are greedy, disagreeable birds. Indeed, I think all greedy animals are unpleasant. What dirty, disgusting creatures pigs are!

MOTHER. Perhaps, my love, you have heard enough for this evening, and do not wish me to tell you any thing else.

ROBERT. Oh, no; I am not tired, mamma. I hope you will tell me something more. You have not yet told me about the penguin, which, I think you said, was caught in the Feroe Islands. I should like very much to hear about

that: it is such a droll-looking bird. I have seen a picture of one. It has short wings, that look almost like a fish's fins; and its little, awkward legs seem stuck into its body.

MOTHER. For this reason they are but ill-fitted for flight, and still less for walking: they waddle from side to side, more awkwardly than a duck; for their "little, awkward legs," as you call them, have a great body to sustain; and were they not assisted by their wings, they would scarcely move faster than a tortoise. When they attempt to fly, they have to make several strokes with their wings, before they can raise themselves from the ground; for their wings are too short, too scantily furnished with quills, and placed too forward, to facilitate their ascent into the air. Even when, by repeated efforts, they have succeeded in raising themselves, they fly but slowly, and are soon tired of their exertion, and obliged to rest.

ROBERT. Can they swim, mamma?

MOTHER. Yes, and dive too; for the awkward position of their wings and legs, which so unqualifies them for living upon land, adapts them admirably for a residence in the water. There, their legs, being placed very backward, push forward their body with great swiftness;

and their wings serve as paddles, to help them along.

ROBERT. Really, that is very curious; and, as I suppose they live upon fish, it may be more useful to them than longer wings and legs would be. And you say they can dive, mamma?

MOTHER. They are very expert divers; and when they see a fish, a great depth below the surface, they dart down, and seize it. They will continue under water for some minutes, then ascend to take breath, and again dive for fresh prey.

ROBERT. Then, I suppose, they are not very easily caught; for I dare say, if they see themselves in danger, they dart down, and get out of the way.

MOTHER. They are easily taken on land, but readily escape in the water; for if they see themselves pursued, they instantly sink, and show nothing but their bills, till the enemy is out of sight.

ROBERT. But how can they breathe so long? for I have heard persons say, that, when they have been bathing, only just jumping into the water has almost taken away their breath.

MOTHER. In the lungs of the penguin there are numerous vacuities, or hollow parts, into

which they inhale a large portion of air at once, sufficient to serve them for a length of time.

ROBERT. I have often heard you say, mamma, that every animal is formed in the manner best suited to its way of living: this seems the case with the penguin.

MOTHER. Yes, my love; the all-wise Creator has provided for the comfort and accommodation of all his creatures, and furnished them with every convenience their nature can require. Each is formed in the manner best adapted to its peculiar habits and mode of life. As you become better acquainted with natural history, you will have stronger proofs of the wisdom and goodness of Providence; yet the present is sufficient to convince you of his tender care.

“ 'Tis sweet to muse upon his skill, display'd  
(Infinite skill) in all that he has made!  
To trace, in nature's most minute design,  
The signature and stamp of power divine;  
Contrivance intricate, express'd with ease,  
Where unassisted sight no beauty sees.”

ROBERT. I hope, as I grow older, you will teach me more of natural history: it is very entertaining.

MOTHER. I wish you to pay particular attention to it: it is my favourite study, and



always supplies fresh sources of amusement. Besides, I know of none better calculated to enlarge the mind, and furnish it with just ideas of the benevolence and wisdom of the Deity. I wish you to cultivate a taste for it; and if I find that you take a delight in it, I shall willingly supply you with books on the subject.

ROBERT. Thank you, mamma. I am sure I shall be fond of it, and like very much to read the books.—But now, will you go on with the penguin?

MOTHER. Of all this tribe, the largest and most remarkable is the penguin of South America. It walks erect, with its fins, like wings, hanging down like arms: its breast, and the under part of the body, are of a snowy whiteness, except a line of black across the crop. When seen at a distance, they are said to look like children with white aprons.

ROBERT. I wonder whether I should mistake them for little girls. I suppose they look very much like the children in the charity-school: you know they wear dark-blue frocks and white aprons. The next time I see any of them in the street, I shall think of the penguins.

MOTHER. These birds are said to unite in

themselves the qualities of men, fowls, and fishes. Can you tell me what these are?

ROBERT. Let me consider. They are like fishes, because they swim, and their wings are like fins; and they are like fowls, because they have feathers. But what can they be like men in? Oh, now I know. It is because they walk with their heads up, as we do.

MOTHER. You are right; but in something else I hope you will never resemble them. They are very greedy animals: even the young ones will eat three herrings at a single meal. Hence they are generally extremely fat.

ROBERT. I suppose they are never used for food, mamma.

MOTHER. Their flesh is rank and fishy; yet our sailors, who have but little variety, say that it is pretty good eating.

ROBERT. That is because they like a change. But do you think we should call them nice, mamma?

MOTHER. Probably not; since we have sufficient variety to gratify, without cloying the appetite. But should you, as you grow up, ever have occasion to take a long voyage, you will find a difference, and that you must not be particular in your choice of food. I believe it is only when young that the penguins are

eaten; since the flesh of the old ones is so tough, and the feathers lie so thick, that they will stand the blow of a scimitar, without injury.

ROBERT. Are their feathers ever used for beds?

MOTHER. No; they contain too great a quantity of oil to be serviceable.

ROBERT. I recollect your telling me, that the feathers of many water-fowl were useless, on that account. Do penguins mostly live on the water, mamma?

MOTHER. Yes; it seems their natural element, since they are more warmly covered with feathers than any other birds whatever; and their dexterity in diving and swimming, adapts them for a residence in it.

ROBERT. But they come on land sometimes.

MOTHER. They seldom come on shore, except to lay their eggs.

ROBERT. But do they not stay and sit on them, mamma?

MOTHER. Yes, my love; but from the warmth of their feathers, and the great heat of their bodies, the eggs are soon hatched.

ROBERT. What kind of nests do they make?

MOTHER. They build no nests; but where they find a small depression in the earth, lay their eggs, without any further trouble, except in parts where they have been frequently disturbed. In some places, they are found to burrow two or three yards deep; in others, to clamber up the ledge of a rock, and there bring up their young. They, probably, use these precautions to avoid danger, as they appear to be, naturally, a very fearless tribe; but have learned, from experience, that some care is necessary, and that men are their enemies.

ROBERT. Do people get their eggs, mamma?

MOTHER. Yes; and the birds too. Some of this tribe have been called boobies, from the insensibility they have shown, when persons have attempted to kill them. When our seamen first went among them, not suspecting any danger, these birds would suffer themselves to be knocked on the head, before they attempted to escape; and even shot at, in flocks, till every one of their number was destroyed.

ROBERT. What silly birds! They do not deserve to be pitied much: they should get out of the way.

MOTHER. It is singular they should not have endeavoured to escape, since self-defence

seems common to animals in general. Few, I believe, can be found, that will not try to save their lives, if they are in danger. It proves, however, how unsuspecting and incautious animals are, when not liable to be disturbed in their retreats.

ROBERT. Are penguins as careless now, when people try to get them?

MOTHER. No; they are more guarded, and endeavour to avoid danger, by forsaking those retreats where they are liable to be disturbed. When the parts they inhabit were first discovered, their eggs were found, by hundreds, on the plains, where the old ones sat upon them in careless security. They now seek more retired places; and it is said that, sometimes, several will lay their eggs in the same hole, and sit upon it, by turns, while one is placed, as sentinel, to give warning of approaching danger.

ROBERT. How very strange! I thought all birds, except ducks, were careful of their eggs, and never liked to leave them till they were hatched; and that they all kept to their own nests. I do not like penguins at all, mamma.

MOTHER. They do not, indeed, show much sagacity or tenderness; but there is a numerous tribe of smaller birds, very similar to them in

form, and in their general habits, that are noted for their care of their young, especially the puffin. When once become a mother, this little bird equals the hen, in tenderness and persevering attention to the wants of her young brood. Though not much larger than a pigeon, few birds or beasts will then venture to attack her, as she courageously defends herself against them. The sea-raven, which is very fond of the young, sometimes ventures near her retreats; but no sooner does the puffin perceive him, than she catches him under the throat, with her beak, and sticks her claws into his breast. The raven screams, and attempts to disengage himself; but this little enemy will not let go her hold, till they come to the sea: they then drop down together, till they reach the water; when the puffin flies away, and the raven is drowned.

ROBERT. Does the raven never kill the puffin?

MOTHER. Yes; he often overcomes his weak enemy by strength, and then robs the nest of its young.

ROBERT. What kind of a nest does the puffin make?

MOTHER. It scrapes a hole in the ground,



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See page 59



near the shore. This curious bird is furnished with a very singular bill, of a triangular shape.

ROBERT. I understand what you mean by that, because you have shown me how to draw a triangle on my slate. It has three sides, and three corners. Go on, dear mamma.

MOTHER. The edge of the bill turns upwards, and ends in a sharp point; having a striking resemblance to the coulter of a plough.

ROBERT. To the iron part, do not you mean, mamma?

MOTHER. Yes, my dear.

ROBERT. That is a strange thing. I can see no use in it; and yet you say every thing in nature has its use.

MOTHER. I believe, if we examine patiently, we shall find it so; and you shall now hear what use the puffin makes of this strange bill. When it has scraped the hole some depth in the earth, it turns itself on its back, and burrows, with its bill and claws, to the depth of eight or ten feet. What do you think of that, Robert?

ROBERT. I think its odd bill is very useful; and now I know why the edge is upwards: it is to cut the ground, as a plough does. How glad I am I know that! I hope I shall never

think again, that any thing God has made is of no use.

MOTHER. On the contrary, the more you know of his works, the more you will find to excite your love and admiration; and I wish you always to think of him as a Being full of kindness and benevolence, who cares for the meanest of his creatures, and bountifully provides for the wants of his whole family.

ROBERT. Indeed, mamma, the more I learn, the more I find how good and kind HE is; and that every thing HE has made is really of use. Can you tell me any thing more about the puffin?

MOTHER. Great numbers are found in a little island called Priestholm, near the isle of Anglesea.

ROBERT. May I get the map, and find it?

MOTHER. I believe Priestholm is not mentioned on your map. But you may look for Anglesea: it is the most northern county of Wales.

ROBERT. Here it is, near Caernarvonshire; but I cannot find Priestholm.

MOTHER. In this little island are great numbers of rabbits; which the puffin, not willing to be at the trouble of burrowing, when she finds

a hole ready made, dispossesses, and seizes their retreats.

ROBERT. How unjust! I wonder the rabbits do not kill her!

MOTHER. They are glad to get out of her way; for the puffin bites terribly with her bill, and, were the rabbits to oppose her, would, probably, make them pay for their courage with their lives.

ROBERT. Are they of any use, mamma?

MOTHER. When pickled, and preserved with spices, they are considered very fine, by those who are fond of high-flavoured dishes.

ROBERT. Can you tell me how they are caught?

MOTHER. They are drawn out of their holes with a hooked stick.

ROBERT. I suppose they feed upon fish, as they live near the sea.

MOTHER. Their food consists chiefly of sprats and sea-weed. They leave their young early in the morning, and seek the water; where they remain till night, when they return to their nests.

ROBERT. But what do the young ones live upon, mamma?

MOTHER. When the food of the old ones

which they procured in the day, is become partly digested, they eject it into the mouth of their young, who thrive upon it, and become very fat.

ROBERT. Do these birds migrate like the gulls?

MOTHER. It is supposed they do, though to what countries is not known. They forsake their summer retreats in August, and are not seen again till the ensuing spring. It is thought that their voyage is performed more on the water, than in the air; and that, if the season is stormy and tempestuous, they undergo incredible hardships; as they are found, by hundreds, cast upon the shore, lean, and apparently starved by hunger, as they cannot fish in very stormy weather.

ROBERT. Can you tell me about any other curious birds, mamma?

MOTHER. I would rather not tell you any more at present: if you hear too much at one time, you will be apt to forget a part.

ROBERT. Then what shall I do the rest of the evening?

MOTHER. Cannot you find some amusement? You have dissected maps: will you not like to put one of them together?

ROBERT. Yes; that is the very thing. I

will get England and Wales; and, perhaps, when I have joined all the pieces, you will question me in the counties.

MOTHER. Willingly, my love.

ROBERT. And then we shall spend our time happily. Do not you think so, mamma?

MOTHER. Indeed, my dear boy, I am always happy, when I see you good, and disposed to enjoy yourself. You may bring your map to this side of the table, where there is room to lay it out; and when you have finished, I will question you on the counties, and I hope I shall find you perfect in them.

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CHAPTER III.  
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ROBERT.

WHAT are you going to your desk for, mamma? I hope you have no letter to write this evening. I want to talk to you.

MOTHER. No, my love; I am not going to write. I only went to fetch a verse that I thought you would like to hear. If you can make out the writing, you may read it to me.

ROBERT. Will you be so good as to read it, mamma; for, as the writing is small, I am afraid it would puzzle me; and then I should have to stop to make out the words, which is very tiresome; and I should not understand it so well as if you read it. But what is it about, mamma?

MOTHER. The lines are on bird-catching; which, you know, we were talking about two evenings ago. I found you were pleased with the account; and I thought you would remem-

ber what I told you better, if it were in rhyme.  
As you wish it, I will read the lines.

Now let us, this evening, in fancy, set forth  
On a voyage of pleasure, and sail to the north ;  
Pass our dear native England, and rest for awhile,  
To watch the sea-fowl on the famous Bass Isle ;  
See the eggs and the young ones, how closely they lie,  
And the old ones, above, seem to darken the sky.  
We'll then steer away for the Feroe's domain,  
Whose high rocky islands rise out of the main ;  
The gulls, like a cloud, are their summits surrounding ;  
And the cliffs, with their nests and their eggs are abound-  
ing.

But who is it ventures to climb up the steep,  
That awfully hangs o'er the ocean so deep ?  
Who holds on the rock, by his toes and his fingers,  
Discovers his danger, and fearfully lingers ;  
Then, summing up courage, renews his ascent,  
With all the exertion that vigour has lent ?  
'Tis the bold, hardy native, in search of his plunder,  
Who thus is exciting our terror and wonder :  
He discovers his spoil, seizes hold of his prey,  
And bears the wild birds, in his girdle, away ;  
Then carries them home to his children and wife,  
Who share what he's earn'd at the risk of his life.  
But ah ! what new dangers astonish our sight !  
Who is it descends from yon mountainous height ?  
Though stones, in huge masses, around him are falling,  
The heart of the fearful with terror appalling ;  
He sits on his rope, swings about in the air,  
And exultingly hopes, while the timid despair.  
With firmness and courage, the vent'rous believe  
No action too great for their skill to achieve.

But now, on the shore let us land, and look round;  
There are eider ducks digging large holes in the ground.  
How kindly they tear the soft down from their breasts!  
And use the warm substance for lining their nests.  
The natives collect it, and bear it away,  
And to far distant regions their cargo convey.  
We'll lay in a store, and then homeward we'll sail,  
Since the wind's in our favour, a brisk northern gale.  
Our voyage concluded, no longer we'll roam,  
But contentedly, gratefully, settle at home;  
Whose peaceful enjoyments true pleasure bestow;  
Where cheerfulness reigns, and pure joys ever flow.

ROBERT. I should like to learn those lines.  
Will you lend them to me?

MOTHER. Certainly; and you may learn  
them at your leisure.

ROBERT. Since I heard that account of the  
poor bird-catchers, I have often thought of  
them. What dangers they suffer! I am sure  
I should be afraid of climbing up their steep  
rocks, or of being let down from the top by a  
rope.

MOTHER. Had you been accustomed to it  
from your infancy, it would appear less dread-  
ful; though still dangerous, and sufficient to  
deter the timid from the adventure. Be thank-  
ful, then, that you are not exposed to such  
dangers. Providence has placed you in a situ-  
ation where you are provided with all the com-



forts and conveniences of life, without any care of your own; and where all he requires of you, for his benefits, is to partake of them with a thankful heart. Contrast your condition with that of the poor Feroes, and tell me what you think of the difference.

ROBERT. It reminds me of a verse in one of my hymns:

“ Are these thy favours, day by day,  
To me above above the rest?  
Then let me love thee more than they,  
And try to serve thee best.”

MOTHER. Cherish that feeling, my dear boy, and be grateful for all the favours bestowed upon you. You cannot be too sensible of them; and I hope you will endeavour to prove your gratitude, by always acting in the way which you believe most acceptable to him who has conferred them:

“ Act well thy part, and do thy best;  
Leave to thy Maker all the rest.”

ROBERT. I hope I shall be a good boy, and do what is right.

MOTHER. I hope you will; and if you

should ever feel inclined to be discontented at your condition, think of the poor Feroes.

ROBERT. Can you tell me any other ways of catching birds, mamma?

MOTHER. The Chinese have a singular and curious method of taking wild-ducks, which I believe you have not heard.

ROBERT. No, never. I should like to hear it. I suppose they are not eider ducks.

MOTHER. No; eider ducks only inhabit cold regions. China, you know, is a hot country. Do you remember what quarter of the world it is in?

ROBERT. Yes, it is in Asia. Now for this curious way of catching the ducks, mamma.

MOTHER. When a number of them are settled on any lake, or shallow water, the fowler sends two or three gourds to float among them.

ROBERT. What are gourds, mamma?

MOTHER. They resemble our pumpkins, and grow to a very large size. You have seen a pumpkin, Robert?

ROBERT. Yes; poor people sometimes put them on their chimney-pieces, for an ornament. I saw one in a cottage, a few days ago, that was nearly as large as my head.

MOTHER. The ducks, at first, seem afraid

of the gourds; but, by degrees, they lose their fear, and at last are so bold as to come and rub their bills against them. When the fowler sees this, he hollows one of the gourds, large enough to put his head in, and, making holes to see and breathe through, puts it on. He then goes slowly into the water; keeping his body under, and showing nothing but his head, in the gourd, above the surface. In this manner he moves slowly towards the ducks, who, having by that time become used to the gourds, are unsuspecting, and peck at his, the same as at the others. He then watches his opportunity, and seizing one of them by the legs, suddenly draws it under water. There he fastens it under his girdle, and goes to the next, which he seizes in the same way; and so on, till he has as many as he can well carry. He then slowly returns with his booty.

ROBERT, (*laughing.*) Well, that is a droll way. How I should like to see him! Does he go back again and get any more?

MOTHER. Yes; he often goes three or four times in the course of the day.

ROBERT. I hear of so many things that are done in other countries, different from what we do in England, that I sometimes think I should like to travel; and then, when I came back,

what a great many things I should have to tell you, and my father, and my sister!

MOTHER. And would you really like to leave us, and all your friends, to go amongst people who were strangers to you?

ROBERT. No, I should not like that; for I love you all so dearly, that I should not wish to go away from you. But suppose you could go with me?

MOTHER. That, indeed, is a different thing; and if we could all go together, it would be very pleasant to see the customs of different nations; but as that is not likely ever to take place, I hope my little boy will be satisfied to remain at home.

ROBERT. Yes, mamma; I would rather be at home with you, than travel about without you.

MOTHER. And there have been so many books written, by different travellers, that you may learn almost as much by your own fire-side, as if you were to go into other countries.

ROBERT. Did you learn all you know by reading, mamma?

MOTHER. No, my love; yet I am very much indebted to books for what little knowledge I may possess. I was blessed with parents who encouraged the love of reading, and kindly fur-

nished me with books that contained useful information.

ROBERT. How did you learn besides, mamma?

MOTHER. I have learned many things by conversing with intelligent people. Did you never hear the five methods of gaining knowledge, or of improvement, which Dr. Watts recommends?

ROBERT. No, mamma. What are they?

MOTHER. Observation, reading, instruction by lectures, conversation, and study.

ROBERT. To be sure, people may learn a great deal by observing what they see done. I have often noticed people at work, when I have been out, and have learned the uses of many things I did not know before.

MOTHER. And you are not likely to forget them.

“ Sounds, which address the ear, are lost, and die  
In one short hour; but that which strikes the eye  
Lives long upon the mind: the faithful sight  
Engraves the knowledge with a beam of light.”

ROBERT. And then a great deal may be learned by reading: the books I have teach me many things. I knew nothing about thermometers, before I read Harry and Lucy; and now I

understand all about them: so, both observation and reading are very useful. What comes next?

MOTHER. Instruction by lectures.

ROBERT. I do not know what that means. What is a lecture?

MOTHER. It means a discourse on a subject, to explain it. When you are older, I intend to take you with me to hear a lecture, and then you will be better able to understand what I mean.

ROBERT. Conversation comes next, I think. I know what that means, and I like to learn things in that way. I am always glad when you or my father can converse with me, because you teach me many new things. I forget what comes next.

MOTHER. Study, which implies thought or reflection.

ROBERT. Do you know, mamma, I have sometimes been puzzled, when I have had any thing to do that I did not quite understand; but, by thinking a little, I have found it out. Was that study?

MOTHER. Whenever the thoughts are bent on a subject that requires the exercise of the judgment to understand, it may be called study.

ROBERT. I think I understand you; and I find all the five ways are very useful. I will try if I can repeat them. *Observation, reading, lectures, conversation, and study.* I will try to remember them.

MOTHER. You will find them of great assistance in the acquisition of knowledge. I have often remarked that you are a boy of observation, and I hope you will equally attend to the other means pointed out.

ROBERT. Was it not Dr. Watts, of whom you were speaking just now, who wrote some of my hymns?

MOTHER. Yes; he wrote much for the instruction of young people. He was a learned and pious man, and his writings have a useful tendency. His "Improvement of the Mind," is a work which I hope you will have a pleasure in reading, when you are old enough to understand it.

ROBERT. We have been talking so much about other things, that we have almost forgotten the birds. What else can you recollect to tell me?

MOTHER. What would you like to hear?

ROBERT. Any thing that is entertaining. I am sure you can think of something I should like.

MOTHER. I am not sure of any such thing; but, however, as you are so earnest, I will endeavour to please you.

ROBERT. Thank you, mamma. I am glad of that. You can always find something to amuse me.

MOTHER. In the "Asiatic Researches," there is a curious account of the Bengal Crossbeak. I was reading it this morning, and I think it will entertain you. This bird is rather larger than a sparrow. Its plumage is a yellow-brown, except the head and breast, which are of a lighter colour. It is very common in Hindostan, and surpasses most birds in faithfulness and docility. It may easily be taught to fetch or carry any small thing. If a ring be dropped over a deep well, and a signal instantly given, the crossbeak flies down with amazing celerity, catches the ring before it touches the water, and carries it to its master.

ROBERT. What a useful little bird! I should like very much to have one. I would teach it to fetch my things, when I wanted them, and that would save me a great deal of trouble.

MOTHER. If that is your reason for wishing to have one, you are better without it, since you are quite able to wait on yourself.



ROBERT. But it would be very diverting to see it fetch things when it was told. I should really like to have one. Do you think you could buy me one?

MOTHER. I never heard of any being brought over to England. As it is the native of a hot climate, our country would probably be too cold for it.

ROBERT. I am very sorry for that. Can you tell me any thing else that it may be taught?

MOTHER. Yes; something that I think will surprise you. It is said that, if a house, or any other place, be shown to it once or twice, and a note given it, upon a proper signal being made, it will immediately fly off, and carry it thither.

ROBERT. You do, indeed, surprise me! How I should laugh to see a little bird fly into our parlour, with a letter in its beak. My sister would like to hear that tale. I intend to tell it her to-morrow. I like to hear about the crossbeak very much, mamma. Go on, if you please.

MOTHER. The young Hindoos, who have leisure, are very fond of training these birds, and teaching them many curious arts. It is a custom among the young Hindoo ladies, in

many places, to wear very thin plates of gold, slightly fixed between their eyebrows, as an ornament; and when they pass through the streets, it is not uncommon for the young men, who are fond of a frolic, to send their little captives to pluck the pieces of gold off their foreheads, which they bring away in triumph to their masters.

ROBERT. How very dexterous they must be! But I think the young ladies must be sadly mortified.

MOTHER. The nest of this bird is very curious. It is made of grass, woven like cloth, and shaped like a large bottle. It is suspended firmly from the branches of a tree, but so as to rock with the wind. The entrance is placed downwards.

ROBERT. In almost all the nests I have seen, the entrance has been at the top, except the wren's, and there it is on one side.

MOTHER. But if the crossbeak made its entrance at the top, its young would be continually exposed to danger, from the numerous birds of prey, and other destructive animals, which are found there. It therefore adopts a more secure method; and thus preserves both itself and its young ones. The nest

consists of two or three chambers; and it is generally believed by the common people, that they are lighted in the inside with fire-flies; which the bird catches alive at night, and fastens to his nest with moist clay, or some other sticky substance.

ROBERT. What are fire-flies, mamma?

MOTHER. They are a species of flies, so called from the bright light which they emit when it is dark. The river Meinam is particularly noted for the numerous swarms of these insects, which illuminate the trees that grow on its banks.

ROBERT. Do they not look very beautiful?

MOTHER. Yes; many travellers have been struck with the brilliant appearance which they exhibit. At a distance, they look like fire-works; as the flies emit and conceal their light with the greatest uniformity.

ROBERT. And do the crossbeaks really take them into their nests for the sake of the light?

MOTHER. That I cannot tell you, though it is a well-known fact that they are often found in its nest, which, being made with the entrance downwards, and thereby almost excluding the light, may seem to favour the opinion. Some, however, imagine that it only feeds on them, supposing their light would be of but little

service: and this appears to me more probable than its using them as a lantern; particularly as several other species of these birds build their nests in nearly a similar manner, in countries, where, I believe, no fire-flies are to be met with.

ROBERT. Is it a singing-bird, mamma?

MOTHER. When many are assembled together, on a high tree, they make a lively noise; but it is rather chirping than singing. They are kept, not for the sake of their note, but for their wonderful sagacity.

ROBERT. Do you know what kind of eggs they lay, mamma?

MOTHER. The eggs are beautiful, resembling large pearls: the white of them, when boiled, is transparent; and the flavour is said to be extremely delicate.

ROBERT. You said there were different species of crossbeaks. Can you tell me of some of the other kinds?

MOTHER. The pensile crossbeak is about the size of the one I have been describing, but possesses a greater variety of plumage. It is found in Madagascar.

ROBERT. That large island to the east of Africa?

MOTHER. Yes. Its nest is composed of

straw and reeds, interwoven in the shape of a bag, with the opening at the bottom. This is fastened above, to the twig of a tree, generally near a stream. It does not use the same nest more than one season; but every year adds a new one to the last: often as far as five in number, hanging one from the other. These birds build in society, like rooks; often five or six hundred being seen on one tree.

ROBERT. The nests must look very curious, hanging down from the boughs.

MOTHER. Yes, they are very curious; but those of the social crossbeak are still more extraordinary.

ROBERT. Before you go on, mamma, will you please to tell me in what part of the world the social crossbeak lives?

MOTHER. It is a native of South Africa, and is chiefly found near the Cape of Good Hope. It is nearly similar to those I have already described to you. These birds live together in large societies; and build their nests on a species of *mimosa*, which grows to an uncommon size.

ROBERT. I suppose *mimosa* is the name of a tree.

MOTHER. It is the name of a certain genus of plants, comprising many different species, all

natives of warm climates. Did you ever see a sensitive plant, Robert?

ROBERT. No, mamma; but I have heard that, when the leaves are touched, they shrivel up as though they were hurt.

MOTHER. The word *mimosa* signifies *mimic*, which means to imitate; and is given to this genus, on account of the sensibility of the leaves, which mimic, as it were, the motions of animals. It includes all the different kinds of sensitive plants, and a variety of shrubs and trees known by other names. The tree I have been speaking of, is particularly adapted for the nests which load its branches, from its great size, and the strength of its branches, as well as for the height and smoothness of its trunk; which many of the serpent tribe, which are the greatest enemies to these birds, are unable to climb.

ROBERT. Why, mamma?

MOTHER. Because they would be liable to slip, not being able to support themselves so well on a smooth, as on a rough surface.

ROBERT. Now, if you please, I should like to hear about the nests.

MOTHER. In "Paterson's Travels among the Hottentots," there is a description of one; or, perhaps, more properly speaking, of an

assemblage of nests, in which he supposed that from eight hundred to a thousand birds resided under the same roof.

ROBERT. Under the same roof! What does he mean by that? Do birds ever build a roof to their nests? I thought a roof meant the slanting part at the top of a house.

MOTHER. He calls it a roof, because it perfectly resembles that of a thatched-house; and is built over the nests, so as to prevent any reptiles from approaching them. The entrance is underneath the ridge.

ROBERT. How curious! I shall like to hear this. But what great nests they must be, for a thousand birds to live together.

MOTHER. As I have his account of this wonderful edifice, you shall hear it in his own words. You may reach me that book off the table, and I will read it.

[*Robert reaches the book, and his mother reads:*]

“The industry of these birds seems almost equal to that of the bee: throughout the day they appear to be busily employed in carrying a fine species of grass, which is the principal material they employ for the purpose of erecting this extraordinary work, as well as for ad-

ditions and repairs. Though my stay in the country was not sufficient to satisfy me, by ocular proof, that they added to their nest, as they annually increased in number; still, from the many trees which I have seen borne down with the weight, and others which I have observed with the boughs completely covered over, it would appear that this is really the case. When the tree, which is the support of this aërial city, is obliged to give way to the increase of weight, it is obvious that they are no longer protected, and are under the necessity of rebuilding in other trees. One of these deserted nests I had the curiosity to break down, so as to inform myself of the internal structure of it, and found it equally ingenious with that of the external. There are many entrances, each of which forms a regular street, with nests on both sides, at about two inches distance from each other. The grass with which they build is called the *Bushman's grass*: and I believe the seed of it to be their principal food; though, on examining their nests, I found the wings and legs of different insects. From every appearance, the nest which I dissected had been inhabited for many years; and some parts of it were much more complete than others. This, therefore, I con-



ceive nearly to amount to a proof, that the animals added to it at different times, as they found necessary, from the increase of the family, or rather of the nation or community."

ROBERT. How ingenious the little birds must be to build these nests, and to make them in streets too. I should like to see them. Did the gentleman bring any over to England?

MOTHER. I believe not, or he would most likely have mentioned it.

ROBERT. What a pity! If I were a traveller, I would bring home a great many curiosities. Have you finished the account, mamma?

MOTHER. Yes; and I hope you have been interested in it.

ROBERT. Indeed I have, for it is very entertaining; but I am sorry it is finished. However, perhaps you can recollect something else to tell me about these birds.

MOTHER. I have told you nearly as much as I think your memory will retain. You know I do not like you to hear too much at once. Learning "a little and well," is better than overcharging the memory.

ROBERT. But I mostly recollect what entertains me, so I do not think I shall forget this.

MOTHER. I hope not; and to impress it more strongly on your mind, you may look at this picture in "Campbell's Travels," of the nests about which I have been reading to you; and if I find you remember what you hear, I may, perhaps, tell you, to-morrow, about the cardinal crossbeak, another species of this tribe.

ROBERT. Thank you, mamma: I shall not forget to remind you of it.

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CHAPTER IV.  
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ROBERT.

Now, mamma, I am come to put you in mind of what you said yesterday: that you meant to tell me about another kind of crossbeak this evening. Do not you recollect?

MOTHER. Yes; you mean the cardinal crossbeak.

ROBERT. Yes, that is the name: I will try to remember it. But why is it called *cardinal*? and why are all these birds called *crossbeaks*?

MOTHER. Because the bill is hooked at both points; and, when shut, they cross over each other. This particular kind is called *cardinal*, because it is much larger than the others; and *cardinal* means *chief*.

ROBERT. Then it is a very suitable name; and now I understand what it means, I shall not forget it. Where do the cardinal crossbeaks live, mamma?

MOTHER. They are found in several parts of North America, where they are often kept in cages.

ROBERT. Then, I suppose, they are singing-birds?

MOTHER. Yes, they are remarkable for the melody of their song, which resembles that of the nightingale. In spring, and the greater part of the summer, they sit on the tops of the highest trees, singing early in the morning, and regaling the ear with their cheerful notes. When confined in cages, they sing nearly all the year. In this respect they differ from most of the other species.

ROBERT. Are they like the others in colour?

MOTHER. No, their plumage is more splendid; being of a bright red, except round the bill, and on the throat, where the colour is black, as are also the quills. On the head is a beautiful crest.

ROBERT. They must be very pretty birds.

MOTHER. Yes; in warm countries the plumage of birds is generally more brilliant than in colder climates.

ROBERT. What sort of food do these cross-beaks live upon?

MOTHER. They are particularly fond of

maize and buck-wheat, and lay by stores of them; often collecting as much as a bushel, which they artfully cover with leaves and small twigs, leaving only a small hole for the entrance. They are also fond of bees.

ROBERT. I do not like them for killing the industrious little bees: the wheat they are quite welcome to. But what is maize?

MOTHER. Indian wheat. We had some growing in the garden last year: do not you recollect?

ROBERT. Oh, yes; I remember very well, now you mention it. A bushel is a great deal for such little birds to collect. I suppose they lay it by for the winter.

MOTHER. I do not know, but I think it is probable they may. At least it proves their industry.

ROBERT. Do they live a great number together, like the social crossbeaks?

MOTHER. No, there are seldom more than three or four met with together; yet they are familiar little birds, often hopping along the road before the traveller.

ROBERT. Now, mamma, shall I repeat the names of the different crossbeaks you have described?

MOTHER. If you like, my dear.

ROBERT. The Bengal crossbeak, which lives in India, and is taught so many curious tricks; the pensile crossbeak, which makes its nest in the shape of a bag, and lets several hang down, one below another, from the branch of a tree; the social crossbeaks, which live together in great numbers, and build their nests in rows, like streets, with a roof over, that serpents may not get to them; and the cardinal crossbeak, which is the largest of all. You find I have not forgotten them.

MOTHER. Not yet; but do you think you shall continue to remember them?

ROBERT. I hope so. The cardinal and Bengal are very easy to recollect; but why are the others called *social* and *pensile*?

MOTHER. I think I know; and, perhaps, you will, if you consider a little.

ROBERT. *Social*, that means fond of friendly society, I believe. I suppose that kind is called so, because they *associate*, or live together. Is that the reason you thought of, mamma?

MOTHER. Yes, Robert: there is no doubt that they were named so from that circumstance.

ROBERT. I am glad I found it out. Now for *pensile*; that quite puzzles me.

MOTHER. I believe you do not know that *pensile* means *hanging*.

ROBERT. No, I never heard that before; but I do not know that it has any thing to do with this. I am still at a loss to know why the bird is called *pensile*. I believe I must get you to tell me.

MOTHER. Their nests, you say, *hang* down from the trees. I am not certain that it was from this circumstance the bird derived its name; but it seems likely that it might be called *pensile* on that account; at least, associating the word with its manner of building, may enable you to remember it more easily.

ROBERT. So it will; and I am glad you thought of it, because now I shall not be likely to forget. Are there any other species of these birds?

MOTHER. There are various others; but, as many of their habits are similar, you had better not charge you memory with the detail of them.

ROBERT. But can you tell me whether any of them live in England?

MOTHER. Some have been seen, at different times, in the western counties, during the autumn, when apples are ripe. These birds make great devastation in orchards, by pierc-

ing the fruit, in order to extract the pips, of which they are remarkably fond: they slit them open with their beaks, and, casting away the skins, eat the inside.

ROBERT. Then, I suppose, the apples decay, and drop from the trees. I dare say the persons to whom the orchards belong would rather the birds should keep away.

MOTHER. They are, indeed, unwelcome visitors; yet they, in part, repay the owners by their songs. I hope you think it right to spare the little songsters some of their fruit.

ROBERT. Yes; for I like to hear birds sing: it sounds very cheerful. I enjoy listening to them, when I walk out; and I like them to build their nests in our garden, though they eat the gooseberries and currants, and peck the cherries. We had several nests in the garden, last spring, and I hope we shall have some more when next spring comes.

MOTHER. I hope you never take any of the eggs.

ROBERT. Oh, no; but I often go softly, and peep at them, though I never take them away.

MOTHER. I advise you not to go and peep at them too often, lest it should frighten the old birds, and make them forsake the nests.

ROBERT. I should be sorry to frighten



them; so I will, in future, be very careful, mamma.

MOTHER. You are a good boy, and I hope you will not forget your promise. As it is not late, you may bring your paper and pencil, and draw a little, before you go to bed.

ROBERT. Yes, mamma; I will finish the little cottage I was copying. I like drawing, as well as any thing I learn.

MOTHER. It is an agreeable employment, for those who have leisure and inclination to pursue it. It is an art which I wish you to practise, as you appear fond of it; for it may afford you much pleasure, and be useful, by impressing images more strongly upon your memory. I believe you will find it of advantage, even in natural history; for the nicety it requires, may lead you to examine more closely the works of nature, and to discover beauties which would escape the eye of a careless observer.

ROBERT. I believe what you say is true, mamma; for drawings do help us to remember what we see or read about. I like to have pictures in my books, for they make me understand what I read. I should not have liked the account of bird-catching so well, if I had not seen the picture of it; but now I can fancy

the mountains, and the poor men hanging by ropes, or pushed up by the poles, just as if I saw them.

MOTHER. And you would not form so accurate an idea of any object that was new to you, by a description, as by a drawing.

ROBERT. Indeed I should not; so I will try to improve in drawing, since I find it is useful.

MOTHER. Well, my love, take pains, and you will no doubt succeed; and should you, as you grow up, have much leisure, you need never be at a loss how to employ your time.

“To give the canvass innocent deceit,  
Or lay the landscape on the snowy sheet:  
These, these are arts pursued without a crime,  
That leave no stain upon the wing of time.”

THE END.

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