Alice Ann Smith
April 18th 1867

A. Richardson
March 22nd 1902

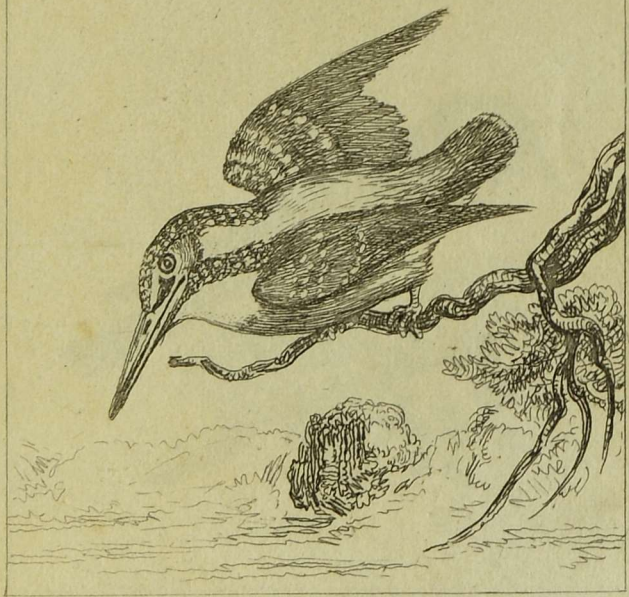
A NATURAL HISTORY OF BIRDS,

INTENDED CHIEFLY FOR YOUNG PERSONS,

BY

CHARLOTTE SMITH.

VOL. 1.



COMMON KING FISHER. *PAGE 69.*

LONDON,
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1819.

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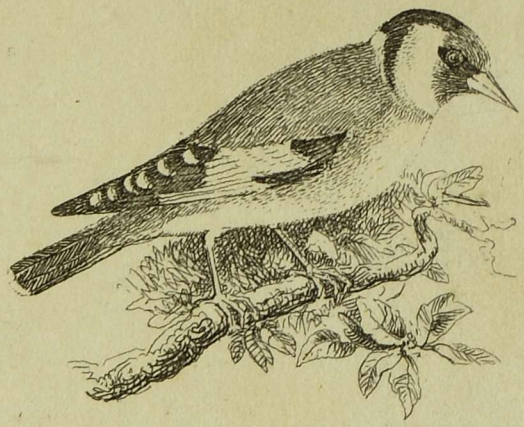

THE GOLDFINCH. *PAGE 56.*

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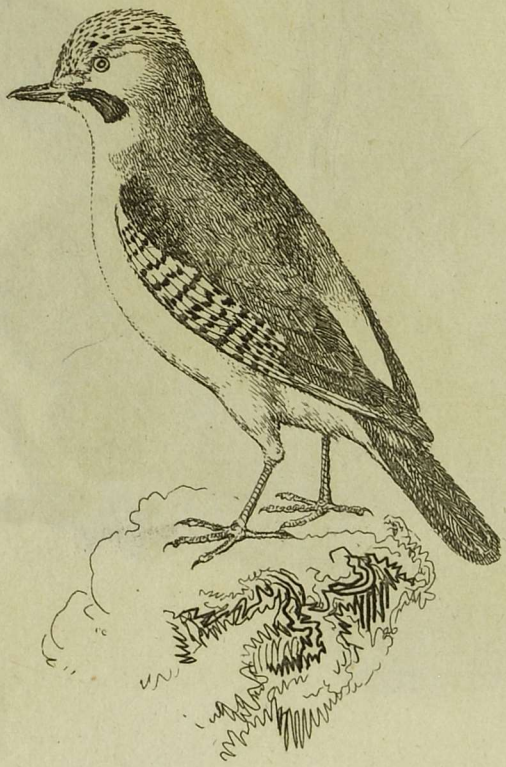
BUSTARD.

GOLDEN EAGLE.



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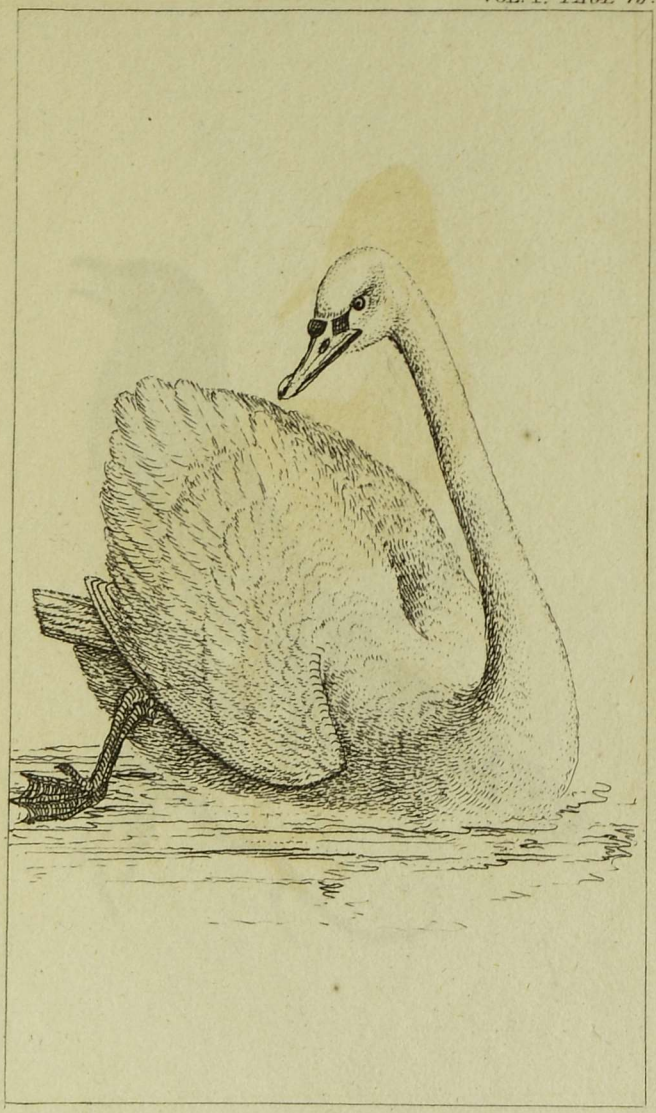
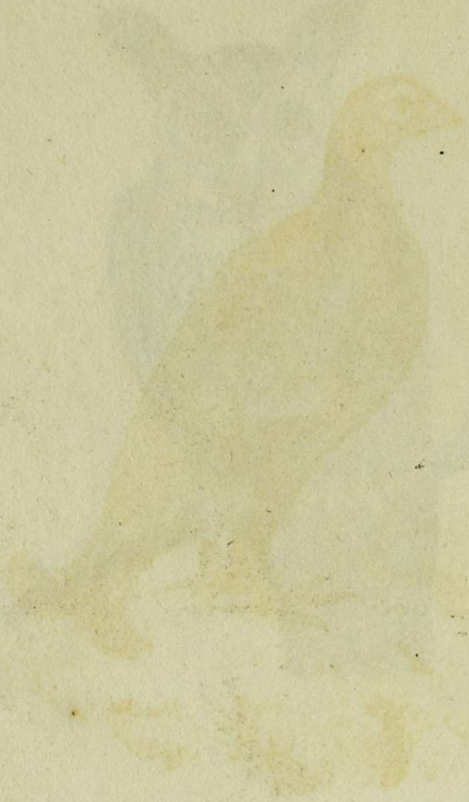


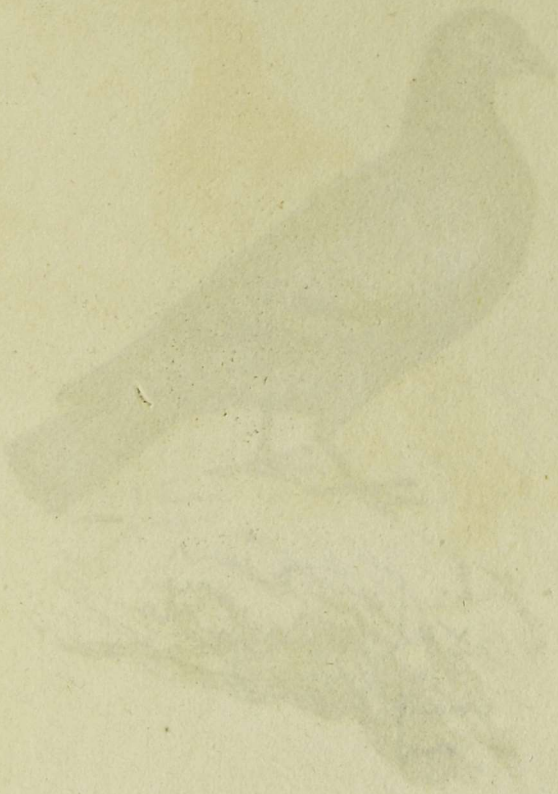
TAME SWAN.

COMMON CUCKOO.

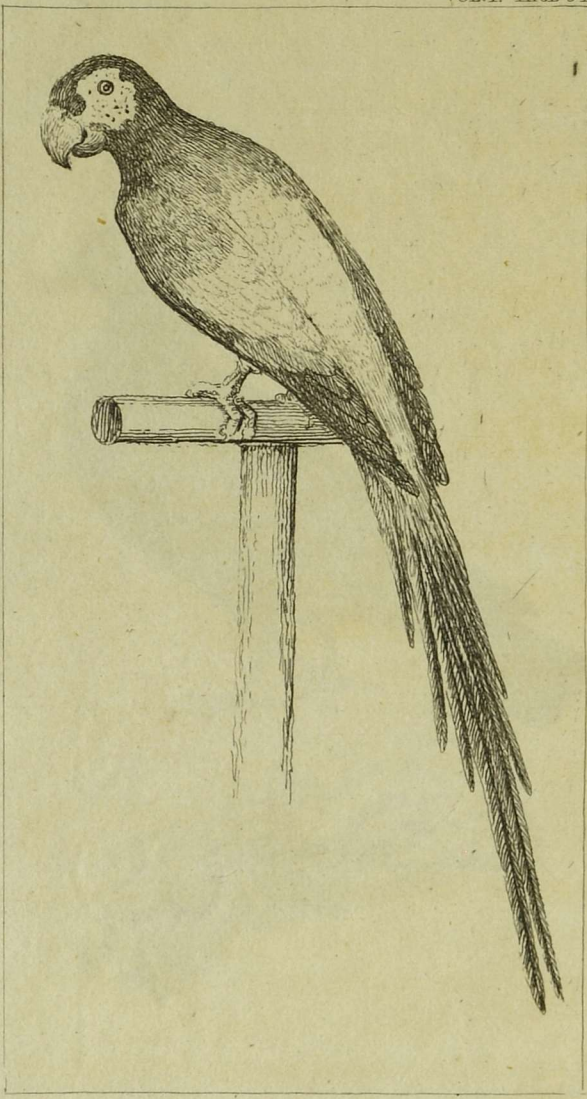
GREAT HORNED OWL.



BLACK COCK.



STOCK DOVE.



RED AND BLUE MACAO.

A

NATURAL HISTORY

OF

BIRDS.

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NATURAL HISTORY

OF

BIRDS,

INTENDED CHIEFLY FOR YOUNG PERSONS.

BY

MRS. CHARLOTTE SMITH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

London:

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY JOHN ARLISS,

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No. 38, NEWGATE STREET.

1819.

PREFACE,

BY THE EDITOR.

One of the biographers of Mrs. Charlotte Smith observes, that "her school-books are among the most admirable which have been written for the use of young persons, and are eminently calculated to form the taste, instruct the mind, and correct the heart." The present volumes, which were finished for the press some time before the death of the author, it is trusted will be found both instructive and amusing, by those for whom they were chiefly designed.

The poetical pieces, with which they are interspersed, are not the laboured efforts of a determination to write on a given subject: they evidently breathe the sentiments of the heart, and were dictated by the feelings of the moment.

With regard to the scope of the work itself, to have attempted a complete system of ornithology in so small a compass, is evidently out of the question; they who would read with such a view must have recourse to far more bulky volumes: but the author has filled her pages in a more useful and novel way, by noticing only birds of our own country, or such of foreign climates as are in some way remarkable; and by introducing the stories of heathen mythology that relate to the feathered race, which will not only convey information to many young persons, but prove an incite-

ment to them to the farther pursuit of classical learning.

Occasionally too anecdotes are interwoven, facts noticed, and observations made, that distinguish the original writer from the mere compiler: while the moral reflections that occur will probably be the more impressive, as they naturally arise out of the subject. Nor will the quotations from some of our best poets, who have alluded to the manners of particular birds, be found superfluous: as they are not only beautiful in themselves, but tend to promote the general scope of the work; which was, not so much to gratify, as to excite a thirst for the attainment of knowledge.

T. C.

LETTER I.

Our late conferences on various subjects of Natural History* have awakened your curiosity, my children, and as you wish to hear more of the varieties of Birds, their habits, and history, I will communicate the observations I have made, and consult the books I have about me, and endeavour to give you a general idea of these animals.

There are few subjects more worthy of admiration, than the various instincts by which the different classes of Birds are governed, and the manner in which nature has fitted them for the modes of life they are destined to follow. Many of them contribute to the sustenance or convenience of man, by their flesh and feathers, and by the instinct which directs them, for their own support, to destroy great numbers of those insects which would otherwise be

* See Conversations on Natural History, 2 vols.—*Johnson.*

injurious to him; while his pleasure is promoted by the beauty of their forms, and the cheering sounds of their voices. "The music of the groves," has always been named among the most pleasing circumstances that attend the renewal of vegetative life. And even the dark and gloomy days of winter are not without sounds, that afford a sort of melancholy pleasure. The evening owl, and the rooks that in a calm morning clamour high in the air, in their flight toward distant downs and wild heaths, where in mild weather the worms work up on the surface, contribute to the satisfaction of the pensive observer. So felt that admirable poet, to whom I am always disposed to refer for forcible and exquisite description:

"And cawing rooks, and kites that swim sublime
"In still repeated circles, screaming loud;
"The jay, the pie, and ev'n the boding owl,
"That hails the rising moon, have charms for me."

In, or rather before very severe weather, vast flocks of wild water fowl pass overhead in their way from the North to places where, from the shelter of woods and hills, or the rapidity of the streams, the frost does not deprive them of their food. These, particularly

wild Geese, fly so high in the air, that they are often heard without being seen. Nearer the sea, the birds peculiar to the rocks and sands scream round the cliffs, or wheel over the expanse of water; and are not less in harmony with the scene, than the thrush, the woodlark, and the nightingale, with the tender green and reviving beauty of spring.

The pleasure you seem to feel in the study of Natural History, at least such parts of it as are fit for your study at this period of your lives, gives me very great satisfaction. It is a study, that, wherever you are placed, will afford you a source of amusement; but it is yet of greater consequence, as being often of great utility in the conduct of life. The philosopher and the poet should both be naturalists. Homer, whose poems are read with such delight, under all the disadvantages of a translation into a less perfectly sonorous language, was well versed in Natural History; and his similies, generally so well chosen and well painted, relieve, illustrate, and embellish the principal actions of his two poems. Virgil, his imitator, gives many proofs of his great

knowledge as a Natural Historian. And the description of natural objects in the "Paradise Lost" of Milton, are perhaps those parts of the poem, which afford the most general pleasure. Our immortal poet, Shakespeare, is never more exquisitely beautiful, than when he places his human figures in those situations that give them "a local habitation."

Perhaps I may find occasion to enlarge on these remarks, and I therefore content myself now with recalling to your mind these great examples of the advantages resulting from the study of nature. Your future studies will introduce you to Aristotle and Pliny: but names more familiar to you are those of Bacon and Boyle, and among very late instances that of Erasmus Darwin.

My present purpose shall be to give a general view of the six orders of Birds, though I shall not dwell on the description of any that have not something remarkable in their history, or that are not natives of this country or of Europe. I shall then add what mythological story tells of them; and afterward touch on their appearance in fables, where their qualities

or attributes are often mingled with the passions and affections of human beings, in order to give lessons of morality.

I do not apprehend, Edward, that you or your brother will object to the first part of my plan through the fear of being required to remember what some boys of your age and his might perhaps call *hard names.* You both know enough of the languages from which these systematic terms are borrowed, to make you easily comprehend them, and you will be pleased to find how characteristic they generally are of the qualities and dispositions of the animals they describe. You will both endeavour to assist Emily, by explaining to her any thing she may not understand. Orders, classes, and species, are so far from being burdensome to the memory, that they greatly assist it; and serve to give a precise and determinate idea of the objects we desire to understand. Linnæus the great Swedish naturalist, divides birds into six Orders, and these orders into Genera and Species: I adopt *his* as the best authority.

THE FIRST ORDER IS CALLED

ACCIPITRES,

And comprehends the birds formed by nature to prey on other birds, and on small creatures of different species. They have strong hooked bills, wide nostrils, strong and short legs, with four toes armed with formidable talons, with which they grasp their prey. They are monogamous, that is, they live in pairs, and unite in the task of taking care of their young. The females, which are in this race of birds usually larger and more beautiful than the males, in general lay from two to four eggs.

The first genus of this order is the Vulture, and the first species of that genus, the Condor, Vultur Gryphus, its trivial name being derived from the Griffin, or Gryphon, a being of which we form no idea but from the figure so called in heraldry, that of an animal between a bird and a beast. The Condor is said to be so strong, that he can bear away a man, nay an ox, in his talons; and his wings, the sound of which is like thunder, to measure from eighteen to twenty feet. But this tremendous

winged monster has been so seldom seen, as it is an inhabitant of the Andes, the highest mountains of the New World, that much must be allowed to the love of the marvellous so generally imputed to travellers.

The King of the Vultures, Vultur Papa, is found in South America. Its size is that of the largest turkey; and it is a very formidable creature. There are many other species of the Vulture inhabitants of the warmer parts of Asia, and some in Europe.

In Heathen mythology the Vulture is described as being the instrument of punishment on Prometheus. The story, to which frequent allusions are made, is told in many different ways; but the most generally received is this. —Prometheus, being an ingenious artist, formed a man of clay so correctly, that it wanted only the spark of life to animate it. This vital fire he contrived by the assistance of Minerva to steal from the chariot of the Sun, and he concealed it within a hollow reed hidden in his bosom. Jove, or Jupiter, the greatest of Heathen divinities, was enraged by this presumptuous theft, and ordered Vulcan to make a woman of clay of exquisite beauty; then as-

sembling the gods, he directed every one to endow her with some gift, that she might be rendered the most accomplished, as well as the fairest of women. Thus adorned with beauty, graces and talents, she was called Pandora, which means All-endowed. But he was no sooner obeyed, than Jupiter ordered this admirable creature to be put in possession of a box, which was filled with all those vices, and their consequent evils and diseases, that have since afflicted the world.

Prometheus, however, for whom this fatal present was designed, refused to accept it; but his brother, Epimetheus, enamoured of the beautiful possessor of this destructive treasure, married Pandora, and the dreadful casket being opened, the miseries of war, plague, famine, and all the passions which generate the wretchedness of man—ambition, anger, avarice, revenge, and hatred, burst from it, and *hope* only remained at the bottom. Prometheus having thus escaped the immediate effects of the anger of Jupiter, that god directed Mercury and Vulcan, to bind him to a rock on the top of Mount Caucasus, where a Vulture was sent to prey on his liver, which

was constantly renewed as soon as the ravenous bird had devoured it. The figure of Prometheus, with the Vulture feeding on his vitals, is among those usually seen in representations of the infernal regions; and it has afforded a subject for some fine, but disagreeable pictures. This ancient allegory has sometimes been supposed to represent the punishment attending on crimes, particularly those dictated by ambition; as disappointed ambition is, of all others, the sensation most uneasy, and which feeds with the most fatal violence on the mind. Some have thought that the Vulture was *conscience,* which continually gnaws and corrodes the mind of the wicked. But this allegory has by others been supposed to contain a lesson against intemperance, the inordinate use of fermented or spirituous liquors being known to affect the human liver, and bring on a dreadful train of diseases, destroying the powers both of the body and the mind. Dr. Darwin, under the article *Vitis,* or the vine, in the poem of the Botanic Garden, has illustrated this idea by the following impressive lines, after relating the mischief occasioned by indulging in an immoderate use of strong drink.—

"So when Prometheus brav'd the thund'rer's ire,
Stole from the blazing throne celestial fire,
And, lantern'd in his breast from realms of day,
Bore the bright treasure to his man of clay;
High on cold Caucasus by Vulcan bound,
The lean, impatient Vulture flutt'ring round,
His writhing limbs in vain he twists and strains,
To break or loose the adamantine chains.
The glutt'nous bird, exulting in his pangs,
Tears his swoln liver with remorseless fangs."

Obnoxious as the Vulture is to our imagination, it was under the figures of two birds of this species, that Homer represents Apollo and Pallas to have appeared, when Hector and Ajax met in single combat.

——— Above them all
Exalted, Pallas and Apollo, pleas'd
Spectators both, but Vulture-like in form,
Perch'd on the branches of the sacred beech."
Cowper's Homer's Iliad, 6th Book.

In the economy of nature, however, these birds fulfil a very useful purpose. In the warmer regions of the earth, where Vultures are found, the carcasses of animals that perish by accident or disease would pollute the air, if these birds of prey, and other creatures, did not devour them.

The second genus of this order is the Falcon, Falco; at the head of which stands the Eagle, a bird that seems to hold the same place among birds as the lion does among beasts, and to partake of the generous nature, which that animal is said to possess.

The Erne, Falco Albicilla, is found in the North of Scotland, and in some parts of Ireland. It is a bird of great strength, and has been known to carry a lamb in its talons the distance of four miles, to its nest on the inaccessible summit of a rock.

The Sea Eagle, or Osprey, Falco Ossifragus, feeds principally on fish, and goes far out to sea for its prey.

The Golden Eagle, Falco Chrysaetos, is met with in the northern parts of Wales and Scotland, in the latter of which countries an Eagle, it is affirmed, has been known to bear away an infant in its talons. Kids, lambs, hares, and rabbits, are its usual food, so that it is very injurious to the people of the countries it inhabits. This Eagle lives to a great age, and to attempt to take it or molest its young, is a service of great danger.

Eagles are still seen in the New Forest in

Hampshire; or at least they were to be found there not many years ago; when, as Mr. Gilpin relates in his "Forest Scenery," a pair of Eagles took possession of a part of the forest called King's Wood, and eluded for several years all attempts of the keepers to dislodge them.

At Queen's College, Oxford, an Eagle is always kept chained to a perch; *why*, I never could learn. I remember seeing one there which was very old, and appeared to drag on a wretched and neglected existence. I believe there used to be one kept also at New College. This bird makes a considerable figure in ancient history. It is the bird of Jove, and has always been considered as the symbol of majesty and dominion.

Before we enter on its mythological and remote history, the poet Thomson, whom I know you always refer to with pleasure, shall be called upon for his description of a family of this race.—

"High from the summit of a craggy clift,
Hung o'er the deep, such as amazing frowns
On utmost Kilda's shore, whose lonely race
Resign the setting sun to Indian worlds,

The royal Eagle draws his vig'rous young,
Strong pounc'd, and ardent with paternal fire;
Now fit to raise a kingdom of their own,
He drives them from his fort, the tow'ring seat
For ages of his empire, which in peace
Unstain'd he holds; while many a league to sea
He wings his course, and preys in distant isles."

Thomson.

It is justly here related, that the property of these birds is to seek their food at a considerable distance from their nests. In Alpine scenery the Eagle makes a conspicuous figure, soaring and screaming at a great height above the stupendous cliffs. Yet from that height its piercing sight enables it to distinguish among the rocks and precipices the young lamb, chamois, or kid, and to pounce upon it with unerring aim. The Eagle, it is said, can fly immediately against the cloudless sun, without being dazzled by the excess of light, and is therefore called the most perfect of birds.

In heathen story the Eagle is placed in a pre-eminent rank. Among the many fabulous and wildly imagined circumstances that are related of Jupiter, one is, that he was in his infancy fed by an Eagle with nectar; and

that, in gratitude for such service, he elected this bird to be his peculiar attendant, to bear his lightning, and to serve him occasionally as a messenger. When the beauty of Ganymede, a young shepherd, determined Jupiter to remove him to heaven, the Eagle was sent for his conveyance. And Hebe, the goddess of youth, is always drawn with one near her. Many other visionary and extravagant pictures are drawn of this bird, which is usually seen at the feet of Jupiter Tonans, grasping the lightning. Perhaps there are few ideas more exquisite than that of Gray, in the "Progress of Poesy," where the Eagle of Jove is described as being soothed by the power of harmonious numbers.—

O sovereign of the willing soul,
Parent of sweet and solemn breathing airs,
Enchanting Skill! the sullen Cares
And frantic Passions hear thy soft control!
On Thracia's hills the lord of war
Has curb'd the fury of his car,
And dropp'd his thirsty lance at thy command;
Perching on the sceptred hand
Of Jove, thy magic lulls the feather'd king,
With ruffled plume, and flagging wing,
Quench'd in dark clouds of slumber lie
The terrors of his beak, the lightning of his eye!

When Jove determined to send a favourable omen to encourage the Grecians in the resistance of the Trojans, who had nearly succeeded in burning their fleet, an Eagle was employed.

——— Th' eternal Father pitying saw
His tears, and for the monarch's sake preserv'd
The people ;—instant, surest of all signs,
He sent his Eagle : in his pounces strong
A fawn he bore, fruit of the nimble hind,
Which fast beside the beauteous altar rais'd
To Panomphæon Jove sudden he dropp'd.

Cowper, 8th Book.

And afterward the Eagle is again directed to carry an omen in a still greater extremity. The Trojans, with Hector at their head, endeavour to burst the barriers.

While they press'd to pass, they spied a bird
Sublime in air, an Eagle. Right between
Both hosts he soar'd, (the Trojan on his left,)
A serpent bearing in his pounces clutch'd,
Enormous, dripping blood, but lively still,
And mindful of revenge : for while the bird
Compress'd him to his bosom, he, his head
Retorting, struck him at the throat. Heart-sick
With pain, the Eagle cast him to the ground
Retween the hosts, and clanging loud his plumes,
As the wind bore him, floated far away."

Cowper's Homer, Book 11th.

I remember seeing in the possession of an acquaintance of mine a sort of amulet, which had been purchased at a considerable price by her mother, and was said to have been found in an Eagle's nest. It was a small brown perforated stone, and a riband was usually passed through it. When shook, it rattled as if another smaller stone was within it. The virtues ascribed to this Eagle-stone were so numerous, that I cannot pretend to recollect or enumerate them. I have since seen it gravely related by Pliny, that a stone of this sort so perforated, and found in an Eagle's nest, is a preservative against shipwreck, and other disasters; and a charm which puts pain and disease to flight. But a very little reflection would convince any person of common sense, that whatever might be the singularity of its shape, or wherever it might have been found, it could have no influence on the human frame. The notion, however silly, would be innocent, if such things were not sometimes relied upon as efficacious, when effectual remedies should be used.

The Romans were accustomed to bear the figures of various animals as standards before their warlike legions; but Caius Marius di-

rected, that the Eagle alone should be the ensign of the Roman armies.

It was at a later period taken by the emperors, when, after a long struggle, the Romans yielded to a despot; and it has ever since been the Imperial standard. The Black Eagle spread, or displayed, as it is called in heraldry, is borne by the king of Prussia.

In those fables where animals are introduced, the Eagle is frequently a principal performer. La Fontaine has, from Æsop and other fabulists, the Eagle and the Owl; the Eagle and the Pie; the Eagle and the Beetle; but I do not think that any of them can be reckoned among the best told or most impressive of the fables. And you will perhaps think my letter long enough; for though majestic and of high rank, the subjects of it are not among the most pleasing of this class of beings.

LETTER II.

The most immediate relation of the Eagle, and of the same genus, is the Kite, or Glead; a bird with which we are well acquainted in every part of England. It breeds in woods, and is known by its gliding and smooth flight high in the air. It is the terror of good housewives, from the ravages it makes among the poultry. Three or four species of this genus are known by the name of Buzzards; one is called the Honey Buzzard, Falco Apivorus, from its being very destructive to bees, which with reptiles, mice, and small birds, constitute its food. Another of this genus is the Goshawk, Falco Palumbarius, which, when Falconry was a diversion eagerly pursued in England and other parts of Europe, was one of the most esteemed birds for the purpose; and though not large, is so fierce and courageous, that it was flown at cranes, wild geese, and other birds of considerable size. The Gentil

Falcon, Falco Gentilis, is an Alpine bird, and inhabits the highest Scottish mountains. Among several other species of these, is the Peregrine Falcon, Falco Peregrinus, which is still used by the few gentlemen who pursue the amusement of hunting in the air by means of birds of prey. The Peregrine Falcon was seen at Selborne not many years ago, but is rare in the south of England. Another, the Hen Harrier, Falco Cyaneus, is one of the most formidable enemies to young partridges, pheasants, and domestic poultry. It skims lightly along near the surface of the ground in search of prey, and on the ground makes its nest.

The Sparrow Hawk, Falco Nisus, is one of the most common of this kind of birds. It spares no smaller bird, and is a destructive enemy to pigeons. The Sparrow Hawk makes its nest in ruins, rocks, and sometimes on high trees; and is frequently tamed, and kept in gardens, to prevent the depredations of small birds on peas and fruit. There are in all above a hundred species of the Falco.

The Hawk is in mythology said to have been once a monarch, called *Nysus*, king of

Megara. Being engaged in war with Minos, it was understood that the fate of the king depended on the preservation of a certain lock of *purple hair*, which, as long as it grew on his head, secured his prosperity. Scylla, his daughter, who was in *love*, as it is called, with Minos, was unnatural enough to sacrifice her father to her passion, and cut off this lock while he slept. Far, however, from obtaining by this odious action the affection of her lover, he repulsed her with abhorrence, and she threw herself into the sea; but was afterward metamorphosed into a Lark, and her father Nisus into a Hawk, which continually pursues and preys upon her in her new form.

Of this order, Accipitres, is the Owl, Strix, of which there are about fifty species enumerated by the ornithologists, and these are divided into *two* sections—those that have feathers on their heads, standing up like ears or horns, and which they can raise at pleasure; and those that are without this singular addition.

The Great Horned Owl, Strix Bubo, is a very formidable bird, as large and as strong, as some eagles. It has been shot in England,

but is not common. It will devour hares, and the largest birds, such as pheasants and grouse. The Horned, or Long-eared Owl, Strix Otus, is more common, but not often seen, unless in Wales and Scotland, or the mountainous parts of the north of England.

The Short-eared Owl, Strix Brachyotus, is a bird of passage, and appears in this country at the same time with the woodcock. It is known, however, to breed in the Orkneys, those islands which are beyond the county of Caithness, the most northern point of Scotland, where it makes its nest in the long grass.

The White Owl, Strix Flammea, is the most common species in these islands, and inhabits barns and outhouses about farm-yards, where these birds are encouraged, because they destroy mice, which are so injurious to the grain. The glare of the day they generally avoid, but when twilight approaches, they leave their perch, which is often a beam in a barn, or cart shed, or within some pollard tree not far from the farm buildings, and are seen gliding along near hedge-rows, in search

of mice, which, in its wild state, are said to be its only food; one, however, that I kept for some time, though it never could be called tame, would eat dead small birds, or pieces of meat. The feathers of this bird are very beautiful, of a deep buff colour, spotted with white and black; and round its full black eyes the feathers are like a circle of white flos silk. It has a look of affected wisdom, as it sits with half-closed eyes, dreaming on its roost all day; but when it is alarmed, or eager for food, and opens those round staring eyes, it gives an idea of folly. There are human faces extremely resembling that of this bird; and I think I have observed, that such faces indicate no great strength of intellect, but much of presumption and self-conceit.

The Screech Owl, Strix Stridula, is a coarser feeder, and will devour any animal substance it finds. To the voice of this bird the folly of superstition has annexed ideas of fatal portent; but its cry is, like that of other birds of its species, either occasioned by hunger, or a signal to its absent mate; and the Screech Owl, however disagreeable its voice may be,

or however repulsive its habits, has no more foreknowledge of approaching evil affecting mankind, than the lark or the peacock.

The Wood Owl, Strix Ulula, lives among trees, and is the Brown Owl, most common in woody countries. These are heard in great numbers hooting in the evenings of autumn. It breeds in ruins and old trees, and lives on mice, young hares, and moles.

The Little Owl, Strix Passerina, is sometimes seen in England. It is not much bigger than a thrush, and preys on bats, mice, beetles, grasshoppers, and other insects.

The singular appearance, and nocturnal habits of these birds, have made them objects of observation in all ages. The goddess of wisdom, and of the arts, Minerva, is always distinguished by the Owl as one of her attendants; and it has thence been called *the Bird of Wisdom;* though to say that a person looks *like* an Owl, or *is* an Owl, is to accuse him of the appearance at least of stupidity. And the metamorphose of *Nictymene* into one of these birds indicates a disposition, that would not, it should seem, greatly recommend her in her new form to the favour of the most severe and

reserved of the Heathen goddesses. Another metamorphose of this bird is thus related:— Proserpine, the daughter of Ceres, having been forcibly carried away by Pluto, monarch of the infernal regions, the unhappy mother sought her throughout the world; and hearing at last from the Fountain Nymph, Arethusa, that she was an inhabitant of the dark domain of Pluto, and already his wife, Ceres, with tears and prayers, besought her father Jupiter to use his power, and compel the king of Tartarus to restore her. Jupiter, moved by these earnest and affecting entreaties, consented; but only on condition, that Proserpine should have eaten nothing since she had been a resident in the dominions of Pluto. It happened, however, that Proserpine, tempted by the beauty of a pomegranate, had tasted of its seeds. Ascalaphus, the son of Acheron, a river that runs through Pluto's domain, was the only witness of this fact: he told what he had seen, and Proserpine in resentment dipped her hand in Phlegethon, another river of those dark regions, and changed the detested informer into an Owl.

A crooked beak the place of nose supplies,
Rounder his head, and larger are his eyes ;
His arms and body waste, but are supplied
With yellow pinions flagging on each side ;
His nails grow crooked, and are turn'd to claws,
And lazily along his heavy wings he draws.
Ill omen'd in his form, th' unlucky fowl,
Abhorr'd by men, is call'd a screeching Owl.

Garth's Ovid, Book 5th.

One of the French names for the Owl, is Chat-huant, or by abbreviation, Chouette, a hooting cat; it is a very appropriate name for a bird which has many of the propensities and habits of that animal.

Pliny says, it is a curious sight to see an owl defending itself against other birds, by throwing itself upon its back, and fighting with its beak and talons. Something like this I remember to have observed in the Owl I kept when I was a girl. If a dog approached it when it was on or near the ground, or if any thing greatly alarmed it, it would throw itself backwards, and prepare in that posture to make the best use of its beak and claws ; and if the latter stuck into the hand, it was not very easy to escape from its grasp.

The Owl is a common subject of fable; yet

I think there are only one or two in La Fontaine, and one of these is rather a story of the sagacity of an owl in securing its prey; a story which, in a note, is said to be a fact. His description, however, of the bird's abode, is excellent.

"On abattit un pin, pour son antiquité,
Vieux palais d'un Hibou, triste et sombre retraite
De l'oiseau, qu' Atropos, prend pour son interprète,
Dans son tronc caverneuse et miné par le tems."

Atropos is, you know, one of the Fates, Destinies, or Parcæ; the three fatal sisters, called by the Greeks Atropos, Clotho, and Lachesis. On them it was supposed depended the duration of human life; and the fabulist here described the Owl to be, according to the vulgar superstition, the messenger of evil, by denouncing the decrees of Atropos. In Scandinavian, or northern mythology, there were twelve of these destinies, as you may remember in Gray's ode, called "The Fatal Sisters." There is another fable, but I know not by whom told; it is of a league between the Eagle and the Owl, both birds of prey: they agreed to forbear devouring the young

of each other. The Eagle however said, "That I may not unknowingly do you this injury, pray give me a description of your young." The Owl replied, "If you happen to meet with some little creatures more beautiful than the loveliest of the feathered race, you will know them to be the family of your friend. So much are they superior to the young of every other bird, that it is impossible, after having heard this description, that you should mistake them; and their voices are remarkably melodious." Not long afterward, the Eagle, wandering about in search of food, to carry to his eyrie, for the supply of his eaglets, perceived in the cavity of a tree, overcanopied with ivy, four of the ugliest little staring animals he had ever beheld, who made a very disagreeable hissing noise: and as it was a case of necessity, and he really thought it besides rather a good thing to rid the world of such disgusting little monsters, he bore them off without ceremony as a breakfast for his own family. The mother Owl, in despair for the loss of her owlets, sought the Eagle, who she knew had destroyed them, and reproached him with cruelty and breach

Addicted too to sportiveness and joke,
To song and frolic, and profane delight;"
But Strixaline declar'd, the feather'd folk
Should be to grave demeanour given quite;
Nor, while rejoicing in the new-born spring,
Should cooing dove be heard, or woodlark carolling.

She often had to tell, in piteous tone,
How a poor chough by some sad chance was shent;
Or of some orphan cuckoo left alone
She would declaim; and then with loud lament,
To do them good, she'd their disasters tell,
And much deplore the faults they had committed;
Yet "hop'd, poor creatures! they might still do well."
And sighing, she would say, how much she pitied
Birds, who, improvident resolv'd to wed,
Which in such times as these to certain ruin led!

To her 'twas music, when grown grey with age,
Some crow caw'd loud her praise, with yellow bill,
And bade her in the wholesome task engage,
'Mid the plum'd race new maxims to instil;
The raven, ever famous for discerning,
Of nose most exquisite for all good things,
Declar'd she was a fowl of wondrous learning;
And that no head was ever 'twixt two wings
So wise as hers. Nor female since the pope,
Ycleped Joan, with Strixaline could cope.

This, in process of time, so rais'd her pride,
That ev'ry hour seem'd lost, till she had shown
How science had to her no light denied,
And what prodigious wisdom was her own!

So, no more shrinking from the blaze of day,
Forth flew she. It was then those pleasant hours,
When village girls, to hail propitious May,
Search the wild copses and the fields for flow'rs,
And gaily sing the yellow meads among,
And ev'ry heart is cheer'd, and all look fresh and young.

His nest amid the orchard's painted buds
The bulfinch wove ; and loudly sung the thrush
In the green hawthorn ; and the new-leav'd woods,
The golden furze, and holly's guarded bush,
With song resounded: tree-moss grey enchas'd
The chaffinch's soft house ; and the dark yew
Receiv'd the hedge sparrow, that careful plac'd
Within its bosom eggs as brightly blue
As the calm sky, or the unruffled deep,
When not a cloud appears, and ev'n the zephyrs sleep.

There is a sundial near a garden fence,
Which flow'rs, & herbs, & blossom'd shrubs surround.
And Strixaline determin'd, that from thence
She to the winged creatures would expound
Her long collected store. There she alighted,
And, though much dazzled by the noon's bright rays,
In accents shrill a long discourse recited ;
While all the birds, in wonder and amaze,
Their songs amid the coverts green suspended,
Much marvelling what Strixaline intended !

But when she told them, never joyous note
Should by light grateful hearts to Heav'n be sung,
And still insisted, that from ev'ry throat,
Dirges, the knell of cheerful Hope, be rung ;

While, quitting meadows, wilds, and brakes, and trees,
She bade them among gloomy ruins hide;
Nor finch, nor white-throat wanton on the breeze,
Nor reed-lark warble by the river side;
They were indignant each, and stood aloof,
Suspecting all this zeal, but mask'd a shrewd Tartuffe.

Till out of patience they enrag'd surround her,
Some clamouring cry, that her insidious tongue
Bodes them no good; while others say they've found her
At ev'ning's close marauding for their young,
When frogs appear'd no more, and mice were scarce.
At length the wryneck, missel thrush, and bunting,
Protested they would end this odious farce,
And from the dial the baffl'd prater hunting,
With cries and shrieks her hooting they o'erwhelm,
And drive her back for shelter to her elm.

There, vanity severely mortified,
Still on her heart with sharp corrosion prey d;
No salvo now could cure her wounded pride,
Yet did she fondly still herself persuade,
That she was born in a reforming hour,
And meant to dictate, govern, and direct;
That wisdom such as hers included pow'r,
Nor did experience teach her to reflect
How very ill *some folks* apply their labours,
Who think themselves much wiser than their neighbours.

And with the mortification of the Owl, who is not altogether unlike some persons we have seen or heard of, I end, my dear Edward, my second letter.

LETTER III.

The second order of birds, *Picæ*, are those that have compressed, convex, and mostly crooked bills, though some are extremely crooked, and others less so; it includes a great many birds, and those of different properties, and which feed in a very different manner. They pair in the spring, and the male and female are equally attentive to the care of their young.

About one hundred and forty species of this order inhabit the warm regions of Asia and Europe, and many are found in Africa. Their figures, from their strong curved beak, and short feet with claws made for holding or grasping, give to some of them a great resemblance of *Accipitres*, or *Birds of Prey;* but those of the Parrot race, Psittacus, of which there are near one hundred and seventy species, all inhabitants of the warm regions of Asia, Africa, and America, feed only on

fruits and berries in their wild state, though when they become favourites with us, they feed on bread and milk, and will pick the bones of chickens, or eat other food given them from our tables.

You have seen the red and blue Macaw, Psittacus Macao, which I need not therefore describe; nor is it my purpose to give a regular detail of the varieties of these birds. There are some with wedge-shaped tails, which we usually call Parrots; those with long feathers in their tails are distinguished by the name of Paroquets; and a third sort, with a crest of feathers on their heads, from their often repeating that word are called Cockatoos. Of these the Grey Parrot, Psittacus Erithacus, possesses the greatest power of imitating the human voice, and has the best memory. Some have been known to go through a song of several verses with great correctness, and a considerable degree of humour.

There is a small sort of Parrot usually brought in pairs from the West India Islands, and sold in the bird shops by the name of Guinea Sparrows. These beautiful little creatures will live for some years in England,

if preserved from cold, but unless their cage is lined with baize, and carefully curtained of a night, they perish on the first severe frost. They are, however, an elegant ornament to the aviaries sometimes erected in conversatories, where they will live extremely well; and though they do not sing or speak, their voice is cheerful, and their actions remarkably amusing. I suppose there are several sorts of these very small Parrots, as I see one named in "Elements of Natural History," which is called the Blue and Green Paroquet, and is described as not being bigger than a sparrow.

Very little larger than a bulfinch was a bird of this genus, which a gentleman intended as a present for me many years ago, but which died a little time before the ship reached Portsmouth, from the island of Nevis, where he had purchased it among Guinea Sparrows, and some other birds, of a free negro, who dealt in these articles. That this curious specimen might not be entirely lost, it was stuffed and dried as well as it could be done on board ship; but the form of it was much injured.

The feathers, however, were preserved. Its tail was fan-shaped, like those of the little Parrots called Guinea Sparrows, and each feather coloured with yellow, scarlet, black, and green, very like theirs. The green feathers of its body were also very much the same colour; but the head and throat were of the brightest royal purple, and the inside of the wings straw colour, which at the extremity of the shoulder became of a deep yellow, and then by beautiful gradations melted into green. I was assured by those who had more time than I had, and attached more consequence to these subjects than I did, that this little creature was of a species extremely rare, and that it was not to be found in any of the collections. I regretted that I did not receive it alive, though probably it came from so warm a climate, that I should not long have preserved its existence in this country.

It would be a long task, and one for which I am not qualified, to give even an abridged account of the various stories told of the sagacity of parrots, who are said in many of those accounts, to have given proofs of memory

and of intelligence, nearly approaching to human reason. Parrots holds the same place among birds as apes do among beasts.

Considered as accompaniments to the scenery of tropical regions, they must make a great impression on the imagination. Among trees of forms and foliage so unlike those of the temperate zone, we may figure to ourselves, though probably very faintly, compared with the reality, the splendour of these birds, the feathers of which are painted by nature's gayest pencil, climbing among the branches, which are at some seasons of a green as vivid as the plumage of many of them; the Macaws sitting in stately pomp, and the parrots in moving flocks, clamouring in their short flights from one tree to another; while the more delicate paroquets are less distinctly seen, and less loudly assail the ear. Though birds of this species have been known in Europe ever since the time of Alexander, king of Macedon, called the Great from his extensive conquests, I do not recollect that they appear in fabulous history; or can I call to my mind at this moment any fable in which they are actors. The poets have sometimes compared

their loquacity, and their speaking only by rote, to that desire of talking without having any thing to say worth being heard, which these satyrists impute to women. I intended to have copied any poem I could find on this subject, that had the merit of being well written; but the only one which occurs to me is a translation by Cowper from Vincent Bourne, which, not because of the subject, but the general treatment of it, I do not think worthy of the admirable translator, and therefore I forbear to give it you.

Of the next genus of this order, the Toucan, Ramphastos, of which there are seventeen species, with their enormous disproportionate bills, I have nothing to say, that is not better told in those well-written little books called "The Natural History of Birds," [in 3 vols. Johnson, London.] The Hornbill, Buceros, that lives on the nutmeg in the Spice Islands, and another species, the Horned Indian Raven, Buceros Rhinoceros, which follows hunters in India, to feed on the offal of their game, are of another genus of this order, none of the species of which are natives of Europe.

But the genus Crow, Corvus, is one of those

with which we are most familiar through almost all its species. The first of these is the Raven, Corvus Corax. It is among birds of ill name, from its habits of life, and from a superstitious idea that it predicts misfortune. Notwithstanding this prejudice, it is often seen tame about country alehouses and farms, and it may be taught to speak.

The Raven builds in high trees, particularly firs, and on the summits of rocks. It will eat carrion, and sometimes attacks lambs when they are quite young; it also feeds on smaller birds, and when hungry will eat almost any thing. Attachment to its nestlings, however, which it possesses in a great degree, a little qualifies these disagreeable parts of its character. Shakspeare, whose mind saw every object that could heighten his unequalled pictures, makes lady Macbeth exclaim, that even the ominous and ill-boding note of the Raven was become more portentous, when the destined victim of ambition entered the castle:—

> ——————— The Raven himself is hoarse,
> That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
> Under my battlements!

But whatever sounds of horror the Raven might utter, to alarm a conscience predetermined on the most atrocious actions, it has appeared to the benevolent naturalist a less disagreeable attendant on the wilder scenes of nature. The following is an extract from White's History of Selbourne, [4to. edition, 1789, for B. White and Son, Fleet-street.] He speaks of an extraordinary growth of oak timber, of peculiar straightness, purchased at twenty pounds each tree, for repairing the bridge at Hampton Court, and proceeds thus:—

"In the centre of this grove there stood an oak, which, though shapely and tall on the whole, bulged out into a large excrescence about the middle of the stem. On this a pair of ravens had fixed their residence for such a series of years, that the oak was distinguished by the title of 'The Raven Tree.' Many were the attempts of the neighbouring youths to get at this eyry. The difficulty whetted their inclinations and each was ambitious of surmounting the arduous task. But when they arrived at the swelling, it jutted out so in their way, and was so far beyond their grasp,

that the most daring lads were awed, and acknowledged that the undertaking was too hazardous. So the Ravens built on, nest upon nest, in perfect security, till the fatal day arrived, in which the wood was to be levelled. It was in the month of February, when Ravens usually sit;—the saw was applied to the butt, the wedges were inserted in the opening, the woods echoed to the heavy blows of the beetle or mallet, and the tree nodded to its fall; but still the dam (the mother Raven) sat on. At last, when it gave way, the bird was flung from her nest, and though her parental affection deserved a better fate, was whipped down by the twigs, which brought her dead to the ground."

I confess I have often listened with a *species* of enjoyment, though it belongs not, I think, to those sensations usually called *pleasurable*, to the hoarse voices of Ravens, of which several pair are heard near a habitation endeared to me by the recollections of early youth and happier days: and even now I like to listen to their deep and solemn cawing, as they fly high over head, or are heard from their old haunts among some ancient oaks,

half a mile from the house; where perhaps, as they are said to live to a great age, they might have uttered the same deep notes, in token of enjoyment, when they shared the provision of my grandfather's dog-kennel, who lived occasionally at the place I allude to, for the purpose of pursuing field sports, near a century ago.

Our never failing friend, Cowper, has given us in his first volume a short poem, of which the Raven is the subject. I find no mythological story relative to this species of Corvus, and I cannot better supply the want of ancient fable than by a modern one from so good a writer. It is on the fallacy of human calculation.

A Raven, while with glossy breast
Her new laid eggs she fondly press'd,
And, on her wicker-work high mounted,
Her chickens prematurely counted,
(A fault philosophers might blame,
If quite exempted from the same,)
Enjoy'd at ease the genial day;
'Twas April, as the bumpkins say,
The legislator call'd it May:
But suddenly a wind, as high
As ever swept a winter's sky,

Shook the young leaves about her ears,
And fill'd her with a thousand fears,
Lest the rude blast should snap the bough,
And spread her golden hopes below;
But just at eve, the blowing weather
And all her fears were hush'd together.
And now, quoth poor unthinking Ralph,
'Tis over, and the brood is safe;
For Ravens, though as birds of omen
They teach both conjurors and old women
To tell us what is to befall,
Can't prophecy themselves at all.
The morning came when neighbour Hodge,
Who long had mark'd her airy lodge,
And destin'd all the treasure there
A gift to his expecting fair,
Climb'd, like a squirrel to his dray,
And bore the worthless prize away.

'Tis Providence alone secures
In ev'ry change both mine and yours.
Safety consists not in escape
From dangers of a frightful shape;
An earthquake may be bid to spare
The man that's strangled by a hair.
Fate steals along with silent tread,
Found oft'nest in what least we dread;
Frowns in the storm with angry brow,
But in the sunshine strikes the blow.

In ancient fable, the Raven, once white, is said to have been condemned by Apollo to

assume black feathers, as a punishment for his officious garrulity in betraying to the god the infidelity of Coronis, one of his mistresses, whom he slew in the first emotions of anger; preserving, however, the child of the guilty nymph, who was afterward the first and greatest of physicians, and called Esculapius.

The next species of this genus is the Common, or Carrion Crow, Corvus Corone, a bird every where seen, and very much resembling the Raven in its habits as well as colour, but somewhat less.

The Crow is not gregarious, that is, does not at any time assemble in flocks, but builds a solitary nest in woods: and these nests are destroyed whenever they can be found and got at; because the Crow is extremely destructive to young poultry, and even to lambs, the eyes of which it will sometimes pick out; and these dispositions, as well as its feeding on carrion, make it universally obnoxious. It is found almost every where.

The Rook, Corvus Frugilegus, is found in every part of Europe. It is the Corvus of Virgil.

Nothing is more amusing than to observe

these birds when they are building, which happens so early as the end of February and beginning of March, when the high trees on which they establish their colonies being leafless, their progress, and their contentions one with another, for the materials of which their nests are made, may be easily seen. Far from shunning the habitations of man, these birds seem fond of his society; and formerly scarce any old house in the country was without a rookery near it. Indeed, the avenues that have almost universally fallen, in compliance with the fashionable attempts to imitate nature, which certainly never plants in parallel lines, were often extensive rookeries. I cannot, however, help regretting the avenues, and their ci-devant people, the Rooks, which once answered so well the following description:

> Should I my steps turn to the rural seat,
> Whose lofty elms and venerable oaks
> Invite the Rook, who high amid the boughs
> In early spring his airy city builds,
> And ceaseless caws amusive.

Perhaps my predilection is owing to my having lived from my first recollection in

houses, near one of which there was a long avenue of elms leading from it, and the other had many high trees around it, where Rooks were encouraged; and their cawing was one of the sounds, which, when I awoke in the morning of the first holydays, reminded me most pleasantly that I was at home. How many of our attachments to sights and sounds, as well as our aversion to others, might be traced to impressions received in infancy! I have heard a gentleman of elegant taste declare, that he extremely disliked that most beautiful plant the Passion-flower, Passiflora Cerulea; and on my entreating him to tell me whence could originate so strange an antipathy, he said, that when he was a little boy, and lived with a relation in a provincial town, he was sometimes punished for idleness and neglect of his task, by being shut up in a closet; into it no light was admitted, but by a small window, against which a Passion-flower grew very luxuriantly. That plant blows, you know, late in August, and in the first weeks of September; and he ever afterward associated the idea of heat, confinement, and deprivation, with that of these flowers,

which seemed to insult him, by ornamenting the bars of his hated prison.

But to return to the little that remains to be said of Rooks. When the young of the season fly, these birds leave the trees where they build; but after midsummer, though they feed at a distance on downs and ploughed lands, they always return at night, to roost on these their more permanent habitations. Their flight is thus marked by Thomson, among the accompaniments of a storm in winter:—

> Retiring from the downs, where all day long
> They pick'd their scanty fare, a black'ning train
> Of clam'rous Rooks thick urge their weary flight,
> And seek the closing shelter of the grove.

Great trouble is taken and expense incurred to save the new-sown, and even new-sprung corn, from the voracity of these birds, which from their numbers are probably injurious to the farmer; but it should be considered, that they make him in some degree amends, by the assiduity with which they destroy an infinite quantity of noxious insects, that would otherwise eat the roots of his wheat, particularly the larva of the Chafer; for which purpose they are seen following the plough.

Young Rooks are sometimes eaten, and when skinned and baked in pipes are said to be not much inferior to pigeons.

The Hooded Crow, Corvus Cornix, is a bird of passage in this country. In the high chalk cliffs along the Sussex coast, there builds a bird of this kind, called the Saddle-backed Crow, from a gray mark on its back, which I have thought was the same as the Cornish Chough, or Red-legged Crow; but I see no such bird in the books I have consulted. It is however of them that I suppose Shakspeare speaks in his description of Dover cliff:—

> How fearful
> And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!
> The Crows and Choughs, that wing the midway air,
> Show scarce so gross as beetles!——

Perhaps, however, by *Chough* is meant the next species, the Jack-daw, Corvus Monedula, which also builds in cliffs near the sea. It is a loquacious bird, easily taught to speak, and is pert and busy. I think Shakspeare somewhere calls a prating coxcomb a Chough.

The Magpie, Corvus Pica, is noisy and mischievous; and yet these birds are agreeable objects in lone woods and copses, flying

after each other, and appearing to have some important matter in hand. There is a fable in Ovid relating to the Magpie, and thus it is: The Pierides were nine sisters, the daughters of the king of Pella. Elated by the praises they received for their skill in singing and reciting, they had the presumption to challenge the muses to contend with them for pre-eminence in these arts. The muses, though indignant, would not decline the competition. The nymphs were to be judges. The muses were the victors, and enraged at the taunting insolence of the pretenders, changed them, as a punishment, into magpies:

Beneath their nails
Feathers they feel, and on their faces scales;
Their horney beaks at once each other scare;
Their arms are plum'd, and on their backs they bear
Piedwings, and flutter in the floating air;
Chatt'ring the scandal of the woods they fly,
And there continue still their clam'rous cry.
The same their eloquence, as maids or birds,
Now only noise, and nothing then but words.

Garth's Ovid, Book 5th.

There are, I believe, a great many characters, to whom these last lines are but too applicable, and who seem to be nearly related

by their minds to the daughters of the king of Pella.

The Jay, Corvus Glandarius, is classed next to these. It is one of the most beautiful birds that inhabit the British islands. But the gardeners, among whose labours it makes great havoc, are its bitter enemies. Its harsh screaming note is not displeasing where it is most frequently seen; and amidst the glens of the forest it is a great addition to the scenery.

Though Jays indulge themselves in the luxuries of our gardens, they eat acorns, (whence their trivial name, Glandarius,) and beech mast and other seeds. There is something of pertness and importance in the air of a Jay, when he rears the feathers of his head and looks about him, as if he supposed himself a bird of considerable consequence, and was conscious of his beauty. In meditating on an old oak, the growth of centuries, Cowper thus addresses it:—

Thou wert a bauble once, a cup and ball,
Which babes might play with; and the thievish Jay,
Seeking her food, with ease might have purloin'd
The auburn nut that held thee, swallowing down
Thy yet close folded latitude of boughs,
And all thy embryo vastness at a gulp.

I do not recollect that the Jay makes any figure in mythological story; but he is sometimes, and particularly by la Fontaine, described as being (rather than the Daw) the bird that dressed himself in borrowed feathers. Perhaps we can make him appear on a rather larger canvas than is usually assigned to him, proud of his beauty, and unwilling to acknowledge any superiority, trying to emulate that of others which he was compelled to acknowledge.

THE JAY IN MASQUERADE.

Within a park's area vast,
Where grassy slopes and planted glades,
Where the thorn'd chesnuts, cones, and mast,
Strew'd the wide woodland's mingled shades;
From antler'd oaks the acorns shower'd,
As blew the sharp October breeze;
And from the lighter ashes pour'd
With the first frost their jetty keys.
Attracted there a countless throng
Of birds resorted to the woods,
With various cries, and various song,
Cheering the cultur'd solitudes.
In the high elms gregarious rooks
Were heard, loud clam'ring with the daw;
And alders, crowding on the brooks,
The willow wren and halcyon saw;

And where, through reeds and sedges steal
With slower course th' obstructed tide,
The shieldrake, and the timid teal,
And water rail, and widgeon hied,
The lake's blue wave in plumy pride
The swan repell'd with ebon foot,
And ducks Muscovian, scarlet-eyed,
Sail'd social with the dusky coot.
The partridge on the sunny knowl
Securely call'd her running brood,
And here at large the turkeys prowl
As free as in their native wood ;
With quick short note the pheasant crow'd,
While, scudding thro' the paddocks spacious,
In voice monotonous and loud,
Was seen the guinea fowl pugnacious.
The mistress who presided here
Each bird indigenous protected ;
While many a feather'd foreigner
Was from remoter climes collected.
A Jay among these scenes was hatch'd,
Who fancied that indulgent nature
His grace and beauty ne'er had match'd,
Nor ever form'd so fair a creature.
His wings, where blues of tend'rest shade
Declin'd so gradually to jet ;
Plumes like gray clouds, that o'er the red
Float when the summer sun is set ;
Like Sachem's diadem, a crest
Rising to mark him for dominion ;
In short, that never bird possess'd
Such charms, was his confirm'd opinion.

Till wand'ring forth one luckless day,
'Twas his ill fortune to behold
A peacock to the sun display,
Above his lovely shells of gold,
Those shafts, so webb'd, and painted so,
That they seem'd stol'n from Cupid's wing,
And dipp'd in the ethereal bow
That shines above the show'rs of spring;
And, as the light intensely beam'd,
Or as they felt the rustling zephyr,
The em'rald crescent brightly gleam'd
Round lustrous orbs of deep'ning sapphire.
Still, on the peacock as he gaz'd,
The Jay beheld some beauty new,
While high his green panache he rais'd,
And wav'd his sinuous neck of blue;
And still with keen and jealous eyes,
The restless, vain, impatient Jay,
Or perches near, or round him flies,
And marks his manners and his way.
For where his shiv'ring train is spread,
Or near the ant-hills in the copse,
Or in the grass along the mead,
Some radiant feather often drops;
And these, where'er they chanc'd to fall,
The Jay, with eagerness the prize
Hasten'd to seize, collecting all
These snowy shafts with azure eyes,
Fancying that all this plumage gay
He could so manage, as to place
Around his form, and thus display
The peacock's hues, the peacock's grace.

He tried, and so adorn'd appear'd,
Amazing all the folk of feather;
Who, while they gazed at him, were heard
To join in ridicule together,
Gibing and taunting, as they press
Around, and mock his senseless trouble,
While some pluck off his borrow'd dress,
Geese hiss, ducks quack, and turkies gobble.
Shrill screams the stare, and long and loud
The yaffil laughs from aspin gray;
Till scarce escaping from the crowd
With his own plumes, he skulks away.

Be what you are, nor try in vain,
To reach what nature will deny,
Factitious Art can ne'er attain
The grace of young Simplicity.

And ye, whose transient fame arises
From that which others write or say,
Learn hence, how common sense despises
The pilf'ring literary Jay.

I leave you to reflect on the truth of this moral, though I hope and believe, that natural good sense, which is so much better than any acquisition, will always prevent you having, on your own account, occasion to recollect it. The order Picæ is so large a one, that I must divide it; and what remains to be said will fill another letter.

LETTER IV.

The eighth and ninth species of Crows are the Alpine Chough, and Cornish Chough. The first, Corvus Pyrrhocorax, is found in the Swiss Alps; and the second, Corvus Graculus, is perhaps the same as is called on the Sussex coast the Saddle-backed Crow. My authority for the name and description of this bird, Elements of Natural History, 8vo., Cadell and Davies, describes it as being *black* and *violet* colour; but the colours of objects of natural history are, I have often observed, liable to be represented differently by different writers. Thus, in botany, flowers are often called scarlet, which I should call pink; and what is generally called purple is often by botanists called carnation, which ought to mean flesh colour.

The next genus of this order, the Oriole, contains only one species, the Golden Oriole, Oriolus Galbula, that visits England, though

it is, I am told, not very uncommon in Normandy. It is a very beautiful bird, if it resemble the drawing of it which I saw at Rouen, and which was done from one taken near that city. The nest of this bird is attached to the slender branches of trees, is formed of leaves very ingeniously interwoven, and is somewhat in the form of a pitcher.

The next genus of the order, Gracula, contains thirteen species; but as none of them are natives of Europe, I shall name only the first, as a proof of the use of birds to the cultivators of the earth. The Purple Grakle, Gracula Quiscala, migrates, and feeding on rice and other grain, the farmers of Virginia and Pensylvania took infinite pains to destroy and drive them from those provinces: the consequence was, that their crops were entirely destroyed by a caterpillar, which these birds would have eaten.

The three genera, Bird of Paradise, Paradisea; Trogon, Curucui; and Bucco, Barbet; as they are inhabitants of the warmer countries, I must pass over, having a great deal to say on birds more familiar to us, and of which the habits are so unlike those of

other birds, and have been so variously represented, that your curiosity may be more than usually excited.

Of the genus Cuckoo, Cuculus, only one of fifty-five species, the Canorus, or Common Cuckoo, visits England. As it is the herald of spring, it is usually heard with pleasure; and, as well as the nightingale, appears frequently in poetry. Its natural history is supposed, from the evidence that has been collected, to differ from that of all other birds, because it does not take the trouble to rear its own young. I know not that I can do better than make extracts, nearly in his own words, from the account given of the Cuckoo by that agreeable and ingenious naturalist, Mr. White, who, in his "History of Selborne," says to his correspondent,

"I could never find that any young Cuckoo had ever been seen in these parts, except in the nest of the wagtail, the hedge-sparrow, the titlark, the whitethroat, and the redbreast; all soft-billed insectivorous birds. This proceeding of the Cuckoo in dropping its eggs, as it were by chance, is such a monstrous outrage on natural affection, one of the first great

dictates of nature, and such a violence on instinct, that had it been related of a bird in the Brazils, or Peru, it would never have merited our belief. Yet should it appear that this simple bird, when divested of that natural στοργη (storgè,) that seems to raise the kind in general above themselves, and inspire them with an extraordinary degree of courage and address, may be still endued with the more enlarged faculty of discerning what species are suitable and congenerous nursing mothers for its disregarded eggs and young, and may deposit them only under their care, this would be adding wonder to wonder, and instancing in a fresh manner, that the methods of Providence are not subjected to any mode or rule, but astonish us in new lights, and various and changeable appearances."—Page 125, 2d edition.

"You wonder with good reason, that the hedge-sparrow can be induced to sit on the egg of the Cuckoo without being *scandalized* at the vast disproportion of the suppositious eggs. But the brute creation, I suppose, have very little idea of form, colour, and number. A common hen will sometimes sit

on a shapeless stone, and the hen turkey will sit on the nest only."

"A countryman told me he had found a young Fern Owl in the nest of a small bird on the ground, and that it was fed by the little bird. I went to see this phenomenon, and found that it was a young Cuckoo, hatched in the nest of a titlark; it was become vastly too big for its nest, appearing

——————— in tenui re,
Majores pennas nido extendisse,

and was very fierce and pugnacious, pursuing my finger as I teized it, for many feet from the nest, and sparring and buffeting with its wings like a game cock. The dupe of a dam, the titlark, appeared at a distance, hovering about with meat in its mouth, and expressing the greatest solicitude."

From this account, and many others that I might collect, were it necessary, or did my limits admit of it, there cannot be a doubt, but that this very singular mode of putting out its offspring to nurse is that which is generally adopted by the Cuckoo; but in this, as in every thing, whether a matter of justice

or of curiosity, it is best to hear both sides; I therefore give you at considerable length an extract from a publication of Dr. Darwin's, whose penetrating mind left nothing unexamined, that could give new information, and correct established prejudices. He thus writes, Zoonomia, section xvi. 13, 5, on Instinct, vol. i. page 244, octavo:

"As many ladies are too refined to nurse their own children, and deliver them to the care and provision of others, so is there one instance of this vice in the feathered world. The Cuckoo, in some parts of England, as I am well informed by a very distinct and ingenious gentleman, hatches and educates her young; whilst in other parts she builds no nest, but uses that of some lesser bird, generally either of the wagtail or hedge-sparrow, and depositing one egg in it, takes no farther care of her progeny.

"Monsieur Herissant thought, that he had discovered the reason, why Cuckoos do not incubate their own eggs, by having observed, that the crop or stomach of the Cuckoo was placed behind the sternum, or breast bone; and he thence fancied, that this would render

incubation disagreeable or impracticable. But on dissecting the fern owl, or goat-sucker, Caprimulgus, the crop or stomach of which bird is placed like that of the Cuckoo, this idea of the French naturalist seems unfounded, because the fern owl hatches her own eggs. The structure, therefore, of the Cuckoo, cannot be the reason why she abandons her eggs.

"As the Rev. Mr. Stafford was walking in Glosop dale, in the peak of Derbyshire, he saw a Cuckoo rise from its nest. The nest was on the stump of a tree, that had been some time felled, among some chips that were in part turned gray, so as much to resemble the colour of the bird. In this nest were two young Cuckoos; tying a string about the leg of one of them, he pegged the other end of the string to the ground, and very frequently for many days beheld the old Cuckoo feeding these young ones."

In this fact it seems impossible there could be any mistake. In the sequel of the same account, Dr. Darwin thus continues, from the Rev. Mr. Wilmot, of Morley:

"In the beginning of July, 1792, I was attending some labourers on my farm, when one

of them said to me, 'There is a bird's nest on one of the coal slack hills; the bird is now sitting, and is exactly like a Cuckoo. They say that Cuckoos never hatch their own eggs, otherwise I should have sworn it was one.' He took me to the spot. It was in an open fallow ground; the bird was upon the nest; I stood and observed her some time, and was perfectly satisfied it was a Cuckoo."

The reverend narrator goes on to relate very minute particulars of the pains he took, to watch the progress of the incubation. There were three eggs laid among the coal slack, in a nest just scratched out, like the hollows in which plovers deposit their eggs. After some days, two young Cuckoos appeared, but of the third egg there was no appearance. Mr. Wilmot himself, and several of his friends, constantly watched the nest, to which the old bird, for it does not appear that there were more than one, seemed remarkably attentive. One of the young birds was soon afterward missing, but the other, constantly fed by its anxious parent, was soon fully fledged, and was, when it was lost sight of, supposed to have flown, in a condition to have provided for itself.

It appears from these observations of accurate naturalists, made with a view to investigate the subject, that this bird is not always unnaturally careless of her young; yet why she should in one part of England act with the tenderness and attention of a good mother, and in another abandon her young to the care of a bird which from its size seems so inadequate to the charge, it is impossible to say; and this seems one among many other inquiries in natural history, which baffle the curiosity of man.

Aristotle says, that the Cuckoo sometimes builds her nest on broken rocks and on high mountains; but adds, that she generally possesses herself of the nests of other birds; and this seems to have been the received opinion among the ancients.

Pliny gives a more disagreeable character to this bird, which he considers as a hawk; the hawks, he says, will devour it. This ancient naturalist has many wild and visionary ideas, and among others, he gravely relates, that the Cuckoo, knowing the aversion in which all other birds hold it, takes this method to bring their young into "special grace and

favour" with their nurses, who become, he says, so fond of these adopted children, notwithstanding their enormous size, that their own young are often turned out to make room for them. The fact, I think, as it has been ascertained by some late observer, but I cannot now recollect who, is, that the young Cuckoo soon grows so large as to push his foster brothers out of the nest where he is fed and nurtured by the silly mother. Cuckoos are said by Linnæus to be birds of prey; but this seems to be denied by late writers. They undoubtedly feed on large insects, and are often seen skimming about near ponds in pursuit of the dragon flies, Libelluæ, which are particularly welcome to them. The only time I ever saw Cuckoos very near was in a part of Middlesex where there was a great deal of wood, and several fish ponds. I remember plainly distinguishing them, three or four at a time, uttering their monotonous notes in different keys on high elm trees near these pools and ponds, and at other times singing on the wing. The greatest number of these birds which I ever recollect at any time to have heard was at Tunbridge Wells.

Among the many poems in which the Cuckoo is mentioned, none seem to me more simply descriptive than one by Logan, which, as it is so very common, and appears in all collections, I will not insert here. It is inserted in "Poetry for Children," a compilation with some original pieces by Miss Lucy Aikin, [Phillips, Bridge-street.]

It is singular, that this well known and remarkable bird is not one of those which the luxuriant imagination of Ovid has represented as having once been some unnatural father or careless mother.

The Honey Bird, Cuculus Indicator, is found in Africa, and I believe in America. The natives of the Cape attend to the call of this bird, by which they are directed to the stores of honey laid up by the wild bees in the woods. They leave a small portion of the spoil as a reward and an inducement to the bird again to exercise his sagacity. I believe the same thing is related of the manner in which the inhabitants of some parts of America discover the honey of the wild bees, with which the woods there abound.

The genus Woodpecker, Picus, compre-

hends some of the most beautiful birds inhabiting our woods. The Green Woodpecker, Picus Viridis, is the commonest, and is called in many countries the Laugher, from its frequently, and particularly before the welcome showers of spring, making a noise very like laughing. In Sussex it is known by the name of the Yaffil. This bird, larger and longer than a missel thrush, is of an olive green, with a cap of glossy crimson feathers. With its hard wedge-shaped bill it pierces the bark of trees, especially those of which the wood is soft, or enlarges any hole it finds already made; and when the cavity is sufficiently spacious, builds its nest within it, usually laying five or six eggs. The food of these birds is insects, which it collects with its long tongue. To me all the notes of this bird are particularly pleasant, from the association of ideas. An avenue of aspen trees, planted by my grandfather, was one of the walks in which I delighted in my early youth. It was frequented by great numbers of these birds, which built there every year. The pallid colour and tremulous motion of the leaves of the aspen, which from the slenderness of their

stalks vibrate and quiver in the lighest air, give to this tree something of the melancholy air which we attach to very different trees, the cypress and the weeping willow; but the Woodpecker seems to feel himself happy among them, as from the softness of the grain he can easily penetrate to make his next; and amid the decayed wood great numbers of insects are to be found.

In North America there are fifteen species of Woodpeckers, all extremely beautiful in their plumage. The vast woods of the New World are rich in an infinite variety of birds, many of which have the gayest plumage, and are exquisite in song. The Woodpeckers however make these Sylvan solitudes echo with their loud and singular note.

Some of these different species of Woodpecker have occasionally been seen in England, but I do not suppose any are very frequently found. With us the only very common one is the Picus Viridis, the Green Woodpecker. The country people often call the Woodpecker the *Laugher*. I doubt whether the name of *Yaffil* is not peculiar to Sussex. Sir Ashton Lever said he had never heard that

name given to the Woodpecker, till a Sussex lady called it so in examining his collection.

There is a story of the metamorphose of this bird. Picus was a king of the Latins; he had the misfortune to appear too amiable in the eyes of Circe, the enchantress, who shamelessly importuned him to return her passion. His attachment to his wife made him repel her advances with horror, and the revengeful sorceress, by her spells, immediately deprived him of his own form, and gave him that of a Woodpecker.

> On the lost youth her magic power she tries;
> Aloft he springs, and wonders how he flies:
> On painted plumes he seeks the woods, and still
> The monarch oak he pierces with his bill.
> Thus chang'd, no more o'er Latian land he reigns;
> Of Picus nothing but the name remains.

The European Nuthatch, Sitta Europea, has habits very like those of Woodpeckers, and it often takes possession of one of their forsaken nests for its habitation. It runs up and down trees searching for insects, but it also eats nuts and grain.

The other species of this genus are all natives of other countries.

The history of the next genus, the Kingfisher, Alcedo, will engage a greater portion of our attention than the preceding. There are of them forty-three species, but one only is an inhabitant of Europe.

That with which we are therefore best acquainted is the Alcedo Ispida, the Common Kingfisher; a bird that, concealing itself among reeds and willows on the banks of unfrequented ponds and streams, lives by catching small fish and water insects. Its size, which is less than that of a blackbird, must render it incapable of preying on any larger fish than gudgeons, minnows, or miller's thumbs. The beauty of its plumage exceeds that of most other European birds, and the term *halcyon blue* is used to describe any object of that peculiar hue. Shenstone, I think, applies it to the eyes of his "Nancy of the Vale."

> The little Halcyon's azure plume
> Was never half so blue.

The story that belongs to the Halcyon as a member of the *corps travestie*, is long, but is so frequently alluded to when we say Halcyon

days, Halcyon hours, that I will relate it somewhat more minutely than is always necessary in regard to these wild and extravagant fables.

Ceyx, king of Magnesia, was married to Alcyone, the daughter of the Wind, by whom he was passionately beloved, and to whom he was tenderly attached. Some disagreeable events, which had happened in his country, and to his relation Peleus, excited his fears, and determined him to consult the oracle of Apollo. For this purpose he went on shipboard, notwithstanding the earnest entreaties of Alcyone, who implored him either to take her with him, that she might share his fate, or abandon an enterprise, which her prophetic fears told her would be fatal. To do either he refused, yet endeavoured to appease the apprehensions of Alcyone by making light of the danger, and assuring her he would not long be absent.

> Before two moons their orb with light adorn,
> If Heaven allow me life, I will return.

The unhappy queen, however, saw him depart with the most fearful forebodings. They

were too well justified by the event. Ceyx was shipwrecked and perished, while his widow, still cherishing some hope amid the sad presentiments of evil, continued to importune Juno, the goddess particularly propitious to connubial love, for the safety of her beloved Ceyx; and reckoning how long his absence had been, watched the waning moon, and prepared for his desired return. Juno, distressed by these petitions for a man already lost, directs Iris, her messenger, to repair to the House of Sleep, and obtain of Somnus a dream, which should inform Alcyone of the fatal truth. The description of the House of Sleep is very finely painted by Dryden, who tells this story admirably. Morpheus is commissioned by the drowsy god to go to the couch of the wretched Alcyone, assuming the figure of her drowned Ceyx. This is so executed, as leaves her little doubt of the fatal truth. In an agony of grief she repairs to the seaside, where soon after a drowned body appeared floating at a distance. It was soon driven by the tide to the feet of the frantic Alcyone, who having thus her worst fears confirmed, sought only to die, and rejoin him, whom in life she had so

fondly loved; and running to the summit of a cliff that hung over the sea, she threw herself from it, but was by the pity of superior powers turned into a bird; while the body of her lord was reanimated in the same shape.

The gods their shape to winter birds translate,
But both obnoxious to their former fate.
Their conjugal affection still is tried,
And still the mournful race is multiplied.
Fondly they bill; Alcyone compress'd,
Seven days sits brooding on her floating nest,
A wintry queen; her sire at length is kind,
Calms every storm and hushes every wind;
Prepares his empire for his daughter's ease,
And for his hatching nephews smooths the seas.

It is thus that this beautiful but melancholy poem closes; of which it may be necessary to remark, that grandsons were formerly called *nephews*. The stormy god gave seven serene winter days to the production of his daughter's offspring in her new state of existence, and it is for this reason that days particularly calm and happy have obtained the name of Halcyon days. You perceive that Ceyx and Alcyone were transformed into Halcyons, the birds usually called Kingfishers.

I have once or twice seen a stuffed bird of this species hung up to the beam of a cottage ceiling. I imagined that the beauty of the feathers had recommended it to this sad pre-eminence, till on inquiry I was assured, that it served the purpose of a weather vane; and though sheltered from the immediate influence of the wind, never failed to show every change, by turning its beak from the quarter whence the wind blew. So that some superstition as to the connection between the wind and the Halcyon, seems, like many other relicts of almost forgotten prejudices, to linger still in our cottages.

We will have nothing to do with the genus Merops, the Bee-eater; or with the Hoopoe, Upupa: as the first has scarcely ever been seen in England; and the second, though it sometimes breeds here, is very rare.

But of the next in rank, the Creeper, Certhia, you may often see the Familiaris, the Common or Tree Creeper. It is little bigger than the golden-crested wren, which is the least of British birds. I have observed them creeping like mice up and down the trunks of

fir trees particularly. It is the only English species.

When you look back on the larger birds of the order Picæ, and recollect the figures and properties of the Raven and the Crow, you will hear with some surprise, that the most delicate and beautiful of the feathered kind terminates the order, and is thus related, though distantly, to animals of appearance and habit so very different; I mean the Humming Bird, Trochilus, which under two divisions, distinguished by the form of their bills, contains sixty-five species. The least of these lovely little creatures is the Trochilus Minimus. It is frequently seen in the West Indies, and is much less than the smallest English bird, while its eggs are hardly so large as peas; but as in the book which our Conversations of last summer has furnished us with, there is so full an account of, and a short poem addressed to, this feathered fairy, it will not be necessary to say more of it here.

With these I conclude my long lecture.

LETTER V.

ORDER III.—ANSERES.

The subjects of my present letter are not so very interesting as some others of the class of birds. Linnæus puts into this third order web-footed birds: they feed on plants and animals.

The first of the genus Anas, is the Wild Swan, Anas Cygnus, a bird that has been called the emblem of the poets. I know not why, as Wild Swans are gregarious, that is, they assemble in flocks, and the poet is not, I think, a very sociable animal. It is to this bird Horace is believed to allude in the 20th Ode of the 2d Book, addressed to Mæcenas, beginning,

> Non usitatâ nec tenui ferar
> Pennâ.

Of the next species, the Tame Swan, Anas

Olor, we know more. It is a stately and beautiful bird in the water. Its graceful form, and the delicate and pure white of its plumes, have occasioned it to be protected as an ornament to lakes and ponds in the parks and grounds of people of fortune. The lord mayor and aldermen of London are the proprietors and guardians of the Swans on the Thames, and a water party is made by them once a year, when they go on the river in a sort of procession, and this ceremony is called *Swan-hopping;* but what they do at this period to contribute to the preservation of these birds, I either never heard, or have forgotten.

The Swan feeds on fish, and plants that grow in the water. In some ait, or small island, in those parts of the Thames where they are the least likely to be disturbed, a pair of Swans make their nest, and lay seven or eight eggs, from which in six weeks the little brown Cygnets appear; and it is three years before they obtain that brilliant and snowy whiteness which distinguishes them in this country. It has lately been discovered, that though a black Swan was supposed by the

ancients to be a phenomenon never seen, and thence

Rara avis in terra,

a rare bird on earth, became proverbial; yet there are black Swans in the country now called Botany Bay. In England Swans breed in considerable numbers on the Thames, the Trent, and particularly in a salt-water creek on the coast of Derbyshire. When the Swan has young ones, the male is very fierce, and guards his female and her nest with great vigilance. Thomson thus describes it:

> The stately sailing Swan
> Gives out his snowy plumage to the gale,
> And arching proud his neck, with oary feet
> Bears forward fierce, and guards his osier isle,
> Protective of his young.

The Swan is very strong, and it has happened, that one of the males suspecting a person of a design to molest his young, has sallied forth from the pond, and flown with such fury at the imaginary enemy, as to break the man's leg by a stroke of his wing.

Milton thus gives us the picture of this bird:—

Others on lakes and silver rivers bath'd
Their downy breast. The Swan with arched neck
Between her white wings mantling, proudly rows
Her state with oary feet.

Book 7th.

The down of the Swan is used for muffs, tippets, and ornaments, in winter, of a lady's dress. When I was a child I thought myself very fine in a muff and tippet of this material; for of several swans, which had long inhabited a pond at a house where I then lived, five were killed one night by foxes, who walked over the ice to the little ait on which they usually remained; but these marauders only sucked the blood. The greater part of the skins were uninjured.

The fabulous history of the Swan cannot be given without wondering at the preposterous prejudices, that were received as truths by the otherwise wisest and most illustrious of mankind. They were taught, that Jupiter, the great governor of the world, assumed this figure when he was enamoured of Leda, the daughter of Thestius. How they could assimilate with infinite power the idea of these transformations, it is not easy to say. This absurd fable, however, has given birth to some

beautiful pictures; the great Italian painters appear to have employed their talents with equal spirit on the most sacred and the most profane subjects.

Dr. Darwin, who as a poet avails himself of the same privilege, thus beautifully describes a Swan, as one of the forms assumed to captivate his mistress by a Proteus adorer:—

> And now a Swan, he spreads his plumy sails,
> And proudly glides before the fanning gales;
> Pleas'd on the flow'ry brink, with graceful hand,
> She waves her floating lover to the land:
> Bright shines his sinuous neck; with crimson beak
> He prints fond kisses on her glowing cheek,
> Spreads his broad wings, elates his ebon crest,
> And clasps the beauty to his downy breast.
>
> *Page* 182, *Botanic Garden.*

Among so many absurd stories, the natural history of the creatures to which they related has been much misunderstood and misrepresented. The ancients supposed, that the Swan, though it was at all other times silent, sung most melodiously just before its death.

The fact is, that this bird, though not entirely mute, makes only a sort of snorting noise now and then at particular seasons; and the Wild Swan very frequently utters its loud,

shrill cry, whence it bears the name of the Whistling Swan, or Hooper.

Swans were formerly eaten in England. I think I have seen a drawing of a magnificent table in the reign of queen Elizabeth, at which a peacock, his body gilt and his tail feathers displayed, was one of the principal dishes, and a Swan in his feathers, with gilt bill and legs, another.

The Swan is conspicuously known in Heathen fable, beside his appearance in the foregoing instance. Phæton, the rash and ill-advised son of Apollo, perished by the thunder of Jupiter, who was compelled to destroy him to preserve the world from the effects of his indiscretion. Cycnus, his near relation by the side of his mother, was overwhelmed with grief, and while the sisters of Phæton, who deeply lamented his loss, were turned into poplars, and wept tears of amber in the Po, the river into which Phæton had been plunged, Cycnus abandoned his realms to lament also on its banks the fate of this unfortunate family.

> While here, within the dismal gloom alone,
> The melancholy monarch made his moan;

His voice was lessen'd as he tried to speak,
And issued through a long extended neck.
His hair transform'd to down ; his fingers meet
In skinny films, and shape his oary feet ;
From both his sides the wings and feathers break,
And from his mouth proceeds a blunter beak ;
All Cycnus now into a Swan was turn'd,
Who still rememb'ring how his kinsman burn'd,
To solitary lakes and pools retires,
And loves the waters, as oppos'd to fires.

Ovid's Met. Book 2nd.

Another transformation into a Swan, is that of Cygnus, the son of Neptune, who at the siege of Troy was strangled by the fierce and inexorable Achilles. The parent seagod, not able to preserve him, still continued his existence in the shape of a Swan. The other, however, is the most popular story. Ovid's Met. Book 12th.

The Shieldrake, Anas Tadorna, the Velvet Duck, Anas Fusca, the Scoter, Anas Nigra, the White-fronted Goose, Anas Albifrons, belong to the first division of this numerous tribe. The Scaup Duck, Anas Marila, follows in the second ; and the Wild Goose, Anas Anser, from which the Tame Goose is derived.

The Wild Goose is a native of the northern parts of three quarters of the world, Europe,

Asia, and America. Its abode with us is among the rivers and lakes of Scotland, which in very severe weather it quits, and associating in very large flocks, proceeds southward. At such seasons they are heard at a great height in the air. They bend their course to sheltered ponds and pools not yet frozen, or where the current prevents the water from entirely congealing, or to the salt water creeks, where they are often shot, though extremely shy, and taking many precautions against danger. Those that escape accidents live to a great age.

The Wild Goose has transmitted to his posterity the Goose, usually fed on commons and in marshy countries, only some degree of its vigilance, but none of its activity. This bird, so many ages domesticated, has lost the lightness of its form, and is no longer capable of taking considerable flights, or of soaring into the air. The Goose contents itself, when alarmed, to rise a very little from the ground, and often half flying, half waddling, makes its escape from the object of its apprehension, uttering a harsh and disagreeable cry; but while the females are sitting, or when the

young goslings appear, the gander is very fierce, and flies after any one whom he supposes meditates any offence against them. His awkward attempts to annoy his enemy, hissing with stretched-out neck, and waddling gait, yet retreating if he perceive any signs of retaliation, render this bird an object of ridicule; and if a modern Ovid were to write a series of transmigrations, it is probable that he would choose a man at once stupid and quarrelsome to inhabit the body of a male goose.

But in very high consideration was this bird, whose name is now used in derision and contempt, held by the Romans, who paid the highest honours to Geese, and assigned a portion of land for the support of a certain number of them, that were accounted sacred. The service rendered by these creatures to the Roman republic, happened thus.

In the year of Rome 365, the Gauls made an irruption into Italy. The Romans raised in haste an army to oppose them, but from some strange mismanagement it was entirely defeated; and had the barbarians immediately followed up their victory, and entered the

city with the fugitives that escaped to take shelter there, it must have been entirely destroyed. But intent on spoil, they gave the Romans time to consider what, in such a dreadful emergency, could be attempted to prevent the extirpation of the Roman name. To collect such an army as might with any hopes of success go out to meet the Gauls, flushed as they were with conquest, was impossible. All that could be done was, to send the most valuable of their effects into the Capitol, with the best of their soldiers; while the old men, devoting themselves for their country, exhorted those yet in the vigour of their years to exert themselves for its salvation, and awaited, in the robes of the offices they had gone through, the arrival of the barbarians, who put them to death, as well as such other defenceless inhabitants as were left, and then plundered and set fire to the city.

Those assembled in the Capitol beheld with anguish their houses in flames, and heard the shrieks of distress which they could not relieve. Determined however to defend the Capitol, they repulsed the Gauls in their first attempt to reduce it. Camillus, the celebrated Roman

general, banished long since to Ardea, a city at some distance, heard with astonishment and indignation the condition to which his country was reduced, prevailed on the Ardeans to assist him, and collecting such Roman soldiers as happened to be near him, and joining them to the Ardeans, he cut to pieces a great number of Gauls who were plundering the neighbourhood of Rome. This advantage was followed by others, and Camillus was, by the Romans who were dispersed through the country, entreated to assume the dictatorship. This, however, in obedience to the laws, which even at such a time were respected, he refused to do, till their choice was confirmed by the body of their countrymen shut up in the Capitol. To obtain their suffrage was extremely difficult, as the Gauls closely besieged the Capitol, and no admittance could be gained but by climbing an almost perpendicular rock, that arose immediately from the Tiber.

Pontius Cominius, a young Roman, undertook to conquer an obstacle so fatal to the deliverance of the remaining Roman citizens. He furnished himself with corks, and being an expert swimmer, floated down the Tiber till he

came immediately under the rock, which ascending with extreme hazard, and making himself known to the first centinel, he was carried to the magistrate for the time being, by whom the senate was assembled, and a decree unanimously passed, appointing Camillus dictator; with this trust, Pontius, not without considerable difficulty, returned to Ardea.

The Gauls, in the mean time, pressed by famine, endeavoured by every means to conclude the siege; and failing in several open attacks, they determined to attempt taking the Capitol by stratagem. For this purpose they examined every part of the rock on which the fortress was situate; and it is supposed that they discovered the traces of some one who had ascended: for choosing a dark night, and proceeding with great secrecy and caution, a body of the most resolute mounted the precipice, holding by the brush-wood and grasses, and this so silently, that not even the dogs within the fortress gave any alarm. The Geese, however, were more alert. These birds, which being consecrated to Juno were held sacred, and spared notwithstanding the

great want of food, began a loud clamour, just as the Gauls, having reached the summit, would soon have conquered that last obstacle. The noise of the Geese alarmed Manlius, who rushing towards that part of the battlement, perceived a Gaul on the very point of entering it. He instantly pushed him down, and he in his fall overturned those behind him, so that they were all precipitated into the Tiber. Honours were ever after shown to the sacred Geese at Rome; an annual procession was made every year, in which a Goose was carried in a splendid litter, while a dog was hung in memory of the vigilance of the Geese and the inactivity of the dogs, on this occasion. This is not among the wisest of the Roman customs.

A picture of Jupiter is sometimes seen with a Goose between his feet. The reason I think is, that Jupiter and Mercury wandering about on earth to try the disposition of different people into whose houses they entered, were received by a poor couple, who had only a Goose which they could offer their unknown guests for supper. They were however of so hospitable a temper, that they pursued the

Goose, intending to kill her for that purpose; but the bird having recourse to the protection of Jupiter, he commanded them to spare her life, and I hope furnished them with a supper by some other means. This is the same sort of story as that of Baucis and Philemon.

The fable of the Goose that every day produced a golden egg, and was killed by her foolish and ungrateful master, in order that he might possess himself of all the treasure at once, is a lesson to unfeeling improvidence. A horse is sometimes overworked by his barbarous owner, that he may make all the present profit he can of him; and the same thing has, I fear, been done in those countries where the unhappy negroes are purchased, and compelled to labour to raise sugar, and coffee, and cotton, for the use of Europeans.

There are ninety other species of Anas of this division, including tame and wild ducks, teal, and widgeon. Among them is the Bernacle Goose, Anas Erythropterus, of which the following strange notion was once entertained. When ships have been long at sea, they become foul, and a shell fish, called a Bernacle, adheres to them; from these, people

took it into their heads that the Bernacle Geese were hatched, though the thing is evidently impossible, and contrary to every known law of nature. Yet I think I have somewhere read an account, in which a man declares he has *seen* the young Geese in these shells, or only adhering to them by the bill. Such extravagancies were, however, not unfrequent, when means of general information were less easy of attainment than they now are; and when travellers supposed they could impose upon the credulous. Much more extraordinary stories than this were formerly believed.

I forbear to tell you any thing about the management of the tame Geese in the fen countries, where such numbers are bred for the sake of their quills and feathers. Of these the poor birds are deprived three or four times a year, to supply mankind with beds, on which they repose; and if I were inclined to venture an antithesis, I should say, with the *pens*, by which their repose is too often disturbed. You remember a very clear and entertaining account of this, and of the decoys in Lincolnshire, and other low and watery

countries, and the contrivances by which great numbers of wild fowl are taken for market, in the "Natural History of Birds," in three volumes, which I before mentioned to you.

The Auks, Alcæ, are of the order Anseres. Perhaps no inquiries have excited more curiosity, and have been less satisfactorily answered, than many that has arisen as to the migration of birds. Birds of this genus, inhabitants of the sea and sea rocks, whether called Auks, Puffins, or Razorbills, are so numerous on the coast of Scotland and the Western Isles, as to afford a great part of the scanty sustenance of the natives. Some are said to live entirely on the water, of which species is one called the Herdsman of the Sea. It is not, however, probable that their nests and eggs can resist the violence of the waves without being dashed to pieces; and it is more likely they occasionally take shelter in caverns and holes of the rocks.

The Aptenodytes is a genus of this order, and includes most of the Penguins, of which you have also read in voyages. There also are frequently named birds of the next genus,

the Procellaria. You remember reading of the Stormy Petrels, Procellaria Pelagica, which seem to run on the sea, and assemble about a ship before a storm comes on, during which they keep near it. These are what the sailors call Mother Cary's Chickens. This little sea bird is of so fat and oily a nature, that a wick being drawn through its body, it serves the rude natives of the island of St. Kilda and the Orkneys with light, instead of any more artful preparation.

The Fulmar, Procellaria Glacialis, a larger species of the Petrel, is likewise very fat, and would be thought by us very rancid and offensive; but Providence seems to have adapted the taste of his creatures to the food with which he has furnished them. An inhabitant of St. Kilda, or of Greenland, probably finds a Fulmar a more delightful treat, than he would consider a partridge or a quail. They eat them raw, dried, and boiled, and drink their oil.

The Pintado, Procellaria Capensis, is welcome to the sailor on his voyage to India, as it tells him he is approaching the Cape of

Good Hope. The Shearwater also, Procellaria Puffinus, belongs to this genus.

The Albatross, Diomedea, follows, and then the Pelican, Pelecanus. The idea entertained of the White Pelican, Pelecanus Onocrotalus, that it feeds its young with its own blood, which has caused it to be an emblem of an affectionate mother devoting herself to the support of her children, does it more honour than it deserves. It does not appear to have more tenderness for its young than other birds: but it has a large bag connected with its lower mandible, so big indeed, that a man who carried animals about to show for money, exhibited the Pelican by drawing this bag over his head. Into this pouch the Pelican receives the fish she catches, or the water which she has occasion to give her young; and thus in feeding them, she seems to supply them from her own vitals. Bartram says there is a Pelican in America bigger than a tame goose, with wings that, when extended, measured near seven feet. The same author also describes a very singular creature of this species, which he calls the Wood Pelican, a

large and solitary bird, which he thinks is related to the Egyptian Ibis, and, like that, feeds on the young of the crocodile, or alligator.

The Frigate Bird, Pelecanus Aquilus, is a very large bird, feeding on flying fish, and seen only between the tropics. The Corvorant, Pelecanus Carbo, is frequent on our coasts, where it is known by its croaking noise, and distinguished for its voracious appetite. It eats till it becomes stupid, like other gluttons, and then sits nodding and half asleep on some solitary rock, waiting till hunger renews its activity. The Chinese still employ it as it was once employed by the English, in catching fish; which is done by putting a ring round its neck, to prevent its swallowing all it takes. By habit the bird learns to bring the fish to his master, who gives him some share, as the reward of his toil. The arch fiend is described by Milton to have assumed the form of the Corvorant, or Cormorant, as it has usually been called, when he entered the garden of Eden.

> Thence up he flew, and on the tree of life
> Sat like a Cormorant.

The Crested Shag, Pelecanus Cristatus, and the Gannet, Pelecanus Bassanus, are both of this genus. The latter is called in Scotland the Solan Goose. Some cliffs and precipices in the island of St. Kilda, and the Frith of Forth, are the only places, as it is said, in Europe, where the Gannets resort. The Bass, in the Frith, is one of their principal haunts, and though only a perpendicular rock, rising steeply out of the sea, it is farmed for a considerable sum of money, on account of the profit derived from the young Gannets, or Solan Geese, which are eaten roasted about an hour before dinner in that part of Scotland, as a sort of provocative to a more hearty meal afterwards; or, as it it vulgarly called, a *whet*. These birds arrive in March, feed on sprats and herrings, and quit their summer abode in September, to go nobody knows whither. There are stories told of the manner in which the islanders and hardy natives of the northern coast obtain the eggs and feathers of these and other sea fowl, that make any one shudder to read them. Bishop Pontoppidan, of Norway, who relates the many wonders of the northern seas, gives va-

rious accounts of this nature; and some of them have been thought little less incredible than his Sea Snake and Craken, which are now considered as wholly fabulous. Tremendous as it seems to be, suspended in a basket, moving on a cord between two rocks several fathoms over the sea, or hanging in the air, sitting across a stick, or to be standing on a point of the rock over the sea, yet habit reconciles some to modes of life, which those unaccustomed to them tremble but to think of. The motive that urges men to cross oceans, and in remote and unwholesome regions attack the natives or the colonists of a power at war with their country, is not stronger than that which induces the peasant or fisher of St. Kilda to climb, at the risk of his life, up a precipice beetling over the ocean, to obtain a scanty supper for his family, or a few feathers, which he can dispose of to purchase a small quantity of oatmeal.

The Booby, Pelecanus Sula, is another of the species. You will often see it mentioned in voyages by the former name, which the sailors have given it for its stupidity.

The Darter, Plotus, and the Tropic Bird,

Phaeton, are two links in this chain of beings. The latter is a beautiful bird, seen chiefly between the tropics. The generic name was derived from Apollo's ill-fated offspring, who so rashly insisted on driving for one day the horses of the Sun, and perished in the Po. A fable which probably had its origin in some extraordinary convulsion of nature.

The twenty-five species of the genus Colymbus offer themselves next; a genus, which under three divisions comprehends Guillemots, Divers, and Grebes; birds that, on account of their legs being placed so far backward, walk with difficulty. One of the first, called a Scout, but in Scotland a Lavie, appears as early as February in the island of St. Kilda, the rocks around which island are white with the dung of sea birds. An islander, covering himself with a piece of cloth, is believed by this silly animal to be a part of the rock; it settles on him, and is seized and put into a bag, in which he often carries some hundreds. As this bird lays but one egg, which, being deposited on the bare rock, often falls and is lost, it is wonderful that such immense quantities appear every year. Their arrival is con-

considered by the natives as an omen of plenty.

Of the Divers there are eight; one called the Northern Diver, Colymbus Glacialis, is as large as a goose, and has so tough a skin, that the natives of the dreary regions it inhabits make it into leather. Of Grebes there are thirteen species. The feathers of some are of the most delicate and glossy white, like satin, and are used for muffs and other parts of dress. The Crested Grebe, Colymbus Cristatus, is frequent on the lake of Geneva. Its feathers are extremely beautiful.

Of the genus Larus is the Kittywake, so called from its odd note, resembling that word; the Tarrock, which was formerly considered as a distinct species, is the female. The Winter Gull, Larus Hybernus, is the bird that is often seen before and during the succession of stormy weather, on downs and heaths, at a considerable distance from the sea, where it feeds on frogs, worms, and other insects. On the Downs that surround Winchester I have seen many hundreds, apparently feeding with rooks. The Common Gull, Larus Canus, is that which is most

usually seen on the shore, screaming about the cliffs, or fishing at a small distance in the sea. I once had one for some time, living with pheasants under a netting ; but though it existed, its way of life was evidently unpleasant to it ; it became so thin, that it was merely a form of bones and feathers when it died. It is at once cruel and useless to detain a bird of this species in captivity, though it is sometimes done, that they may destroy worms in gardens. I should not have kept this miserable individual, but it was given me in an inland county, from which he could not have found his way back to his native rocks.

There are twelve or thirteen species of Gulls beside these, one of which is called the Laughing Gull, Larus Ridibundus, from its note being like a loud and hoarse laugh. Another, the Skua Gull, Larus Cataractes, is a very large bird, preying not only on fish but on smaller sea birds, and is so daring, that it will attack the eagle. A remarkable creature of this genus is the Arctic Gull, Larus Parasiticus, which pursues and terrifies other birds till they let fall, through fear, the food they have taken, which the Arctic Gull catches in the

air. The genus Sterna, Tern or Sea Swallow, and that of Rynchops, Skimmer or Cutwater, of which there is but one species, conclude this order.

It is time to finish this very long letter.

LETTER VI.

GRALLÆ.

To follow the orders of Linnæus, I am next to speak of the birds called *Grallæ*, which includes Cranes, Storks, Flamingoes, and all those birds that are denominated *Waders*. They seem to follow naturally enough those who inhabit the water, and to be a sort of amphibious race. Designed by nature to find their sustenance in wet and marshy situations, they are furnished with long legs, feet calculated for walking in water, with a long neck and a long bill: at least most of them are thus equipped; and while many contri-

bute to the food of those that can afford so to be fed, others are useful in devouring the great number of reptiles and insects, which would otherwise infest the inhabitants of marshy countries. The Flamingo, Phœnicopteros, is a bird that derives its name from the brilliancy and beauty of its colours, that are like flame. Though the body of this creature is less than that of a goose, its legs are so long, that it is in height six feet. I know not where I have seen a description of their splendid appearance, wading through the clear and deep water, with only their heads and bodies above it.

There are several genera of this order, which are never seen in Europe; but the Crane, Ardea Grus, sometimes appears in vast flocks in the fen countries of Cambridgeshire and Lincolnshire. It soars to a great height, and on the approach of winter wings its way to the more genial regions of Africa and Asia. Its nearest relation, the Stork, is held in great respect by the people of Holland, for the service it does in delivering them from the immense quantity of reptiles generated in their canals and low marshy soil; but Storks

will not eat toads. These birds retire in autumn to Egypt and Barbary, in flocks of a thousand, or even more, as well as can be guessed from their appearance in the air, and it does not appear that they ever bait on the way. Beside that gratitude for actual services, which occasions the Stork to be held in some degree sacred, so that the Dutch never allow their nests to be destroyed, they are supposed to be impressed with a sense of filial reverence and affection highly to their honour. I suppose it is a fable, but they are described as bearing on their backs their aged parents, disabled by time and accident from taking their usual voyage. Others believe, that they carry their young from place to place on their own wings. And the ideas of this kind have given the bird its name from στοργη (storgé) that affection which subsists between parents and children; though I fear it does not very often influence the young among human creatures, and that the storgé almost always *descends*.

Cranes and Storks are often mentioned by Homer in those exquisite similies, with which the Iliad and Odyssey are enriched. Bartram gives a very elaborate history of the Savannah

Crane, Ardea Americana, sailing in vast squadrons over the lakes and savannahs of the American continent. In another part of his work he describes the singular manner in which these birds build their nests. They choose a tussock, or little hillock, and there collect a heap of dried grass, on which they deposit their two eggs. This being nearly as high as their bodies, they stand with one leg on each side of the nest, and rest their breast on the eggs. They share this task, and when the female sits, the male marches backwards and forwards, to guard her from all intruders.

These birds are often made the vehicle of fable. The Fox invites the Crane to dinner, but provides his entertainment in so shallow a dish, that the Crane's long bill cannot possibly be of any service to him. The Crane in his turn desires the company of the Fox, but the provision is placed in a bottle with a narrow neck, into which the Crane himself easily dips his long bill, while the Fox can only lick the mouth of the bottle, without being able to satisfy his hunger with the contents. I see no moral in this fable, that ought to be inculcated. In another, a Wolf engages a Stork or Crane

to extract a bone from his throat, which having accomplished, the bird asks for the reward that had been promised her. The Wolf bids her desist from any such demand, and tells her she ought to think it obligation enough, that when it was in his power he did not bite her head off. I perceive only a mercenary service on one side, and ingratitude and dishonesty on the other.

The Common Heron, Ardea Major, is an elegant bird, its pendent crest waving in the wind, as, standing near some unfrequented pool or pond, it remains patiently waiting for fish, which, with frogs and aquatic vegetables, are its food. It builds in high cliffs or trees, making a large nest with sticks, of which one tree has sometimes held a hundred nests, as they associate together in the breeding season. Formerly a heronry was sometimes seen like a rookery, near a nobleman's or gentleman's house. At Penshurst, in Kent, formerly the seat of the Sidneys, Earls of Leicester, there was a heronry, and perhaps it is there at this time. This house was remarkable for being the birth place of the gallant and accomplished Sir Philip Sidney, who excelled not

only as a soldier but as an author. The "Arcadia," a sort of pastoral romance, in the taste of the age in which he lived, is now little read, and only as a curiosity; but in him elegance of mind was accompanied by the most manly and generous heart. Wounded to death in the field of Zutphen, his resigning the water that was brought to him to a soldier who was also wounded, and exclaiming, "*Thy necessity is yet greater than mine!*" is a trait of heroic goodness, that must endear him to every one, who has a heart to feel it. At Penshurst, Waller, one of our first correct poets, wrote his light and pleasant pieces to lady Dorothy Sidney, under the name of "Saccharissa;" and at Penshurst was born Algernon Sidney, who died on a scaffold with the noble fortitude, to which such sentiments as he felt and avowed must elevate a great and powerful mind. See how the mention of a bird can lead to anecdotes. I relate them here, because I wish you may be induced to make yourself master of the histories more at length.

To return however to our ornithology, Pennant, who is called the British Pliny,

speaks thus of Cranes and Herons, in his "Tour in Scotland:"—

"At Cressy Hall, six miles from Spalding in Lincolnshire, is a vast heronry. The Herons resort there in February to repair their nests, settle there in the spring to breed, and quit the place during winter. They are numerous as rooks, and their nests so crowded together, that myself and the company with me counted not less than eighty in one spreading oak. I here had an opportunity of detecting my own mistake, and that of other ornithologists, in making two species of Herons: for I found that the Crested Heron was only the male of the other. It made a most beautiful appearance, with its snowy neck and long crest streaming to the wind. The family who owned this place was of the name of Heron, which seems to be the principal inducement for preserving them. In the time of Michael Drayton—

> Here stalk'd the stately Crane, as though he stalk'd in war.

But at present this bird is quite unknown in our island, though every other species enume-

rated by that observant poet is still found in this fenny tract, or its neighbourhood."

Pennant, Vol. 1, *p.* 13, 4*to. edit.*

The Bittern, Ardea Stellaris, is, I suppose, more common than the Heron. It lives on frogs and fishes; and is often spoken of by the poets for its loud and singular note, which in the countries it inhabits is heard of an evening almost as loud as the bellowing of an ox; and a strange notion has been entertained, that the male produces this loud noise by inserting his bill in a hollow reed, which has thus the effect of a trumpet. This is however only ideal. Thomson speaks of the Bittern when he describes the early spring, and its fluctuating weather:—

——— Scarce
The Bittern knows his time, with bill ingulf'd,
To shake the sounding marsh.

Of this order of birds is the Ibis, Tantalus, one species of which was an object of worship to the ancient Egyptians, probably on account of the great services it rendered them by clearing the country of serpents, frogs, and noxious insects, which swarm when the

inundations of the Nile subside. And so far was this veneration extended, that the body of the dead Ibis was embalmed with as much care as those of the natives. The mummies of the Ibis are sometimes met with in the cabinets of the curious. I remember being shewn, in the library of Winchester College, what I was told was an embalmed Ibis. The nests of these birds are built in palm trees.

Of this order is the genus Scolopax, many species of which frequent Britain. The Common Curlew, Scolopax Arquata, belongs to this genus. Curlews live in winter on the sea coast, but in summer retire up the country. I have seen and purchased them in Hampshire, but they were not good, having a strong taste of fish.

The Woodcock, Scolopax Rusticola, and the Greater Snipe, Scolopax Major, you have frequently seen. The former arrives in October, November, and December, in England; and, as people fancy, mostly in moonlight nights. The Woodcocks haunt small copses and hedge-rows, near little runnels of water. They feed on worms, which is the reason of

their inserting their long bill into the earth, and not because they are fed by sucking only the moisture from the earth itself, as is a received, though erroneous opinion. I have been told, and, from what I remember, believe, that Woodcocks were, some years ago, much more plentiful than they are now; which inquirers into the cause have asserted to be occasioned by Swedish epicures having discovered that Woodcocks' eggs are greatly superior to every other dainty of the same sort, and that these eggs are devoured in great numbers, just as Plovers' eggs are in England. The Common Snipe, Scolopax Gallinago, is frequent in wet grounds. This bird feeds like the Woodcock, and is very attractive to the sportsman. "In the breeding season," says the 'History of Selborne,' "Snipes play over the moors, piping and humming. They always hum as they are descending."

There are several other species of this genus. The Redshank, Scolopax Calidris; the Less Godwit, Scolopax Limosa; the Red Godwit, Scolopax Lapponica; the Common Godwit, Scolopax Ægocephala, and above

forty more; all of which are taken for the table in those countries which are particularly adapted to their habits of life.

Of the same order is the numerous genus Tringa, including the bird so coveted by the lovers of good eating, called the Ruff, Tringa Pugnax, the trivial name of which is taken from its warlike disposition; for two of them will fight like game cocks. It is a bird of passage, and comes in early spring to breed in the fen countries, where it is caught in such numbers as to be an article of commerce. The males have a ruff of feathers round their necks; but the females, which have not this distinction, are generally called Reeves. I remember, when I was a girl, seeing several of these birds, which were pinioned and confined in a walled garden, to destroy the insects.

The Lapwing, Tringa Vanellus, is sometimes made a prisoner for the same purpose. Its note, which makes the word *peewit*, occasions its being usually called so. On moors and marshes, and those extensive heaths with which many counties abound, these birds assemble to rear their young; and it is wonderful, that as each only lays four eggs, so

many are still left to congregate, considering the numbers of eggs which are every year taken to supply the poulterers in London, and individuals who account them as particularly good, and often make them a part of their breakfast. Ovid tells us that Tereus was transformed into a Lapwing. The artifice which the Lapwing, or Bastard Plover, makes use of for the concealment of its young, is a proof of the force of parental affection, that deserves to be named. Apprehending some design against the beloved home where her young are concealed, she speeds as if lame before the enemy, alluring him to pursue her to some distance from her nest. Having thus deceived him, she flies round and round above his head, uttering a cry of distress—then skims along the ground near a particular place, as if to persuade the pursuer that the object of her anxiety was near it, till, having completely misled and seen him at a great distance, she soars into the air and escapes. This I once witnessed on a moory heath between Midhurst and Petersfield. And I confess it is with regret that I see, during the spring season, so many of the eggs brought to my door for

sale, and cannot but grieve for the poor birds, who so ingeniously attempt to preserve their progeny from the destructive luxury of man.

There is a great number of birds of the genus Tringa, Sandpiper. Some frequent the sea coasts, as the Purre, Tringa Cinclus, which appears in vast flocks. The Knot, Tringa Canutus, which is reputed to have received its name from Canute, or Knut, king of England and Denmark, being particularly fond of it. The Turnstone, Tringa Interpres, which is called so because, with a bill calculated for that purpose, it turns over the stones on the sea shore in search of insects, or small shell-fish concealed under them. The Green Sandpiper, Tringa Ochropus, frequents the shores of fresh waters. It is as beautiful to look at, as delicate to eat; but it is only occasionally seen in England, and its general abode is little known.

Of the genus Charadrius, is the Ringed Plover, Charadrius Hiaticula, a summer visitor on our sea shores. The Dotterell, Charadrius Morinellus, proverbial for its stupidity. They are, however, so much esteemed by judges of good eating, that some pains have been taken

to discover the places in which they choose to rear their young; but though they leave the marshes twice a year, their retirement has not, it is said, been detected.

The Golden Plover, Charadrius Pluvialis, which is often called the Whistling Plover, is a mountain bird, chiefly found in the highlands of Wales and Scotland, and in great numbers in the Orkney Islands, the most northern extremity of that country. Sanderlings, Charadrius Calidris, are very little birds of this genus, very common on our sea coasts. I have bought them in Hampshire and Sussex; but they make so indifferent a figure at table, that it is a pity to destroy them to eat. They often run along the sea sands, darting after the sand-eels, which you may remember I told you threw up those little heaps in the sand, very like the worm casts on grass-plots. In search of these sand-eels, which the people call wriggles, you have seen boys and women drag up the sand at low water with a hoe.

A bird with which I happened to be better acquainted than with any of the foregoing is the Stone Curlew, Charadrius Oedicnemus. In a part of Hampshire where I once resided some

years, and which was high and flinty land, with a good deal of what is called *white land*, from the admixture of chalk, these birds were constantly heard in the evenings of summer, uttering a loud and somewhat plaintive note, very unlike that of any other bird. At Selborne, which is not more than four or five miles from the place I speak of, the Stone Curlew was frequent, and the historian of that district, says, "I wonder the Stone Curlew should be mentioned by writers as a rare bird. It abounds in all the campaign parts of Hampshire and Sussex." Probably Mr. White is right; yet it is singular, that as I have often been in parts of Sussex very much resembling that part of Hampshire, where I used to listen to ten or twenty Stone Curlews clamouring of a night, I never did hear the Stone Curlew in Sussex, or know of any one that did. On the contrary, many Sussex people, who visited me in Hampshire, have asked what bird it was that made so odd a noise.

Stone Curlews are, I have been told, frequent on the Dorsetshire downs. Their trivial name is taken from the swelled and gouty appearance of the legs. Their food is snails,

slugs, and insects that harbour under stones. They pipe as they run along very quick among the flints, with which many fields in the country I saw them in are very thickly strewn. On referring again to the "History of Selborne," I see Mr. White writes thus to his correspondent, either Mr. Pennant or the Honourable Daines Barrington, who probably wrote to him for farther information relative to a bird which was to him a stranger. "The Stone Curlew lays its eggs, commonly two, never more than three, on the bare ground, without any nest in the field; so that the countryman in stirring his fallows often destroys them. The young run immediately from the egg, like partridges, &c. and are withdrawn to some flinty field by the dam, where they skulk among the stones, which are their best security; for their feathers are so exactly of the colour of our grey-spotted flints, that the most exact observer, unless he happen to catch the eye of the young bird, may be eluded. The eggs are short and round, of a dirty white, spotted with dark bloody blotches. Though I might not be able just when I pleased to procure you a

bird, yet I could show you them almost any day, and any evening you may hear them round the village; for they make a clamour that may be heard a mile. After harvest I have shot them before pointers in turnip fields."

White's Selborne, 4to. p. 44.

Mr. White's indefatigable researches obtained of a friend who resided, as I think, in the neighbourhood of Lewes, in Sussex, such information as he could give about the Stone Curlew. "These birds," says he, "live with us all the spring and summer, and at the beginning of autumn get together in flocks, and prepare for their departure. They seem to be a bird of passage, that may travel into some dry hilly country south of us, probably Spain, because of the abundance of sheep-walks in that country; for they spend their summer with us in such districts."

It was probably in consequence of this conjecture that Mr. White wrote to a relation of his then in Spain, to look out for these birds in Andalusia; "and now (continues the naturalist) he writes me word that, for the first

time, he saw one dead in the market on the first of September."

It has often appeared surprising, that of the many intelligent Englishmen who have at different times visited Gibraltar, so few remarks on the migration of birds have been made. That rock, which, being the nearest land to the coast of Africa, where so many are known to resort, would probably afford considerable information on this curious subject. But young men in the army are rarely taught to have a taste for natural history, and consider every thing of that sort as childish and useless. It would be well if they could be convinced, that what leisure they have (and in peace *some* time is always their own) would be very advantageously applied to this branch of science, which is neither effeminate nor expensive, but leads to much of the best knowledge that man in any rank or profession can acquire.

I return to the genus Charadrius.

The Long-legged Plover, Charadrius Himantopus, is of this genus. An extract from the book quoted in regard to the last will best describe this singular bird, in a letter dated

the 7th of May, 1779. "In the last week of the last month, five of those most rare birds, too uncommon to have obtained an English name, but known to naturalists by the terms of *Himantopus,* or *Loripes,* were shot upon the verge of Freinsham pond, a large lake belonging to the bishop of Winchester, and lying between Woolmer Forest and Farnham, in the county of Surry. One of these specimens I procured, and found the length of the legs to be so extraordinary, that at first sight one might have supposed the shanks to have been fastened on, to impose on the credulity of the beholder. They were legs in caricatura. They may with propriety be called the *Stilt Plover.* Brisson, under this idea, gives them the opposite name of *l'Echasse.* My specimen, when drawn and stuffed with pepper, weighed only four ounces and a quarter; the legs were near eight inches long to the feathered part of the thigh."

The Scooping Avocet, Recurvirostra Avocetta, is alone in his genus, at least in this country. That of Hæmatopus, Seapie, has only one species; but it is very numerous, and feeds on the clams and insects that adhere

to sea rocks. Great flocks of Seapies may be observed in winter. They abound about estuaries. The mouth of the river Ex swarms with them.

The genus Fulica belongs to this order. Moorhens, Fulica Chloropus, lead a retired life among reedy coverts, and willowy banks, near ponds and rivers; and, as they are very indifferent eating, would increase to a great degree, if the wantonness of sport did not occasion many of them to be shot for mere exercise of the gun; and if birds of prey did not make great havoc on them. Great flocks of different sorts of Coots may be observed on those extensive sheets of water, which here and there throw a gleam of light on the moory heaths so common in certain districts of Surry and Sussex. Some of these are the Common Gallinule, or Moorhen, Fulica Chloropus; but the greater part are assemblages of the Common, or Bald Coot, Fulica Atra, and the Greater Coot, Fulica Aterrima.

There are several other birds belonging to this order, which we know nothing of in England. I therefore pass to one you are well acquainted with, and have often seen;

I mean the Rail, Rallus, of which we have three species. The Rail, or as it is frequently called, Land Rail, Rallus Crex, takes up its abode in wild heaths, or among corn and grass lands; and is often concealed among furze and fern.

By the accounts of Siberia, quoted by Dr. Darwin, in the Poem I have so often named, we are told that all the water-fowl on the lakes of that inhospitable region begin their journey to the south, as soon as the frost sets in; the Rail alone remaining, which becomes torpid, and sleeps under the snow. The poet personifying the Moss, Moschus Corallinus, which is the food of the Reindeer, and therefore the most valuable gift bestowed on the inhabitants of these northern climates, breaks out in this beautiful apostrophe.

> Awake, my love! (enamour'd Moschus cries,)
> Stretch thy fair limbs! refulgent maid, arise;
> Ope thy sweet eyelids to the rising ray,
> And hail with ruby lips, returning day.
> Down the white hills dissolving torrents pour,
> Green springs the turf, and purple blows the flow'r.
> His torpid wing the Rail exulting tries,
> Mounts the soft gale, and wantons in the skies.

I cannot now recollect where I have read,

that the people of the north, being asked how Rails migrate, because they seem to have no power to take long flights, have replied, that the Cranes, when they go away, take each a Rail upon his back.

The Water Rail, or Brook Ouzel, Rallus Aquaticus, frequents brooks and watery ground. It swims well, though it is not web-footed, and has been seen dashing along on the surface, as if supported by the broad round leaves of the water-lily, Nymphea.

The Spotted Gallinule, Rallus Porzana, is rare in this kingdom.

I now take leave of these inhabitants of rivers, pools, and marshes. And I do not remember that any of them are among those to whom Ovid assigns a previous state of existence.

END OF VOL I.

J. ARLISS, Printer, 38, Newgate-Street, London.

A

NATURAL HISTORY

OF

BIRDS.

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BIRDS,

INTENDED CHIEFLY FOR YOUNG PERSONS.

BY

MRS. CHARLOTTE SMITH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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LETTER VII.

GALLINÆ.

The fifth order, Gallinæ, includes all those birds which are assembled in our farm or poultry yards, and are collected from different parts of the world, to contribute, under the name of *domestic fowl*, to our support; as well as all those that are usually called game, which, whether indigenous or naturalized from other countries, are preserved by laws for the amusement of the rich. It also includes some of the largest natives of Africa and America. The first of these, which is a native of England, is the Bustard, Otis, formerly more frequent than at present on downs and open countries. The Bustard is bigger than the largest turkey, and runs with such swiftness, that only greyhounds have any chance of overtaking it. Under its tongue is an orifice, opening into a sack, in which it can carry seven pints of water; a wise contrivance

of nature, to prevent the inconvenience the bird would otherwise encounter from the want of water, on those dry and stony tracts where it is destined to live. There were, a few years ago, Bustards on Salisbury Plain; but I have heard that even there they are now very rarely met with, and would probably have been entirely extirpated, as the young ones are excellent food, but that their sight and hearing is so quick, as enables them to escape from their pursuers. Always on the alert, they fly from the most distant appearance of danger; and I think I recollect being told, that the only way in which they can be approached within gun shot is by the following stratagem:—They are accustomed to see a great number of tilted waggons passing over the plain in different directions, and from such appearances they do not fly with their usual velocity. The sportsman, therefore, concealing himself in one of these waggons, sees the Bustards fearlessly feeding on the grass and worms within a convenient distance, and fires at them with swan shot. Their nests are made on the bare earth, on the edges of cultivated grounds, near the plains where they live.

They lay only two eggs. As the close of the season for shooting Bustards is marked in the Almanack on the 28th of February, I suppose they are still an object to sportsmen.

There is a smaller sort of Bustard, Otis Tetrax, which has the same manners and habits as the foregoing. I have heard that they are common in some parts of France, though rare in England.

The Ostrich, which is of this order, is the largest of all birds: it is six or eight feet high, and as many long; and is able, while bearing a man on its back, to outstrip the swiftest horse. It has been alledged, in the course of the season of breeding, the ostrich lays fifty eggs, as big as a melon; but a late traveller in Africa asserts, that many hens lay in the same nest. They are deposited in the sand of the deserts, and the male assists in covering them at night, but leaves them during the day to receive the heat of the sun, in consequence of which great numbers are destroyed; and it is from this circumstance, the idea of the ostrich's abandoning its young has originated. This immense bird lives on

vegetables, but often swallows stones, iron, and other indigestible substances.

The Arabs convert its skin into leather; and the feathers of its tail were once sought to increase the splendour of the Roman soldier's appearance. The same plumes are now coveted as ornaments by Europeans, and are some of the graceful appendages to the full dress of English ladies. The Ostrich is found in the deserts of Asia and Africa.

There is one of this species, the Cassowary, that kicks like a horse, and grunts like a hog. It runs very fast, but is incapable of flying.

The Dodo, Didus, is a bird that inhabits some of the islands of the East Indies. Its history is little known; but if the representation of it be at all just, this is the ugliest and most disgusting of birds, resembling in its appearance one of those bloated and unwieldy persons, who by a long course of vicious and gross indulgences are become a libel on the human figure. Of the genus Dodo there are only three species.

The Peacock, Pavo, has a strong convex bill, a crest on the head, with a train supported

by the circular tail. If the last mentioned bird be the most deformed, this is undoubtedly the most beautiful of the feathered creation. Some are more showy, but none have plumage so elegant, or a more graceful form. It has long been known in England, where it is the ornament of the park and paddock; and assumes, as do all domestic fowls, many beautiful varieties, some being white, others pied, white, and blue; and I once saw one of which the body and wings were white, the neck bright changeable light blue, and the tail spangled like that of the common sort, only the colours were less deep; but this was called a very rare bird. The Peacock appears conscious of his beauty, and is proud and quarrelsome. He eats grain and insects. The female is less beautiful than the male. They are, when young, excellent food.

The Peacock is always given to Juno, the principal of the Heathen goddesses, and the wife and sister of Jupiter, as her peculiar favourite and attendant. Her chariot, too, is usually described as being drawn by this splendid bird. And the reason given for the

goddess's favour is found in the following story.

The Greeks, assigning to their deities all the passions of man, even those that are the most disgraceful to him, relate, that the god Jupiter, being enamoured of Io, the daughter of Inacus, a river god, transformed her into a heifer, to conceal her from the jealous and vindictive Juno. The goddess suspecting that this beautiful heifer was a mistress, affected to suppose her only what she appeared to be, and requested of Jupiter to give the heifer to her as a present; this Jove had the cowardice to comply with, and Juno put her under the care of Argus, who had a hundred eyes, some of which were open night and day. He led her from pasture to pasture, where the wretched Io experienced every hardship her keeper could inflict upon her; and sometimes she had the mortification of seeing the nymphs, her former companions, happy and enjoying themselves, and to perceive her father searching for her, while she had no voice to say, his unhappy daughter had lost her former appearance, and was the animal he passed un-

regardingly by; till at length, as she followed him with imploring eyes, he noticed her, and pleased with the familiarity of the beautiful animal, stroked her, and fed her with grass. As he was thus engaged, she marked with her foot the word "Io," in the sand. The father in an agony of sorrow, acknowledged and lamented her, lost as she was to him for ever; till Argus, disliking their familiarity, drove her to another place. Jupiter at length determining to end her sufferings, directed Mercury to assume the appearance of a shepherd, and deliver her from her watchful guardian. Mercury, whose Caduceus had the power of charming to sleep any being over whom it was exercised, stole as he went an herd of goats, and piped and sung as he followed them, till he attracted the notice of Argus, who, charmed with his music, invited him to ascend the hill on which he sat to watch Io; Mercury complying, he begged to know who invented the pipe, which made such delectable music? and Mercury began to recount the story of Syrinx, pursued by the god Pan, and of her transformation into reeds. This story, and

the art of Mercury, at length closed all Argus's eyes in slumber, when the perfidious messenger of Jupiter cut off the head of Argus, and Juno immediately placed the eyes in the tail of the Peacock. Such is the fable.

The Turkey, Meleagris Gallipavo, is well known. There are only two species. Like other animals taken into the immediate protection of man, these birds assume various colours. The wild Turkeys that roam in flocks the vast woods of America, are probably the same as the original breed, and as those first known in Europe. The American Turkey is thus described by Bartram, the naturalist and traveller, in passing through Georgia:—

"I saw here a remarkable large Turkey of the native wild breed; his head was above three feet from the ground when he stood erect; his colour a dark dusky brown; the tips of the feathers of his neck, breast, shoulders, and back, edged with copper colour, which looked like burnished gold."

In another part of his account of the forests of Georgia and Carolina, he thus speaks:—

(perhaps his imagination has in this and many other respects given a too luxuriant colouring to the objects he describes.)

"I was awakened in the morning early by the cheering converse of the wild Turkey cocks, Meleagris Occidentalis, saluting each other from the sun-brightened tops of the Cupressus Disticha, and Magnolia Grandiflora. They begin at early dawn, and continue till sunrise, from the beginning of March till the end of April. The high forests ring with the noise of these social centinels, the watch-word being repeated from one to another, for hundreds of miles round." The truth is, that great numbers of these birds, so difficult to raise in this country, and requiring so much care when they are young, live wild in America, where they make a considerable article of food. A very near and dear friend of ours, when on military duty at an American outpost, was supplied with these birds as almost the only provision that could be obtained.

The Turkey was known before the discovery of America, and has a story belonging to it in fabulous narrative, though like many others, it is so absurd, that it is difficult to under-

stand how it could have entered into any person's head to invent it. Diana, having been offended by the Caledonians, sent an enormous boar to ravage their fields and vineyards. Meleagrus, or Meleager, with his friends Castor and Pollux, Jason, Theseus, Perithous, Laertes, and other heroes, assembled to destroy this mischievous animal; and they were joined by the beautiful huntress Atalanta, who is thus described :—

Among the rest, fair Atalanta came,
Grace of the woods; a diamond buckle bound
Her vest, that else had train'd upon the ground,
And show'd her buskin'd legs; her head was bare,
But for her native ornament of hair,
Which in a simple knot was tied above,
Sweet negligence, unheeded bait of love.
He sounding quiver on her shoulder tied,
One hand a dart, and one a bow supplied;
Such was her face, as in a nymph display'd
A fair fierce boy, or in a boy betray'd
The blushing beauties of a modest maid.

This lovely huntress made a great impression on the young hero; and his admiration knew know bounds, when with an arrow she wounded under the ear the monster, which all the heroes failed to strike, and under whose fangs some had expired.

Meleager himself having succeeded in giving the boar another wound, with much difficulty severed his monstrous head from his body, which he presented to Atalanta, to whom, he insisted upon it, the victory was owing. This preference so enraged the uncles of Meleager, that they attempted by force to deprive her of it; when the young and impatient hero drew his faulchion, and slew the brothers of his mother, Plexippus and Toxeus.

Althæa, their sister, who had heard of the conquest achieved by her son, without knowing the fatal consequence, was offering up sacrifices in the Temple, when the pale and bleeding bodies of her brothers were brought in. Amazed and overwhelmed with grief, indignation against her son conquered her tenderness. At his birth, the three destinies, Parcæ, had appeared, and began to spin the thread of the infant's life; then, pointing to a brand burning on the hearth, they cried,

To this red brand and thee,
O new-born babe! we give an equal destiny.

After which they vanished. Althæa springing from her couch, snatched the wood from the fire, and carefully extinguishing it, she

locked it up with great anxiety, as the life of her son depended upon it. Now, however, the anger that inflamed her bosom against the murderer of her brothers stifled her maternal affection, and she flew to commit this fatal brand to the fire. The idea of her son's death, however, for some time suspended her fatal purpose; all the fondness she had once felt for him returned, and she felt herself incapable of dooming him to destruction; yet the next instant, the crime he had committed against her brothers, and the recollection of their bleeding corses, hardened her heart. Her rage returned, and she threw the billet into the fire. The unhappy Meleager immediately felt the cruel effects, and began to burn in the most dreadful flames, and soon after expired. His unhappy mother destroyed herself, and his sisters, long lamenting, were at length turned into Turkeys, which ever make a mournful and plaintive noise. This story is versified with great elegance by Dryden.

All the species of the Yacou, Penelope, aud the Currasow, Crax, are South American birds. With the succeeding genus of this

order, Phasianus, particularly the Domestic Cock, Phasianus Gallus, we are well acquainted. However common the birds of this description now are here, they are natives of the woods of India. There is a very great variety of these fowls; and "the paucity of human pleasure" among men of uncultivated minds is such, that they value and preserve one breed of these birds, because they fight with so much perseverance and courage. Game Cocks have pedigrees, like race horses, and have been sold at prices almost as high. Men are instructed to become their feeders, and to prepare and regulate their battles, on which great sums have been lost and won. There have indeed been instances of persons, who have been undone by indulging their taste for this barbarous diversion. That there can be found a human being of education, or the slightest degree of refinement, capable of feeling delight at beholding two birds with sharp steel fastened to their feet cut and mangle each other, would appear incredible, if we did not know that there *are* men, and even gentlemen, who are delighted by the more hideous spectacle of two of their own

species beating and bruising each other to death;—by the sad sight of a bull, inoffensive till his cruel tormentors drive him to madness, fastened to a stake and torn by dogs.

It has been alledged in defence of these sports, that such spectacles are necessary to keep up the courage of a nation. If a nation need scenes of blood and of suffering to sustain its courage, it must be lost indeed! nothing is so remote from true courage as cruelty. The Spaniards and Portuguese have still their bull feasts, yet they have forgotten their character as generous and warlike nations; and the Romans had forgotten their liberty and their honour, when the amusements of the arena became more necessary to them than bread.

Few ancient customs appear so strangely absurd as those of the Romans, who never set about any undertaking of moment, till they had consulted their winged advisers. Auspices were taken by the flight of, and feeding of birds, says Rollin. The flight of a raven on the left, or a crow on the right, was a good omen. Much depended on the sacred chickens; the pullarius, or keeper of them,

let them out of the coop, and threw down a handful of grain. If they seized the meat eagerly, and scattered part on the ground, the omen was favourable; but if they refused to eat, or seemed indifferent, no good fortune impended. All these must be considered as among the stratagems, by which the vulgar have in all ages and countries been deceived into doing that which their governors thought expedient. It is easy to see, that the augurs could have the omens turn out as they were directed, and that the pullarius could easily keep his sacred chickens so hungry, as to be sure of a good omen.

The French, from their original name, considered the Cock as one of their heraldic ornaments; before the great gate at Versailles there was, and may still be for aught I know, a statue, representing the Gallic genius piercing the British leopard, (for they do not allow it to be a lion,) while a Cock crows and claps his wings in triumph.

The Pheasant, Phasianus Colchicus; of a bright chesnut yellow, every feather fringed with glossy black; a blue and green head, and a scarlet papillæ on the cheeks, is now,

though originally of Greece, become naturalized in this country. Pheasants are preserved with great care in the woody countries, where they feed on acorns and other seeds; and have been said to eat toads, and other reptiles. The Cock Pheasant crows something like a domestic cock, but not with so loud and long a note. In many of the lone farms in Sussex, where Pheasants abounded in the neighbouring woods, they were often seen feeding in the farm yards, among the domestic poultry; and there were in these farms a half-bred race, partaking of the Pheasant and the domestic fowl.

The Argus Pheasant is a beautiful inhabitant of China and Sumatra.

The Golden Pheasant, Phasianus Pictus, seems to glow with an assemblage of the most brilliant and beautiful colours. It is kept in this country in menageries, and breeds, but is less able to bear the cold than the first sort.

The Silver, or Pencilled Pheasant, is white, beautifully varied with pencilling of jet; the crest and belly are of a glossy black. It is less difficult to rear than the preceding sort. The

hens of all these species are not so elegantly plumed as the cocks.

In fabulous story, it is related that Itys, the ill-fated son of Tereus and Progne, who was murdered by his frantic mother, was turned into a Pheasant. The story will be more fully related in giving the mythological history of the nightingale.

The Guinea-hen, Numidia Meleagris, is now very common ; though a native of Africa and South America. It was known to the Romans, who understood good eating, and who kept it in their vivarias. In this country they are not reared without considerable trouble, because the mother, after laying thirty or forty eggs, often forsakes her nest; or if the young Guinea fowls are hatched, they immediately run away, and their mother is so indifferent a nurse, that few of them arrive at maturity ; for this reason the eggs are generally put under a hen which is confined, and the little Guinea chicks fed and treated like young turkeys.

The genus Tetrao follows, which is divided into three sections. The first is the Grous, or Cock of the Wood. This inhabitant of the

north of Asia and Europe, once abounded in the great forests of pine that clothed the Scottish mountains; but it is now rare, if not entirely extinct in that country. It is as big as a turkey, and its flesh has an excellent flavour; the birds feeding on juniper-berries, cranberries, and other mountain fruit, and the seeds out of the cones of pines. The female forms her nest among mosses on the ground, and often lays 16 eggs. From its size, it is called by the Highlanders the Horse of the Wood.

Another species of Grous is the Black Cock, which animates the birch and poplar woods of the north, and even those of Siberia, with its crowing. It lives much on heaths, where the young males, assembling in parties of seven or eight, seem to find their sustenance still spring.

The Ptarmigan, another bird of this genus, is found on the highest mountains of Scotland and the islands; there it takes short flights like the pigeon, and is often killed only by stones thrown at it. It is a very silly bird, and easily taken. During winter it becomes white, and conceals itself under the snow, to

shelter itself from the severity of the cold. Its flesh resembles that of the Grous in taste, and is equally esteemed. It eats the buds of pine-trees, or the erica and other plants of these northern Alps.

The Red Grous, or Moorcock, is more common than the black; its habits nearly resemble those of its congeners. It lives on the mountains, feeding on berries, and tender shoots of mountain plants; and forms a desirable pursuit for the sportsman. The breed is almost entirely extirpated in the southern parts of England.

The Partridge, Tetrao Perdix, which belongs to another division of the same genus, is well known in England. There is a species in France, rather larger, and with red legs; but it is not found farther north than the Orleanois and I have never heard that the attempts to naturalize them in England have succeeded. Perdix was, as Ovid tells, the nephew of Dedalus, who, feeling much displeased at his superior genius, which he feared might eclipse his own, pushed him from the top of a tower; when Minerva, whose favourite he was, caused him to assume the form of a Partridge.

Still, though transform'd, his ancient name he keeps,
And with low flight the new shorn stubble sweeps ;
Declines the lofty trees, and thinks it best
To brood in hedgerows, o'er his humble nest.

Ovid's Met. Book 8th.

Among all the amusements eagerly followed by men of fortune in this country, none is more universal than Partridge shooting ; and as the animal suffers little or no pain, and the exercise is wholesome, and not so expensive as many others, there is much reason for the partiality many people feel for it.

I had an odd accident happen to me some years ago in France : I was riding on an extensive plain near Dieppe, and suddenly something fell exactly between my mare's ears, and startled her so that I with difficulty kept my seat. It was a Partridge, which had been struck by a hawk, and fell at that instant. The hunter of the air was obliged to relinquish his prey, which my servant put into his pocket. When the destiny of nations, or of individuals, was supposed to be learned from the flight or actions of birds, I might perhaps have looked into destiny from such a circum-

stance; and had I consulted the augurs, might have been alarmed with prognostication of evil, which no such supposed foreknowledge enables any one to avoid.

The Quail, Tetrao Coturnix, is a bird of passage; at least it is seen only at particular seasons in England, and Thomson describes his note among the features of autumn.

> And the Quail clamours for his running mate.

I have seen it shot in Hampshire, but I do not imagine it is very common in England now; though I have seen several dozens, in cages, anded from Dieppe, at Brighthelmstone, so that I suppose they are very plentiful in France, where I have eaten them. They are exquisite food, and very fat when killed; but I believe they are sometimes fattened for the table. This little innocent-looking bird is of so fierce and pugnacious a temper, that it is kept in China to amuse the natives by fighting, just as game cocks are in England.

LETTER VIII.

PASSERES.

The sixth, and most interesting order of birds, is the Passeres, which includes all the singing birds, feeding either on seeds exclusively, or on insects, or on both indiscriminately. It is justly observed by Mr. White, I think, that the birds of this order, brought from foreign countries, are all of the hard-billed genus, and live upon grain and seeds, with which they can be supplied during the voyage; while the soft-billed birds, which require insects for their nourishment, cannot be supported at sea, and therefore we never receive them alive in England. Latham, a late ornithologist, has made a distinct order of the Columba, and deviates in some other respects from the arrangement of Linnæus; but the attachment which, as a very humble student in botany, I have felt for the Swedish na-

turalist, makes me desirous of preferring his system, and the more so as it is the most simple.

In following the Linnæan arrangement, therefore, we begin the class Passeres with the Doves and Pigeons. The fidelity of these birds to each other is proverbial. The Stock Dove, Columba Oenas, so called because it is the stock or origin of the numerous varieties of these birds, builds in ruins, or rocks, in unfrequented parts of the country; from these, besides the common domestic Pigeon, kept chiefly for the table, there are a great variety of Pigeons, bred by people who call themselves *bird-fanciers;* I think above twenty sorts are enumerated. It would appear that, to vary the form of any particular bird by care is at least an innocent, though not a very useful amusement; but there is nothing that idleness and folly may not render a source of mischievous expence. Instances have been known of persons lavishing hundreds on the fantastic object of producing the Pigeon called a *Powter*, with the most enormous crop, or another called a *Tumbler*, of particular dimensions and colours. There is somewhere

in London a society who meet once a month, to exhibit the most curious birds, and premiums are assigned according to the distance of these productions from the original stock; that is, to the most extraordinary specimens of the power of art over nature. I suppose half the trouble and pains that is thus applied would be sufficient to obtain the knowledge of something useful, and of real benefit to mankind; perhaps to raise the persons who thus apply their time and money to eminence in their professions. What is called a *Fancier*, whether in flowers or birds, is always a trifling and subordinate character. Such men are only full-grown children, and it is well if their folly be not attended with serious consequences to them.

The Ring Dove, Columba Palumbus, is, I believe, what is usually called the Wood-pigeon. It is a large bird, and builds a nest with dry sticks, in woods and copses; where its low gurgling voice, rather melancholy, but not unpleasing, is heard from the month of March till late in the autumn. It is beautifully shaded with that peculiar colour called pigeon's-breast, a mixture of pink and blue;

and on the back of the neck are several white feathers, forming a crescent, from which it takes its name. The food of these birds, and of the Stock Dove, or Rock Pigeon, is peas and acorns, and other seeds. Their flesh is very dark coloured.

Of the Passenger Pigeon, Columba Migratoria, there are such immense flocks seen in America, as darken the air. Sometimes the countless myriads of these literally obscure the sun, in their passage from the northern to the southern parts of that great continent.

There are Doves of many kinds in the East and West Indies. I once saw a pair of Doves of singular beauty : their backs, and the upper parts of their heads, were of that shining green which distinguishes the feathers of the peacock, and of some insects, and which baffles the power of the pencil to imitate : the breast and under the chin was rose colour ; the legs and feet bright scarlet. I have no recollection where they were said to come from, but I know they were purchased at a great price, at a bird shop. These were probably Ground Doves, for I recollect that

they crept about on the ground, and made a slight murmuring noise, but were very impatient of cold.

What are usually called Ringdoves, comes from the coast of Africa, opposite Gibraltar, where cages full of them used to be sold. These are of elegant forms; are of a buff, or clay colour, with a black ring round their necks, and they breed in England, if kept in large cages.

Before I conclude this article, I should observe, that Doves, beside many other attributes in fabled stories, have been always harnessed by the poets and mythologists to the car of Venus; and notwithstanding what I have said about the folly of bestowing money on such pursuits, the variety of these birds is very amusing; and many of them, such as Nuns, Fantails, and Capuchins, afford great entertainment, and a pleasant variety, in a collection of domestic poultry. You know that the Carrier Pigeons have been used to carry messages; taken from the place where they have young, and carried to the distance of forty or fifty miles, they deliver, in fifteen or twenty minutes, a letter tied to them so as

not to impede their flight: for, rising high in the air, they seem to have occasion only just to look around them, when they dart with incredible swiftness towards the place where their hearts seem to have been left with their helpless pair, this genus seldom or never having more than two young at a time.

It is to the common Stock Dove that the following fable is to be referred. It has often been told, and, among others, by La Fontaine, but less happily perhaps than many others. I think I remember it among those attributed to Pilpay; I have, however, new dressed it for you.

THE TRUANT DOVE.

A mountain stream its channel deep
Beneath a rock's rough base had torn;
The cliff, like a vast castle wall, was steep
By fretting rains in many a crevice worn;
But the fern wav'd there, and the mosses crept,
And o'er the summit, where the wind
Peel'd from their stems the silver rind,
Depending birches wept——
There, tufts of broom a footing used to find,
Aud heath and straggling grass to grow,

And half-way down from roots, unwreathing, broke
The branches of a scathed oak,
And seem to guard the cave below,
Where each revolving year,
Their twins two faithful Doves were wont to rear.
Choice never join'd a fonder pair;
To each their simple home was dear,
No discord ever enter'd there;
But there the soft affections dwell'd,
And three returning springs beheld
Secure within their fortress high
The little happy family.
"Toujours perdrix, messieurs, ne valent rien"—
So did a Gallic monarch once harangue,
And evil was the day whereon our bird
This saying heard
From certain new acquaintance he had found;
Who at their perfect ease,
Amid a field of pease,
Boasted to him, that all the country round,
The wheat, and oats, and barley, rye and tares,
Quite to the neighb'ring sea, were theirs;
And theirs the oak, and beech-woods, far and near,
For their right noble owner was a peer,
And they themselves luxuriantly were stored
In a great dove-cote—to amuse my lord!
"Toujours perdrix ne valent rien." That's strange!
When people once are happy, wherefore change?
So thought our Stock Dove, but communication
With birds in his new friends' exalted station,
Whose means of information,
And knowledge of all sorts, must be so ample;
Who saw great folks, and follow'd their example

Made on the dweller of the cave, impression ;
And soon, whatever was his best possession,
His sanctuary within the rock's deep breast,
His soft-ey'd partner, and her nest,
He thought of with indiff'rence, then with loathing ;
So much insipid love was good for nothing.—
But sometimes tenderness return'd ; his dame
So long belov'd, so mild, so free from blame,
How should he tell her, he had learn'd to cavil
At happiness itself, and longed to travel ?
His heart still smote him, so much wrong to do her,
He knew not how to break the matter to her.
But love, though blind himself, makes some discerning;
His frequent absence, and his late returning,
With ruffled plumage, and with alter'd eyes,
His careless short replies,
And to their couplets coldness or neglect
Had made his gentle wife suspect,
All was not right ; but she forbore to teaze him,
Which would but give him an excuse to rove :
She therefore tried by every art to please him,
Endur'd his peevish starts with patient love,
And when (like other husbands from a tavern)
Of his new notions full he sought his cavern,
She with dissembled cheerfulness " beguiled
" The thing she was," and gaily coo'd and smiled.
'Tis not in this most motley sphere uncommon,
For man (and so of course more feeble woman)
Most strongly to suspect, what they're pursuing
Will lead them to inevitable ruin,
Yet rush with open eyes to their undoing ;
Thus felt the Dove ; but in the cant of fashion

He talk'd of fate, and of predestination,
And in a grave oration,
He to his much affrighted mate related,
How he, yet slumb'ring in the egg, was fated,
To gather knowledge, to instruct his kind,
By observation elevate his mind,
And give new impulse to Columbian life;
" If it be so," exclaim'd his hapless wife,
" It is *my* fate, to pass my days in pain,
" To mourn your love estrang'd, and mourn in vain;
" Here in our once dear hut to wake and weep,
" When your unkindness shall have ' murdered sleep;'
" And never that dear hut shall I prepare,
" And wait with fondness your arrival there,
" While, me and mine forgetting, you will go
" To some new love." Why *no*, I tell you *no*,—
" What shall I say such foolish fears to cure?
" I only mean to make a little tour,
" Just—just to see the world around me; then
" With new delight, I shall come home again;
" Such tours are quite the rage—at my return
" I shall have much to tell, and you to learn;
" Of fashions—some becoming, some grotesque;
" Of change of empires, and ideas novel;
" Of buildings, Grecian, Gothic, Arabesque,
" And scenery sublime and picturesque;
" And all these things with pleasure we'll discuss—"
" Ah, me! and what are all these things to us?"
" So then, you'd have a bird of genius grovel,
" And never see beyond a farmer's hovel?
" Ev'n the sand-martin, that inferior creature,
" Goes once a year abroad." " It is *his* nature,

" But yours, how diff'rent once!" and then she sigh'd,
" There *was* a time, Ah! would that I had died,
" E'er you so chang'd! when you'd have perish'd, rather
" Than this poor breast should heave a single feather
" With grief and care; and all this cant of fashion
" Would but have rais'd your anger, or compassion.—
" O my dear love! You sought not then to range,
" But on my changeful neck as fell the light,
" You sweetly said, you wish'd no other change
" Than that soft neck could show; to berries bright
" Of mountain ash you fondly could compare
" My scarlet feet and bill; my shape and air,
" Ah! faithless flatt'rer, did you not declare
" The soul of grace and beauty centred there?
" My eyes, you said, were opals, brightly pink,
" Enchas'd in onyx, and you seem'd to think,
" Each charm might then the coldest heart enthrall,
" Those charms were mine. Alas! I gave you all—
" Your farthest wand'rings then were but to fetch
" The pea, the tare, the beechmast, and the vetch,
" For my repast, within my rocky bow'r,
" With spleenwort shaded, and the blue-bell's flow'r:
" For prospects then you never wish'd to roam,
" But the best scen'ry was our happy home;
" And when, beneath my breast, then fair and young,
" Our first dear pair, our earliest nestlings sprung,
" And weakly, indistinctly, tried to coo—
" Were not those moments picturesque to you?"
" Yes, faith, my dear; and all you say is true."
" Oh! hear me then; if thus we have been blest,
" If on these wings it was your joy to rest,
" Love must from habit still new strength be gaining—"
" From habit? 'tis of that, child, I'm complaining:

" This everlasting fondness will not be
" For birds of flesh and blood. We sha'n't agree,
" So why dispute ? now prithee don't torment me ;
" I shall not long be gone ; let that content ye :
" Pshaw ! what a fuss ! Come, no more sighs and groans,
" Keep up your spirits ; mind your little ones ;
" My journey won't be far—my honour's pledg'd—
" I shall be back again before they're fledg'd ;
" Give me a kiss ; and now, my dear, adieu !"
So light of heart and plumes away he flew ;
And, as above the shelt'ring rock he springs,
She listen'd to the echo of his wings ;
Those well-known sounds, so soothing heretofore,
Which her heart whisper'd she should hear no more.
Then to her cold and widow'd bed she crept,
Clasp'd her half-orphan'd young, and wept !
Her recreant mate, by other views attracted,
A very different part enacted ;
He sought the dove-cote, and was greeted there
With all that's tonish, elegant, and rare,
Among the pigeon tribes ; and there the rover
Liv'd quite in clover !
His jolly comrades now were blades of spirit ;
Their nymphs possess'd most *fascinating* merit ;
Nor fail'd our hero of the rock to prove,
He thought not of inviolable love
To his poor spouse at home. He bow'd and sigh'd,
Now to a Fantail's, now a Cropper's bride ;
Then cow'ring low to a majestic Powter,
Declar'd he should not suffer life without her !
And then with upturn'd eyes, in phrase still humbler,
Implor'd the pity of an Almond Tumbler ;

Next, to a beauteous Carrier's feet he'd run,
And liv'd a week the captive of a Nun :
Thus far in measureless content he revels,
And blest the hour when he began his travels.
Yet some things soon occurr'd not quite so pleasant ;
He had observ'd, that an unfeeling peasant,
In silence mounting on a ladder high,
Seiz'd certain pigeons just as they could fly,
Who never figur'd more, but in a pie :
That was but awkward ; then, his lordship's son
Heard from the groom, that 'twould be famous fun,
To try on others his unpractis'd gun ;
Their fall, the rattling shot, his nerves perplex'd ;
He thought perhaps it might be his turn next.
It has been seen ere now, that much elated,
To be by some great man caress'd and fêted,
A youth of humble birth, and mind industrious,
Foregoes in evil hour his independance ;
And, charm'd to wait upon his friend illustrious,
Gives up his time to flatt'ry and attendance.
His patron, smiling at his folly, lets him—
Some newer whim succeeds, and he forgets him.
So far'd our bird ; his new friend's vacant stare
Told him he scarce remember'd he was there ;
And, when he talk'd of living more securely,
This very dear friend, yawning, answered, " Surely !
" You are quite right to do what's most expedient,
" So, au revoir !—Good bye ! Your most obedient."
Allies in prosp'rous fortune thus he prov'd,
And left them, unregretting, unbelov'd :
Yet much his self-love suffer'd by the shock,
And now, his quiet cabin in the rock,

The faithful partner of his ev'ry care,
And all the blessings he abandon'd there,
Rush'd on his sick'ning heart; he felt it yearn,
But pride and shame prevented his return;
So wand'ring farther—at the close of day
To the high woods he pensive wing'd his way;
But new distress at ev'ry turn he found—
Struck by a hawk, and stunn'd upon the ground,
He once by miracle escap'd; then fled
From a wild cat, and hid his trembling head
Beneath a dock; recov'ring, on the wind
He rose once more, and left his fears behind;
And, as above the clouds he soar'd, the light
Fell on an inland rock; the radiance bright
Show'd him his long deserted place of rest,
And thitherward he flew; his throbbing breast
Dwelt on his mate, so gentle, and so wrong'd,
And on his mem'ry throng'd
The happiness he once at home had known;
Then to forgive him, earnest to engage her,
And for his errors eager to atone,
Onward he went; but ah! not yet had flown
Fate's sharpest arrow: to decide a wager,
Two sportsmen shot at our deserter; down
The wind swift wheeling, struggling still he fell,
Close to the margin of the stream, that flow'd
Beneath the foot of his regretted cell,
And the fresh grass was spotted with his blood;
To his dear home he turn'd his languid view,
Deplor'd his folly, while he look'd his last,
And sigh'd a long adieu!
Thither to sip the brook, his nestlings led

By their still pensive mother, came ;
He saw ; and murm'ring forth her dear lov'd name,
Implor'd her pity, and with short'ning breath,
Besought her to forgive him ere his death.—
And now, how hard in metre to relate
The tears and tender pity of his mate!
Or with what gen'rous zeal his faithful moitie
Taught her now feather'd young, with duteous piety,
To aid her, on their mutual wings to bear,
With storklike care,
Their suff'ring parent to the rock above ;
There, by the best physician, Love,
His wounds were heal'd—his wand'rings at an end,
And sober'd quite, the husband, and the friend,
In proof of reformation and contrition,
Gave to his race this prudent admonition ;
Advice, which this, our fabling muse presumes,
May benefit the *biped without plumes* :
" If of domestic peace you are possess'd,
" Learn to believe yourself supremely bless'd ;
" And, gracefully enjoying your condition,
" Frisk not about, on whims and fancies strange,
" For, ten to one, you for the worse will change :
" And 'tis most wise, to check all vain ambition—
" By such aspiring pride the angels fell ;
" So love your wife, and know when you are well."

I will add nothing to this maxim ; for the present, therefore, adieu.

LETTER IX.

The Skylark, Alauda Arvensis, is every where known, and is every where a favourite, from his cheerful and animating notes, which he utters as he rises in the air, or hangs there singing above the clouds. The poets have been as fond of celebrating this bird as the nightingale. Nor is the less refined epicure without his partiality for Larks, when assembling in large flocks during the winter they become very fat, and make a very good figure on the table.

There are several species of Larks; the Titlark, Alauda Pratensis, sings delightfully either flying or sitting on the ground, or on trees. The Wood or Tree Lark, Alauda Arborea, is one of the earliest and sweetest of our songsters, and it sometimes sings in the night. The Red Lark, Alauda Rubra; and the Smaller Crested Lark, Alauda Nemorosa, a solitary bird, common in the North, are pretty generally known.

The Grasshopper Lark, Alauda Trivialis, has a note so like that of the grasshoppers and crickets, with which our fields abound in summer, that few people believe the sound is uttered by a bird; and "the country people (says Mr. White,) laugh if you tell them so." Last summer I was particularly attentive to this inquiry, and am convinced that the chirping noise uttered all night from Midsummer till the beginning of August is the voice of the Grasshopper Lark. It is difficult to see the bird, and I could not verify my opinion that way; nevetheless I have no doubt, but that Mr. White is perfectly correct.

It is however to the Skylark that the annexed fable is to be applied. You will recollect it to be a story briefly told by Esop, or some ancient fabulist. I have dressed it with a few botanical ornaments, which I think you will allow to be an improvement.

I will not repeat here the mythological story of Nysus and Scylla. The Lark ought not to have animated, even in fabulous story, the frame which had held so odious a mind.

THE LARK'S NEST.

A FABLE FROM ESOP.

"Trust only to thyself;" the maxim's sound;
For, though life's choicest blessing be a friend,
Friends do not very much abound;
Or, where they happen to be found,
And greatly thou on *friendship* shouldst depend,
Thou'lt find it will not bear
Much wear and tear;
Nay! that even kindred, cousin, uncle, brother,
Has each perhaps to mind his own affair;
Attend to thine then; lean not on another.
Esop assures us, that the maxim's wise;
And by a tale illustrates his advice:

When April's bright and fickle beams
Saw ev'ry feather'd pair
In the green woodlands, or by willowy streams,
Busied in matrimonial schemes;
A Lark, amid the dewy air,
Woo'd, and soon won a fav'rite fair;
And, in a spot, by springing rye protected,
Her labour sometimes shar'd;
While she, with bents, and wither'd grass collected,
Their humble domicile prepar'd:
Then, by her duty fix'd, the tender mate
Unwearied press'd
Their future progeny beneath her breast,
And little slept and little ate,

While her gay lover, with a careless heart,
As is the custom of his sex,
Full little recks
The coming family; but like a dart
From his low homested with the morning springs;
And far above the floating vapour, sings
At such a height,
That even the shepherd-lad upon the hill,
Hearing his matin note so shrill,
With shaded eyes against the lustre bright,
Scarce sees him twinkling in a flood of light
But hunger, spite of all her perseverance,
Was one day urgent on his patient bride;
The truant made not his appearance,
That her fond care might be a while supplied,—
So, because hunger will not be denied,
She leaves her nest reluctant, and in haste
But just allows herself to taste,
A dewdrop, and a few small seeds—
Ah! how her flutt'ring bosom bleeds,
When the dear cradle she had fondly rear'd
All desolate appear'd!
And ranging wide about the field she saw
A setter huge, whose unrelenting jaw
Had crush'd her half-existing young;
Long o'er her ruin'd hopes the mother hung,
And vainly mourn'd,
Ere from the clouds her wanderer return'd:—
Tears justly shed by beauty, who can stand them?
He heard her plaintive tale with unfeign'd sorrow,
But, as his motto was, "Nil desperandum,"
Bade her hope better fortune for to-morrow;

Then from the fatal spot afar, they sought
A safer shelter, having bought
Experience, which is always rather dear;
And very near
A grassy headland, in a field of wheat,
They fix'd, with cautious care, their second seat—
But this took time; May was already past,
The white-thorn had her silver blossoms cast,
And there the Nightingale to lovely June,
Her last farewell had sung;
No longer reign'd July's intemp'rate noon,
And high in Heaven the reaper's moon
A little crescent hung,
Ere from their shells appear'd the plumeless young.
Oh! then with how much tender care,
The busy pair,
Watch'd and provided for the panting brood!
For then the vagrant of the air,
Soar'd not to meet the morning star,
But, never from the nestlings far,
Explor'd each furrow, ev'ry sod for food;
While his more anxious partner tried,
From hostile eyes the helpless group to hide;
Attempting now with lab'ring bill to guide
The enwreathing bindweed round the nest;
Now joy'd to see the cornflow'r's azure crest
Above it waving, and the cockle grow,
Or poppies throw
Their scarlet curtains round;
While the more humble children of the ground,
Freak'd pansies, fumitory, pimpernel,
Circled with arras light the secret cell.—

But who against all evils can provide ?
Hid, and o'ershadow'd thus, and fortified,
By teasel, and the scabious' thready disk,
Corn-marygold, and thistles ; too much risk
The little household still were doom'd to run,
For the same ardent sun,
Whose beams had drawn up many an idle flow'r,
To fence the lonely bow'r,
Had by his pow'rful heat,
Matur'd the wheat ;
And chang'd of hue, it hung its heavy head,
While ev'ry rustling gale that blew along,
From neighb'ring uplands, brought the rustic song
Of harvest merriment : then full of dread,
Lest, not yet fully fledg'd, her race
The reaper's foot might crush, or reaper's dog might trace,
Or village child, too young to reap or bind,
Loit'ring around, her hidden treasure find ;
The mother bird was bent
To move them, ere the sickle came more near ;
And therefore, when for food abroad she went,
(For now her mate again was on the ramble)
She bade her young report what they should hear :
So the next hour they cried, " They'll all assemble,
" The farmer's neighbours, with the dawn of light,
" Therefore, dear mother, let us move to night."
" Fear not, my loves," said she, " you need not tremble ;
" Trust me, if only neighbours are in question,
" Eat what I bring, and spoil not your digestion,
" Or sleep, for this." Next day away she flew,
And that no neighbour came was very true ;
But her returning wings the Larklings knew,

And quiv'ring round her told, their landlord said,
" Why, John ! the reaping must not be delay'd,
" By peep of day to-morrow we'll begin,
" Since now so many of our kin
" Have promis'd us their help to set about it."
" Still," quoth the bird, " I doubt it ;
" The corn will stand to-morrow." So it prov'd ;
The morning's dawn arriv'd—but never saw
Or uncle, cousin, brother, or brother-in-law ;
And not a reaphook mov'd !
Then to his son the angry farmer cried,
" Some folks are little known 'till they are tried ;
" Who would have thought we had so few well-wishers!
" What! neither neighbour Dawes, nor cousin Fishers,
" Nor uncle Betts, nor e'en my brother Delves,
" Will lend a hand, to help us get the corn in ?
" Well then, let you and me, to-morrow morning,
" E'en try what we can do with it ourselves."
" Nay," quoth the Lark, " 'tis time then to be gone :
" What a man undertakes himself is done."
Certes, she was a bird of observation ;
For very true it is, that none,
Whatever be his station,
Lord of a province, tenant of a mead,
Whether he fill a cottage, or a throne,
Or guard a flock, or guide a nation,
Is very likely to succeed,
Who manages affairs by deputation.

I hope you will be pleased with this fable. I know none which goes more immediately to

the business and bosoms of all who are likely to have an active part in the affairs of the world.

The Starling, Sturnus Vulgaris, is a migrant; flocks of them appear in March, and while some resort to the inland country, and prepare to rear their young among rocks and ruins, and in the cavities of old trees, others remain near the sea, and live on small crabs and sea insects among the sands, and make their nests in the cliffs. Before rain, the Starling is particularly clamorous, and utters a shrill loud note, not very unlike the mewing of a cat. I once saw a servant kill fifteen or twenty of these birds by a single shot, as they were feeding on some insects that live under stones on those flinty fields that sometimes occur near the sea; but it was done merely in wantonness, for their flesh is bitter, and they are, I believe, not only very harmless, but perhaps rather beneficial to the farmer, as their food is insects.

This bird is named in a book which was fashionable idle reading some years since. Sterne, in the "Sentimental Journey," relates the adventures of a Starling caught on

Dover Cliff, by the servant of a passenger embarking for France; and after a pleasant history, glancing in his light way on the politics of that period, presents an engraving of the Starling, and bids the Herald's Office twist the bird's head off if it dare. This alludes to the name of Sturnus, its Latin appellation; and by one of those puns so common in heraldry, the Starling is borne as arms by the family of Sterne.

The Starling may be taught to speak or sing, but it is not naturally a songster, and has only imitative powers, without any natural taste; for it will learn to mimic the creaking of a door, or a wheel, as soon as the sounds of the fife or flageolet. It will, however, imitate the human voice, and some rural lover expresses his passion by saying to his mistress,

> I'll teach a prating Stare to speak your name!

Hotspur, in his indignation against Henry the Fourth, for refusing to ransom his brother Mortimer, exclaims,

> I'll have a Starling shall be taught to speak
> Nothing but Mortimer, and give it him
> To keep his anger still in motion.

The Water Ouzel, Sturnus Cinclus, is of this genus. Though it lives near, and in the water, it is not web-footed. Its chosen haunts are on the borders of streams too rapid to be frozen, and it darts down the most rapid falls in pursuit of insects. The nest of this bird is lined with oak leaves, and formed without of the woven fibres of plants. It builds on the ground.

The genus Thrush, Turdus, contains some of the finest songsters. The largest is the Missel Thrush, so called from its feeding on berries, particularly those of the Misseltoe, that singular parasitical plant, which roots itself on other trees, particularly on the oak and the apple. Birdlime is made of the viscous juice of this plant; and this vegetable is often propagated by seeds first swallowed by this and other birds, which are deposited with their dung on the branches of trees, where they afterward germinate; from which a proverb has arisen, that this Thrush furnishes the means of his own destruction.

Turdus malum sibi cacat.

The Missel Thrush is called in some coun-

tries the Storm Cock, because at a very early period of the year he sings sitting on the top of a high tree, and his note is particularly loud in blowing and stormy weather. The nest, made of mosses, lichens, and dry leaves, is fortified without by sticks, and usually contains four or five eggs. The Missel Thrush is very fierce in defence of his young, which he guards with great courage against the attacks of other birds.

Of the genus Turdus is the Fieldfare, Turdus Pilaris, a bird which lives in England only in the winter. It appears in the autumn and retires in March. The flocks of Fieldfares are first seen in the Orkneys, and, travelling southward, arrive in Hampshire in September. This is the bird which the Romans fattened for the table, and which were reckoned by them a great delicacy.

The Redwing, Turdus Iliacus, is another Thrush, which is also a winter visitant in England. It breeds in Sweden, inhabiting the maple trees, with which the woods in that country abound. In the countries that produce wine, this bird makes great depredations, and its song, however excellent, is but a poor

compensation for the mischief it does among the grapes.

The Throstle, or Common Thrush, Turdus Musicus, is called the Mavis in the northern counties. Its song is little inferior to that of the nightingale. Its nest, made of moss and straw, is plaistered very neatly within with clay. The Thrush lays five or six eggs, and feeds on berries, worms, caterpillars, insects, and snails.

There is a bird of this sort, the Rose-coloured Ouzel, Turdus Roscus, the body of which is of a pale carnation colour, the head, wings, and tail, black. It is a migrant, and is sometimes, though I suspect very rarely, seen in England.

The Ring Ouzel, Turdus Torquatus, is larger, but in colour resembles the Blackbird; it has also a yellow bill. It is distinguished by a crescent of white feathers under the throat. In the mountains of Wales and of Scotland, Ring Ouzels are said to breed, and to be seen the whole year, building a nest at the roots of shrubs or thickets; but in the southern parts of England they are only found now and then. "Some birds,

(says Mr. White,) haunting with the Missel Thrush, were lately seen in this neighbourhood feeding on the berries of Yew, which, from the description of them, seem to be Ring Ouzels."

The curiosity of this indefatigable naturalist being thus excited, he learned of a farmer, who out of a large flock shot four of them, that these birds had been observed the preceding spring, about the 25th of March. On farther attention to this subject, Mr. White seems to have ascertained, that they are regular in their visits to the south. They appear for a few days only in the spring on their journey to the more northern parts of England or Scotland, where they breed; and on their way they feed on ivy-berries. On their return for the winter, they remain about a fortnight in the southern counties, recruiting themselves with haws and yew-berries. Such is the uncertainty, however, in which the question of the travels of birds is involved, that Mr. White seems afterwards to think, the Ring Ouzels, at least many of them, come from the west; because great numbers of them, as he was assured, breed in Dartmoor, a

wild and mountainous tract of Devonshire. A great many have been seen in Autumn, about Lewes, in Sussex. An observer of nature, who happened to be for any length of time in Normandy, might probably throw some light on questions, which, while they deserve to excite curiosity, cannot be settled but by a course of accurate observations made by persons in different parts of the world. Sailors, and men who in time of peace pass at almost all seasons of the year from these islands to the continent, might probably give a great deal of information on these subjects, if any body thought of asking them; for they are many of them far from being inaccurate observers, though their terms are sometimes professional, and sometimes so coarse, that they must be translated into the language of the naturalist.

In Shakespeare's plays the name of the Ouzel occurs. Hamlet, affecting madness to conceal the true state of his mind, plays, though indignantly, upon the officious old courtier, Polonius; and in ridicule of that facility, with which the flatterer and parasite agree to the

observations of the great, he says to Polonius, who brings him a summons from his mother,

Ham. Do you see yonder cloud that is almost like a camel?
Pol. By the mass, and it is like a camel indeed!
Ham. Methinks it is like an Ouzel?
Pol. It is black like on Ouzel.
Ham. Or like a whale?
Pol. *Very* like a whale!

The common blackbird however was usually called an Ouzel, and is to be understood when the name occurs without any distinguishing epithet.

Of the genus Ampelis there is only one, which is a visitant in this country. The Bohemian Chatterer, Ampelis Garulus, is about the size of a large lark, and considerable flocks appear in the month of February in the neghbourhood of Edinburgh. In the country of which it is a native, it feeds on grapes and other berries; but in Scotland the scarlet fruit of the mountain-ash supplies it with food. Its flesh is very good. On the back of the head is a crest; but the Bohemian Chatterer is distinguished from all other birds

by a substance on its wing-feathers resembling in appearance red sealing wax, whence it is usually called the Waxen Chatterer.

Of the Grosbeak, Loxia, there are five species known here. The first of these is the Crossbill, Loxia Curvirostra. The form of the bill, in which the mandibles, of great strength, have the power of crossing each other, and crushing very hard substances, distinguish it from all other birds. The seeds of the pine and the alder are its usual food, but it extracts those of the apple. The cones chiefly supplying it with food, the Crossbill forms its nest even in winter among the top branches of some tall tree, fortifying it without with Spagnum Arboreum, making it very thick, and lining it with the lichen aridus; while with the resin of the pine tree it carefully fills up every chink, connecting and consolidating the whole.

The Hawfinch, Loxia Cocothraustes, has so large and strong a bill, as to be able to crack the kernels of almonds, walnuts, cherries, and other fruit. Another sort, the Pine Grosbeak, Loxia Enucleator, lives on the seeds of the different pines and firs. It was once little

known in England, and has only appeared in some counties since there have been such considerable plantations of firs. It is now common in the neighbourhood of Bath, where it is not unfrequently seen in the bird-shops; for it is easily tamed, and sings extremely well, sometimes in the night; and probably might be taught with a flageolet, like its congener, the next species,—

The Bullfinch, Loxia Pyrrhula, which is more familiar to us. This beautiful bird, a favourite with all who do not apprehend its attacks on the garden, may be taught to pipe a tune of two parts with great exactness, and to sing on a signal from its master; a quality the more singular, because its wild note is creaking and rather harsh. I once had a nest of Bullfinches given me, of which only one was reared. It was a hen, which I kept only because I had raised it; but she hung in the same room with a very fine Virginia nightingale, whose song she soon acquired, and went through the same notes in a lower and softer tone. There are a great number of these birds brought over every year from Germany, where they are taught to whistle marches and

minuets, and sold in London for very high prices.

The Greenfinch, Loxia Chloris, though called a Finch, is of this genus, and nearly allied to the next. The Greenfinch has very little song, and no particular merit but that of being easily tamed. Greenfinches assemble in winter in large flocks.

Of the Bunting, Emberiza, there are several species. The Snow Bunting, Emberiza Nivalis, has its summer residence in the remotest regions of the north, but in winter travels southward. Some are known to breed in Scotland.

There are two or three other species of Bunting, about which little is known, and which perhaps are only varieties of this. The Common Bunting, Emberiza Miliaria, assembles in flocks in the autumn. It is a brown bird, spotted with black, and about the size of a yellowhammer. Mr. White says it remains here all the winter.

The Ortolan, Emberiza Hortulana, is a bird the name of which is well known, as being distinguished by the epicure for its fine flavour. It migrates between Italy and the

north of Asia and Europe. In the former country, and in the southern provinces of France, the Ortolan is taken and fattened in a dark place on millet-seed, when it is accounted one of those dainties, with which only the affluent can be indulged. This bird sings during the night; its nest is made either on the ground among tufts of grass, like that of a lark, or at the root of some shrub in low hedges.

The Yellowhammer, Emberiza Citrinella, so very common in England, is a Bunting. It is one of those birds most known, though, except its plumage, which is pretty, it has no remarkable features. It builds in a low bush, and lays twice or thrice a year, feeding on seeds and insects.

The Rice Bird, Emberiza Orizivora, is also a Bunting, but is not known in this country: we are acquainted with its immediate neighbour, the next species, which has some curious particularities.

The Reed Sparrow, Emberiza Schœniclus, inhabits Europe and the southern parts of Siberia in Asia, frequenting the banks of brooks and rivers; there it suspends a curious

nest, hung by the four corners to four strong bulrushes, or reeds, or other aquatic plants, where, two or three feet above the water, it rears in this hammock its little family, the produce of four or five eggs. The materials of this cradle are bents, small rushes, and hair; and the food of the Reed Sparrow is the seeds of water plants. Its habits seem to agree so much with those of the Reed Wren, that it may be doubted whether they are not sometimes confounded.

The Greenheaded Bunting, Emberiza Chlorocephala, is a rare bird in England, and has only now and then been taken by the bird-catchers who go round the neighbourhood of London to catch birds for sale.

The next genus I shall mention, Fringilla, is numerous and interesting. It comprehends most of our Finches. Of these one of the most common is the Chaffinch, Fringilia Cœlebs, which resides in England the whole year, and with its cheerful, though not very musical note, is one of those birds that first hail the returning spring. There are some circumstances relative to this bird, which excite great curiosity. Mr. White thus writes

to his correspondent: "For many years past I have observed, that towards Christmas, vast flocks of Chaffinches have appeared in the fields, many more I used to think than could be hatched in any one neighbourhood; but when I came to observe them more narrowly, I was amazed to find, that they seemed to me to be almost all hens." Linnæus, he says, remarks, that before winter all the hen Chaffinches migrate through Holland into Italy. This is another circumstance relative to the migration of birds, that can only be cleared up by the remarks of intelligent ornithologists in different climates. The nest of the Chaffinch is made with great skill. It is lined with soft wool, and covered with the Sphagnum Arborea.

The Brambling, Fringilla Montifringilla, frequents the pine forests of the north of Scotland, and lives on the seeds of the cones of birch trees.

The next of this genus, the Goldfinch, Fringilla Carduelis, is one of the most beautiful and pleasing of English birds. Great flocks of these assemble in winter; its beauty of plumage, and song, as well as its docility,

make it a universal favourite among those who are fond of birds. The nest of the Goldfinch is very elegantly made of lichen and moss, and lined with hair, wool, the pappus of the willow, and the down of the thistle, the seed of which is its principal support, whence it is called Carduelis. Its nest is usually built in fruit trees, and generally contains four or five eggs.

The lessons given in the following poem cannot be too often inculcated. The cruelty of confining and then neglecting these cheerful and innocent creatures is too frequent. It is a sort of guilt against the design of nature, to imprison animals made to soar above the clouds, or enjoy their existence among the leaves of the forests; but to make these inoffensive creatures prisoners for our amusement, and then to condemn them to the most lingering and painful death through neglect and idleness, is a degree of cruelty, of which it is painful even to think. Cowper, whose excellent heart felt for the humblest being that had life, reproves this barbarous negligence in these impressive stanzas.

Time was, when I was free as air,
The thistle's downy seed my fare,
My drink the morning dew.
I perch'd at will on ev'ry spray,
My form genteel, my plumage gay,
My strains for ever new.

But gaudy plumage, sprightly strain,
And form genteel, were all in vain,
And of a transient date;
For caught and cag'd, and starv'd to death,
In dying sighs my little breath
Soon pass'd the wiry grate.

Thanks, gentle swain, for all my woes,
And thanks for this effectual close
And cure of ev'ry ill!
More cruelty could none express,
And I, if you had shown me less,
Had been your captive still.

LETTER X.

THE most immediate relation to the Goldfinch is the Canary Bird. This beautiful little animal was brought to this country about two hundred years ago, and is now

universally domesticated, though it will not bear the winters of this country in the open air. In cages it breeds not only with its own species, but with the Linnet, Chaffinch, and Siskin, and even with the Yellowhammer. Its food is chiefly the Phalaris Canariensis, Canary-seed; but it will eat other seeds. The note of this bird is extremely loud and shrill, but it can be brought to imitate the song of other birds, and will sing like a Nightingale, or a Lark, or any bird it is much accustomed to hear. If any one play on an instrument in a room where there are two or three Canary Birds, they immediately begin to sing as loud as they can, as if in emulation of the sounds they hear; but they are equally clamourous, if people be talking.

The people of sedentary trades at Rouen, and perhaps of other towns in France, raise numbers of Canary Birds. These are often bred from the Linnet, and I have seen some with a considerable mixture of green feathers; others with tuffs on their heads of the brightest yellow or black; and some are educated to sing with great precision a tune of two parts. A circumstance occurred about a bird of this

sort, which I relate for its singularity, though but little to the honour of those who acted in it.

The mistress of an inn, at a seaport town in France, had a Canary Bird, which sung extremely well the (at that time popular) song of "Malbrouk;" and whenever it was bidden to sing, executed its task with a precision, that greatly amused the hearers. An English lady, who resided near the town, had often heard this bird sing by the direction of its mistress, and felt a violent desire to possess it; she therefore applied to Madame, or as women of that rank were then called in France, la femme L. R. and desire to purchase it, offering any price which might be deemed reasonable. The proposal, however, was peremptorily rejected. La dame Anglaise increased her offers;—La femme L. R. still refused them; and declared, not without some symptoms of displeasure, that no money whatever should induce her to part with the bird. Opposition, in this as in more material concerns, served to inflame the desire to purchase, or by any means obtain it. The lady communicated her wishes, and their disappointment, to one of

her friends, who, being as he thought able to play the politician "en choux et navettes," contrived a scheme to gratify his country-woman; deeming it no breach of integrity to cheat the people of another kingdom, who he said were cursed cheats themselves, and always ready to cheat and pick the pockets of the English, whenever they got them into their devilish country. Being a connoisseur in such matters, he carefully examined the Canary Bird, which happened to be a jonque, that is, one of those entirely yellow. He ordered on a certain day a dinner to be prepared for himself and two of his friends, which he knew would be spread for them in the room where the Canary Bird hung. The dinner over, and the reckoning paid, the English party retired; and the next day Mimi, the coveted bird, sung "Malbrouk" in the chateau of la dame Anglaise, though la femme L. R. did not miss him, but carefully fed her favourite, as she imagined, at the usual time. A day or two afterward, however, some person fond of the bird took notice, that he did not sing as usual. His mistress recollected, that she had not heard him for some time; and,

apprehensive that he was sick, took the cage down to examine: when she found, that it contained indeed a jonque Canary Bird, but not hers; and remembering the circumstances that had lately happened, she guessed the truth, and that la dame had, with the help of her friends, stolen that which she had refused to sell her. This was soon ascertained; and though the gentleman and lady pleaded, that exchange was no robbery, and again offered money to be allowed to keep the bird, la femme L. R. was so much offended, that she refused every proposal of accommodation, and assured la dame Anglaise, that unless the bird was immediately brought back uninjured, she would apply for redress to a magistrate. The threat of having the Marechausseé at her chateau, (it was in 1785,) at length compelled the English lady, though with a very ill grace, to restore it; and gave a specimen, which I trust is single in its kind, of conduct, which though in a trifle did no honour to the country she called her own.

The Canary Bird is one of those, to which the idle folly of mankind has affixed value for qualities, which caprice, or *fancy*, as it is

called, assigns to them; and there is somewhere a society established, where birds are shewn, and prizes assigned according to their qualities. Sums have been given for these birds, which common sense can hardly believe.

The Siskin, Fringilla Spinus, which is sometimes called the Aberdavine, and sometimes the Barley Bird, is very pretty, and its wings coloured like those of the Goldfinch. It feeds on the seeds of alder, and is sometimes seen among hop-gardens; but disappears after the barley-harvest, and passes the winter in more southern countries, where it is supposed to breed, though it is said that its nest has never yet been discovered.

The Great Redpoll, Fringilla Cannabina, frequents the sea-coast; and is found frequently near the sea-side. It is easily tamed, and sings very soon after it is taken.

The Common Linnet, Fringilla Linota, is a well-known bird, and is one of those most frequently kept in cages by persons fond of having birds confined, as it sings very well. The Linnets assemble in great flocks towards the close of autumn, and almost cover tracts

of land where there are thistles or other plants, on the seeds of which they live, though its favourite food is those of flax and hemp.

The Less Redpoll, Fringilla Linaria, lives also on seeds, chiefly those of the alder; its nest, nicely made of dry sticks, and lined with great care, contains four or five eggs.

The Sparrow, Fringilla Domestica, is the commonest of our birds, and is so little fearful of man, that it is frequently seen in the most popular cities. Sparrows are pert and mischievous, and multiply so fast as to become very injurious to gardens. In the winter they assemble in great flocks, and in hard weather are often taken in considerable numbers.

The Mountain Sparrow, Fringilla Montana, is less than the last, and builds in trees more remote from human habitations.

The Fly Catcher, Muscicaper, is a very numerous race, containing above ninety species; but only two are known in England. The first of these, the Pied Fly Catcher, Muscicapa Atricapilla, is very seldom found in this country.

The Spotted Fly Catcher, Muscicapa Grisola, breeds here, but leaves this country ear-

ly in autumn. It eats flies and insects, but also devours fruit.

The next genus, Motacilla, lives chiefly on insects, and therefore many of these which are seen in great numbers in summer in this country, seek in winter those climates where insects are to be found.

Of this numerous genus, which contains near two hundred species, the Nightingale, Motacilla Luscinia, is the most known and admired of all songsters, and is celebrated by the poets more than any other of the feathered race.

Some doubts have arisen, whether the Nightingales really retire into other countries, or remain silent in this from the middle of June, when its delicious song is no longer heard. The Nightingale inhabits every country of Europe within a certain latitude; and the song of this bird is much louder and fuller in the more southern countries than in England.

A friend of mine, who went some years ago to Lisbon for the recovery of her health, was thence sent to Cintra, and afterwards to the baths of St. Pedro del Sul. There are no glazed windows to the houses of the inferior

sort in Portugal, but a kind of jalousie, or something like Venetian blinds, is substituted for them. Bay trees, tall as our tallest elms or oaks, often form a shade from without to the lodging houses, and some of these trees almost grew into the windows of one of the houses where it was my friend's chance to lodge. Perched among these boughs of unfading green, the Nightingales sung of a night so loudly, that though charmed with them at first, and recollecting all the addresses to them which she had been accustomed to read with pleasure, they at length became fatiguing to her; insomuch that she laughingly protested, she would write, contrary to the custom of poets, something in dispraise of these serenades, which to an invalid were really annoying.

The Nightingale is a solitary bird, and, though it really sings all day, is usually celebrated for its song during the night; when, from a thorn or low shrub in the hedgerows, it is heard to peculiar advantage, as the rest of the feathered choristers are silent, and the note is sweeter and more varied than that of any other bird. Its nest is made of dry leaves,

hair, fibres, and grass; and it has more than one brood of young ones in a year. Its food is the larvæ of ants, flies, and other insects; and there are several fables, which describe it as particularly fond of the glow-worm. It is said there are no Nightingales farther north than the North Riding of Yorkshire. For this it is not perhaps very difficult to account; but it seems not so easy to assign a reason for there being none in Devonshire, one of the warmest counties of England, and abounding in wood and water, and of course in insects. I am not, indeed, sure that this is the fact, but I have often known it asserted, and never contradicted. They abound, however, in Somersetshire, and are often heard in the neighbourhood of Bath; why then they should not go farther to the west it is hard to say.

The Nightingale begins to sing in a low and tremulous tone, about the second week in April, unless the weather is very severe; but all insectivorous birds, whose food depends on the appearance of insects, are governed by the weather, which accelerates or retards the hatching of these tribes of flying or creeping creatures.

Much astonishment is excited in the circumstance of these birds, delicate and fragile as they are, taking so long a flight as is necessary for their transportation into other countries. They are sometimes kept in cages, and fed with insects, principally those called meal-worms; but it is very difficult and troublesome to keep them, though food contrived with great care and ingenuity is sometimes prepared for them.

After all, doubts have arisen whether the Nightingales really depart with departing summer. It does not appear that they were ever observed at sea, or settling on the rigging of ships, as other emigrants have been seen to do; and perhaps, like some other birds, they may find in woods and coppices the larvæ of insects enough to support their existence during winter; though they sing only, as other birds do, while building their nests, and attending their young.

The voice of the Nightingale is considered generally as expressive of melancholy, though some of its various notes are certainly very cheerful. Perhaps the impression is given by the mournful story told of the metamorphosis

of an unhappy virgin into this bird. Pandion had two beautiful daughters, of whom Progne, the eldest, was married to Tereus, a king of Thrace. After some few years, Progne became extremely desirous of seeing her sister, Philomela; and Tereus undertook to go himself and persuade Pandion to indulge the sisterly affection of Progne, by suffering him to conduct Philomela for a short time to visit her. But no sooner had he beheld the lovely Philomela, than he became passionately in love with her; and when, after long solicitation, Pandion very reluctantly agreed to her departure, the cruel and designing Tereus conducted her to a remote castle among almost impenetrable woods, where, regardless of her entreaties, and every restraint that honour and humanity should have imposed upon him, he compelled her to disgrace. When in the bitterness of her soul she reproached him with cruelty and treachery, and protested she would make her wrongs known, he was provoked by the eloquence of her sorrow, and the justness of her indignation; and, enraged by the sense of his guilt, he cut out her tongue.

The wretched Philomela, thus confined and injured, bethought herself of a means to communicate her dreadful fate to her sister Progne, to whom Tereus had reported that she was dead. Philomela wove the story of her injuries in tapestry, and prevailed on one of her guards to carry it to Progne ; who no sooner understood the dreadful fate of her sister, than she determined to execute the most signal vengeance on her infamous husband.

Her first purpose was, to release Philomela, to assist her in her vengeance. It was among the religious rites of the Thracians, to celebrate once in three years the feast of Bacchus. At this period, matrons of the highest rank joined the frantic train of Bacchanals, and ran about during the night dressed with ivy and vine leaves, and carrying flaming torches. Progne, availing herself of the liberty given by these orgies, assembled a number of women and persons devoted to her, penetrated the woods where stood the fortress that confined her unhahpy sister, and forced the doors, and disguising her with wreaths of ivy, led her to the palace of the infamous perpetrator of her wrongs.

The wretched condition in which she beheld the miserable victim of her husband's perfidy and barbarity, deprived her of every sense, save only the desire of vengeance. The dumb eloquence of the poor injured Philomela, was more powerful with her than the strongest passion of the heart, maternal love; and the sight of her little Itys, hitherto so dear to her, now stung her to madness. To revenge herself on the father, she murdered the child; and had the strange inhumanity to serve up his flesh to Tereus at a banquet. The gods, according to Ovid, transformed the guilty Tereus into a Lapwing, Progne into a Swallow, Philomela into a Nightingale, and Itys into a Pheasant. From a story so wild, yet so disgusting, it is pleasant to take refuge among the fictions, the apostrophes, or the descriptions of modern poets.

The Asiatic poets seem as partial to this bird as those of Europe. They imagine, among others, one very beautiful fiction—that the Nightingale is enamoured of the rose. In her letters from the East, Lady Mary Wortley Montague quotes the beginning of one of these compositions.

The Nightingale now wanders among the vines;
His passion is to seek Roses.

Hence the luxuriant imagination of Dr. Darwin has formed an ideal being, the description of which can be relished only by those who have a taste for wild imagery and bold fiction.

So when the Nightingale in Eastern bow'rs
On quiv'ring pinions woos the Queen of Flow'rs,
Inhales her fragrance as he hangs in air,
And melts with melody the blushing fair;
Half rose, half bird, a beauteous monster springs,
Waves his thin leaves, and claps his glossy wings;
Long horrent thorns his mossy legs surround,
And tendril-talons root him to the ground;
Green films of rind his wrinkled neck o'erspread,
And crimson petals crest his curled head;
Soft warbling beaks in each bright blossom move,
And vocal Rose-buds thrill th' enchanted grove.
Admiring Ev'ning stays her beamy star,
And still Night listens from his ebon car;
While on white wings descending Houris throng,
And drink the floods of odour and of song.

Milton, the greatest of English poets, has many passages in which the Nightingale is exquisitely described. Thus, in "Paradise Lost," speaking of Adam and Eve, he says,

These, lull'd by Nightingales, embracing slept,
And on their naked limbs the flow'ry roof
Show'r'd roses, which the morn repair'd.

And again :

——— The am'rous bird of night
Sung spousal, and bid haste the ev'ning star,
On his hill top to light the bridal lamp.

His sonnet on the same subject, however frequently quoted, may be repeated here without any apprehension of its appearing less beautiful by repetition.

O Nightingale, that on yon bloomy spray
Warblest at eve, when all the woods are still,
Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart doth fill,
While the jolly Hours lead on propitious May.
Thy liquid notes, that close the eye of day,
First heard before the shallow cuckoo's bill
Portend success in love ; O, if Jove's will
Have link'd that am'rous pow'r to thy soft lay,
Now timely sing, ere the rude bird of hate
Foretell my hapless doom in some grove nigh ;
As thou from year to year hast sung too late
For my relief, yet hadst no reason why :
Whether the Muse or Love call thee his mate,
Both them I serve, and of their train am I.

Il Penseroso presents a description of the Nightingale among the assemblage of circumstances soothing to a melancholy man.

But first and chiefest with thee bring
Him that yon soars on golden wing,

Guiding the fiery wheeled throne,
The cherub Contemplation ;
And the mute Silence hist along,
'Less Philomel will deign a song,
In her sweetest, saddest plight,
Smoothing the rugged brow of Night,
While Cynthia checks her dragon yoke
Gently o'er th' accustom'd oak.
Sweet bird, that shunn'st the noise of Folly,
Most musical, most melancholy,
Thee, Chauntress, oft the woods among
I woo, to hear thy even song.

The poet, who perhaps of all that wrote after Milton has most accurately described nature, Thomson, has several passages of exquisite beauty, in which the Nightingale is introduced. In the admirable description of the loves of the birds in spring, the Nightingale has a distinguished place.

The thrush
And woodlark, o'er the kind contending throng
Superior heard, run through the sweetest length
Of notes ; when list'ning Philomela deigns
To let them joy, and purposes, in thought
Elate, to make her night excel their day.

It is certain, however, that the Nightingale sings in the day as well as in the night.

In the beautiful apostrophe, which depre-

cates the cruelty of confining birds, Thomson pleads particularly for the Nightingale.

But let not chief the Nightingale lament
Her ruin'd care; too delicately fram'd
To brook the harsh confinement of a cage.
Oft when returning with her loaded bill,
Th' astonish'd mother finds a vacant nest,
By the hard hands of unrelenting clowns
Robb'd; to the ground the vain provision falls!
Her pinions ruffle, and low drooping scarce
Can bear the mourner to the poplar shade,
Where all abandon'd to despair she sings
Her sorrows through the night; and, on the bough
Sole sitting, still at ev'ry dying fall
Takes up again her lamentable strain
Of winding woe; till, wide around the woods
Sigh to her song, and with her wail resound.

Thomson has also some elegant stanzas to a Nightingale. The Italian poets have the same idea of the mournful song of this bird. Petrarch has a sonnet on this subject:—

Quel Rossignuol, che si soave piagne
Forse suoi figli, o sua cara consorte,
Di dolcezza empie il cielo, e le campagne
Con tante note si pietose e scorte;

E tutta notte par, che m' accompagne,
E mi ramenti la mia dura sorte.

Sonetto 43.

And in the preceding sonnet, 42,—

Zefiro torna, e 'l bel tempo rimena ;
E i fiori, e l' herbe, suo dolce famiglia ;
E garir Progne, e pianger Filomena ;
E primavera candida, e vermiglia.

An inferior poet, to whom perhaps you may notwithstanding be partial, has two sonnets, which to you may bear a repetition.

TO A NIGHTINGALE.

Poor melancholy bird, that all night long
Tell'st to the moon thy tale of tender woe,
From what sad cause can such sweet sorrow flow,
And whence this mournful melody of song ?

Thy poet's musing fancy would translate
What mean the sounds that swell thy little breast,
When still at dewy eve thou leav'st thy nest,
Thus to the list'ning Night to sing thy fate.

Pale Sorrow's victims wert thou once among,
Though now releas'd, in woodlands wild to rove ?
Say—hast thou felt from friends some cruel wrong ?
Or died'st thou martyr of disastrous love ?
Ah, songstress sad ! that such my lot might be,
To sigh and sing at liberty—like thee !

TO THE SAME.

Sweet Poet of the woods, a long adieu!
Farewell, soft minstrel of the early year!
Ah! 'twill be long ere thou shalt sing anew,
And pour thy music on "the Night's dull ear."
Whether on spring thy wand'ring flights await,
Or whether silent in our groves thou dwell,
The pensive muse shall own thee for her mate,
And still protect the song she loves so well.
With cautious step the lovelorn youth shall glide
Through the lone brake, that shades thy mossy nest,
And shepherd girls from eyes profane shall hide
The gentle bird, who sings of Pity best:
For still thy voice shall soft affections move,
And still be dear to Sorrow and to Love.

There are poets, however, who consider these tones as being indicative of joy, rather than melancholy.

The following lines are taken from the Lyrical Ballads of Mr. Wordsworth:—

——————'Tis the merry Nightingale,
That crowds, and hurries, and precipitates,
With fast thick warble his delicious notes;
As he were fearful that an April night
Would be too short for him to utter forth
His love chant, and disburden his full soul
Of all its music! And I know a grove
Of large extent, hard by a castle huge,
Which the great lord inhabits not; and so

This grove is wild with tangling underwood,
And the trim walks are broken up, and grass,
Thin grass and king-cups grow within the paths;
But never elsewhere in one place I knew
So many Nightingales; and far and near
In wood and thicket over the wild grove
They answer and provoke each others' songs—
With skirmish and capricious passagings,
And murmurs musical, and sweet jug jug;
And one low piping sound more sweet than all,
Stirring the air with such a harmony,
That, should you close your eyes, you might almost
Forget it was not day.

This article would be too much enlarged, if I were to add a twentieth part of all that has been said and sung about this "Minstrel of the Moon."

The Hedge Sparrow, Motacilla Modularis, lays its blue eggs in some low bush, often very near the habitation of man. It has a short but very pleasant note.

The Little Pettychaps, Motacilla Hippolais, is a very small bird, as its name intimates. It builds on the ground, and, concealing its nest under a turf, or any prominent piece of earth, lays four or five white eggs.

The Reed Sparrow, Motacilla Salicaria, inhabits reeds and sallows. The country

people in Hampshire call it the Sedge Bird. It sings, Mr. White says, almost incessantly; imitating, though in a hurrying manner, the notes of several other birds. The Reed Sparrow, or Sedge Warbler, lays four or five eggs in a nest very neatly made on the lower branches of those trees that bend over the water.

The Whitethroat, Motacilla Sylvia, is a migrant, and leaves this country in winter, its food being ripe fruit and insects.

The Dartford Warbler, Motacilla Provincialis, is seldom seen. It is very little bigger than the Wren.

The White Wagtail, Motacilla Alba, is the Water Wagtail so commonly seen in early spring on the grass plots, swiftly scudding after the first insects, that the warmth brings from their winter coverts. As it runs it shakes its tail horizontally, whence it derives its trivial name. The Water Wagtail lives chiefly about water, and is supposed in winter to frequent the southern counties; those that are natives of the north returning thither in the summer.

The Yellow Wagtail, Motacilla Flava, makes

its nest on the ground, and frequents cornfields. This, too, forsakes the northern counties at the approach of winter, to pass the severe season in the south; but the natives of the south, content with their situation, remain there the whole year.

The Wheatear, Motacilla Oenanthe, is well known, since it has been esteemed equal to the Ortolan, or Beccafica of Italy. This bird, in size about as big as a lark, appears in March in warrens, stony wastes, and commons. Stillingfleet says, "If the Wheatear do not quit England, it certainly *shifts places*, for about harvest they are not to be found in places that before abounded with them. *Where*, except on the Sussex downs, they are found in such abundance, I have never heard; but there, about the second week in August, they used to be seen and taken in great numbers. When I was a girl, it was not uncommon, when parties were riding or walking on the hills, to take these prisoners out of the traps set for them by the shepherds, and deposit a penny in payment; but the price afterward rose to two-pence, and at present it is probably higher.

Wheatears never appear in flocks, and three or four only are seen at a time. On the downs westward, which are called Berry, Bignor, Glatten, and Duneton hills, they are sometimes caught by the shepherd; but they are neither so numerous, nor so fat, as those about Brighthelmstone, while towards Beachy Head they are in still greater numbers. I suspect they are much rarer on Harting-Hill, and those hills that trend toward Hampshire. I never saw them on the extensive downs of that country, one of which, called Old Winchester-Hill, joins to the Sussex hills. This, if the observation be just, seems to afford a presumption, that Wheatears cross the Channel in autumn, and resort for that purpose to the part of the coast where the sea is narrowest. From Hastings, a little to the east of Beachy-Head, the coast of France is visible on a clear day; and opposite Dover is the narrowest part of the channel. A strong and steady west wind would blow these voyagers so short a distance in a very little time. But if so, when and how do they return? I have seen them in the stone quarries about Bath in spring, and there it is said, and in places of

such description, they breed. Mr. White, however, calls them the *Sussex bird;* but the Wheatear is certainly not peculiar to that county.

The Whinchat, Motacilla Rubetra, frequents dry heaths and uplands. It builds in early spring, in low bushes, and among furze.

The Blackcap, Motacilla Atricapilla, is a small reddish migrant, named from the feathers of its head. The head of the female, however, is not black, but of a deep crimson, or what is usually, though improperly, called marron colour. It lives on insects and berries, particularly those of the ivy and mountain-ash. This bird sings extremely well.

The Redstart, Motacilla Phœnicurus, is a fair-weather visitant, and is seen only during spring and summer. It builds in the holes of old walls, and small hollows of decaying trees. It is familiar, and frequents places near houses, which it cheers by a pleasant song.

The Reed Wren, Motacilla Arundinacea, is the largest of our Wrens. The nest of this little creature is woven among the reeds, which pass through it like sustaining pillars. It is found on the banks of rivers and streams,

where the seeds of aquatic plants and insects are its food.

The Redbreast, Motacilla Rubecula, is one of those birds, which from its familiarity with man seems to claim protection, entering his dwelling, and putting himself into his power. When to rob the nests of other birds was never discouraged, but long strings of eggs were daily brought in, the spoil of the unfeeling schoolboy, the Robin and the Wren were held sacred. Perhaps the popular ballad of the Children in the Wood has contributed to the partiality generally felt for this bird. And the beauty of its colour, its animated eye, and lively motions, as well as the long continuance of its song, have assisted to obtain for the Robin the rights of hospitality. I have known several instances, beside that given in our little book of Conversations, where one of these birds has become an inmate of the family; and you undoubtedly recollect many poems, of which the Redbreast is the subject. They are most of them so well known, that it would be useless repetition to insert any of them here; but Thomson's lines ought to be recollected. Amid the cheerless gloom of

winter, when the earth, hardened by frost or covered with snow, no longer supplies food,

> The fowls of Heav'n
> Tam'd by the cruel season, crowd around
> The winnowing store, and claim the little boon,
> Which Providence assigns them. One alone,
> The Redbreast, sacred to the household gods,
> Wisely regardful of th' embroiling sky,
> In joyless fields and thorny thickets leaves
> His shiv'ring mates, and pays to trusted man
> His annual visit. Half afraid, he first
> Against the window beats ; then brisk alights
> On the warm hearth ; then hopping o'er the floor,
> Eyes all the smiling family askance,
> And pecks, and starts, and wonders where he is :
> Till more familiar grown, the table crumbs
> Attract his slender feet.
>
> *Thomson's Winter.*

There is a verse of Gray's Elegy, which on revision he left out, but which is too beautiful to be forgotten, though perhaps it is not strictly characteristic of the rustic, who is supposed to utter them to the inquirer after the moody but benevolent being whose grave he is contemplating.

> Here scatter'd oft, the earliest of the year,
> By hands unseen are show'rs of violets found,
> The Redbreast loves to haunt and warble here,
> And little footsteps lightly mark the ground.

The song of the Robin, however pleasant, and among the most lasting, is thought by many people to be particularly melancholy; and I have always felt it to be rather depressing than cheering, because the Robin sings when all other birds are silent, or have fled from the approach of winter. The notes of the Robin, therefore, are associated with the withered flowers, the sallow and falling leaves, the dull gloom of autumnal evenings, and all those circumstances which announce the decay of the year.

This bird is vindictive and pugnacious; two cocks will fight as fiercely as if they were trained to the business; and if one be in possession of a room, he will drive all others away that attempt to share his good fortune. The Robin feeds chiefly, though not entirely, on insects, for which reason it is difficult to keep it in a cage: yet it seems by one of his letters, that Cowper had some of these birds domesticated in his parlour. The nest of the Robin is made very neatly of dry leaves, hair, and moss, and nicely lined with feathers. It usually contains from five to seven eggs. The young hatched in the spring do not acquire

the colours of their race till the following autumn.

The Wren, Motacilla Troglodytes, is generally ranked in the feathered procession next to the Robin. It is a beautiful little bird, its plumage elegantly mottled with shades of brown; the eye remarkably keen and bright; while its tail, rising almost perpendicularly from the body, and a certain smartness in its motions, render this bird unlike any other. Though it is less familiar than the Robin, and does not so often claim the rights of hospitality, this little animal seems fond of the neighbourhood of man, and hides its deep oval nest, which often contains from eight to eighteen eggs, in some hollow tree, or hole in a beam or post about outhouses or hovels. This receptacle for so numerous a family is made with great care, and a little entrance only is left, just sufficient to allow the master and dame to enter. In a garden within the hollow of a yew tree, near some old paling, a wren built her nest, as she hoped, very securely; but the pales undergoing a repair, her nest was much more exposed than she intended when she chose the site. She was not, how-

ever, discouraged enough to leave her mansion, as she had been sitting some days, when this unlucky dismantling happened: but with increased vigilance her bright eye was constantly to be seen glittering like a very little diamond at the entrance of her nest, as if she were incessantly on the watch against a surprise. I was very desirous of sheltering this tiny family, and saving it from the senseless and wanton mischief of boys, who often got over the pales, stole the fruit, and carried away the birds' nests. I therefore caused some thick boughs of yew to be cut, and placed so as to conceal, I hoped, even better than before, the little hermitage in the trunk of the tree. It happened, however, in this instance as in many others, that the very means I took to secure my minute neighbour, was injurious to her safety. The idle boys at an early hour of the morning visited the garden, and perceiving the new fence round the yew tree, guessed that there was something to hide. Thus all my precautions were rendered vain, for the next day, after I had so sheltered it, the nest and its contents were gone. In the 1st volume of the Annual Review I have just

seen an extract from the Ornithological Dictionary of George Montague, F. L. S. containing an account of the habits of these little birds. Had I known before that there was such a publication, I should have consulted it in composing these pages. The Wren sings extremely well, and is heard very early to announce approaching spring.

The least of all the British birds, and one of the most beautiful, is the Golden Crested Wren, Motacilla Regulus. This elegant minute creature resembles the preceding in its habits, but it has a gayer dress, particularly a line of golden coloured feathers on the head, which it can raise or depress at will. The nest it makes is round, with a small entrance. It lays only eight or nine little eggs, and is not so frequently seen as the preceding species.

There is another species, the Yellow Wren, Motacilla Trochilus, which is seen among willows, creeping up and down their stalks in search of insects. This is the bird, I believe, that White calls the Willow Wren, Motacilla Trochili, but he seems to think his correspondent has confounded it with the willow lark, perhaps the reed lark.

The Willow Wren, he says, is of a yellow colour, haunts only the tops of trees in beechen woods, and runs up and down making a sibilous or whispering noise. I have somewhere seen that this bird, or one of this genus, runs up and down the stalks of the Fritillaria, commonly distinguished by the name of the Crown-imperial, and drinks the dew that is found in the five glands of that flower, which look like pearls set in the middle of each petal.

The next genus of the order Passeres, with which we have any thing to do, is that of the Titmouse, Parus. Restless, familiar, and thievish, without any song, and coarse feeders, they have no claim to our admiration, but from the beauty of their plumage. The first of these is the Great Titmouse, or Ox-eye, Parus Major. It is an unwelcome visitor in gardens, but is less seen there than some of its relations, building its nest in woods. It lays from six to ten eggs.

The next is the Blue Titmouse, Parus Ceruleas, or Tom-tit, as it is generally called. This bird is one of those most common about houses. Perhaps nothing I can say of the

Titmice will convey so clear an idea of their manners, and the various species of them, as a quotation from the History of Selborne.

"Every species of the Titmouse winters with us. They have what I call a kind of intermediate bill between the hard and the soft, between the Linnæan genera Fringilla and Motacilla. One species alone spends its whole time in the woods and fields, never retreating, in the severest seasons, to houses and neighbourhoods, and that is the delicate Long-tailed Titmouse, Parus Caudatus, which is almost as minute as the Golden-crested Wren. But the Blue Titmouse, or Nun, Parus Ceruleus, the Colemouse, Parus Ater, the Great Blackheaded Titmouse, Parus Fringillago, and the Marsh Titmouse, Parus Palustris, all resort at times to buildings, and in hard weather particularly. The Great Titmouse at such times much frequents houses, and in deep snows I have seen this bird, while it hung with its back downwards, to my no small delight and admiration, draw straws lengthwise from the eaves of thatched houses, in order to pull out the flies that were concealed between them; and that in such numbers, that they

quite defaced the thatch, and gave it a ragged appearance.

"The Blue Titmouse, or Nun, is a great frequenter of houses, and a general devourer. Beside insects, it is very fond of flesh, and pecks bones on dunghills. It is a vast admirer of suet, and haunts butchers' shops. When a boy, I have known twenty caught in a morning, with snap mouse-traps, baited with tallow, or suet. It will also pick holes in apples left on the ground, and be well entertained with the seeds of a sun-flower. The Blue, Marsh, and Great Titmouse, will, in severe weather, carry away barley and oat straws from the sides of ricks.

"There is another species, the Bearded Titmouse, Parus Biarmius, which lives in marshy places, and forms its nest of the pappus or down of willows, poplars, and other trees growing in wet soils."

Mr. White seems to have omitted some remarkable circumstances relating to the Long-tailed Titmouse. This pretty and active little creature is taught by unerring instinct to form a nest capable of receiving its long tail without inconvenience. It is constructed of mosses

and lichens, curiously and elegantly interwoven in the form of an oblong purse, with only a very small entrance. It is lined with the softest down, and contains sometimes seventeen or eighteen small eggs. I remember seeing these nests in the hands of boys when I was a child, who called them Long Pots, but perhaps did not know what bird it was, the labours of which they thus rendered abortive. Not unfrequently it constructs its nest on a mossy bank, of which it appears to form a part; and with a small opening at each end, so that it can come in and go out without turning in the nest, for which its long tail would be inconvenient.

The next genus that solicits our notice is that of the Swallow, Hirundo, which will terminate our sketches. I shall, however, deviate a little from the regular order to which I have hitherto in some degree adhered; and, instead of relating here in its place the history of the Swallow, I shall speak of the only bird known in this country of the next genus, which is closely allied to it, and is termed by Lewin the Night-Swallow. The Jar Bird, Fern Owl, or Night Hawk, for it is known by

all these names, as well as by the Linnæan name of Caprimulgus, or Goatsucker, frequents woods, and lives on the larger insects, which it takes on the wing. It has one of its toes long, and curiously serrated, to enable it to grasp its prey more firmly. Before I knew what it was, I have often seen it flying before me, when I have been on horseback in the dusk of the evening, and was told by the servants that it was a Night Hawk, "a bird that brought bad luck." I was not weak enough to believe that such was its commission, though *bad luck* certainly came very frequently; but as I always felt a great deal of curiosity to know the origin of those superstitions which lurk among the humbler ranks of society, I took some pains to understand *why* this bird had so bad a character. I could make out nothing, however, but that it was "a sort of a flying toad;" and a toad, time out of mind, whether flying or crawling, has been an object of fear and horror. In France it bears the name of the Flying Toad, no doubt from its colour.

It is remarkable, however, that the American bird called "Whip-poor-Will," from its

notes seeming to express those words, and which is also a Caprimulgus, is supposed by the native Indians to be a bird of ill omen; and when its voice is heard loud round their encampment, they imagine that some misfortune is about to overtake them.

I had lately an opportunity of seeing the Goatsucker. The latter end of March, a servant brought me a bird which he had shot late in the evening, but which he said none of the people in the village had ever seen before. I examined it, and soon found, by the description in the books I have on birds, what it was. Its plumage is very beautiful; bright chesnut, white, brown and black, in dashes or large spots. Its face, with the mouth closed, is something like that of a small owl; and, like the owl, it distinguishes objects best when the sun is below the horizon. Its food is chiefly beetles and chafers; and when I so often saw it taking short flights on downs and commons, it was pursuing the small fern chafers, Scarabæus Solstitialis, which abound on such places in July and August; hence it is called the Fern Owl. It has two notes, one a shrill cry or shriek,

which it often utters on the wing; the other a sort of loud purring, not unlike the noise of a spinning-wheel; and it is to express this noise the peasants call it the *Jar* Bird, or Churn Owl.

White speaks of it once or twice, and it is among the pleasures that attend his naturalist's walk.

> While o'er the cliff the awaken'd Churn Owl hung,
> Through the still gloom protracts his ev'ning song.

I do not recollect any other writer of poetry, or *soi disant tel*, that has named it, except an acquaintance of yours, who says,

> O'er the tall brow of yonder chalky bourn,
> The ev'ning shades their gather'd darkness fling;
> While by the ling'ring light I scarce discern
> The shrieking Night Jar sail on heavy wing.
> *Charlotte Smith's Sonnets.*

The Caprimulgus lays only two eggs on the ground. It is never seen, they say, till March, and disappears in September; but the fact of its migrating seems doubtful. When the bird utters that long and singular sound, it sits with its head lower than the tail; and this sound is so loud, as not only to be

heard at a great distance, but to make, as Mr. White says, a small hermitage vibrate, on the top of which it was perched.

The Goatsucker is a link between the Swallow and those birds that prey indiscriminately on smaller birds, insects, and reptiles. The Swallows prey on insects only.

The first species of the genus Hirundo, is the Chimney Swallow, Hirundo Rustica. Its sharply forked tail, touched with a spot of white, and the flat and peculiar shape of its head, mark this bird, as well as its choosing the immediate habitation of man for the place of its incubation. Sometimes the Swallows make their nests several feet within the chimney; and it has happened that illness, or very cold and unseasonable weather, having compelled the owners of their temporary lodging to light fires, these luckless lodgers have perished by suffocation. Their nests are made of clay, strengthened by straw and hair, and lined with feathers; and it is curious to observe them dipping their breasts swiftly into pools, and then immediately resorting to their nests, to temper the mortar with the moisture. They are very strong of

wing, and will remain a great while untired in the air. This makes their emigration probable; and they have been known at certain seasons to cling to the rigging of ships at sea, as if tired with their journey, and after a night's rest disappear. Sometimes it is said, that there is no doubt of their migration, because in September and October they are seen to assemble, as if preparing for their flight, and afterward to have been met in great numbers on the southern coast, journeying towards the sea. They pass, as is believed by some, to France; and thence they can, by easy journeys, reach Gibraltar, whence the passage to Africa is very short. Those who prefer this manner of disposing of them during the winter have their system strengthened by the observations that have been made on the number of birds of this genus seen in Senegal, and other parts of Africa, at the season when they disappear from this country. Others, however, have collected facts, or made observations, which they believe establish their opinion, that Swallows do not migrate, but remain torpid, either under water

or in the hollows of cliffs, or rocky caverns, between the months of September and April.

We will have nothing to do with the Hirundo Esculenta, that builds nests of some glutinous substance, which the Chinese dissolve in broth, and which has been numbered among dainties and rarities in that country. The nest of a bird must make but a very dirty dish. We have more acquaintance with the Martin, Hirundo Urbica. The blueish black of its feathers, and its white chin and rump, distinguish it from others of its species. It builds under the eaves of houses, against the tops or sides of windows, and among the carved or rugged stone of steeples and churches. Duncan, entering on his fatal visit the castle of Macbeth, is made thus to speak:

> This castle hath a pleasant seat, the air
> Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
> Unto our gentle senses.

Banquo answers——

> The guest of summer,
> The temple haunting martlet, does approve,
> By his lov'd masonry, that the Heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here; no jutty prize, buttress,
> Nor coin of vantage, but this bird hath made

His pendant bed, and procreant cradle. Where
They most breed and haunt, I have observed,
The air is delicate.

The Martin does not appear quite so early as the Swallow, and retires rather later. Some have been seen here so late as November. I ought to have remarked, that the Martlet, or Martin, is the distinction given in heraldry to the fourth son of a house, and is intended to intimate, that he must depend on himself to rise in the world. I have no book of heraldry at hand, but I think there is some such meaning given to this distinguishing mark.

The Sand Martin, Hirundo Riparia, makes a nest in a sand-bank, hanging over or near rivers. I have often watched these birds darting into the little round holes seen in these sand cliffs, which sometimes are very deep, but which they are occasionally compelled to abandon on account of the fleas that infest them. These, it is highly probable, pass the winter among dead reeds at the bottoms of lakes, pools, and slow rivers. They are very pretty little birds.

The Swift, Hirundo Apus, is the largest of

the British Hirundines, and that it is a migrant is said to be past a doubt. It appears in May, but remains only till August, when there are still great numbers of insects.

These birds fly high, and scream round and round old and high buildings, feeding on those insects which inhabit the highest region of the air. The legs of the Swift are so short and disproportionate, that when it is on the ground it cannot rise into the air.

There is something very cheerful, and "breathing of summer," in the sight and sound of the Swifts, flying with inconceivable velocity round an old steeple, or the spires of a cathedral. I once passed great part of a summer in a country town, which is perhaps of all others that to which the word *dull*, as applied to local situation, may be most justly appropriated. Of books none were to be obtained for which I had then any taste; the good ladies' card parties and conversations were then utterly intolerable to me; and after I returned from the short walk I was allowed to take alone, there was nothing that gave me any pleasure, but to sit at a window looking toward the old church, and watch the Swifts,

whom I was even then tempted to envy. The degree of liberty they enjoyed, and the ease of their almost imperceptible and arrow-like flight, added to the idea that they would soon follow departing summer, fly after the sun, leave the cold glooms and tedious winter of this country behind, and visit regions for ever shut to me, made me often say to myeslf, "I would I had the wings of one of those birds;" and it was grievous to me to have my reveries disturbed by the *un*gentle youths, calling themselves sportsmen, who often exercise their skill on the race of Hirundines against the great epoch of the first of September. I have already related the story of Progne and Philomela. Petrarch begins his description of Spring with the arrival of these two birds, which are, however, so dissimilar in habits, appearance, and voice, that it is strange they should have been chosen to represent the two unfortunate sisters Progne and Philomela.

From this poet of another age and country, I am not perhaps politic in recalling you at once to one of your own, in the address which shall close our studies on ornithology.

TO THE SWALLOW.

The Gorse is yellow on the heath,
The banks with speedwell flow'rs are gay,
The oaks are budding; and beneath
The hawthorn soon will bear the wreath,
The silver wreath of May.

The welcome guest of settled Spring,
The Swallow, too, is come at last;
Just at sunset, when Thrushes sing,
I saw her dash with rapid wing,
And hail'd her as she pass'd.

Come, Summer visitant—attach
To my reed roof your nest of clay,
And let my ear your music catch,
Low twitt'ring underneath my thatch,
At the gray dawn of day.

As fables tell, an Indian sage,
The Hindustani woods among,
Could, in his desert hermitage,
As if 'twere mark'd in written page,
Translate the wild-bird's song.

I wish I did his pow'r possess,
I then would learn, fleet bird, from thee,
All our vain systems only guess,
And know from what wide wilderness
You come across the sea.

I would a little while restrain
Your rapid flight, that I might hear,
Whether, on clouds that bring the rain,
You sail across the Western main,
The wind your charioteer ?—

Do Afric's plains, where ev'ry gale
Bears odours from the palmy grove,
Hear the loud cuckoo's frequent tale ?
There did you meet the vagrant rail ?
Or the low murm'ring dove ?

Were you in Asia ? O relate,
If there your fabled sister's woes
She seem'd incessant to narrate ;
Or sang she but to celebrate
Her nuptials with the Rose ?

I would inquire, how, journ'ying long
The wide and stormy ocean o'er,
You ply again those pinions strong,
And come anew, to build among
The scenes you left before.

But if, when colder breezes blow,
Prophetic of the waning year,
You hide, though none know when or how,
In some tall cliff's excaved brow,
And linger torpid here ;

What wondrous instinct bids you know
Approaching dearth of insect food ?
If to the will'wy aits you go,
And, crowding on the pliant bough,
Sink in the dimpled flood ;

How there, while cold waves eddying flow
Your transitory tomb above,
Learn ye when winds more mildly blow,
And the propitious moment know,
To rise to life and love?

Alas! how little can be known,
Her sacred veil where Nature draws!
Let baffled Science humbly own
Her myst'ries understood alone
By Him who gives her Laws.

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THE END.

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