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Author: Mary Elizabeth Southwell Dudley Leathley

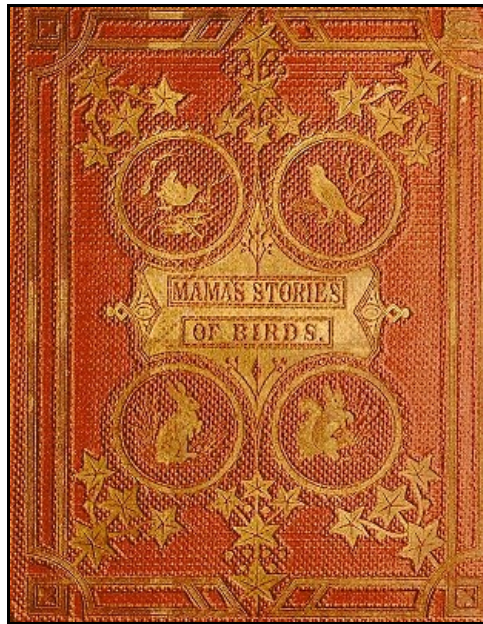
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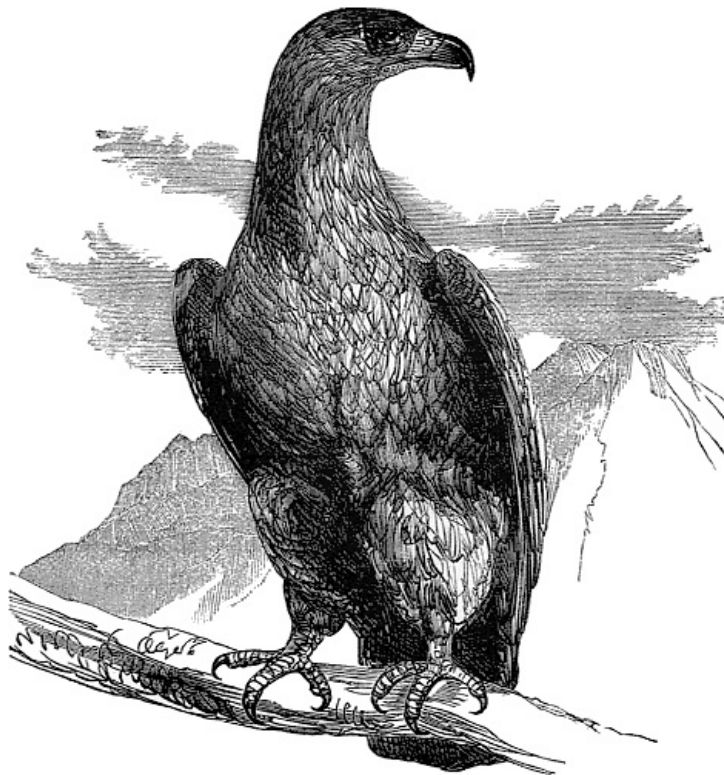
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MAMMA'S STORIES ABOUT BIRDS ***





THE EAGLE.

M A M M A ' S
S T O R I E S A B O U T B I R D S .

BY THE AUTHOR OF "CHICKSEED WITHOUT CHICKWEED."



LONDON:
DARTON AND CO., HOLBORN HILL.

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M A M M A ' S

STORIES ABOUT BIRDS.

THE EAGLE.

THE Eagle is often called the King of Birds, and therefore it is of him that we ought to speak first. Very likely you have often seen eagles in the Zoological Gardens, and, if so, you know what noble looking birds they are. But they seem very sad in their prison-houses, to which no kindness can ever attach them. They are formed to soar boldly to the top of some lonely mountain height, and there dwell far from the abode of men. And to chain them down upon a stunted branch, within reach of all who like to go and gaze upon them, seems treating them unworthily. One can almost fancy that they show by their sullen, brooding attitude, and sparkling eyes, how much they feel themselves degraded and out of place. I cannot tell you that the Eagle is of any real service to man, but every one who has been out amongst the mountains, reckons it a fine sight if he can catch a glimpse of one or more of these noble birds soaring in the air. Eagles are found in every country where there are mountains. In Ireland, and sometimes in England and Scotland, the large golden eagle is found, and is a very fine bird. In America there is an eagle called the Bird of Washington, which is so large that its wings spread out from seven to ten feet. The body of the bird is not so very much larger than a goose; but, as this eagle can fly as many as 140 miles in an hour, it wants very large strong wings to bear it onwards. The North American Indians—you have heard of them, have you not?—fine handsome looking men they are, though copper-coloured; and

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in former times before Columbus first found out America, the whole of that vast continent belonged to the Indians and had no other inhabitants;—well, these men have a great feeling of reverence for the eagle. They admire him very much, because he is bold, active, watchful, and patient in bearing with want. All these qualities the Indians value in men, and they say the eagle is noble above all birds because he possesses them. But for all that they kill him, and will watch for days to get a chance of shooting their prize. And they think his feathers the very finest ornament they can wear, and on grand occasions the chiefs deck themselves with eagles' plumes as a sign of their rank. These feathers are also used by them in making arrows. For the feathers of the eagle do not get spoiled by wet or pressure, as those of other birds would do, but always remain firm and strong.

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Another eagle is called the Erne, White-tailed, or Sea Eagle. These birds live near the seashore, and feed upon fish. Their sight is so piercing that they can mark a fish swimming far below them as they hover over the water, and, pouncing down, will strike their strong talons into it, and steer themselves and their prey ashore by their great outspread wings. The African Eagle is said to be very generous in his disposition, and certainly deserves to be called kingly. Although he will not allow any large bird to dwell in peace too near him, yet he never harms the little warblers who flutter round his nest. He will let them perch in safety upon it, and if they are attacked by any bird of prey, he is said even to fly to their protection.

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The eagle is, however, himself a bird of prey, and is often found a very troublesome neighbour. Hares, rabbits, poultry, nay, even lambs have been carried off by these powerful birds, for when excited by hunger they will attack even those creatures which are larger than themselves. Deer and even oxen have been pounced upon by eagles and buffeted about the head until they fell down quite helpless, but there are not many instances of this kind. We are also told of little children who have been carried up into their nests by the old birds as food for their young; and one very old story of the kind, taken from an old book in English history, I must tell you. "Alfred, king of the West Saxons, went out one day a hunting, and, passing by a certain wood, heard as he supposed the cry of an infant, from the top of a tree, and forthwith diligently inquiring of the huntsmen what that doleful sound could be, commanded one of them to climb the tree, when in the top of it was found an eagle's nest, and lo! therein a pretty sweet-faced infant, wrapped up in a purple mantle, and upon each arm a bracelet of gold, a clear sign that he was born of noble parents. Whereupon the king took charge of him, and caused him to be baptized, and because he was found in a nest, he gave him the name of Nestringam, and in after time, having nobly educated him, he advanced him to the dignity of an earl."

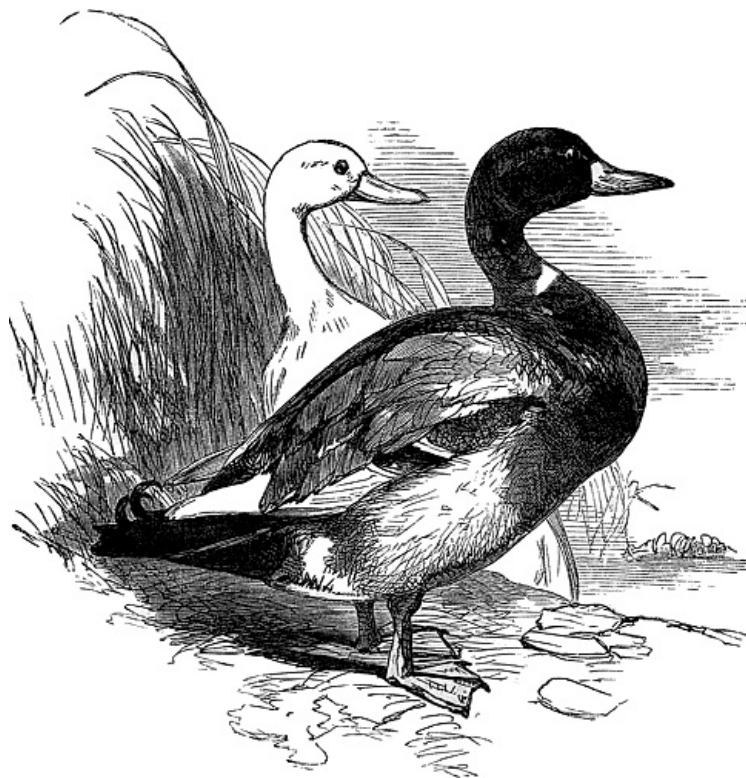
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Eagles are said to be very long lived; one died at Vienna that had lived in confinement more than one hundred years. Their cry consists of two notes, uttered in a loud sharp key. They make a flat nest, formed of loose sticks, on the top of some solitary rock where they are not likely to be disturbed, and lay two eggs. Whilst the young are not able to fly, they are carefully fed by the parent birds, who are then more fierce than usual, and forage everywhere for food, carrying off fawns, lambs, hares, &c., never, if possible, touching any animal already dead. Smith, in his history of Kerry, a county in Ireland, tells us of a poor man then living there, who got "a comfortable subsistence for his family during a summer of famine, out of an eagle's nest, by robbing the eaglets of the food the old ones brought." And lest he should lose this supply too soon, he was clever enough to cut the wings of the young birds when they were old enough to fly, so that the unsuspecting parents went on feeding them much longer than usual. Mr. Dunn says he once saw, while shooting on Rona's Hill, a pair of skua gulls chase and completely beat off a large sea eagle. The gulls struck at him several times, and at each stroke he screamed loudly, but never offered to return the assault.

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THE DUCK.

THE DUCK.

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THERE IS SO MUCH that is interesting to tell you about the duck, that I scarcely know where to begin. Most of you know something of the habits of the tame or domestic duck. But perhaps you have never noticed its curious bill, which is constructed so as to filter, through its toothed edges, the soft mud in which these birds love to dabble. The tongue of the duck is full of nerves, so that its sense of taste is very keen, and thus provided the bird can find out all that is savoury to its palate in puddles, ponds, etc., and throwing away all that is tasteless, swallow only what it likes. Try and examine the bill of the next duck that you see, and you will discover this wonderful apparatus which I have described as acting like a filter. The duck is very capable of affection for its owners, as the following fact will show. A farmer's wife had a young duck, which by some accident was deprived of its companions. From that moment all its love seemed to centre upon its mistress. Wherever she went the duck followed, and that so closely, that she was in constant fear of crushing it to death. With its age its affections seemed to strengthen, and it took up its abode in-doors, basking on the hearth, and delighting in notice. After some time other ducks were procured, and, to induce it to mix with its natural companions, the pet duck was driven out day by day; but there was great difficulty in weaning it from the kind friend to whom it had attached itself. We are told also of some ducklings who grew so fond of a great, savage house-dog, that though every one else was afraid of him, they showed no fear of his terrible bark; but, on the first approach of danger, would rush in a body to his side, and take shelter in his kennel. Wild ducks, or mallards, are very abundant in marshy places, and are a source of great profit. They are in some parts shot by means of a long gun which will kill at a greater distance than usual, because the duck, besides being very watchful and timid, has a keen sense of smell and hearing. In other places they are caught by decoys. These are thus contrived. A number of ducks, trained for the purpose, are employed to lead the wild fowl on and on through narrow wicker channels up to a funnel net. Hemp-seed is thrown in their way, as they advance, by the decoy-man, whose whistle is obeyed by the decoy-ducks, until the poor strangers are quite entrapped.

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China is said to be a wonderful place for rearing ducks, and, indeed, all poultry, but in Canton many people gain a good livelihood by bringing up ducks in particular. The eggs are hatched in ovens, and then the young ones are brought up by people who buy them from the hatchers. Sometimes the heat has been too great, and then the little ducks, even if hatched at all, soon die. The way by which those who buy them find out whether they are likely to live, is by holding them up by their beaks. If the heat has not been too great, they will sprawl out their little wings and feet, but if hatched too soon they hang motionless. They are fed on boiled rice, herbs, and little fish, chopped small. When old enough to learn to swim, they are put under the care of a clever old duck, trained to the business. A number of these ducks with their broods are sent down to the river in a sort of floating pen. In the evening a whistle, which the ducks well know, recalls them to the boat in which they were sent out. The instant this is heard the ducks come trooping in as fast as possible, followed by their pupils. In order to encourage them to be punctual, the first duck is rewarded with something nice, but the last one is whipped for its laziness. And it is said to be very funny to see how the ducks will waddle, and run, and fly over each other's backs, that they may escape the punishment which they know awaits the last straggler.

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As to the *use* we make of ducks, it is chiefly as an article of food the English duck is prized. But in the Northern regions, particularly in Iceland, there is a bird called the eider duck, which is

much valued on account of the soft and beautiful down which grows upon its breast, and is used for pillows and counterpanes, being wonderfully light, warm and elastic. These birds, though naturally solitary creatures, assemble in crowds at the breeding season, and build their nests in the roofs of the houses. They tear away this soft down as a cradle for their young. But the people rob the nests when they are finished, not only once, but sometimes, cruelly enough, a second time. For the poor birds, finding the down gone, tear a second supply from their loving bosoms. If the plunder be attempted more than twice, the birds are said to forsake the spot entirely. The eider duck has a curious method of teaching her young ones to swim. A few days after they are hatched she carries them some distance from shore on her back. Then, making a sudden dive, she leaves the little ones afloat and obliged to exert their own powers. Re-appearing at a little distance, she entices them towards her, and thus they at once become good swimmers.

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Before concluding, I will relate an instance of the sagacity often displayed by the tame or domestic duck. It is told by a gentleman named Mr. Saul:—

"I have now a fine duck which was hatched under a hen, there being seven young ones produced at the time. When these ducks were about ten days old, five of them were taken away from beneath the hen by the rats, during the nighttime, the rats sucking them to death and leaving the body perfect. My duck, which escaped this danger, now alarms all the other ducks and the fowls in the most extraordinary manner, as soon as rats appear in the building in which they are confined, whether it be in the night or the morning. I was awakened by this duck about midnight, and as I feared the rats were making an attack, I got up immediately, went to the building, and found the ducks uninjured. I then returned to bed, supposing the rats had retreated. To my surprise, next morning, I found that two young ducks had been taken from beneath a hen and sucked to death, at a very short distance from where the older duck was sitting. On this account, I got a young rat dog, and kept it in the building, and when the rats approach, the duck will rouse the dog from sleep, and as soon as the dog starts up, the duck resettles herself."

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THE QUAIL.

THE QUAIL.

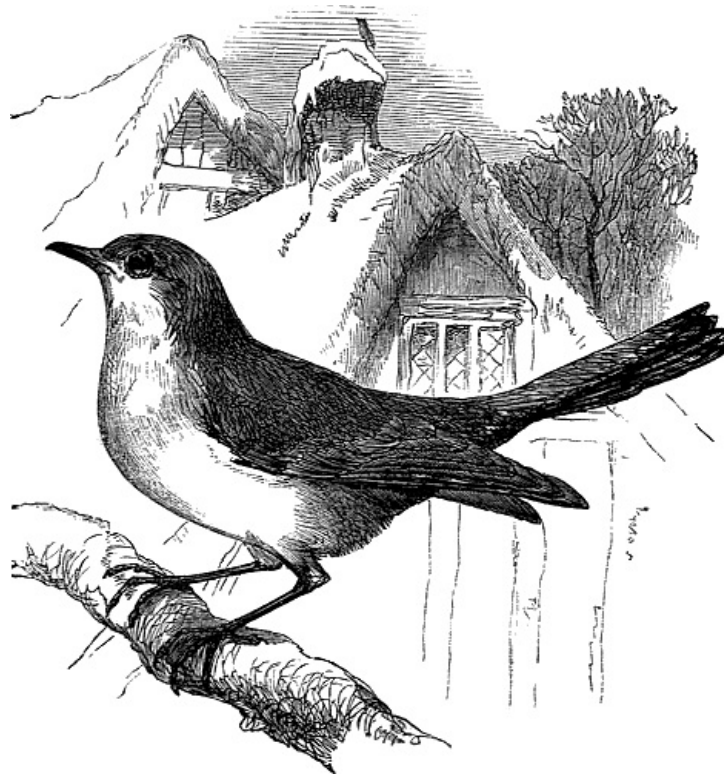
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THE quail is the smallest of the poultry tribe, and is a pretty little bird, something like a partridge, but not so large. I dare say you have sometimes seen quails alive in a poulterer's shop, where they are often displayed in long narrow cages, and are sadly crowded together. The quail is a migratory bird, except in those countries blessed with an equable temperature, such as Italy, Portugal, etc., where it is to be found in all seasons. In warm weather the quail visits our island, but nearly all those sold in London are brought from France, where they are caught in hundreds by means of a quail-pipe as it is called. This is a little instrument which imitates the cry or call of the quail so successfully that the bird is deceived, and, following the note, is easily ensnared. Africa is the head-quarters of quails in the winter, but in the summer they come in vast flocks and take up their abode in Europe and Asia. In the Crimea and Egypt they are caught in immense numbers whilst exhausted by their long flight. We are told in Stade's Travels in Turkey, that, "near Constantinople in the migrating season, the sun is often nearly obscured by the prodigious

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flights of quails, which alight on the coasts of the Black Sea, near the Bosphorus, and are caught by means of nets spread on high poles, planted along the cliff, some yards from its edge, against which the birds, exhausted by their passage over the sea, strike themselves and fall." The Arabs also catch quails by thousands in nets, when they visit Egypt, about harvest time. The observations of modern travellers have confirmed in a very interesting manner the account given us of quails in the Bible. Do not you remember reading of the multitude of quails that were sent by God as food for the children of Israel whilst wandering in the desert, when they grew tired of the sweet manna God had rained upon them from heaven, and desired flesh? "They gathered the quails," we are told, in great quantities, "and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp."—Numbers xi. 32. This was done in order to dry them, and this method of preserving not only quails, but other flesh and fish, is still followed by the Arabs. There is one particular island off the coast of Egypt where myriads of quails are caught, and, being stripped of their feathers, are dried in the burning sand for about a quarter of an hour, after which they are sold for as little as a penny a pound. The crews of those vessels which in that season lie in the adjacent harbour, have no other food allowed them. The quails, when migrating, fly so near the ground that they are very easily knocked down and secured. The nest of the quail is very simple. It consists merely of a few dried sticks in a wheat-field, and contains from twelve to eighteen pretty little green and brown eggs. The quail itself is very prettily coloured with black, chestnut, yellow, and white, and the males have a black collar round their throats. The old Romans would not eat the flesh of the quail, because it feeds on the grains of a poisonous plant. But we moderns are not so scrupulous, and find it very delicious food. I am sorry to tell you this little bird is so fond of fighting that there was an old proverb, "as quarrelsome as quails in a cage." And the Greeks and Romans kept quails on purpose to see them fight, as some people did formerly (I hope not now), game-cocks. Even to this day this is the custom in India and China.

I always like to conclude with a pretty story for you if I can, but I can find nothing likely to amuse you about the quail, except the following account of the Virginian quail, related by a gentleman residing in Canada. He "happened to have above a hundred at one period alive, and took much pleasure in the evening, watching their motions where they were confined. As it grew dusk, the birds formed themselves into coveys or parties of twelve or fifteen in a circle, the heads out and tails clustered in the centre. One bird always stood guard to each party, and remained perfectly stationary for half an hour, when, a particular *cluck* being given, another sentinel immediately took his place, and relieved him with as much regularity as any garrison could boast. It became a matter of further curiosity to observe how they would meet the extra duty occasioned by the havoc of the *cook*. For this also a remedy was found, and the gentleman remarked with admiration that, as their number decreased, the period of watch was extended from a half to a whole hour, in the same form, and with unfailling regularity."



THE ROBIN REDBREAST.

THE ROBIN REDBREAST.

EVERY little boy and girl well knows this pretty little bird. His bright eyes and rosy breast delight us even before we hear his lovely song. And do you not remember that when the babes in the wood were left alone, to die, by that cruel robber, after wandering about till they were so weary

that they lay down and slept the sleep of death, it was the Robin Redbreast who "painfully did cover them with leaves." One would think the robin must be very fond of little boys and girls. One thing I am sure of, and that is that they love him very dearly, that they delight in the very sound of his name, that they scatter crumbs upon the window sill for him in winter, and that they would not disturb his nest for all the world.

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Robins are not very often to be seen in the summer, for they fly far into the depths of woods and lonely places to rear their young. So amongst the chorus of sweet singers who make melody when leaves are green it is not very common to hear the voice of the robin, though he is said to sing very constantly by the side of his mate, whilst she sits upon her eggs or broods over her young ones. But in autumn, Robin comes nearer the abode of man, and it is difficult then in country places to skirt a field or wander in a lane, without seeing a brisk little bird with ruby breast perched upon the hedgerow, pouring forth a sweet and gentle song. This is the robin, and we love his notes all the more at a time when few other birds still sing. Nay, even in the winter when, the Nightingale and many other warblers have left our shores to spend the chilly months in some warmer climate, the robin only draws nearer to our homes, makes his abode in our gardens, pecks up the crumbs at our very doors, nay, often finds his way into our houses, and rewards every kindness shewn to him with the same sweet flood of song that he poured forth amidst the woods in the days of summer. Many very pretty stories are told of different robins who have been tamed by kindness until they seemed to lose almost all that fear of man which is generally so striking in birds.

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"The birds of heaven before us
fleet."

I have heard of one who came to live almost entirely in the chamber of a sick gentleman, and grew very fond of ground rice pudding, which was a favourite invalid dish. But the out-door feeding of robins is not so dainty in general, and I am sorry to tell you that, by those who have taken pains to watch robins, and study their wild habits, these birds are found not only to prey on live worms, which is natural enough, but also to spend much time and trouble to prepare the poor things for food, in a way that must be any thing but agreeable to the victims. For the robin does not eat the whole worm, only the outer skin, and, to get rid of the inner part, Mr. Robin takes the worm in his bill and dashes it about on a stone with great skill until he has effected his purpose. He is also a very pugnacious bird; that is he is very fond of fighting, I am sorry to tell you, but such is really the case. He will not allow other robins to build in the same bush with him. He never joins himself in friendly company with his fellows, and on occasion he can fight very heartily: so heartily that a lady who writes much that is delightful, of birds, and amongst them of robins, tells the following story. She was once sitting with a family party, when a cat rushed in with two robins in her mouth, which she had pounced upon in the garden whilst they were engaged in such a desperate battle that they did not see their enemy at hand. One head stuck out at each side of puss's mouth, but of course she was instantly seized and forced to let go her prey, when both robins flew away as if not much hurt. But for all this Robin Redbreast is a very charming little fellow, and well deserves a warm place in your regard.

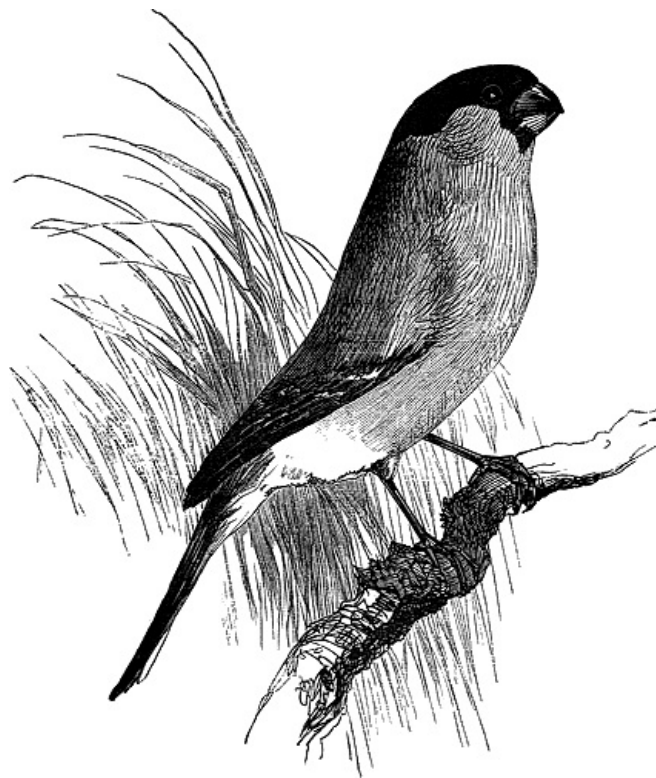
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Some years ago a pair of robins took up their abode in the parish church of Hampton, in Warwickshire, and affixed their nest to the church Bible as it lay on the reading desk. The vicar would not allow the birds to be disturbed, and, therefore, provided another Bible. Another instance is related where a clerk, in Wiltshire, found a robin's nest, containing two eggs, under the Bible on the reading desk. The bird was not disturbed, and laid four more, which were hatched in due season. The cock-bird actually brought food in its bill and fed the young brood during Divine service.

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THE BULLFINCH.

THE BULLFINCH.

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Look at the bright colours of this beautiful little bird: you can scarcely find one with prettier plumage or a sweeter note. His native song is not very remarkable, but he is so docile, and so readily taught to whistle different airs, that he is highly valued. Bullfinches are common enough in our woods and gardens, but gardeners are sad enemies to these little birds, declaring that they spoil trees by picking off their buds. It is, however, now thought by intelligent persons that the only buds destroyed by the bullfinch are those infested with insects, so that he really confers a benefit on us instead of doing mischief. Almost all the piping bullfinches as they are called, kept in cages in this country, are brought from Germany, where much care is devoted to their instruction in the art of music. In their education the following method is pursued. "The birds are taken from the nests of wild ones when about ten days old, and are brought up by a person who is very kind and attentive to them, so that they very soon grow gentle and tame. As soon as they begin to whistle their studies commence, they being then about two months' old. Formed into classes of six or so, they are kept a little while hungry and in the dark, whilst the tune they are to learn is played over to them on a bird-organ, which has a sort of bird-like note. Over and over again the same air is repeated, until, one by one, the birds begin to imitate what they hear. Directly they do this, light is admitted, and they have a little food given to them. By this means the birds learn to think of the tune and their dinners at the same time, and directly they hear the organ will begin to whistle. They are then turned over to the care of boys, whose sole business it is to go on with their education, each boy having a separate bird placed under his charge, and he plays away from morning to night, or as long as the birds can pay attention, during which time their first teacher, or feeder, goes his rounds, scolding or rewarding his feathered scholars by signs and modes which he has taught them to understand, until they become so perfect, and the tune, whatever it may be, so imprinted on their memory, that they will pipe it for the remainder of their lives."

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Bullfinches that are perfect in their song, are worth a great deal of money. Both the male and female sing, but the colours of the male are the brightest. These birds, however, in confinement, lose their brilliancy of hue, and, from growing duskiest and duskiest, sometimes become entirely black, as if putting on mourning for their lost liberty. The same change has been observed in a bird which lost its mate to whom it had been tenderly attached. It is principally for its power of imitation and memory that this bird is prized. His wild notes, when loud, are not particularly sweet, but at times are very soft and plaintive.

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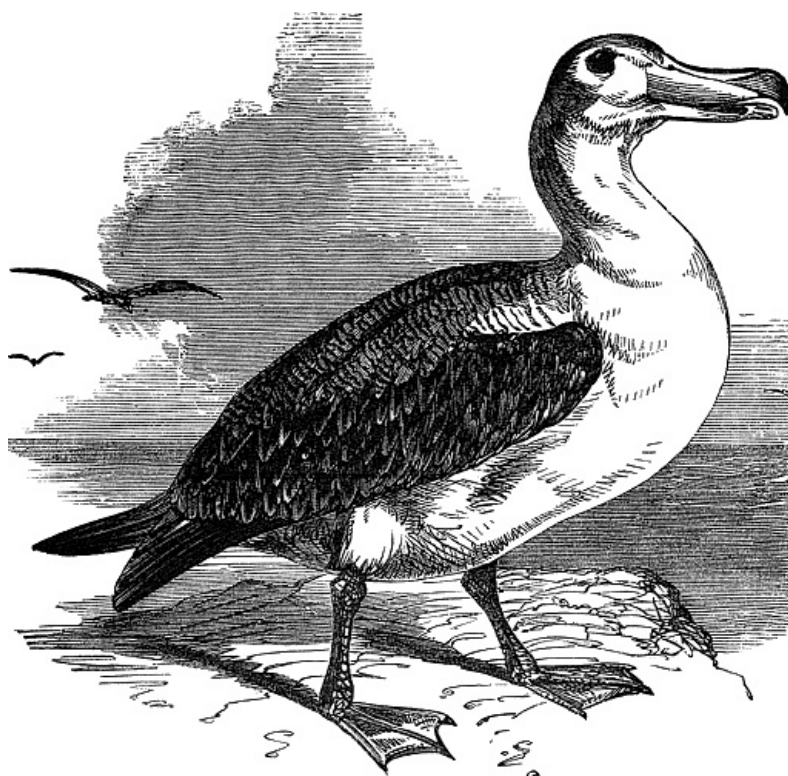
I will conclude with a pretty and affecting little story of a piping bullfinch that once belonged to Sir William Parsons. When young he was a great musician, and had taught his bullfinch to sing "God Save the King." On going abroad, he committed his feathered friend to the care of his sister, with many injunctions to be watchful of its health and happiness.

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On his return she told him the little bird had seemed pining away, and was then very ill. Grieved to hear this news, Sir William went at once to the room where it was kept, and, putting his hand into the cage, called the little creature. It knew the voice of the dear master for whom it had so pined and, opening its eyes and shaking its disordered feathers, as if to do him honour, staggered on to his finger, piped "God Save the King," and then fell dead.

THIS is the largest of all sea-birds, and you are not very likely to make acquaintance with him except in a picture. For though the albatross has been seen in our latitudes, yet the southern seas are his native home. There he spreads his long wings and floats over the ocean like a white sailing. The greater part of his feathers are white, but the head and back are shaded with grey. There are many kinds of albatross, but the great Wandering Albatross, as it is called, is the largest, and though the body is not much bigger than that of a pelican, the wings, which are long and narrow, have been known to measure as much as fourteen feet across when fully expanded, or spread out. Must he not look a noble bird, sailing as he does calmly round and round, far up in the air, over those southern seas? From the length of his wings, the albatross has some little trouble in raising himself from the surface of the water, where he often floats at rest. He has to skim along half flying and half running for some distance, until his wings are clear of the water; then he soars away, seldom flapping his wings, but rising, sinking, and floating through the air, as if kept up by some internal power. As he seldom is obliged to flap his wings he does not get tired of flying, and can remain on the wing for a very, very long time, pursuing his prey, or enjoying the sailing motion through the air.

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THE ALBATROSS.

The albatross feeds on fish or on smaller sea-fowl, and is a very voracious bird; that is, he will eat a great quantity, and devours in a greedy way. His chief food consists of flying-fish, as they are called. The flying-fish is a little like the common herring, but much prettier, for it is covered with bright blue and silver scales, and its fins are also a brilliant azure. It does not really fly. That is, it has no wings, but it has very large strong fins attached near its gills, by means of which it can spring out of the water and dart some distance through the air. This fish is very nice eating, *particularly* good, and it is sought after very eagerly by larger fish. And not only by fish; the water-fowl who are large enough to eat it, are always on the watch for the flying-fish, and as the poor thing springs from the water to enjoy the bright sunshine and fresh air, or perhaps to escape some of its under-water foes, especially the dolphin who is one of its deadliest enemies, it frequently finds itself snapped up by the albatross before it can return to its native element. The albatross loves also to follow in the wake of ships. For any offal or garbage thrown overboard is welcome to its hungry maw, and sailors do not often destroy this bird. When one is taken, however, they hesitate not to make such use of it as they can; and the large web feet, when cleaned and opened, are favourite tobacco pouches. I have one by me that was taken from a large albatross caught on the voyage from Australia. In Kamtschatka the albatross is caught by the natives and made useful. For in the summer, flocks of these birds make their way up into the northern latitudes, as is supposed in order to prey on the shoals of fish which migrate thither.

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The albatross is caught by means of a hook baited with a fish. The "intestines are blown and used as buoys for nets, and the long hollow wing bones as tobacco pipes," but the flesh is not good to eat. The albatross has been seen fully 1000 miles from any shore. Its power of wing must therefore be very great, but when tired it can walk on the water with its strong webbed feet, and the sound of its tread is said to be heard at a great distance. In the breeding season the albatross retires in company with other sea-birds, particularly the penguin, to some rocky shore to build its nest. The penguins' and albatrosses' nests are always found in company, but the penguin robs his neighbour in order to get the scanty materials which are necessary for his own nest. The male

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albatross takes turns with his mate in hatching the young.

A poor sailor once fell over board from a man-of-war in the Southern Indian Ocean. In an instant he was attacked by two or three albatrosses, and though the ship's boat was immediately lowered to his assistance, nothing of him could be found but his hat, which was pierced through and through by the strong beak of the albatross, the first blow having no doubt penetrated to his brain and killed him.

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THE OWL.

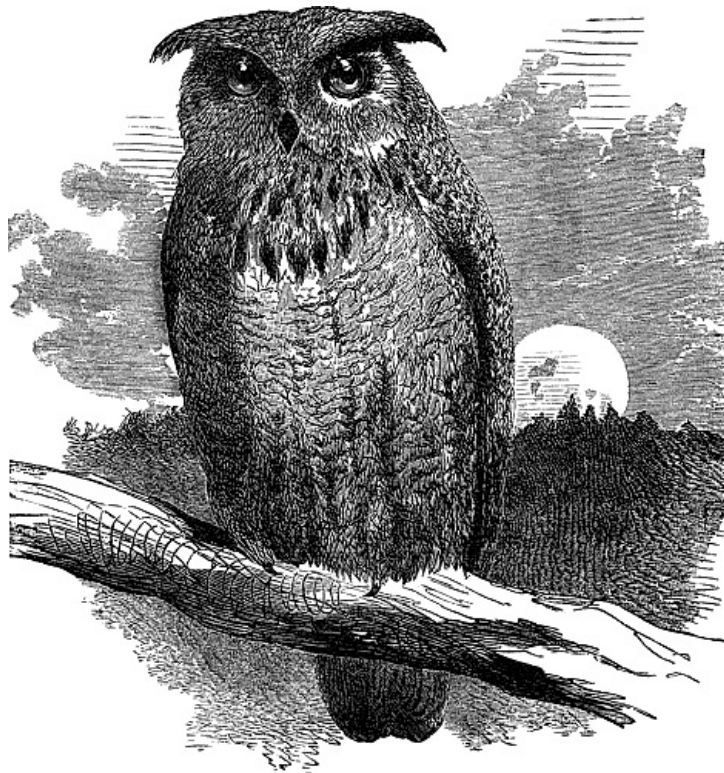
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THIS solemn looking bird is seldom to be seen by day. It is strictly a night bird. Its eyes are unable to endure the glare of sunshine, but are formed for seeing in the dim twilight, or in the soft radiance of the moon. There are at least eighty different species of owls. This picture resembles most nearly the Virginian Eagle Owl, an American bird. Our common barn-door owl has no tufts on its head. Some people are foolish and cruel enough to persecute owls, under the plea that they do mischief, destroy pigeon's eggs, etc. But this is a false charge. On the contrary they are very actively useful creatures, and the humane naturalist, Mr. Waterton, says that "if this useful bird caught his food by day instead of hunting it by night, mankind would have ocular demonstration of its utility in thinning the country of mice, and it would be protected and encouraged everywhere. It would be with us what the ibis was with the Egyptians." The ibis is a bird that was found so useful in destroying locusts and serpents in Egypt, that in olden times it was made a capital crime for any one to destroy it. Nay, the idolatrous Egyptians went further, and not only paid divine honours to this bird, worshipping it as a deity whilst alive, but embalmed its body after death, and preserved it in the form of a mummy. You may see many ibis mummies in the Egyptian rooms of the British Museum. Through God's goodness there is no danger of our going quite so far as the Egyptians even if we did do justice to the poor abused owl, and it is very much to be wished that people would learn to see its valuable qualities. There is no doubt owls are amongst the creatures given to us by God to do us real service in keeping down the increase of smaller animals, that would otherwise soon over-run and destroy our food. But as Mr. Waterton elsewhere says, prejudices are hard to overcome, and I suppose the poor owl will be hunted and killed, whenever he is to be found by the ignorant, to the end of the chapter. Some idea may be formed of the rapid clearance an owl would make of vermin from a barn, from the fact that, when he has young, he will bring a mouse to the nest every twelve or fifteen minutes. Mr. Waterton saw his barn owl fly off with a rat he had just shot. And at another time she plunged into the water and brought up in her claws a fish, which she carried away to her nest. The Barn Owl is white, and does not hoot, at least by many this is thought to be the case. The Brown Owl is the hooting or screech owl, and makes a very dismal noise.

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THE OWL.

The owl can do without drinking for a very long time. Mr. White, of Selborne, says he knew a Brown Owl to live a whole year without water. The owl swallows its prey whole when small, and afterwards brings up from its crop the fur, bones, and other parts that cannot easily be digested, in the form of a round cake. Hawks are said to do the same thing.

The great Virginian Owl is of an immense size, and its cry is said to be very terrible when heard in the lonely American forests, resembling at times the last struggling scream of a person being throttled. Owls will eat raw meat, but their favourite food consists in young mice, and they may often be seen at twilight, hunting like sporting dogs round the meadow paths for field-mice which come out at that hour, and going back every five minutes or so to their nests, to see that all is well at home.

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If by chance an owl appears in daylight, he is immediately attacked by all the smaller birds, who know their enemy, and feel pleasure in insulting him when he cannot revenge himself. For the owl grows so confused if he lingers abroad till the sun has risen, that he cannot find his way back to his nest, nor make head against his pursuers, as he would soon do in the dim twilight. Bird fanciers have been known to take advantage of this circumstance in Italy, and tying an owl to a tree in daylight, they lime all the surrounding branches. Troops of little birds soon find out their helpless foe, and hurrying to attack him with their little beaks and claws, they perch on the limed twigs, and are taken by scores.

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The Snowy Owl inhabits the north of Europe, but is sometimes seen in more southern regions. It pursues hares, of which it is particularly fond, and often snatches fish from the water, over which it slowly sails, with a sudden grasp of its foot. It often also accompanies sportsmen, that it may share in the sport. In winter, when this owl is fat, the Indians esteem the Snowy owl to be good eating. Its flesh is delicately white.

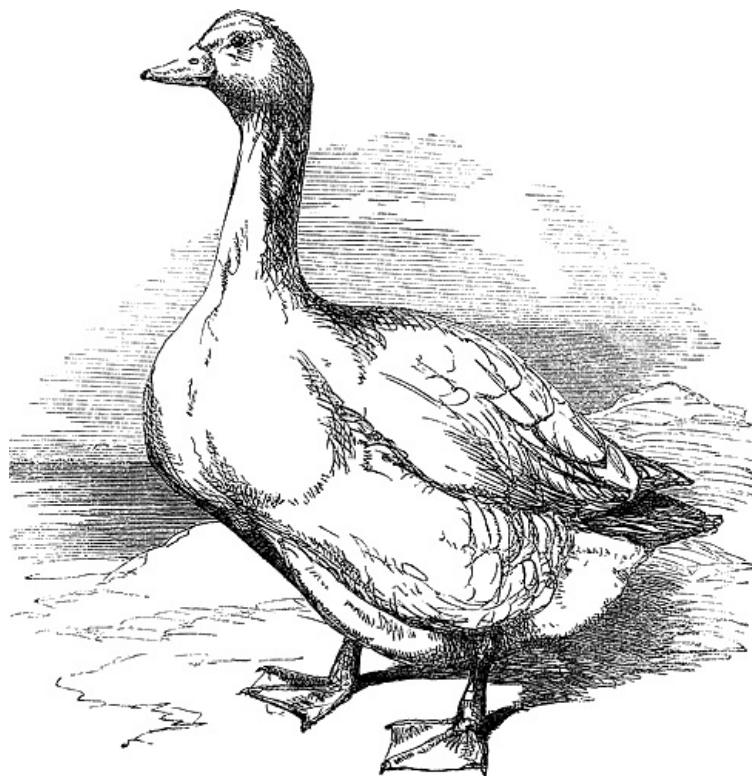
THE GOOSE.

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HAVE you not often heard people say "as silly as a goose"? Now I am going to tell you that the goose is one of the most sensible birds we know, and not only sensible, but very affectionate, and exceedingly useful to man. I will tell you some stories of Mrs. Goose presently, which will show you her real character. But I must begin with her uses. The goose is to be found in almost every country, and its flesh is very good eating; but it is principally for its feathers and quills that it is valued here. The quills, from which our pens, and in part our paint brushes, are made, are plucked from the pinions of the goose, and the best featherbeds and pillows are stuffed with her feathers. Geese love water and marshy places, and Lincolnshire, which is a fenny place, is famous for breeding them. People there make it their business to keep perhaps as many as a thousand geese, which, in the course of a year, will increase seven-fold, the geese being kept in the houses, and even bedrooms, of their owners whilst hatching, and a person called a gozzard having the charge of them. They are plucked, poor things, for their feathers as often as five times a year, and for their quills once. Even the young goslings of six weeks' old are deprived of their tail feathers, in order, as it is said, to accustom them to this cruel operation. When ready for the London market, the geese are marched slowly up from Lincolnshire to London, in flocks of from two to nine thousand. Being slow travellers, they are on foot from three in the morning to nine in the evening, and during that time get through about nine miles.

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THE GOOSE.

Amongst the Romans this bird was held sacred to Juno, their supreme heathen goddess;

indeed, it appears to have been looked upon with reverence by all ancient nations, and not longer ago than the time of the Crusades, a goose was carried as a standard from our own country by an irregular band of crusaders. Possibly in former times the good qualities of the goose were better known than now; for the sagacity and affection of this bird have been proved by so many well authenticated instances, that I am at a loss which to select for your entertainment, and must try to choose those you are least likely to have met with already. As a proof of the goose's sagacity, is the following. A goose begun to sit on six or eight eggs, when the dairy maid, thinking she could hatch a larger number, put in as many duck eggs, which could scarcely be distinguished from the others. On visiting the nest next morning, all the duck eggs were found put out of the nest on the ground. They were replaced, but the next morning were again found picked out and laid outside, whilst the goose remained sitting on the whole of her own eggs. Lest she should abandon the nest altogether, she was not troubled with the strange eggs again, but allowed to rear her own children in peace. There are a vast number of stories told of singular and strong attachments formed by geese to people. We hear of one old gander who used to lead his old blind mistress to church, graze in the churchyard during the service (for I ought to have told you that geese eat grass like oxen), and then lead her home again. A goose attached itself so strongly to its master that it forsook for him the society of its fellows, followed him wherever he went, even through the crowded streets, sat, if allowed, upon his lap, and responded with a cry of delight to every sound of his voice. Even to other animals the goose has been known to show strong affection. There was once a goose who had been saved by a dog from the ravenous jaws of a fox. She seemed from that time to centre all her affection on her preserver, left the poultry yard for his side, tried to bite any one at whom she heard him bark, and, if driven away into the field, would sit all day at the gate from which she could gaze on her friend. The dog at last fell ill, but the faithful goose would not leave him, and would have died, for want of food, at his side had not corn been put near the kennel. The dog died, but she would not leave the kennel, and I am sorry to tell you that when a new dog was brought, very much like the old one, as she ran to greet him, hoping it was her old friend restored, he seized her by the neck and put an end to her faithful life. One more story I must tell you, though I have already said so much. A game cock had cruelly attacked a goose on her nest, and even pecked out one of her eyes. The gander took his mate's part, and fought over and over again with the enemy. One day, during his absence, the game cock attacked the goose again, when the gander, hearing a noise, ran up, and, seizing the cock, dragged him into the pond where he ducked him repeatedly until he had made an end of him. In Russia, ganders are taught to fight each other, and a trained gander has been known to sell for twenty pounds.

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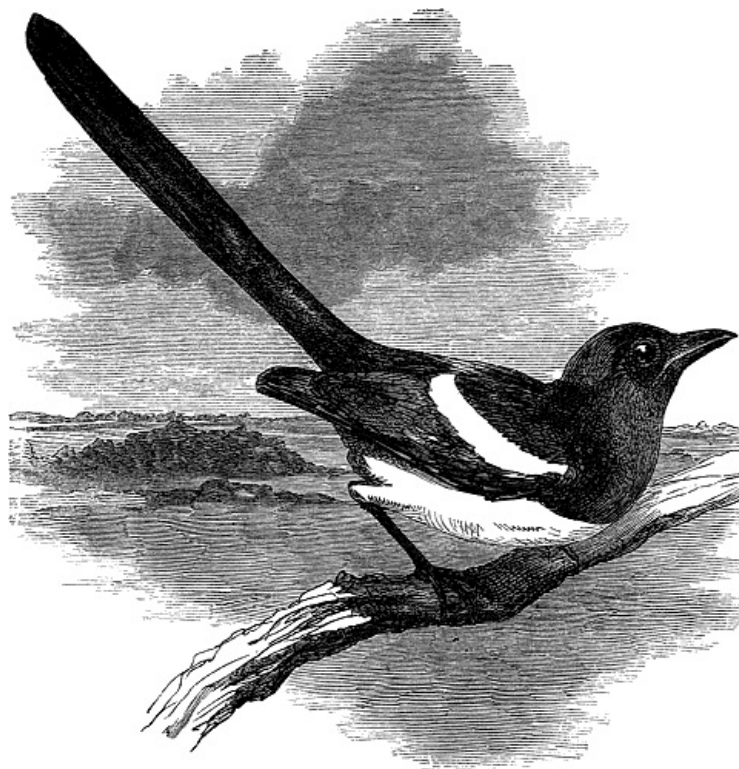
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There is a very beautiful goose called the Egyptian Goose, or goose of the Nile. Its feathers are very handsomely marked with black, brown, green, and white. It is the goose so often represented, in old fresco paintings of heathen temples, by the ancients. This goose is famous for its devotion to its young. The old birds will remain with their offspring during times of most imminent danger, refusing to save themselves and leave their young in peril.

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The Canada Goose is also another prettily-marked variety of goose. And although not a native of this country, its migratory habits often bring it to this shore.



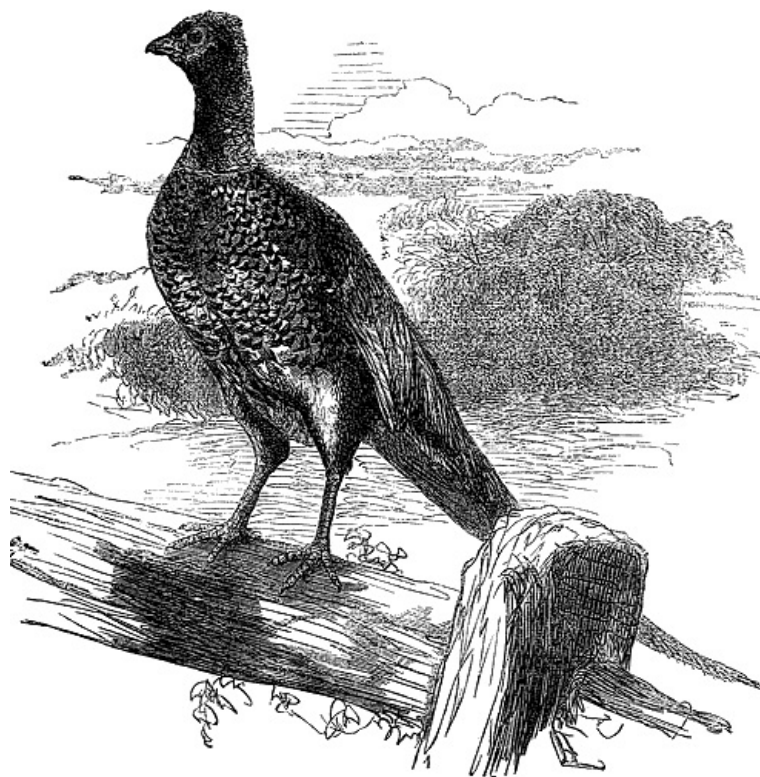
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THE MAGPIE.

THE Magpie is a very pretty and cunning bird. It is easy to teach it to speak, and it may be rendered very tame. Where high trees abound, the magpie chooses the very highest and most difficult to climb for its nest. But otherwise, when secure of not being injured, it will often build in low bushes round about houses. This is particularly the case in Norway and Sweden, where an idea prevails that it is unlucky to kill them.

An interesting account is given by a gentleman of a pair of magpies that built for several successive years in a gooseberry bush near a house in Scotland, where there were no trees for a considerable distance. In order to secure themselves from cats, &c., they brought briars and thorns in quantities all round the bush, and pulled rough prickly sticks so closely and in such numbers in amongst the branches, that even a man would have found the greatest difficulty in getting at their soft warm little abode within. The barrier all round was more than a foot thick. They were kindly protected by the family to whom the garden belonged, but one day the hen magpie was ungrateful enough to seize a little chicken, which she carried up to the top of the house to eat; the poor little thing screamed loudly. But the hen, who can be brave enough when her young are in danger, hearing the cry, flew to the rescue, and soon obtained possession of her chick, which she brought safely down in her beak; nor did it utter one cry then, though I daresay mamma pinched it sadly. I think I can find you one more pleasing story of the magpie. Some boys once took a raven's nest and put it in a waggon in a cart-shed. A magpie, whose nest they had also plundered, hearing the young birds cry, came to them with food, and continued to supply the little ravens until they were given away by the boys.

In Sweden, as I said before, neither the magpie nor its eggs are ever touched, whilst Mr. Hewitson, writing of Norway, says: "The magpie is one of the most abundant, as well as the most interesting of the Norwegian birds; noted for its sly, cunning habits here, its altered demeanour there is the more remarkable. It is upon the most familiar terms with the inhabitants, picking close about their doors, and sometimes walking inside their houses. It abounds in the town of Drontheim, making its nest upon the churches and warehouses. We saw as many as a dozen of them at one time seated upon the gravestones in the churchyard. Few farm-houses are without several of them breeding under the eaves, their nest supported by the spout. In some trees close to houses their nests were several feet in depth, the accumulation of years of undisturbed and quiet possession."



THE PHEASANT.

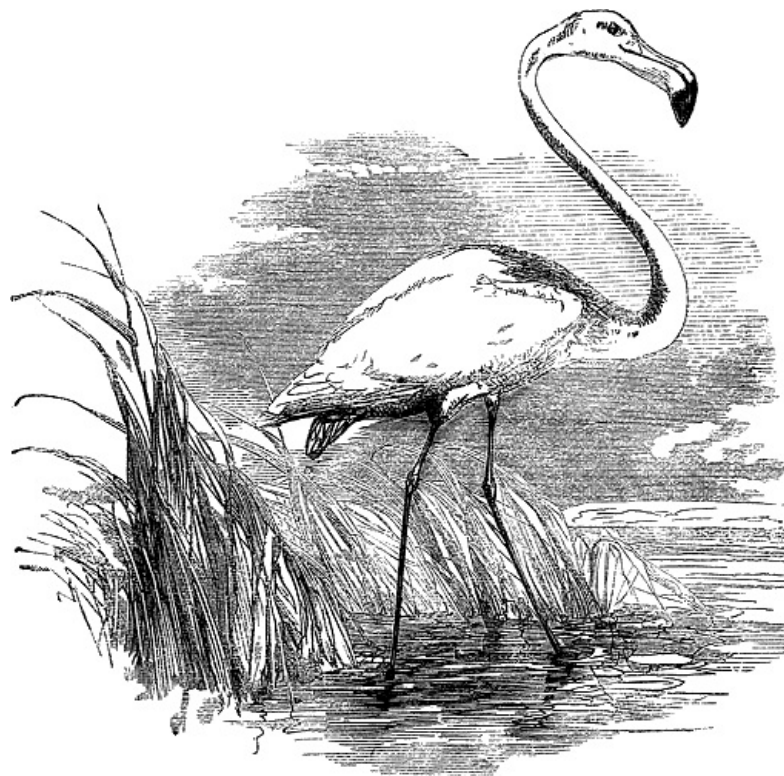
THE PHEASANT.

THIS beautiful bird comes originally from the East, and takes its name from the river Phasis, in Colchis, Asia Minor, whence it was first brought to Europe by the Argonauts. The pheasant is one of the most beautiful of all fowls, and can only be rivalled by the peacock. The shifting hues upon his neck, and the brilliant scarlet and black around his head, strike every beholder with admiration. Pheasants are very good to eat, but sportsmen are not allowed to shoot them until the 1st of October, in order that they may have time to rear their young. In ancient times the

pheasant was held in reverence by the heathen, and it was only on the most solemn occasions that they were used as food, and then only by the emperors of Rome. There are no pheasants in America, and, on account of their short wings and heavy bodies, they never fly from one country to another. But they increase very rapidly in number, a single pair having been known to produce as many as 183 eggs in a season. The sportsman, however, takes care to keep their numbers within due limits. Their habit of squatting or sitting so close to the earth, has been supposed to be an instinctive act to save themselves from the attacks of the hawk, who is unable to master his prey, if large and strong, near the ground, where it could offer resistance. I have met with a story of a pheasant which proves that this bird is very bold and courageous. "A young lady walking alone a few miles from Stirling (in Scotland), observed a beautiful cock pheasant perched on a stone by the road side. Instead of showing timidity at her approach, he flew down upon her, and, with spurs and beak, began a furious assault. Being closely pursued, and seeing no way of escape from the enraged bird, she adopted the only alternative that was left, namely, of seizing her adversary, whom she carried home, but soon afterwards released; on the door being opened, however, he went out without any sign of fear, and, with a deliberate step, paced backwards and forwards in front of the house, and manifested an inclination to join the fowls in the poultry yard. It should be remarked that the young lady, when attacked, wore a scarlet mantle, which probably excited the irritability of the pheasant, as it is well known to do that of the turkey-cock, and some other animals."

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Wild pheasants feed on grain, seed, green leaves, and insects. They have been seen as eager as country children after the ripe blackberries in the hedges, or, later in the year, after sloes and haws. The root of the buttercup is also a very favourite food of the pheasant, and they will eat greedily of acorns. When kept in confinement, the young birds require very careful feeding with ants' eggs, and many other kinds of soft provision.



THE FLAMINGO.

THE FLAMINGO.

Is not this a beautiful bird, though rather singular in its appearance? To see it in perfection we should have to travel at least as far as Sardinia, and possibly to Africa, its native country. Observe its wonderfully long and slender legs. They are so formed as to enable it to wade into morasses, or even rivers, in quest of food, but it can also swim, when so disposed, being perfectly web-footed. The beak of the flamingo is not less remarkable than its legs, and it seems puzzling, until we know the truth, how the bird can gather up its food from mud and water, with that awkward turned-in bill. But the fact is, that the flamingo feeds very differently to other birds, turning the back of its head to the ground, and spooning up the mud or water in which it finds its sustenance with the upper mandible. It is able to do this very easily from the unusual length of its neck, and the beak is provided with the means of filtering the mud, as I told you that of the duck is also. But in this instance the apparatus provided is said to act more like the whalebone sieve possessed by the whale. The brilliant plumage of the flamingo is very beautiful. M. de la Marmora, in his "Voyage to Sardinia," speaks in great admiration of the effect produced by a flock of flamingoes in the air. These birds are gregarious—that is, they live in large companies, and when returning from Africa to the borders of a lake, which is one of their favourite haunts,

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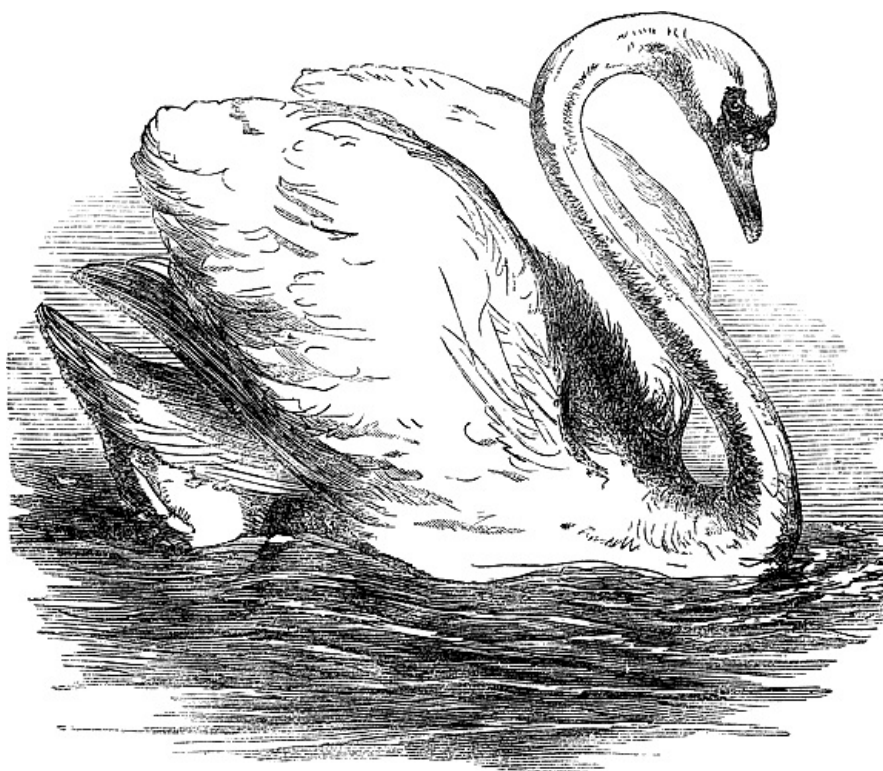
near Cagliari, all the inhabitants are attracted by the splendour of their appearance. Like a triangular band of fire in the air, they gradually come onwards, until within sight of the lake. Poised on the wing for an instant, they hang motionless over the end of their weary flight; then, by a slow circular movement, they trace a spiral descent and range themselves like a line of soldiers in battle array upon the borders of the lake. But no one dares approach them more nearly, for the air from the lake is at this season, though perfectly harmless to the flamingo, deadly poison to a human creature. [89]

Taught by God, the flamingo has, however, another means of security than the malaria from the intrusion which its brilliant colouring would be sure to draw upon it. In other respects, besides its red coat, it has been compared to the soldier. When feeding or resting (which they do on one leg, the other drawn up close to the body, and the head under the wing), the flamingoes are drawn up in lines, and sentinels, very watchful ones too, are placed to guard these shy and cautious birds. At the first appearance of danger, the sentinel flamingo utters a loud cry, much resembling the sound of a trumpet, upon which the whole flock instantly takes flight, and always in the form of a triangle. [90]

Do not you think sitting on her eggs must be rather cramping work for the flamingo with those long legs? But I will tell you how cleverly she contrives. Instead of building a nest on the ground, where she would find it impossible to cower closely enough over her eggs to keep them warm, the flamingo heaps up a hill of earth so high, that she can sit comfortably upon it with her long legs dangling, one on each side. At the top is a hollow just large enough to hold her two or three white eggs. A full-grown flamingo stands between five and six feet high. There is another species of this bird much smaller, called the little flamingo. The Romans ate these birds, and Heliogabalus, the profane Emperor, delighted in a dish of their tongues, which are large, considering the size of the bird. In modern times, however, the flesh is rejected as fishy, but the feathers are highly valued. [91]

THE SWAN. [92]

You are no doubt well acquainted with this beautiful bird, and have perhaps fed some of its species, by the ornamental waters of the parks. Or perhaps, and that is far better, you have seen it sailing majestically down the river Thames, free and unconfined, enjoying its perfect liberty. The swan has been called a royal bird, being formerly regarded as the exclusive property of the crown, and even now there are but few exceptions to the rule. The royal swans, that is those belonging to the Crown, are marked in a particular manner on the bill, and every year, on the first Monday in August, men, now called swan-hoppers (a corruption of the old term swan-uppers, because they went up the river after the swans), proceed up the Thames to mark the young swans hatched during the year. The Dyers' Company and the Vintners' Company also own swans in the Thames, which were granted to them in olden times. The Vintners' mark for their swans is a nick or notch on each side of the beak, from which their swans have been called, merrily, "swans with two necks" (nicks). Perhaps you have heard of an inn, which has a swan with two necks as a sign; now you will understand how it came by so strange a name. [95]



THE SWAN.

The swan builds his nest of sticks near the river side, generally amongst the reeds. If disturbed, the male bird assumes a very warlike attitude, and will attack the intruder with great violence. The swan is a strong, powerful bird, and I have heard of a boy whose arm was broken by a blow from a swan's wing, because he ventured too near the nest. But when not sitting, swans are harmless, gentle birds. They live to a great age, feeding on coarse grass and water-weeds. Young swans are called cygnets, and are at first quite grey or light brown; they do not become perfectly white until the beginning of the third year. The swan is not a native of our island, but comes originally from the East, and is, when in a state of nature, migratory in its habits. One species of wild swan, called the Hooper, or Whistling Swan, spends the winter in warm climates, sometimes flying as far south as Africa, and returns in spring to Iceland, Norway, Lapland, and Siberia. This bird is hunted eagerly by the Icelanders for its soft white down. The season chosen is the moulting time, when the poor birds, having lost their quill feathers, are unable to fly away; and with trained dogs which catch them by the neck, and little ponies which ride them down, the swans are taken in great numbers. [96] [97]

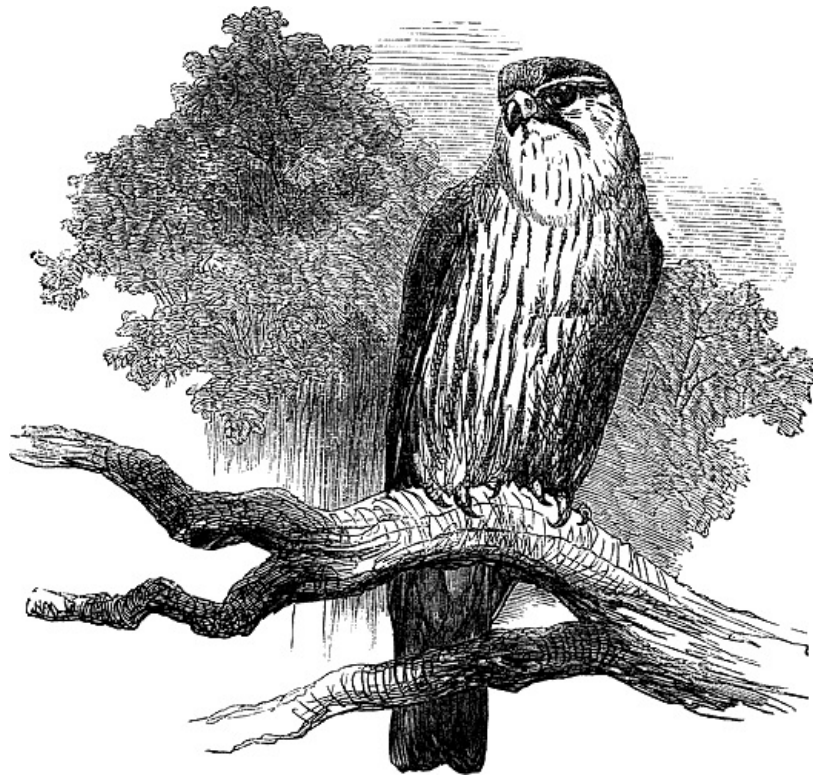
The Black Swan is another variety, found in Australia. Formerly this bird was considered very rare, but now it may be seen any day in one or other of the parks. Swans are very particular in not allowing their neighbours to intrude on their domains. If a strange swan comes to that part of the river which has been already appropriated, he is instantly pursued and compelled to return to his own family. Once two White Swans attacked a poor Black Swan on the lake in the Regent's Park, and at last drove him ashore so exhausted that he fell dead. The White Swans kept sailing up and down to the spot where he fell, with every feather on end, and apparently proud of their conquest. Swans are fond of their young, and the mother will often carry her young ones to another part of the river on her back. Cygnets are good to eat, and the corporation of Norwich, who boast this treat at their public dinners, are bound, by some old regulation, to present the Duke of Norfolk every year with an immense cygnet pie. [98]

The Wild Swan has a very loud call, and utters a melancholy cry when one of the flock is killed. The Wild Swans of Hudson's Bay furnish the finest quills used for writing. Swans and their eggs are still protected by several statutes, and to steal the latter is felony.

I will copy for you an instance in which a swan once showed that wonderful instinct with which all animals are gifted by God. "Whilst sitting on her eggs, she was one day seen to be very busy, collecting weeds, grasses, and other materials to raise her nest. A farming man was ordered to take down half a load of haulm, with which she most industriously elevated her nest and eggs two feet and a half. That very night there came down a tremendous fall of rain, which flooded all the malt-kilns, and did great damage. *Man* made no preparation, the *bird* did. Her eggs were above, and only just above, the water." [99]

THE KESTREL. [100]

THIS picture represents the kestrel, one of the smallest and most beautiful of hawks. The hawk is a bird of prey, feeding on small birds, chickens and mice. In order to secure his prey the hawk holds himself suspended, as it were, in the air on his wide spread wings, until he sees a favourable opportunity, and then suddenly pounces down upon his victim. Other birds well know the predatory habits of the hawk, and when one appears in sight they fly with loud screams of fear. Little chickens throw themselves upon their backs, if one hovers over the poultry yard, from some instinctive notion of defending themselves with their feet, whilst all the hens shriek in concert, and prepare for a desperate defence. But though so great an enemy of young poultry, a singular instance is recorded of a hawk, which not only sat upon the eggs of a common fowl, but even attended with great care to the little ones when they were hatched. [103]



THE KESTREL.

Many of the different kinds of hawk were used in olden times for a sport called hawking. That is, they were trained to fly at game and return with it to their masters. Large gay parties of ladies and gentlemen used then to go out on horseback with their hawks for a day's sport, just as now they go for a pic-nic, or a day in the woods. This was before guns were used. But to this day hawking is practised in China, where the emperor goes on "sporting excursions with his grand falconer and a thousand of inferior rank; every bird having a silver plate fastened to its foot, with the name of the falconer who has the charge of it." The bird used on these occasions is the species known as the Gos-hawk, which was always with us most highly esteemed in falconry. These birds were carried on the wrist, bells were hung to their legs, and their heads were hooded or covered until the moment came for letting them fly at the game. Whilst under training a string was fastened to them that they might be "reclaimed," as it was called, at the pleasure of their owners. The person, who carried the hawk, wore gloves to protect his hand from the sharp talons of the bird. The kestrel migrates in autumn, going away at the same time with the larks, which are its favourite food.

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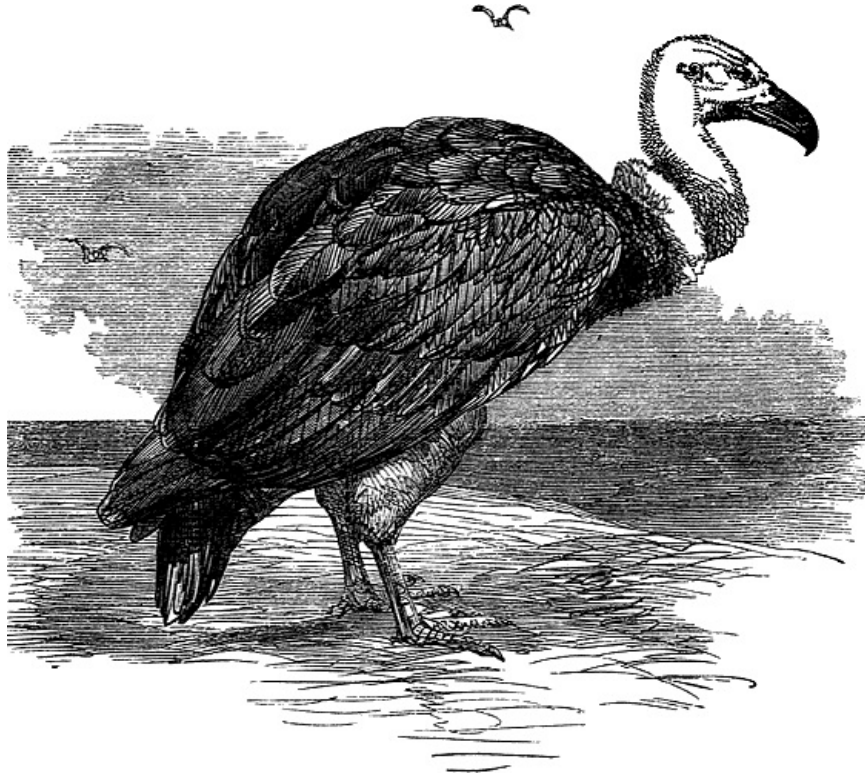
The Sparrow-hawk is a larger and fiercer bird, and the one that preys most frequently on chickens. A gentleman once missed a great many chickens from his poultry yard, and, after a little careful watching, he found the plunderer was none other than a large, hungry Sparrow-hawk. To catch the thief, he ordered a net to be hung up in such a way that the hawk in his next visit could not fail to be entangled. The net was hung, the thief was caught, and, in order to punish the murderer as he deserved, the gentleman gave him over to the tender mercies of the brood hens whose families he had desolated. That he might be helpless in their hands, his wings and talons were cut, and a cork was put on his beak. The cries and screams of the bereaved mothers were said, by Mr. White, the charming naturalist of Selborne, to be wonderfully expressive of rage, fear, and revenge; they flew upon him in a body, they "upbraided—they execrated—they insulted—they triumphed—in a word they never desisted from buffeting their adversary until they had torn him in a hundred pieces."

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The Hawk is very bold. Mr. P. John tells of one that he found calmly plucking the feathers of a large pigeon on the drawing-room floor, having followed the poor bird through the open window into the room and there killed it. And another actually chased a pigeon through the glass of his "drawing-room window, out at the other end of the house through another window, not at all scared by the clattering of the broken glass."

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THE VULTURE.

THE VULTURE.

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THIS strange looking bird is also a bird of prey; but it feeds generally on dead carcasses or offal. There are several kinds of vulture. The largest of all birds of prey is the Condor, a South American species. There is also the King Vulture, a native of the same country, called so not from its size, for it is the smallest of the race, but from its elegant plumage. Mr. Waterton, the naturalist, relates a little story of a King Vulture, which seems to show that, though so much smaller, this bird is regarded with some degree of reverence by the common vultures. He says that "the carcase of a large snake, which he had killed in the forest, becoming putrid, about twenty of the common vultures came and perched in the neighbouring trees; amongst them came also the King of the Vultures; and he observed that none of the common ones seemed inclined to begin breakfast till his majesty had finished. When he had consumed as much snake as nature informed him would do him good, he retired to the top of a high mora-tree, and then all the common vultures fell to, and made a hearty meal." Mr. Waterton also observed that the day after the planter had burnt the trash in a cane-field, the King Vulture might be seen feeding on the snakes, lizards, and frogs, which had suffered in the conflagration. Indeed the vulture is of real service in this respect, for he clears the carrion away from the hot countries he inhabits, which would otherwise putrify and infect the air. In some places, as at Paramaribo, the value of these birds, on this account, is so fully recognized, that they are protected by law, a fine being imposed on him who kills one.

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The vulture is to be found in almost all hot countries. A traveller in Abyssinia speaks of having seen them hovering, as a black cloud, over an army of soldiers, in numbers like the sands of the sea. After a battle they come sweeping down to feed upon the slain. Indeed they prefer dead to living food, and must be endowed with a wonderfully keen sense of sight or smell, the former is thought most likely, as no sooner does a beast of burden drop in the deserts exhausted on the sands, than vultures begin to make their way towards the carcase. Whence they come none can tell, and the only probable suggestion is that they hover at a height beyond the ken of human eye over a passing caravan, for they are first noticed as specks in the air above, moving slowly round in circles as they descend spirally upon their prey.

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These birds are most voracious, gorging themselves with as much as they can possibly contrive to swallow. They are also very strong and difficult to kill, one of the condors having been known to walk about after it had been strangled and hung on a tree with a lasso for several minutes, and to keep on its legs after receiving three balls from a pistol.

The vulture is wonderfully fitted by nature for the part it has to fill as "scavenger" abroad, this being the name they often go by. It is large and strong, so that the carcase of a horse or a buffalo is not too much for it to attack. Its legs are strong, but not armed with sharp claws like those of birds that feed on living prey. Its wings are long and wide, and its bones, though thick, unusually light, so that the bird can remain an immense time poised in the highest regions of the atmosphere. Its beak is strong and hooked, and remarkably well formed for tearing or dividing, and what is still more noticeable, the head and neck which, from the disgusting nature of its food, must often be buried in unclean carcasses, are quite, or very nearly, destitute of feathers, which, in such a situation, would be soon covered with dirt or blood, and could not be kept clean by the bird's own bill. The smell of vultures is, as may be supposed, very offensive, and they are

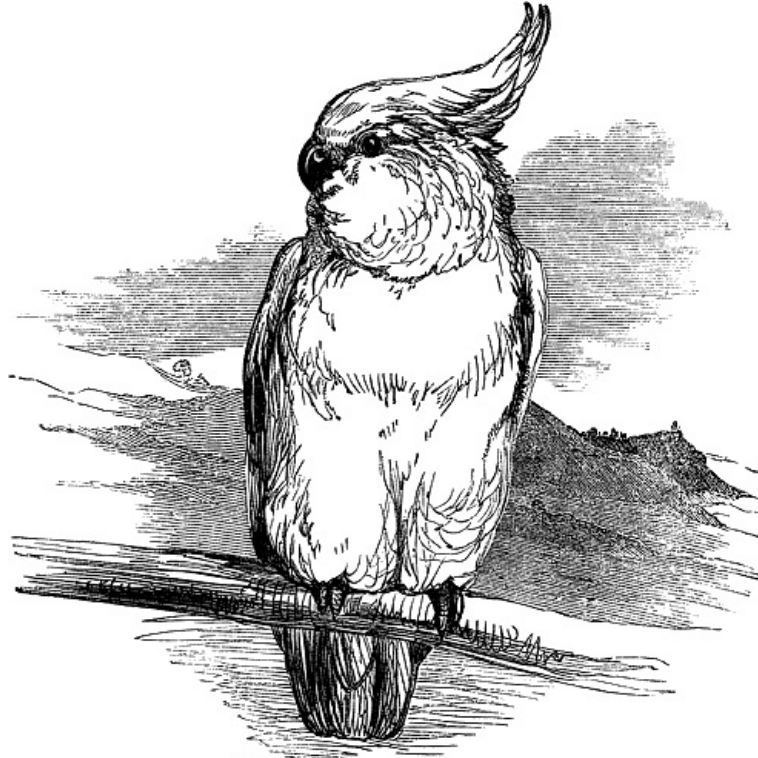
[113]

altogether very disagreeable birds to have anything to do with; but they are appointed to fill a particular office in the world, and are found invaluable in performing it.

The largest vultures are fifteen or sixteen feet from the tip of one wing to the tip of the other, even when not stretched to the utmost, and four feet from beak to tail. Its legs are as thick as a man's wrist, and its middle claw seven inches long. They bring forth their young on the tops of inaccessible rocks, in sunny regions, more than twelve thousand feet above the level of the sea.

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The European Vulture dwells amongst the Alps, but flies as far as the mountains of Africa and Asia. It is not so large as the condor, seldom exceeding the size of an eagle.



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THE COCKATOO (OR PARROT).

THE PARROT.

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Now I have to talk to you of much prettier birds, though, alas! to tell the truth, not half so useful as the disgusting vulture of whom we have been speaking. This picture represents a cockatoo, one of the parrot tribe, of which there are at least 250 species, including, besides this, the parrot, macaw, lory, parrakeet, etc., etc.

Parrots are all, for the most part, tropical birds, and in their native climates the most numerous of the feathered tribes. There, amongst brilliant creepers and dazzling sunshine, the "parrots swing like blossoms on the trees."

The foot of the parrot is formed for climbing, being, as Linnæus would say, *scansorial*, that is, with two toes forwards and two backwards. The strong hooked beak is also used as a third foot in climbing, very much as the long tail of a monkey helps him in flinging himself from one branch to another.

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They fly often in large flocks, and are killed and eaten as food. Indeed they are so destructive to the farmer's crops, that he kills them in self-defence. Do you know the pretty little Australian singing parrot, about as large as a yellow hammer, green and gold coloured? Well, I was told by a gentleman that he once ate part of a pudding which contained at least thirty of these little creatures, for each of which here one would have to pay heavily enough, and be only too anxious to take every care of afterwards to preserve it alive.

The cockatoo is also found in New Holland, and is chiefly remarkable for its beautiful sulphur coloured crest. The finest macaws come from South America; they are larger than parrots, and have magnificent plumage of blue, crimson, green and yellow. Seen in their native land in large flocks they are said to resemble a flying rainbow. Lories are so called from their frequently repeating the word lory. The grey African Parrot is the best speaker, for I need not tell you how closely almost all kinds of parrot can imitate the human voice. None imitate so closely as this, the plainest in its personal appearance. It seems to take pains to learn, but prefers being taught by children. Very many amusing stories are told of its docility and sagacity. A very clever man tells of one that was introduced to Prince Maurice in a room in Brazil, where he was in company with several Dutchmen. The bird immediately exclaimed in the Brazilian language, "What a company of white men is here." Being asked, "Who is that man?" (pointing to the Prince) it answered,

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"Some general or other." When asked, "Where do you come from?" it replied, "From Marignan." "To whom do you belong?" "To a Portuguese." The Prince then asked, "What do you do there?" it answered, "I look after the chickens." The Prince, laughing, exclaimed, "You look after the chickens!" "Yes," says Poll, "I can, I know very well how to do it," clucking at the same time like a hen calling her brood. We are told also of a parrot that learned to repeat the Apostles' Creed quite perfectly, and on that account was bought by a cardinal for 100 crowns.

The bite of a parrot is very violent, so that unless assured they are good tempered you will do well not to approach a strange bird too closely. The cause of this power in the beak is that, in order to enable it to climb about more easily, the upper mandible, or bone, instead of forming a continuation as it were of the skull bone, as in other birds, is united by a membrane which enables it to raise or depress the beak at its pleasure. This gives much greater force to its power of grasping. Parrots do not build nests nor hatch young in this country, but they thrive abundantly, and, when well treated, show no symptoms of pining.

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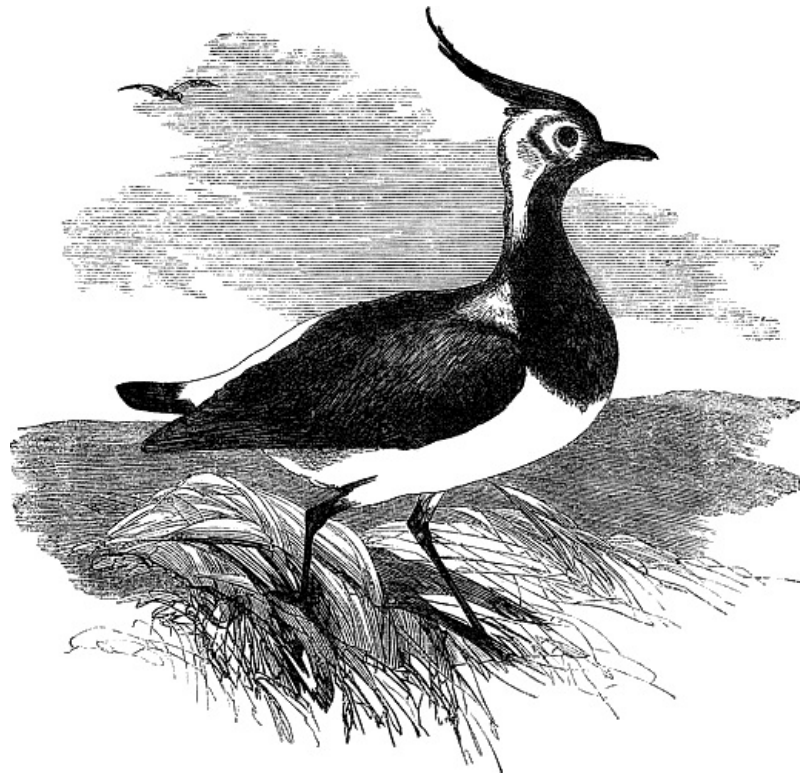
There are some very pretty little birds of the parrot tribe called love-birds, from their affectionate nature. They are quite worthy of the name, as they show the utmost tenderness for each other, both in health and sickness.

THE LAPWING.

[122]

THIS little bird which is often called the Pewit, from its uttering frequently a cry resembling the sound of this word, builds its nest or rather lays its eggs, for it builds no regular nest, amongst long grass or heather on open downs. If any one goes near the nest, the watchful mother, who knows herself too weak to defend her young, tries by all manner of artful contrivances to draw away the stranger's attention. She will hover close to his ear screaming, or else flutter along the ground as if wounded and unable to fly. And when by this means she has drawn aside the feet of the passer-by to some distance, she will suddenly rise in the air and return to her nest. The eggs of this bird are eagerly sought after as an article of food, so she is naturally driven to try her utmost to secure her nest from intruders. In Scotland formerly the Lapwing was very abundant, and there exists a curious old act of the Scotch parliament passed before England and Scotland were as friendly as they are now, encouraging the destruction of the Lapwing "as an ungrateful bird, which came to Scotland to breed, and then returned to England to feed the enemy." Worms are their favourite food, but being unable to pierce the ground with their weak, short beaks they are ingenious enough to have recourse to the expedient of tapping on the earth with their bills. The earth-worm, who is very sensitive of danger, comes up in alarm from his quaking habitation, and is instantly pounced upon by the attentive lapwing.

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THE LAPWING.

This bird is easily tamed, and I will conclude with an account of one kept by a clergyman, that is related by Professor Rennie. "It lived chiefly on insects, but, as the winter drew on these failed, and necessity compelled the poor bird to approach the house, from which it had previously remained at a distance, and a servant, hearing its feeble cry, as if it were asking charity, opened for it the door of the back kitchen. It did not venture far at first, but it became daily more familiar

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and emboldened as the cold increased, till at length it actually entered the kitchen, though already occupied by a dog and a cat. By degrees it at length came to so good an understanding with these animals, that it entered regularly at nightfall, and established itself at the chimney corner, where it remained snugly beside them for the night; but as soon as the warmth of spring returned, it preferred roosting in the garden, though it resumed its place at the chimney corner the ensuing winter. Instead of being afraid of its two old acquaintances, the dog and cat, it now treated them as inferiors, and arrogated to itself the place which it had previously obtained by solicitation. This interesting pet was at last choked by a bone which it had swallowed."

When its eggs are laid, the pewit will fight fiercely with any other of its species which comes too near it. Mr. P. John saw one attack a wounded bird which came near his nest. "The pugnacious little fellow ran up to the intruder, and, taking advantage of his weakness, jumped on him, trampling upon him, and pecking at his head, and then dragging him along the ground as fiercely as a game-cock."

Transcriber's Note: Minor typographical errors have been corrected without note.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK MAMMA'S STORIES ABOUT BIRDS ***

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