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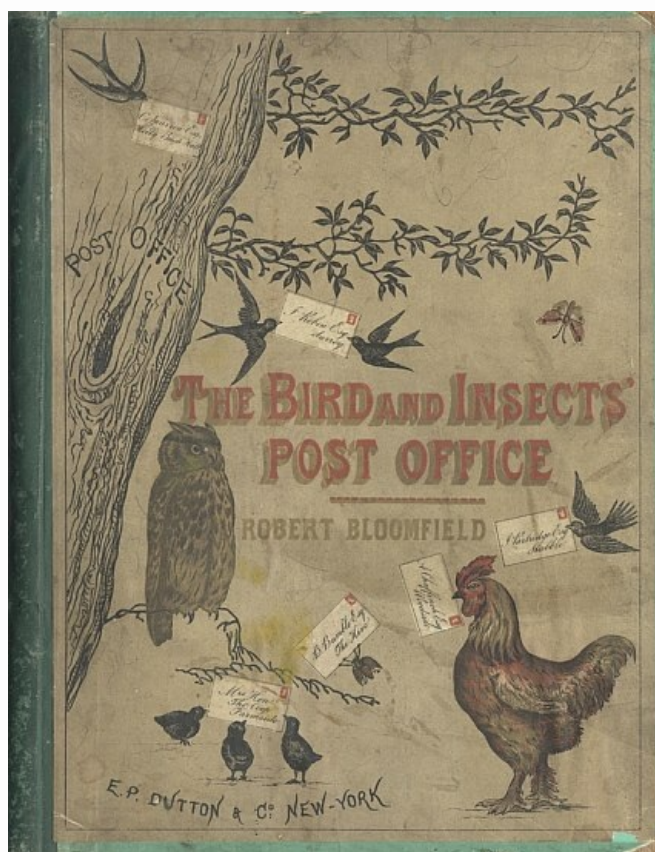
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THE BIRD AND INSECTS' POST-OFFICE.

Frontispiece.



THE BIRD AND INSECTS' POST-OFFICE.

THE BIRD AND INSECTS' POST-OFFICE.

BY

ROBERT BLOOMFIELD,

Author of "The Farmer's Boy," "Rural Tales", &c. &c.

WITH THIRTY-FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS

NEW YORK:

E. P. DUTTON AND CO.

GRIFFITH AND FARRAN: ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, LONDON.

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PREFACE.

"THE BIRD AND INSECTS' POST-OFFICE" was projected and written by ROBERT BLOOMFIELD, author of the "Farmer's Boy," &c., excepting Letters VIII., X., XI., and XVI. by his eldest son, Charles. It was the author's intention to publish it uniformly with his other juvenile work, the "HISTORY OF LITTLE DAVY'S NEW HAT," but he did not live to do so, and it was therefore included in his literary *Remains*, published in 1824—a year after the poet's death—in two volumes, price twelve shillings. Its circulation, in consequence, has been extremely limited, its form of publication preventing its introduction to children; for this reason, and because I think it would be a pity for it to be shut up for ever in a dusty old volume from the little ones, for whom it was written, I have sent it forth in the form originally intended for it to assume.

The original manuscript, in the author's autograph, I recently presented to the Trustees of the British Museum.

March 1st, 1879.

CONTENTS.

LETTER	PAGE
I. —FROM THE MAGPIE TO THE SPARROW	19
II. —THE SPARROW'S REPLY	22
III. —FROM A YOUNG GARDEN-SPIDER TO HER MOTHER	29
IV. —FROM A YOUNG NIGHTINGALE TO A WREN	33
V. —FROM AN EARWIG, DEPLORING THE LOSS OF ALL HER CHILDREN	39
VI. —FROM THE WILD DUCK TO THE TAME DUCK	42
VII. —THE TAME DUCK'S REPLY	47
VIII. —FROM THE GANDER TO THE TURKEY-COCK. <i>By Charles Bloomfield</i>	53
IX. —FROM THE DUNGHILL-COCK TO THE CHAFFINCH	58
X. —FROM THE BLUE-BOTTLE FLY TO THE GRASSHOPPER <i>By Charles Bloomfield</i>	63
XI. —FROM THE GLOW-WORM TO THE BUMBLE-BEE. <i>By Charles Bloomfield</i>	66
XII. —FROM THE PIGEON TO THE PARTRIDGE	71
XIII. —FROM THE WOOD-PIGEON TO THE OWL	78
XIV. —THE OWL IN REPLY TO THE WOOD-PIGEON	85
XV. —FROM A SWALLOW IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE TO AN ENGLISH ROBIN	88
XVI. —ON HEARING THE CUCKOO AT MIDNIGHT, MAY 1ST. 1822. <i>By Charles Bloomfield</i>	95

LIST OF FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS.

	PAGE
THE BIRD AND INSECTS' POST-OFFICE	<i>Frontispiece.</i>
MAGPIE	18
SPARROWS	23
SPIDERS	28
NIGHTINGALE	32
WRENS	35
WILD DUCKS	43
SPARROWS	49
GOOSE	55
COCK	59
PARTRIDGES	70, 74
PIGEONS	72, 76
OWLS	79, 83
SWALLOWS	89, 92

AND SEVERAL SMALLER ONES IN THE TEXT.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

WE all know that Æsop has made his birds and beasts talk, and reason too; and that so well as still to make the volume bearing his name a favourite with thousands. Perhaps, too, we all know that some French author has objected to this method of teaching, alleging that children should not be imposed upon (or something to that effect), and led to believe in the *reality* of talking birds and beasts. To me it appears plainly that they do not, nor are they inclined to, believe in any such reality. Observe two or three children at play with a favourite kitten. When one of them, in mere wantonness, shall give the little animal a rap on the nose, or a squeeze by the tail, the owner of the cat will instantly exclaim, "Poor little pussy! she does not like that, *she says.*" Now, the child knows very well that the cat did not say a word about the matter, but she looked and acted as if she had, and that was enough.

In the following pages I have endeavoured to make my winged and creeping correspondents

talk in their own characters, according to their well-known habits and pursuits.

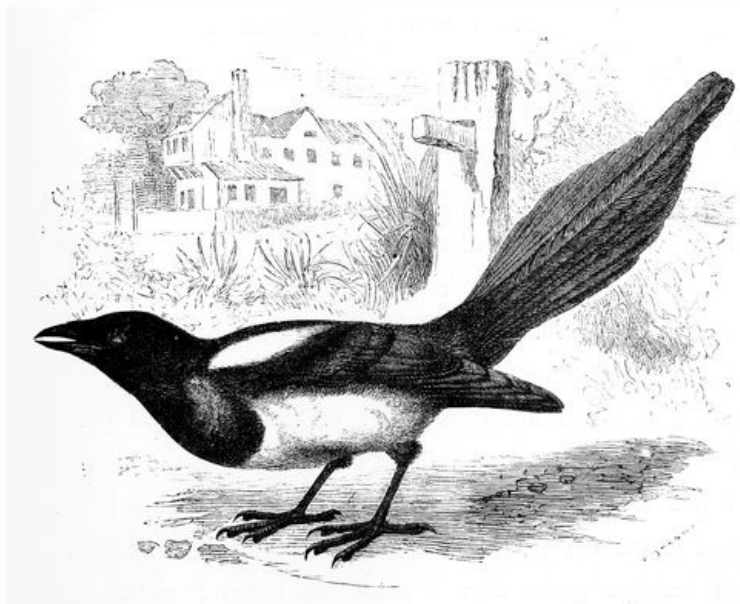
I have added a few notes, sometimes of illustration, and sometimes of inquiry; for, as natural history is almost a boundless field, I may stand in need of correction myself. It will be obvious that I have taken only some of the plainest and simplest subjects, for the purpose of trying whether any interest can be awakened in young minds by such means. And as I like to write for children, and think a great deal of information might be blended with amusement in this way, I hold myself acquitted of the charge of trifling and puerility, and am the young reader's friend and well-wisher,

R[OBERT] B[Loomfield.]

THE BIRD AND INSECT'S POST-OFFICE.



MAGPIE



LETTER I.

FROM THE MAGPIE TO THE SPARROW.

LITTLE JABBERER,

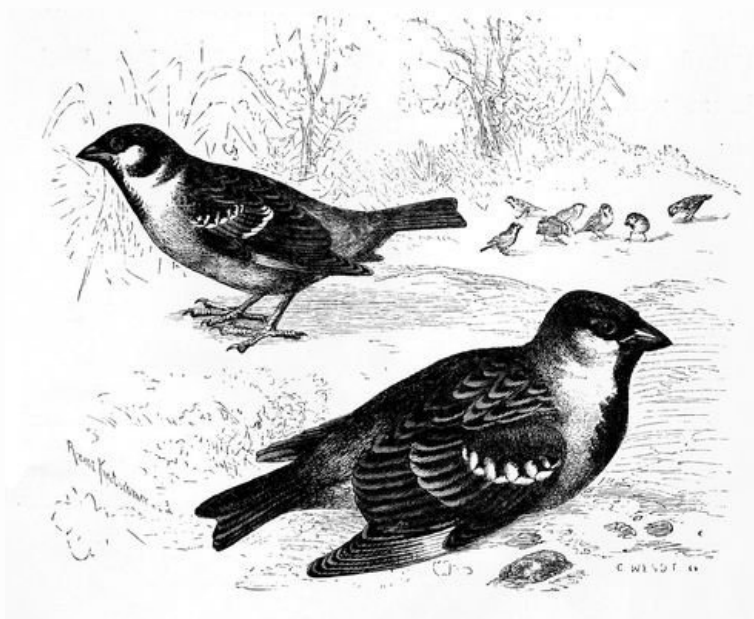
I have many times thought of addressing to you a few words of advice, as you seem to stand in need of such a friend.

You know that I do not stand much upon ceremony; I am always ready for talking and for giving advice, and really wonder how other birds can keep themselves so quiet. Then you will pardon my frankness, since you know my character, when I inform you that I think you remarkably tame and spiritless: you have no enterprise in you. In an old farmyard, shuffling amongst the straw, there you may be found morning, noon and night; and you are never seen in the woods and groves with me and my companions, where we have the blessing of free liberty, and fly where we please. You must often have heard me sing; that cannot be doubted, because I am heard a great way. As to me, I never come down to your farm, unless I think I can find a hen's egg or two amongst the nettles, or a chicken or duck just hatched.

I earnestly advise you to change your manner of life and take a little free air, as I do. Stop no longer in your dull yard, feeding upon pigs' leavings, but come abroad with me. But I must have done till a better opportunity; for the gamekeeper with his gun has just turned the corner. Take my advice, and you may be as well off, and learn to sing as well as I do.

Yours, in great haste,

MAG.



LETTER II.

THE SPARROW'S REPLY.

OLD MAG (I won't say Neighbour),

I was hopping along the top ridge of the house when I received your insolent and conceited epistle, which does you no credit, but is very much in your usual style. "Little Jabberer" indeed! and pray, what is your letter of advice? Nothing but jabber from beginning to end. You *sing*, you say. I have heard you often enough; but if yours is singing, then I must be allowed to be no judge of the matter. You say you are afraid of the gamekeeper; this, perhaps, allows some sense in you, for he is paid for killing all kinds of vermin.



SPARROWS.

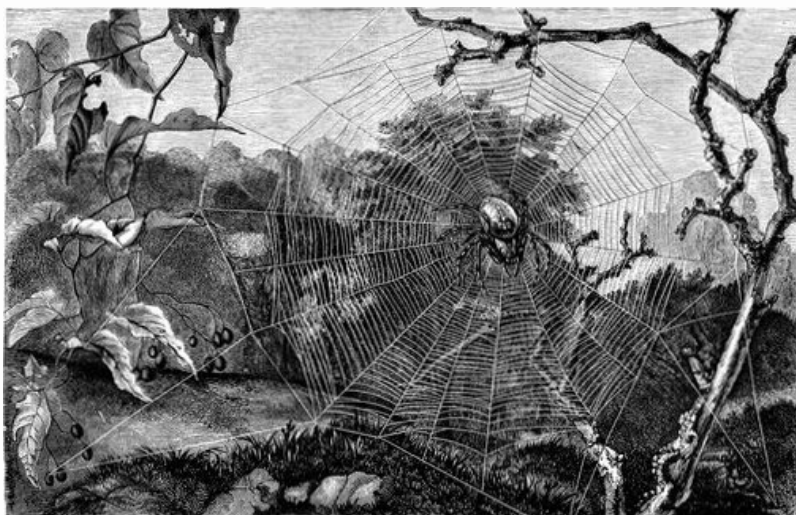
And so you come down to our farm when you think you can steal something! Thus, if I did not hide my eggs and my young ones, in a hole too small for you to enter, I can see pretty plainly how I should come off with your thieving and your advice.

Be advised in *your* turn; keep away from our yard, for my master has a gun too; and your chattering, which I suppose you call singing, he abominably hates. You will be in danger of catching what the gamekeeper threatens, and then where is the great difference between your station and mine?

From my lodging under the thatch of the stable, I am, as you may happen to behave yourself,

Yours, at a convenient distance,

&c. &c.



SPIDERS.

LETTER III.

FROM A YOUNG GARDEN-SPIDER TO HER MOTHER.

DEAR MOTHER,

I cannot exactly tell what happened before I came out of the shell; but, from circumstances, I can give you some information. When I came to life, amongst some scores of other little merry yellow creatures, I found myself, and all of us, enclosed in a thing, through which we, with our eight eyes, could see very well, but could not instantly get out. I soon perceived that we, in the egg state, wrapped in a white bag, as you left us, had been put into a thing called a bottle, by one of those great creatures whom we always call *striders*; but this was a particular one of that tribe, who wanted to play tricks with us—one whom they would perhaps call a philosopher.^[1] Well, his own sense (if he had any) told him that we could not live without air; so he left the cork out, and went about his business; no doubt of much less consequence than the lives of all us prisoners—but that they do not mind. But how long were we prisoners? Why, as soon as ever we were out of the shell we began to spin, and linked our webs so thick together that the philosopher's bottle would hold us no longer. We climbed out in a crowd, and spread our webs over the room, up to the very ceiling. I shall never forget how the great booby stared when he saw us all climbing up our own rope-ladders! I wonder if those great creatures are not sometimes caught in webs spun by their fellow-creatures, and whether they are not sometimes put by hundreds into a bottle without possessing any means of escape? But I am but a child, and must live and learn before I talk more freely. Long life to you, dear mother, and plenty of flies.

Yours ever, &c.



NIGHTINGALE.

LETTER IV.

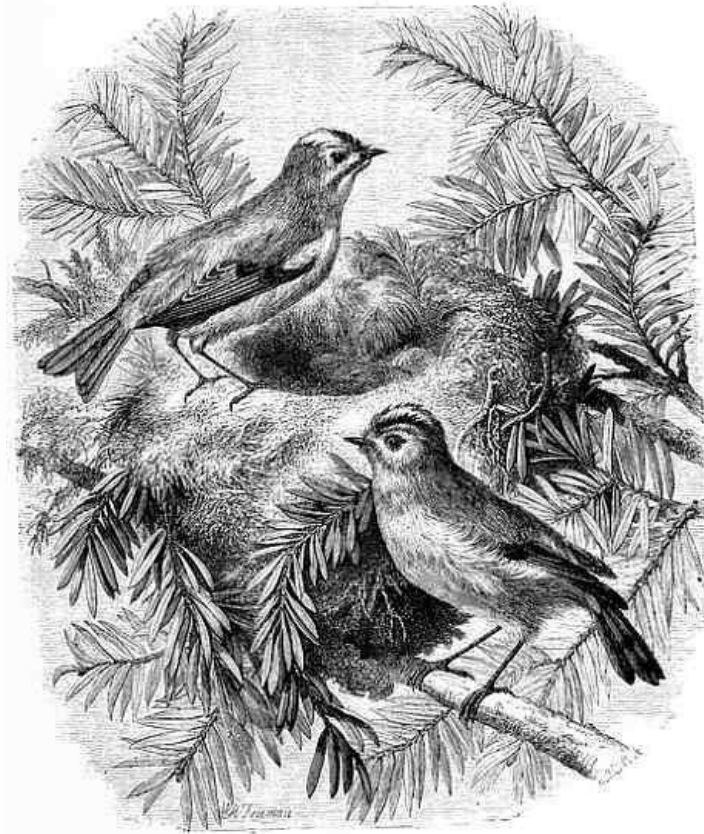
FROM A YOUNG NIGHTINGALE TO A WREN.

Dated "Home Wood."

NEIGHBOUR,

When we last met you seemed very lively and agreeable, but you asked an abundance of questions, and particularly wanted to know whether we nightingales really do, as is said of us, cross the great water every year, and return in the spring to sing in your English groves. Now, as

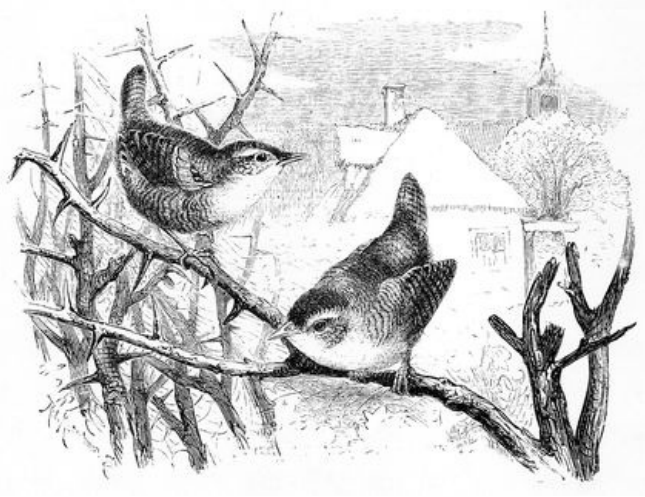
I am but young, I must be modest, and not prate about what I cannot as yet understand. I must say, nevertheless, that I never heard my parents talk of any particular long journey which they had performed to reach this country, or that they should return, and take me and the rest of the family with them, at this particular time or season. I know this, that I never saw my parents fly further at one flight than from one side of a field to another or from one grove to the next. Who are they who call us "birds of passage"?^[2] They certainly may know more of the extent of the GREAT WATERS than we can, neighbour Wren; but have they considered our powers, and the probability of what they assert? I am sure, if my parents should call on me to go with them, I shall be flurried out of my life. But it is my business to obey. I have so lately got my feathers, that I cannot be a proper judge of the matter. As to the swallows and many other birds going to a vast distance, there is no wonder in that, if you look at their wings; but how would you, for instance, perform such a journey—you who, even when you sing, put yourself into a violent passion, as if you had not a minute to live? We nightingales are the birds for song. This you will acknowledge, I dare say, though I have not begun yet. I will give you a specimen when I come back (if I am really to go), and you will hear me in "*Home Wood*" when it is dark, and you have crept into your little nest in the hovel.



WRENS.

Believe me, I have a great respect for you, and am your young friend,

THIRD-IN-THE-NEST.



LETTER V.

FROM AN EARWIG, DEPLORING THE LOSS OF ALL HER CHILDREN.

DEAR AUNT,

You cannot think how distressed I have been, and still am; for, under the bark of a large elm, which, I dare say, has stood there a great while, I had placed my whole family, where they were dry, comfortable, and, as I foolishly thought, secure. But only mark what calamities may fall upon earwigs before they are aware of them! I had just got my family about me, all white, clean, and promising children, when pounce came down that bird they call a woodpecker; when, thrusting his huge beak under the bark where we lay, down went our whole sheltering roof! and my children, poor things, running, as they thought, from danger, were devoured as fast as the destroyer could open his beak and shut it. For my own part, I crept into a crack in the solid tree, where I have thus far escaped; but as this bird can make large holes into solid timber, I am by no means safe.

This calamity is the more heavy, as it carries with it a great disappointment; for very near our habitation was a high wall, the sunny side of which was covered with the most delicious fruits—peaches, apricots, nectarines, &c.—all just then ripening; and I thought of having such a feast with my children as I had never enjoyed in my life.

I am surrounded by woodpeckers, jackdaws, magpies, and other devouring creatures, and think myself very unfortunate. Yet, perhaps, if I could know the situation of some larger creatures—I mean particularly such as would tread me to death if I crossed their path—they may have complaints to make as well as I.

Take care of yourself, my good old aunt, and I shall keep in my hiding-place as long as starvation will permit. And, after all, perhaps the fruit was not so delicious as it looked—I am resolved to think so, just to comfort myself.

Yours, with compliments, as usual.



LETTER VI.

FROM THE WILD DUCK TO THE TAME DUCK.

Dated Lincoln and Ely Fens.

DEAR COUSIN,

I suppose I must call you so, though I declare I know not how we are related. But, though I am thought so very wild and shy, I have still a kind of fellow-feeling for you; and, if you have not gone to the spit before this comes to you, I should be glad of your reply in a friendly way. You know very well that you are intended to be eaten, and so are we—when they can catch us. I understand that you never fly and that you seldom waddle above a meadow's length from your pond, where you keep puddling and groping from daylight till dark. This, I assure you, is not the life that I lead. We fly together in vast numbers in the night, for many miles over this flat, wet country; so, as to water, we have an inexhaustible store: we may swim ourselves tired. But, I dare say, every station of our duck-lives is subject to some disadvantages and some calamities. Thus, with all our wildness, we are not secure; for we are taken sometimes by hundreds in a kind of trap which is called a decoy.



WILD DUCKS.

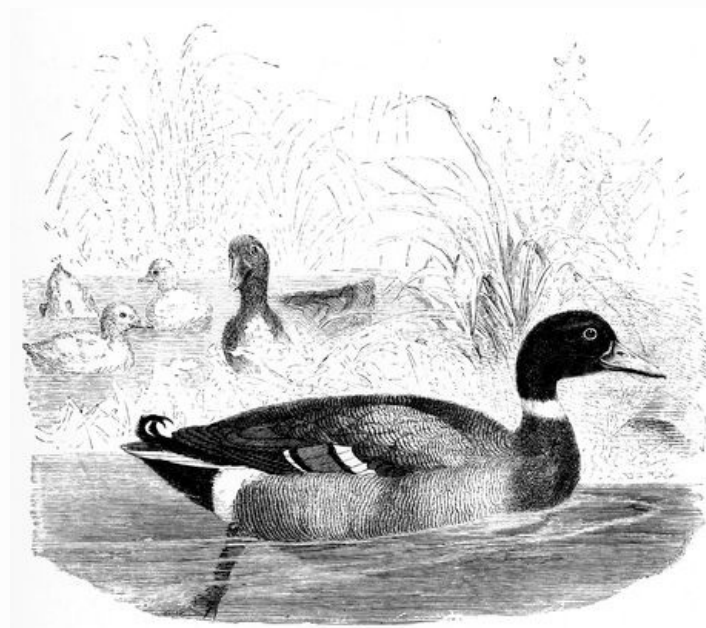
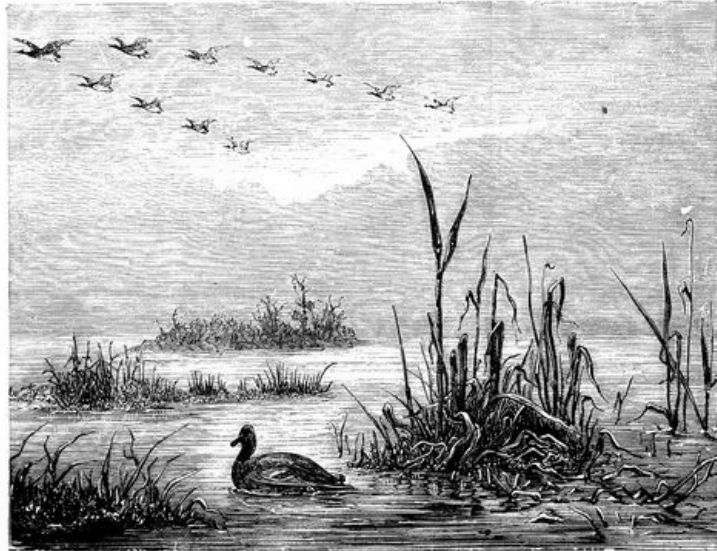
Some of our tribe have been made tame like you (but I hope you are not so false-hearted), and then their masters feed them plentifully, in a place contrived on purpose, with a narrow entrance, with which these *traitor ducks* are well acquainted, so that they can pass in and out at a place we strangers should never have thought of. They are sent out in the dusk of the evening, when they

soon join with large companies of us strangers; and knowing, as they do, their way home, and that they shall find food, they set off, close at each other's tails, along a ditch, or watercourse, and we fools follow them.

The entrance, as far as I could see of it, is very narrow; for I have been twice within a hair's breadth of being caught, and do not pretend to know all about it; but I wish heartily that every duck and drake in the country—ay, and every one of our allies, the geese, too, could say as much—could say that "they had twice been on the verge of destruction by keeping bad company, but had escaped."

What becomes of my companions, when taken, I think I have heard pretty accurately; for there is somewhere a very large assemblage of fellow-creatures to those who catch us, and whose demand seems never to be satisfied. Well, never mind, cousin; I am determined to fly, and swim too, as long as I can, and I advise you to do the same, and make the most of your day.

Hoping to hear from you, I am, affectionately, your wild cousin.



LETTER VII.

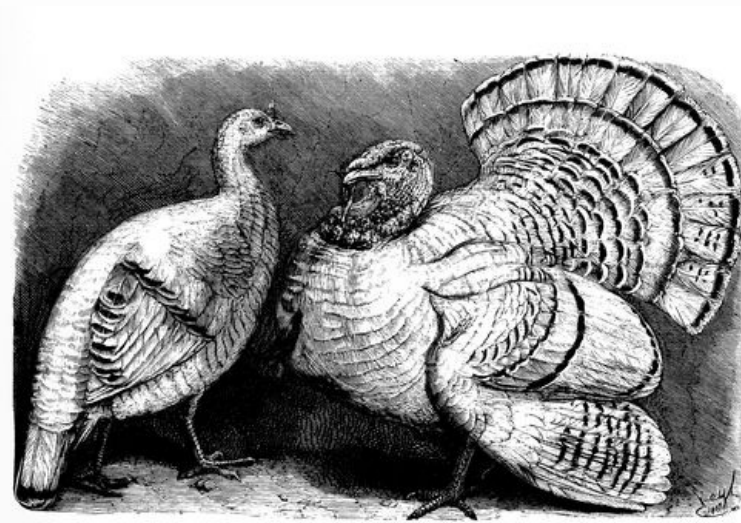
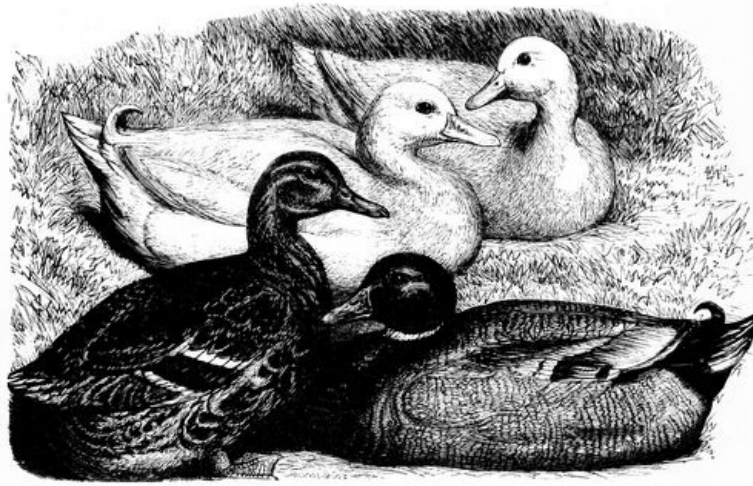
THE TAME DUCK'S REPLY.

I confess I did not at all expect to hear from you; for I always believed you to be one of those thoughtless young creatures which are to be found in other stations of life as well as in yours and mine, who, as soon as they get fledged and able to get abroad, care no more for their parents and those who brought them up than I care for a shower of rain. However, you have escaped danger *twice*, and you have reason to congratulate yourself. I have been sitting here upon ten eggs for three weeks past, and of course have another week to be confined; but then the thoughts of the pleasure I shall have in hatching and guiding my young ones to the water, is ample payment for all my pains. They will look so clean and so delighted, and will do as they are bid by the smallest quack that I can utter, that I must be a bad mother indeed if I am not proud of them. Perhaps you will wonder when I tell you that we have a creature here—fledged indeed—which is called a hen; a strange, cackling, flying, useless, noisy, silly creature, which is as much afraid of water as you are of your decoy.



SPARROWS.

I have often known one of these birds to hatch nine or ten of my eggs; and then, if you wanted to ridicule the lifted foot of conceit, and the dignity of assumed importance, you should see her lead her young, or more properly, see the young lead her to the nearest water they can find. In they go, and she begins to call and scold, and run round the edge to save them from drowning! Now, what fools these hens must be compared to us ducks! at least, I, for one, am determined to think so. I have seen this same hen with the brood about her scratching in our farmyard with all her might; when, not considering who was behind her, or who under her feathers, she has tricked away one little yellow duck with one of her claws, and another with the other, till I wished I had her in a pond; I would have given her a good sousing, depend upon it. But really, cousin, don't you think that this way of contradicting our natures and propensities is very wrong? Suppose, for instance, I should sit upon a dozen of that silly creature's eggs which I mentioned above—for I will never consent to have them matched with us—I should then, to be sure, have a week's holiday, as they sit but three weeks; but what should I bring to light? a parcel of little, useless, tip-toed, cowardly things, that would not follow me into the pond—I cannot bear to think of it. I have written you a long letter, and can think of no more but Quack! quack! quack! and farewell.

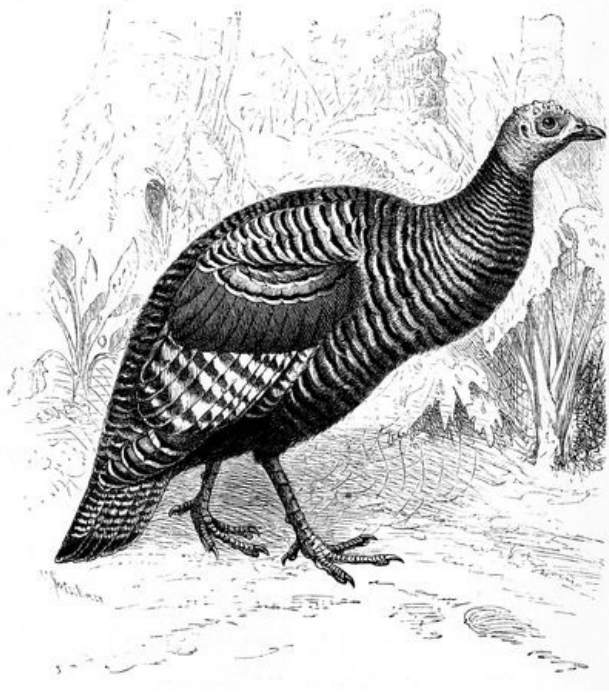


LETTER VIII.

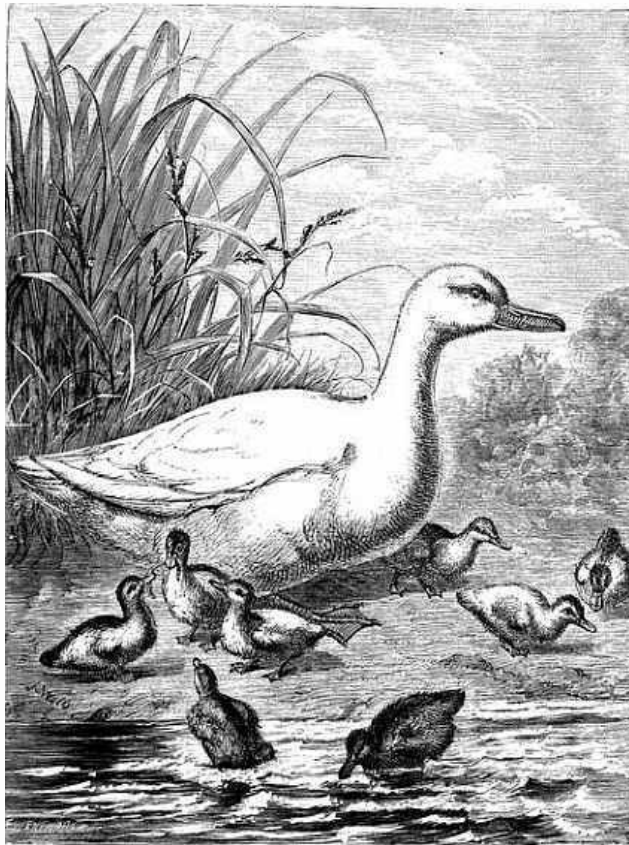
FROM THE GANDER TO THE TURKEY-COCK.

(CHARLES BLOOMFIELD.)

Old friend, you certainly have merit;
You really are a bird of spirit.
I'm quite surprised, I must confess;
I did not think you did possess
Such valour as you've lately shown—
In fact, 'tis nearly like my own.
You know I've always been renown'd
For bravery, since first I found



That I could hiss; and feel I'm bolder
Each year that I am growing older.



GOOSE.

You must, I'm sure, have often seen,
When in the pond, or on the green,
With all my family about me
(I can't think how they'd do without me),
Some human thing come striding by,
And how, without a scruple, I
March after him, and bite his heel;
And then, you know, the pride I feel

To hear, as back I march again,
The feat extoll'd by all my train.
But if I were to tell you all
The valiant actions, great and small,
That ever were achieved by me,
I never should have done, I see;
For cows, and pigs, and horses know
The consequence of such a foe.
However, I am glad to find
That you have such a noble mind,
And think, my friend, that by and by
You'll rise to be as great as I.

Your old friend,

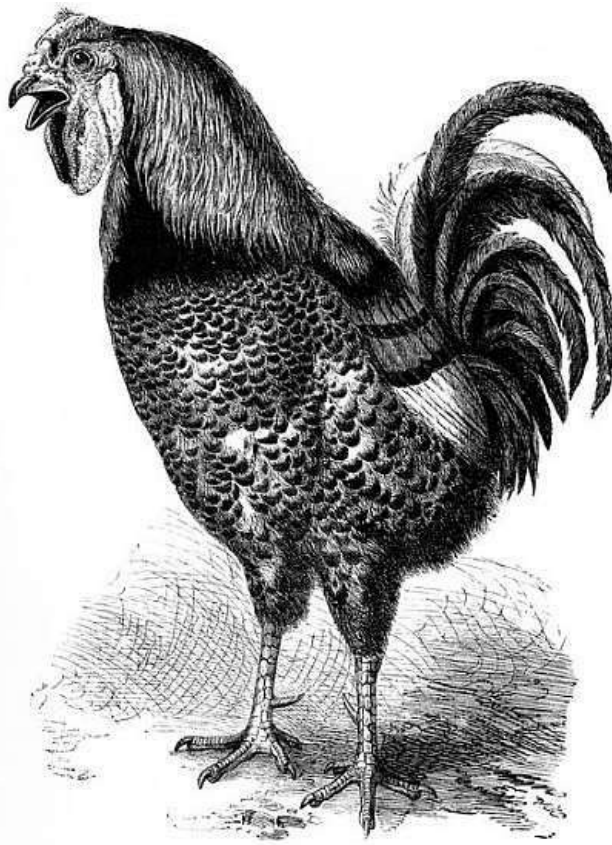
HISS.



LETTER IX.

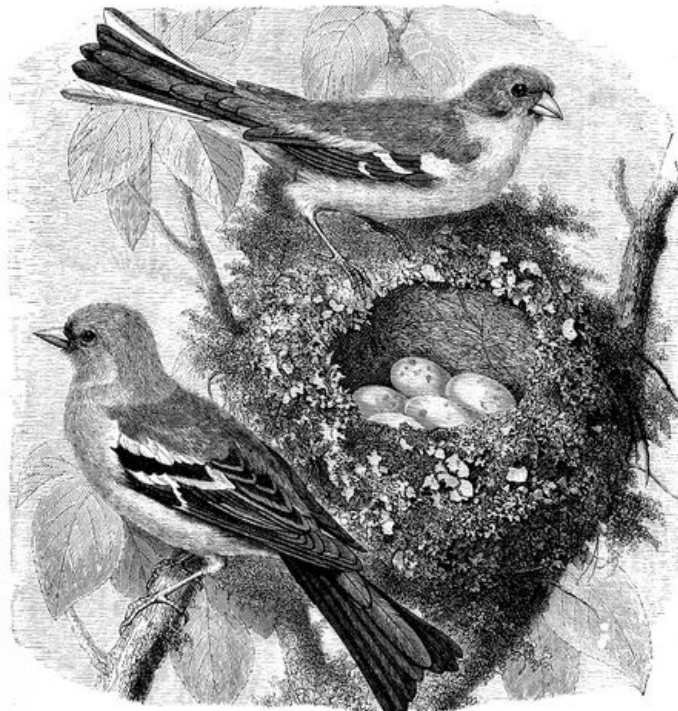
FROM THE DUNGHILL-COCK TO THE CHAFFINCH.

I HAVE often, during the spring and summer, heard you of a morning piping away in the hedges, sometimes as soon as I was up myself, and thought your singing pretty fair, and that you conducted yourself as you ought to do.



COCK.

But this I cannot say lately; for it is quite overstepping the bounds of decency and good manners when you and your brother pilferers, now the winter is come, make it your daily practice to come by scores, as you do, into our yard, and, without any ceremony, eat up all the barley you can lay your beaks to. I suppose when the spring comes again, and you find more to satisfy you outside a farmyard than within, you will be off to the hedges again. I shall let you alone, unless the barley



runs short, which is to support my wives and children; when if you still venture to continue your pilferings, you must not be surprised should some of you feel the weight of my displeasure.

I must go after my family, who are all out of my sight, since I have been writing this.

LETTER X.

FROM THE BLUE-BOTTLE FLY TO THE GRASSHOPPER.

(CHARLES BLOOMFIELD.)

I.



As I roamed t'other day,
Neighbour Hop, in my way
I discovered a nice rotten plum,
Which you know is a treat;
And, to taste of the sweet,
A swarm of relations had come.

II.

So we all settled round,
As it lay on the ground,
And were feasting ourselves with delight;
But, for want of more thought
To have watched, as we ought,
We were suddenly seized—and held tight.

III.

In a human clenched hand,
Where, unable to stand,
We were twisted and tumbled about;
But, perceiving a chink,
You will readily think
I exerted myself—I got out.

IV.

How the rest got away
I really can't say;
But I flew with such ardour and glee.
That again, unawares,
I got into the snares
Of my foe Mr. Spider, you see;

V.

Who so fiercely came out
Of his hole, that no doubt
He expected that I was secure:
But he found 'twould not do,
For I forced my way through,
Overjoyed on escaping, you're sure.



VI.

But I'll now take my leave,
For the clouds I perceive
Are darkening over the sky;
The sun has gone in,
And I really begin
To feel it grow colder.—Good bye!

I'm, as ever, yours,
BLUE-BOTTLE FLY.



LETTER XI.

FROM THE GLOW-WORM TO THE HUMBLE-BEE.

(CHARLES BLOOMFIELD.)

Excuse, Mr. Bee, this epistle, to one
Whose time, from the earliest gleam of the sun
Till he sinks in the west, is so busily spent,
That I fear I intrude;—but I write with intent
To save your whole city from pillage and ruin,
And to warn you in time of a plot that is brewing.
Last night, when, as usual, enjoying the hour
When the gloaming had spread, and a trickling shower
Was beading the grass as it silently fell,
And day with reluctance was bidding farewell;
When down by yon hedge, nearly opposite you,
And your City of Honey, as proudly I threw

The rays from my lamp in a magical round;
 I listened, alarmed upon hearing the sound
 Of human intruders approaching more near;
 But I presently found *I* had nothing to fear,
 For the hedge was between us, and I and my gleam
 Lay hid from their view: when the following scheme
 I heard, as they sheltered beneath the old tree,
 And send you each creature's own words, Mr. Bee:—
 "See, Jack, there it is; now suppose you and I,
 With a spade and some brimstone, should each of us try
 Some night, when we're sure all the bees are at rest,
 To smother them all, and then dig out the nest."
 "I know we can do it," said Jack with delight;
 "I can't come to-morrow; but s'pose the next night
 We both set about it, if you are inclined;
 And then we will halve all the honey we find?"
 "Agreed," said the other, "but let us be gone."
 And they left me in thought until early this morn;
 When I certainly meant, if your worship had stay'd
 But a minute or two, till my speech I had made,
 To have saved you the reading, as well as the cost
 Of a letter by post—but my words were all lost;
 For though they were lavished each time you came near,
 Or was close overhead, and I thought you *should* hear,
 Yet the buzz of importance, as onward you flew,
 Bobbing into each flower the whole meadow through,
 So baffled your brains that I let you alone,
 For I found that I might as well speak to a drone:
 Yet, rather than quietly leave you to fate
 (Such a villainous thought never entered my pate),
 I send you this letter, composed by the light
 Of my silvery lamp in the dead of the night,
 And about the same time, and the very same place,
 That a few nights ago, when the moon hid her face,
 I beheld, nearly hid in the grass as I lay,
 And my lamp in full splendour reflecting its ray
 In the eye of each dewdrop, the fairies unseen
 To all human vision, trip here with their Queen,
 To pay me a visit, to dance and to feast;
 And their revels continued, till full in the east
 The sun tinged the clouds for another bright day,
 When each took the warning and bounded away:
 'Tis the same at this moment. Farewell, Mr. Hum,
 I've extinguished my lamp, for the morning is come.

SPANGLE.

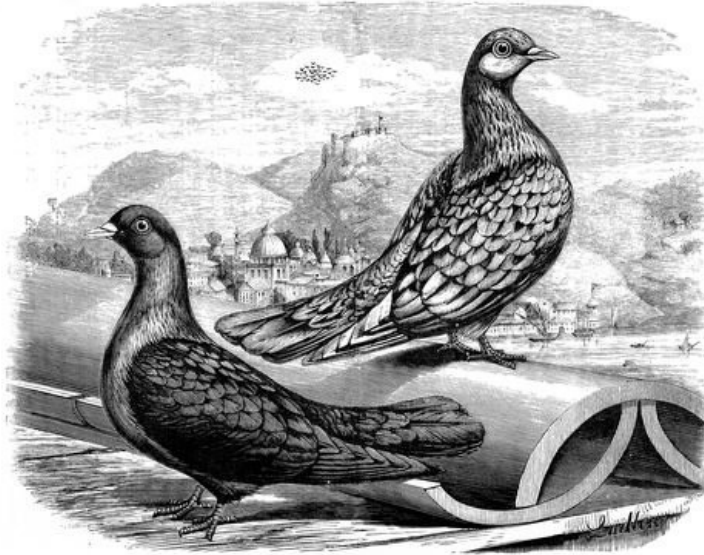


PARTRIDGES.

LETTER XII.

FROM THE PIGEON TO THE PARTRIDGE.

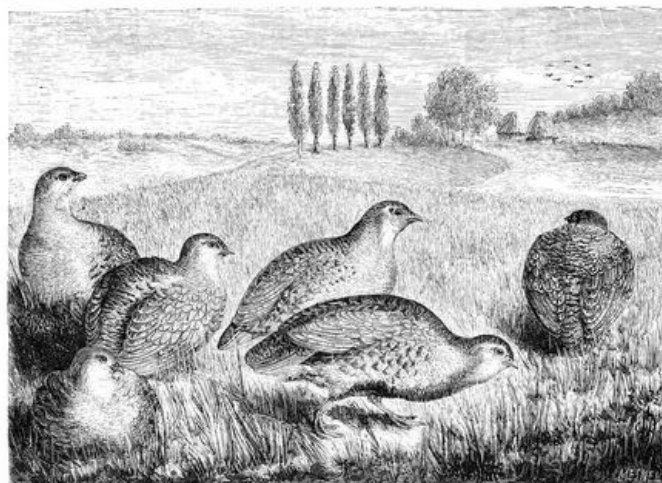
WHAT a long time it is since I received your kind letter about the ripening corn, and the dangers you were presently to be subject to with all your children!



PIGEONS.

You will think me very idle, or very unfeeling, if I delay answering you any longer; I will therefore tell you some of my own troubles, to convince you that I have had causes of delay, which you can have no notion of until I explain them. You must know, then, that we are subject to more than the random gun-shot in the field, for we are sometimes taken out of our house a hundred at a time, and put into a large basket to be placed in a meadow or spare plat of ground suiting the purpose, there to be murdered at leisure. This they call "shooting from the trap,"^[3] and is done in this way:

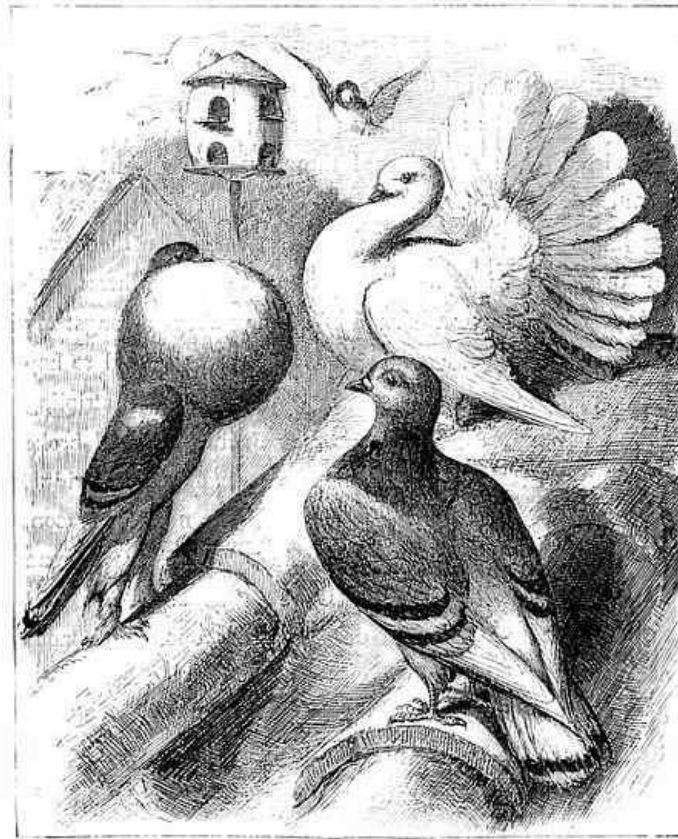
We being imprisoned, as I have said, as thick as we can stand in the basket, a man is placed by us to take us out *singly*, and carry us to a small box, at the distance of fifty or sixty yards; this box has a lid, to which is attached a string, by means of which, he, the man (if he is a man) can draw up the lid and let us fly at a signal given. Every sensible pigeon of course flies for his life, for, ranged on each side, stand from two to four or six men with guns, who fire as the bird gets upon the wing; and the cleverest fellows are those who can kill most;—and this they call *sport*!



PARTRIDGES.

I have sad cause to know how this sport is conducted, for I have been in the trap myself. Only one man, or perhaps a boy, fired at me as I rose; but I received two wounds, for one shot passed through my crop, but I was astonished to find how soon it got well; the other broke my leg just below the feathers. Oh, what anguish I suffered for two months! at the end of which time it withered and dropped off. So now, instead of running about amongst my red-legged brethren, as a pigeon ought, I am obliged to hop like a sparrow. But only consider what glory this stripling must have acquired, to have actually fired a gun and broke a pigeon's leg! Well, we both know,

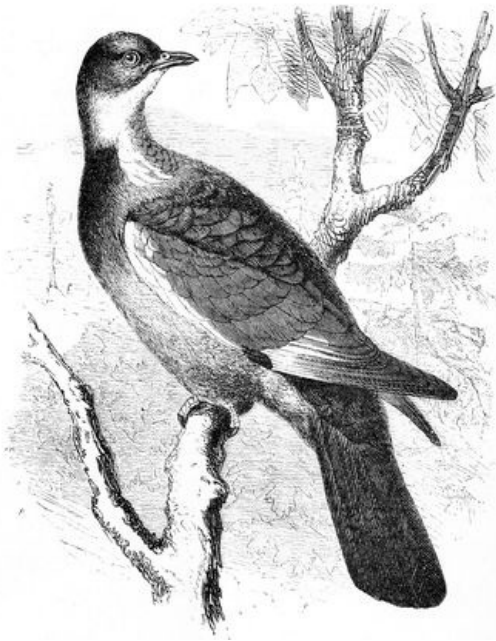
neighbour Partridge, what the Hawk is; he stands for no law, nor no season, but eats us when he is hungry. He is a perfect gentleman compared to these "Lords of the Creation," as I am told they call themselves; and I declare to you upon the honour of a pigeon, that I had much rather be torn to pieces by the Hawk than be shut up in a box at a convenient distance to be shot at by a dastard. You partridges are protected during great part of the year by severe laws, but whether such laws are wise, merciful, or just, I cannot determine,



but I know that they are strictly kept and enforced by those who make them. Take care of yourself, for the harvest is almost ripe.

I am, your faithful,

ONE-LEGGED FRIEND AT THE GRANGE.



LETTER XIII.

FROM THE WOOD-PIGEON TO THE OWL.

MY GOOD, OLD, WISE, SECLUDED, AND QUIET FRIEND,

I write to you in the fulness of my heart, for I have been grossly insulted by the Magpie, in a letter



OWL.

received this morning; in which I am abused for what my forefathers did long before I was born. I know of nothing more base, or more unjust, than thus raking up old quarrels^[4] and reproaching those who had nothing to do with them. The letter must have come through your office, but I

know you have not the authority to break open and examine letters passing between those who should be friends; I therefore do not accuse you; but sometimes the heart is relieved by stating its troubles even when no redress can be expected. I know that you cannot bring to punishment that slanderer, that babbler of the woods, any more than I can; but I wish you would give me a word of comfort, if it is ever so short.

From the plantation of firs,

Near the forest-side,

WOOD-PIGEON.



NIGHTINGALE.

LETTER XIV.

THE OWL IN REPLY TO THE WOOD-PIGEON.

DISTRESSED NEIGHBOUR,

I am sorry for your trouble, but cheer up your spirits, and though you are insulted, remember who it is that gives the affront, it is only the magpie; and depend upon it that in general the best way to deal with impudent fools is to be silent and take no notice of them. I should have enough to do if I were to resent all her impertinences. She will come sometimes round the ivy where I lodge in the old elm, or into the tower on the top of the hill; and there she will pimp and pry into my private concerns, and mob me, and call me "Old Wigsby" and "Doctor Winkum," and such kind of names, and all for nothing. I assure you it is well for her that she is not a mouse, or she should not long escape my talons; but who ever heard of such a thing as eating a magpie? I live chiefly on mice (when I am at liberty to catch them), but I have my complaints to make as well as you, for you know I hold a high situation in the Post-office, and I suppose you know, likewise, that the letters are brought in so very late that it often takes me half the night to sort them, and night is the very time when I ought to get my own food! At this rate of going on, and if the cats are industrious as usual, there will not be a mouse left for me, if I do not give up my place.

I have heard that my family are famed for wisdom; but for my part I will not boast of any such thing: yet I am wise enough to know that other people in high offices expect either a good salary or perquisites, as a reward for their labour, or what is easier still, somebody to do all the work for them. If I hold in my present mind until next quarter, I will certainly send in my resignation. Thus you see what an important thing it is to suit the person to the office, or the office to the person on whom it is conferred; for had the magpie, for instance, been secretary, every one of the letters would have been peeped into, for a certainty, for nothing can escape her curiosity. I will try to

bear with my situation a little longer, and believe me to be

Your true friend,

SECRETARY TO THE BOARD OF MANAGERS.

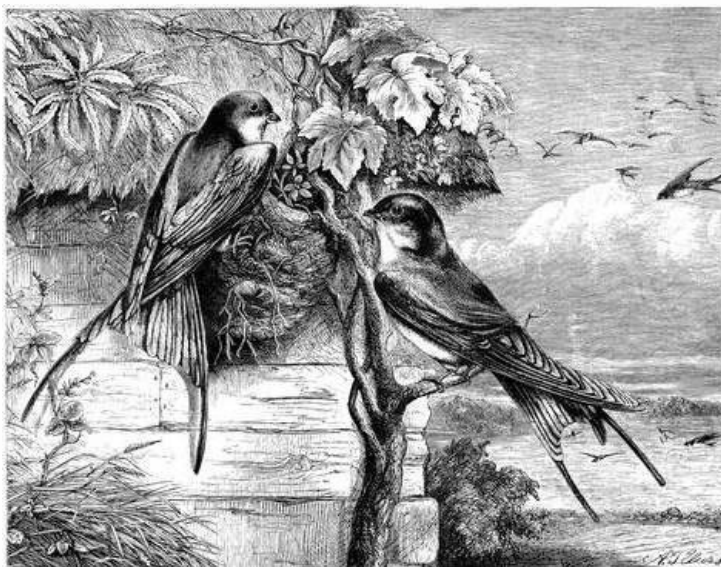


LETTER XV.

FROM A SWALLOW IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE TO AN ENGLISH ROBIN.

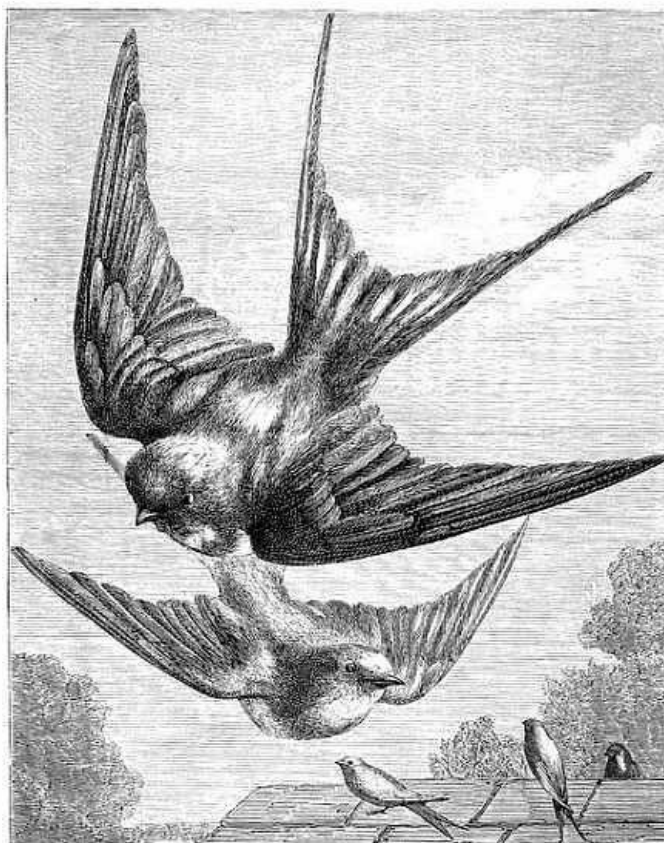
DEAR LITTLE BOB,

I remember your peaceful singing on the top of your shed, near my late dwelling, and I remember also that I promised to write you some account of my journey. You may recollect that, at the close of your summer, when flies became scarce, we all assembled on a sunny morning, on the roof of the highest building in the village, and talked loudly of the flight we intended to take. At last came the day appointed, and we mounted up in a vast body and steered southward.



SWALLOWS.

Being hatched in England, I had thought your valleys and streams matchless in beauty; and for anything I know to the contrary they certainly are; but I am now a traveller, and have a traveller's privilege to say what I like. When we reached the great water I was astonished at its width, but more still to see many travelling houses going at a prodigious rate, and sending forth from iron chimneys columns of black smoke over the face of the water, reaching further than you ever flew in your life; they have a contrivance on each side which puts the waves all in commotion, but they are not wings. My mother says that in old times, when swallows came to England, there were no such things to be seen. We crossed this water, and a fine sunny country beyond it, until I was tired, and we



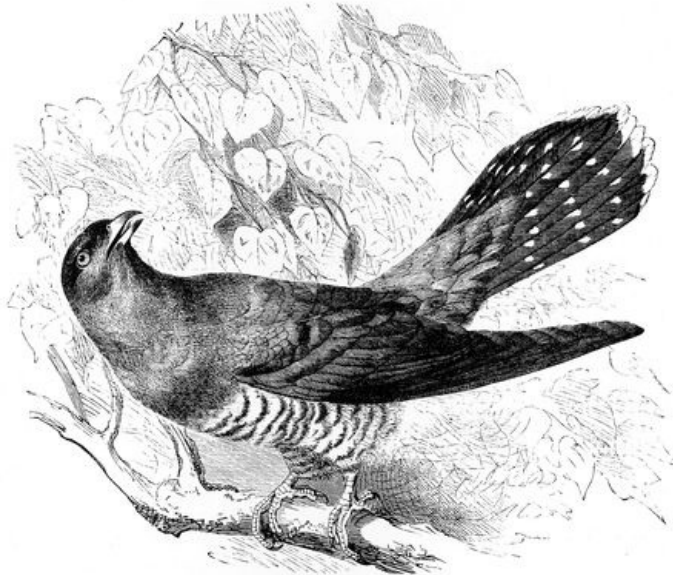
now found flies more abundant, though the oldest amongst us assure me that we must travel further still, over



another wide water, into a country where men's faces are of the same colour as my feathers, black and tawny; but travellers see strange things. When I come to England again I will endeavour to find out your village.^[5] I hope, for your sake, you may have a mild winter and good lodgings. This is all the news worth sending, and I must catch flies for myself now, you know.

So farewell,

For I am in haste.



LETTER XVI.

ON HEARING THE CUCKOO AT MIDNIGHT, MAY 1st. 1822.

(CHARLES BLOOMFIELD.)

'Twas the blush of the spring, vegetation was young,

And the birds with a maddening ecstasy sung
 To welcome a season so lovely and gay—
 But a scene the most sweet was the close of May-day.
 For the air was serene, and the moon was out bright,
 And Philomel boldly exerted her might
 In her swellings and trillings, to rival the sound
 Of the distant defiance of nightingales round.
 While the cuckoo as proudly was heard to prolong,
 Though daylight was over, her own mellow song,
 And appeared to exult; and at intervals, too,
 The owl in the distance joined in with "Too-who!"
 Unceasing, unwearied, each, proud of his power,
 Continued the contest from hour to hour;
 The nightingale vaunting—the owl in reply—
 With the cuckoo's response—till the moon from the sky
 Was hastening down to the west, and the dawn
 Was spreading the east; and the owl in the morn
 Sat silently winking his eyes at the sight;
 And the nightingale also had bidden "good-night."
 The cuckoo, left solus, continued with glee,
 His notes of defeat from his favourite tree;
 At length he departed; but still as he flew,
 Was heard his last notes of defiance, "Cuckoo!"

THE END.

London: R. Clay, Sons, and Taylor, Printers

NOTES:

[1] This part of the letter is very difficult of translation, as the plain word, in spiders' language, means merely "a deep one."—R. B.

[2] Cowper, that excellent man and poet, and close observer of nature, writes as follows to his friend, on the 11th of March, 1792:—

"TO JOHN JOHNSON, ESQ.

"You talk of primroses that you pulled on Candlemas Day, but what think you of me, who heard a nightingale on New Year's Day? Perhaps I am the only man in England who can boast of such good fortune. Good indeed! for if was at all an omen, it could not be an unfavourable one. The winter, however, is now making himself amends, and seems the more peevish for having been encroached on at so undue a season. Nothing less than a large slice out of the spring will satisfy him."

He adds the following lines on the occasion:—

*"TO THE NIGHTINGALE, WHICH THE AUTHOR HEARD SING ON
 NEW YEAR'S DAY, 1792.*

"Whence is it that amazed I hear
 From yonder wither'd spray,
 This foremost morn of all the year,
 The melody of May?

"And why, since thousands would be proud
 Of such a favour shown,
 Am I selected from the crowd,
 To witness it alone?

"Sing'st thou, sweet Philomel, to me,
 For that I also long
 Have practised in the groves like thee,
 Though not like thee in song?

"Or, sing'st thou rather under force
 Of some divine command,
 Commissioned to presage a course
 Of happier days at hand?

"Thrice welcome then! for many a long

And joyless year have I,
As thou to-day, put forth my song
Beneath a wintry sky.

"But thee no wintry skies can harm,
Who only need'st to sing
To make e'en January charm,
And every season spring.

R.B."

[3] I once witnessed this silly and barbarous sport, and saw at least a score of maimed and wounded birds upon the barns, and stables, and outhouses of the village. I was utterly disgusted, and it required a strong effort of the mind to avoid wishing that one of the gunners at least had hobbled off the ground with a dangling leg, which might for one half-year have reminded him of the cowardly practice of "shooting from the trap."—R. B.

[4] The poor pigeon, I think, must here allude to the old well-known quarrel between the two families about building their nests. The magpie once undertook to teach the pigeon how to build a more substantial and commodious dwelling, and certainly it would have become the learner to have observed her progress, and not interrupt the teacher; but the pigeon kept on her usual cry, "Take two, Taffy, take two" (for thus it is translated in Suffolk), but Mag insisted this was wrong, and that one stick at a time was quite enough; still the pigeon kept on her cry, "Take two, take two," until the teacher in a violent passion gave up the undertaking, exclaiming, "I say that one at a time is plenty, and if you think otherwise, you may act about the work yourself, for I will have no more to do with it." Since that time the wood-pigeon has built a wretched nest, sure enough, so thin that you may frequently see her two eggs through it, and if not placed near the body of a tree, or on strong branches, it is often thrown down by the wind, or the eggs rolled out; yet the young of this bird, before they are half grown, will defend themselves against any intruder, at which time the parent bird will dash herself down amongst the standing corn or high grass, and behave as though her wings were broken, and she was utterly disabled; and this she does to draw off the enemy from her young; so that this bird is not so foolish as Mag would make us believe.—R. B.

[5] It is much to be wished that the above letter had contained some information on a very curious subject, for I would rather believe the swallow himself than many tales told of them. It has been said that, instead of flying to southern countries, where they can find food and a congenial climate, they dive into the waters of a bog, and lie in a torpid state, through the winter, round the roots of flags and weeds.—R. B.

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