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“The bold little fellow defended himself with the sickle in his hand.”

TALES ABOUT BIRDS,

ILLUSTRATIVE OF THEIR

Nature, Habits, and Instincts.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "STORIES ABOUT DOGS,"—"TALES OF SHIPWRECKS,"

"STORIES ABOUT HORSES," ETC., ETC.

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P R E F A C E.

BIRDS are such universal favourites, and the Stories connected with their Habits and Instincts so varied and interesting, as to make me feel confident that the Volume now offered to my young readers will meet with a ready acceptance and approbation.

The Engravings, which have been executed by Mr. Landells, from Drawings by Mr. W. B. Scott, will, I hope, be found faithfully and spiritedly to embody the incidents of the Stories which they severally illustrate.

T. B.

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TALES ABOUT BIRDS.

CHAPTER I.

UNCLE THOMAS TELLS ABOUT THE GOLDEN EAGLE, AND NARRATES
VARIOUS STORIES ILLUSTRATIVE OF ITS FEROCITY AND POWER.

UNCLE THOMAS had scarcely finished his last series of Tales, when he was gratified by a visit from the Mama of his young auditors, to introduce her two little Girls, who, having heard their Brothers speak so much of the delightful Stories which he told them, had prevailed on her to come with them to request that Uncle Thomas would be so good as to permit them to accompany their Brothers when they came to visit him.

“ I am afraid, Uncle Thomas,” said Mama,
“ that we already trespass too much on your

kindness, in allowing the Boys to intrude upon you so frequently; but they seem always to be so much delighted with the Stories which you tell them that, during the hours in which they are not engaged in the school-room, I seldom hear them talk of any thing else. ‘Don’t you recollect the story which Uncle Thomas told us?’ cries one, in enforcing some controverted point. ‘Ah! but,’ exclaims another, ‘Uncle Thomas said so and so.’ And I have come at the request of their Sisters to beg that you will allow them to form part of your little circle of listeners.”

Uncle Thomas declared that he was delighted to hear that the Boys were interested in the Stories which he told them, and that he would be still more gratified to be honoured with the company of the young ladies.

Mary and Jane, who during Mama’s long speech had been carefully noting the various articles with which Uncle Thomas’s little room was furnished, were almost overjoyed to hear

that they were to be admitted. Mary intended to have thanked Uncle Thomas for this kindness, but while some other conversation, which it is unnecessary to repeat, took place between Mama and Uncle Thomas, her attention had been directed by Frank to a glass-case which stood on one side of the room, containing a variety of fine specimens of Birds. So completely was their attention engrossed by what they there saw, that they did not observe that during a pause in the conversation Uncle Thomas had advanced to the table at which they stood, and was listening to their remarks and to the questions with which Mary plied her brother.

“ Ah! I see,” said Uncle Thomas, “ it is about Birds I must tell you next. I can tell you many interesting stories about Birds; but Mama waits; we must not detain her at present.”

“ When shall we come again then, Uncle Thomas?” asked Frank.

“ When you please, Frank,” said Uncle Thomas. “ Suppose we say to-morrow night;

perhaps that will suit the convenience of the young ladies."

"Oh, quite, Uncle Thomas!" said Mary; "it will be quite convenient for us whenever it is so to you." Mama having given her assent to this arrangement, the little party, full of smiles, bade Uncle Thomas good morning.

On the following evening, accordingly, they again met, and when they had duly greeted their kind old Uncle Thomas, and seated themselves round his elbow-chair, he began:—

"Birds, my dear children, of which I promised to tell you some stories, are perhaps the most interesting class of animals in creation, whether we consider them in regard to their habits or to the curious structure of their bodies, by which they have been fitted by Nature for the place which God has assigned them, or to the Instincts which have been implanted in them. In most

minds their recollection is associated with all that is most beautiful and romantic in natural scenery. We meet with them in our walks, chirping and frolicing among the village hedgerows, or see them soaring, with almost untiring wing, high above the mountain tops, or hear their solitary voices as they make the wide-spreading and desolate moor seem even more lonely with their harsh and far-sounding notes. Wherever we direct our steps we are sure to find Birds enlivening and cheering the scene, or adding fresh interest by their varied and characteristic occupations. There are few indeed who cannot say with Cowper:—

“ Ten thousand warblers cheer the day, and one
The live-long night ; nor those alone whose notes
Nice-fingered art must emulate in vain ;
But cawing rooks, and kites, that swim sublime
In still repeated circles, screaming loud ;
The jay, the pie, and e’en the boding owl,
That hails the rising moon, have charms for me.”

“ Birds,” continued Uncle Thomas, “ have been divided by some naturalists into Land and

Water Birds ; but more recent and systematic writers have introduced a more extended classification. Cuvier, an eminent French author, divides them into Birds of Prey—such as the Eagle and Vulture ; Sparrow-like, or hopping Birds—such as Jays, Thrushes, &c. ; Climbing Birds—such as Parrots ; Poultry Birds—such as Turkeys, Pheasants, &c. ; Running and Wading Birds, which are easily distinguished by their long legs ; and Web-footed Birds—such as Ducks, Geese, Swans, &c.”

To this long and rather uninteresting detail Mary and Jane listened as patiently as possible. But no sooner was it finished, than the latter seized the opportunity to ask Uncle Thomas whether the Eagle was not the largest Bird in the world, and whether it was a native of Britain, as she had heard a story lately of one having carried off a child to its nest to feed its young?

“ The largest of the Birds of Prey, undoubtedly,” said Uncle Thomas, “ is the Golden Eagle. It inhabits all the wilder parts of

Europe, and is also found in other parts of the world. They are, however, only to be found among wild and savage scenery, preferring for their place of habitation the lonely and elevated peaks of the highest mountains, where, from their great power, they harbour secure from the storm and the tempest."

"Are they very large, Uncle Thomas?" asked Jane—"Larger than this bird?" pointing to a fine Falcon, which occupied a prominent place in the little museum already referred to.

"Yes, dear!" said Uncle Thomas; "they are much larger, very much larger than that. Like all other animals, they are of course subject to variations in size; their development in some measure depending on the plentifulness or scarcity of their food during the time they are in the nest, and indeed during the whole period until they arrive at their full growth; but the average size of the mature Bird is usually about three feet in length, measuring from the point

of the beak to the tip of the tail, while the wings from point to point measure between six and seven feet."

"They must be very powerful animals, Uncle Thomas," remarked Mary.

"So strong, that they frequently carry off lambs and other small animals to their nests," said Uncle Thomas; "and it is said that they have even occasionally carried away children. About a hundred years ago an incident of this kind is said to have occurred in Norway. While a boy about two years old was passing between his father's cottage and a field at no great distance, in which his parents were at work, an Eagle pounced upon him and flew off with him. His parents, attracted by his shrieks, saw their dear child carried off to an inaccessible rock, and notwithstanding all their efforts, they were unable to rescue him."

"And was the poor dear child killed, Uncle Thomas?" asked Jane.

"It appears from the story that he was," said

Uncle Thomas, “and unfortunately it is not the only instance of a similar kind. In one of the Feroe Islands, which lie between the north of Scotland and Iceland, an Eagle stooped down and carried away an infant which its mother had laid on the ground, close by the place where she was at work. It flew direct to its nest, at the point of a high rock so steep and precipitous that the boldest bird-catchers had never ventured to scale it. But the strength of a mother’s love overcame all obstacles; she climbed to the nest, but alas! she reached it too late. She found her poor child dead and partly devoured—its little eyes torn out by the cruel bird!

“I am happy to say, however,” continued Uncle Thomas, “that all attacks of the kind do not terminate so fatally. A child which was carried off by an Eagle in the Isle of Skye, in Scotland, was borne by the huge bird across a lake on the banks of which it sat down, probably for the purpose of feeding on its prey,

which it perhaps found too heavy to carry farther. Fortunately however, it happened that the bird alighted at a short distance from some people who were herding sheep, and hearing the infant cry, they hurried to the spot, frightened away the Eagle, and rescued it uninjured."

"It was very fortunate they were so near," remarked Harry.

"It was so," said Uncle Thomas, "and the parents were in this respect more fortunate than those of another child which was carried off by an Eagle from the side of its mother, who was at work in the fields. She saw the huge bird pounce down on her little darling, but before she could run to its assistance it was carried off, and she heard its cries as it was borne out of her sight, and she saw it no more. This took place in Sweden.

"Though the Eagle has long had the character of being a very bold and courageous bird," continued Uncle Thomas, "it really does not deserve its good name. It is sometimes

called the King of Birds, and if the term is limited, so as to convey only an idea of its great size and strength, it may be permitted; but we must not allow ourselves to be misled by a mere name. It is in truth almost the least courageous among birds, and is frequently put to flight by those of less than half its size."

"Do they ever attack men?" asked Frank.

"Unless when they are forced to put forth their strength in self-defence, which is an instinctive operation which even the weakest animals display," replied Uncle Thomas, "they never attack man; at least the only instance which I recollect of their threatening to do so is related by Captain Flinders, in his account of his voyage to New South Wales. While he and some of his officers were walking on shore, a large Eagle, with fierce looks and out-spread wings, was seen bounding towards them; when it arrived within a few yards it suddenly stopped and flew up into a tree. They had hardly got rid of this one, when a second flew towards them as if to

pounce upon them, but it also stopped short when quite close upon them."

"I suppose they were afraid, then," said Mary.

"Captain Flinders imagined," said Uncle Thomas, "that the Eagles had at first mistaken him and his officers for Kangaroos; and as the place seemed then quite uninhabited, he conjectured that the Eagles had never seen a man before; and he observed that they fed on those animals, as on the appearance of one, the Eagle stooped down at once and tore it in pieces in an instant.

"That the Eagle can defend itself very vigorously, however," continued Uncle Thomas, "is proved by an adventure which a young man had with one in the Highlands of Scotland. He had gone out very early one morning to shoot Rock Pigeons, accompanied by a Dog of the terrier breed. As he stood watching the Pigeons, an Eagle came floating over the brow of the precipice. He took aim and fired, and the bird fell to the ground with a broken wing. He attempted to master it with his hands, but it

fought with great determination, and lacerated his hands so that he was obliged to desist. He then caused his Dog to attack it, but though well accustomed to fight with Badgers and with Otters, it soon found that they were weak foes compared to the Eagle, and ran yelping away. The sportsman was at last compelled to knock it on the head with the end of his gun, nor was it killed till it had received about a dozen heavy blows. He described it as having legs as thick as his wrist."

"It must have been a very strong Bird," remarked Jane.

"It is perhaps only under the influence of extreme hunger, or in defence of themselves or their young," continued Uncle Thomas, "that the Eagle ever attacks human beings. Probably to the former of these is to be attributed the attack of one on a little boy of which I will now tell you:—

"A few years ago, as two boys, the one about seven and the other five years old,

were amusing themselves in trying to reap during the time that their parents were at dinner, in a field in the neighbourhood of New York, a large Eagle came sailing over them, and with a swoop attempted to seize the eldest, but luckily missed him. Not at all dismayed, the Bird alighted on the ground at a short distance, and in a few moments repeated the attempt. The bold little fellow defended himself with the sickle in his hand, and when the bird rushed upon him, he struck it. The sickle entered under the left wing, went through the ribs, and proved instantly fatal. On being measured, it was found that from the tip of one wing to that of the other, was upwards of six feet ! Its stomach was opened, and found to be entirely empty. The little boy did not receive a scratch."

"He must have been a bold little fellow," said Jane.

"Do you think you should have fought as determinedly, John ?" asked Mary.

John was, however, too modest to return an answer directly in the affirmative. He merely said mildly, “ I don’t know, Mary ; I hope I should.”

Uncle Thomas, seeing that this story of the valiant defence of the little boy excited so much interest among his little auditors, produced a portfolio, in which he kept a few choice prints, one of which contained a representation of the boy defending himself against the Eagle. When they had done admiring it, Uncle Thomas continued :—

“Powerful as the Eagle is, it is frequently vanquished by the animals on which it seizes. It has been observed while soaring into the sky with its prey suddenly to falter in its flight, and then to fall to the earth as if pierced with a ball by some skilful marksman. A game-keeper to a Scottish nobleman, who witnessed a scene of this kind, hurried to the spot, and found the Eagle quite dead, and a Stoat, an animal of the Weasel kind, severely wounded, struggling by its

side. The little animal on being seized by the Eagle had with instinctive sagacity seized upon and ruptured one of the principal arteries in the Eagle's neck, and thus brought his enemy to the ground.

"I wonder such a large and powerful animal as the Eagle did not kill the little Stoat before it had time to seize its neck," said Harry.

"Recollect, Harry," said Jane, "that Weasels are very nimble creatures. As we were walking through Langton Wood lately, we saw one running about, but it soon got among some loose stones and concealed itself."

"Perhaps," said Uncle Thomas, "the Eagle had missed its aim when it pounced upon its prey, and thus held it insecurely, for so powerful is the force with which it darts upon its object, that it usually kills its victim at one blow. When it fails to do this, a contest generally ensues; and powerful as the Eagle is, it does not always come off successful. On one

occasion, one was observed to pounce down upon a Cat. The latter darted its sharp claws into the Eagle and clung so that it could not be shaken off. It mounted into the air, but still puss held securely, and on descending to the ground the struggle continued, until some persons who witnessed the attack came up and captured both of the combatants.

“A contest, somewhat of the same kind,” continued Uncle Thomas, “was observed between an Otter and an Eagle. It was witnessed by a party of gentlemen who were enjoying the amusement of fishing in one of the Scottish Lakes. An Eagle, hovering over the lake, descried an Otter sleeping on the sunny side of a bank near the water’s edge, and pounced upon it. Thus attacked, the Otter stood on the alert, and prepared to give battle to its assailant, when another Eagle appeared, and joined in the attack. The unfortunate Otter, finding himself assaulted on both sides, immediately retreated to his favourite element. On reaching the water, it at-

tempted to dive, but was powerfully withheld by one of the Eagles, whose talons had been fixed in his skin, which made him redouble his exertions for life and liberty. In this way the combat was long and amusing, till the Eagle, finding his claws fairly disengaged, and little used to combat on such an element, precipitately beat a retreat, and retired with his companion to his native mountains.”

“ I have heard Mama say that there is a tame Eagle at —— Castle ; I wonder how such a wild creature can be tamed ! ” remarked Jane.

“ There have been frequent instances of the Eagle being tamed,” said Uncle Thomas, “ and sometimes even when taken after having arrived at maturity. One of this sort, which was taken in Ireland, had its wings cut, and was put into a large garden, where it soon became domesticated. Its wings gradually grew again, and the Eagle sometimes flew away for a fortnight at a time, but always returned. The children of the family frequently met it in their walks about

the garden, but it never offered them any molestation. It once, however, attacked its master ; it is supposed in consequence of his neglecting to bring its accustomed supply of food. After living ten or twelve years in this manner it one day quarrelled with a large mastiff. The fight must have been long and obstinate, but no one witnessed it. The Eagle was killed, and so severely was the Dog wounded that it died almost immediately afterwards.

“ In Norway,” continued Uncle Thomas, “ the people represent the Eagle as very sagacious, and as using the most curious devices to secure its prey. It is said, for instance, to attack and overcome Oxen in the following manner. It plunges into the sea, and after being completely drenched, rolls itself on the shore till its wings are quite covered with sand. It then rises into the air, and hovers over its unfortunate victim, and, when close to it, shakes its wings, and throws stones and sand into the eyes of the Ox ; and, having thus blinded it, terrifies the animal

by striking it with its powerful wings. The poor Ox runs about quite desperate, and at length falls down completely exhausted, or dashes itself to death by falling over some cliff. The Eagle then feasts undisturbed on his prey."

"It is a very sagacious stratagem indeed," said Mary; "I really do not see how it could proceed more efficiently if it was endowed with reason.

"But is it true?" asked Harry.

"You are right Harry," said Uncle Thomas; "that ought always to be the first consideration. So much fable has been mixed up with the accounts of the habits of animals that it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the true from the false. In the present case, for instance, the fact rests on the statement of a traveller named Von Buch, who assures us that the circumstance was related to him, in nearly the same terms, at places distant from each other. But, on the other hand, it is so contrary to the general habits of the Eagle that it seems most unlikely to be true;

besides, if the Eagle were to suffer its feathers to be drenched in the way described, it would be unable to fly, and would soon suffer for its hardihood by being drowned."

"Would it, indeed, Uncle Thomas?" asked Jane; "Swans and Geese go into the water, and are not drowned."

"No, my dear, they are not," said Uncle Thomas; "because their habits rendering it necessary for them to spend much of their time in water, the Creator has furnished them with an abundant supply of oily matter, with which they cover their feathers, so as to prevent the moisture from penetrating them; but Birds which are not intended to inhabit the water are not so provided, and would soon become unable to fly, even if they remained exposed to a severe shower of rain, without seeking shelter. The Osprey, or Sea-Eagle, which feeds upon fish which it catches in the sea, is provided in this manner; but then it could not be true of the Osprey either, because for this reason, the water

does not saturate its feathers, and the sand would not adhere to them."

"Is it not true, then?" asked Mary.

"I do not say that it is absolutely untrue," said Uncle Thomas; "because the person who relates it states that it was confirmed to him by various witnesses, in different places; but I think it is very unlikely, to say the least of it.

"However much we may differ as to the sagacity of the Eagle," continued Uncle Thomas, "there can be but one opinion as to its affection for its young, and the valour with which it defends them against all assailants. Ebel, in his work on Switzerland, relates a story of a chasseur, or hunter of that country, which illustrates this fact very strikingly. Having discovered a nest belonging to one of these terrible birds, and having killed the male, the hunter, by name Joseph Schoren, crept along the jut of a rock, his feet bare, the better to keep himself firm, in the hope of catching the young ones. He

raised his arm, and had already his hand upon the nest, when the female, pouncing on him from above, struck her talons through his arm, and her beak into his loins. The hunter, whom the smallest movement would have precipitated to the bottom, lost not his presence of mind, but remained firm, rested his fowling piece, which fortunately he held in his left hand, against the rock, and with his foot directing it full on the Bird, touched the trigger, and she fell dead. He brought away the Eagles, but the wounds which he had received confined him for several months. M. Ebel adds, that these hunters are men of whom the savages of America might learn lessons of patience and courage in the midst of danger and privation. The greater part of them come to a tragical end. They disappear, and their disfigured remains, which are now and then found, alone intimate their fate."

Uncle Thomas went on to say that he had not yet quite finished all his stories about the

Eagle; but as the evening was now far advanced, it would be necessary to delay them till their next meeting.

CHAPTER II.

UNCLE THOMAS TELLS ABOUT THE OSPREY, OR SEA-EAGLE, AND ABOUT
THE WHITE-HEADED, OR BALD EAGLE OF AMERICA.

“THE Osprey, or Sea-Eagle, which I mentioned to you when I last had the pleasure of seeing you,” said Uncle Thomas to his young hearers on a subsequent evening, when they had once more gathered round his chair, “though not quite so large as the Golden Eagle, is yet a very powerful Bird, being in general upwards of two feet in length, its wings extending about five feet and a half. It seeks its prey by water only, and builds its nest in the crevices of rocks, on the banks of lakes and rivers.”

“How does it catch the fish?” asked Frank.

“It has, like most of the other Birds of the Eagle tribe,” said Uncle Thomas, “been endowed

with remarkably keen power of vision, and as it sails over the waters it can, even at a considerable height in the air, see fish swimming near the surface, and, dropping down upon them with the swiftness of an arrow, it plunges into the water, and seldom emerges without securing them in its powerful talons.

“Though the species is a native of Britain,” continued Uncle Thomas, “it is in America where it is seen to most advantage, as its habits can be more easily watched from the vast extent of the broad waters by which some of the majestic rivers are distinguished. It has accordingly attracted the particular notice of two of the most eminent American naturalists. Here is Wilson’s account of its mode of fishing, and the manner in which it seizes its prey.”

Uncle Thomas then took down from a shelf a volume of Wilson’s “American Ornithology,” and turning to the account of the Fish-Hawk, which he explained was the name by which the bird was known in America, “and though”

said he, "as I have already told you, it is smaller than the Golden Eagle, yet its general character is the same; and its size and strength entitle it to the more high-sounding name." He then pointed out the passage which he wished Harry to read, which was as follows:—

"On leaving the nest, the Osprey usually flies direct till he comes to the sea, then sails around, in easy curving lines, turning sometimes in the air as on a pivot, apparently without the least exertion, rarely moving the wings, his legs extended in a straight line behind, and his remarkable length, and curvature or bend of wing, distinguishing him from all other Hawks. The height at which he thus elegantly glides is various, from one hundred to one hundred and fifty and two hundred feet, sometimes much higher, all the while calmly reconnoitering the face of the deep below. Suddenly he is seen to check his course, as if struck by a particular object, which he seems to survey for a few moments with such steadiness that he appears fixed in

air, flapping his wings. This object, however, he abandons, or rather, the fish he had in his eye has disappeared, and he is again seen sailing around as before. Now, his attention is again arrested, and he descends with great rapidity, but, ere he reaches the surface, shoots off on another course, as if ashamed that another victim had escaped him. He now sails at a short height above the surface, and, by a zig-zag descent, and without seeming to dip his feet in the water, seizes a fish, which, after carrying a short distance, he probably drops, or yields up to the Bald Eagle, and again ascends by easy spiral circles to the higher regions of the air, where he glides about in all the ease and majesty of his species. At once, from this sublime and aerial height, he descends like a perpendicular torrent, plunging into the sea with a loud rushing sound, and with the certainty of a rifle-shot. In a few moments he emerges, bearing in his claws his struggling prey, which he always carries head foremost, and, having risen a

few feet above the surface, shakes himself as a Water-Spaniel would do, and directs his heavy and laborious course directly for the land. If the wind blows hard, and his nest lies in the quarter from whence it comes, it is amusing to observe with what judgment and exertion he beats to windward, not in a direct line, that is, *in the wind's eye*, but making several successive tacks to gain his purpose. This will appear the more striking, when we consider the size of the fish which he sometimes bears along. A Shad was taken from a Fish Hawk near Great Egg Harbour, on which he had begun to regale himself, and had already ate a considerable portion of it; the remainder weighed six pounds. Another Fish Hawk was passing the same place, with a large Flounder in his grasp, which struggled and shook him so, that he dropped it on the shore. The Flounder was picked up, and served the whole family for dinner. It is a singular fact, that the Hawk never descends to pick up a fish which he happens to drop either

on the land or in the water. There is a kind of abstemious dignity in this habit of the Hawk superior to the gluttonous voracity displayed by most other birds of prey, particularly by the Bald Eagle. The Hawk, however, in his fishing pursuits, sometimes mistakes his mark, or overrates his strength, by striking fish too large and powerful for him to manage, by whom he is suddenly dragged under water; and though he sometime succeeds in extricating himself, after being taken three or four times down, yet oftener both parties perish. The bodies of Sturgeon, and of several other large fish, with a Fish Hawk fast grappled in them, have at various times been found dead on the shore, cast up by the waves."

"That is very curious," said John. "I wonder the Eagle does not relax his hold of the fish when it finds it is too strong for him."

"The talons of the Eagle tribe, with which they secure their prey," said Uncle Thomas, "are remarkably sharp and powerful instruments,

nor is the power with which they wield them less remarkable, but, like all other muscular power, its greatest force can be exerted in one direction only. Thus, for instance, John, in the case of your own hand, the power with which you could close your fingers on a cylinder compared to that which, supposing it hollow, you could exercise on it by opening them (or applying that power backwards,) is at least ten to one. This will explain to you how it is that the Eagles are sometimes caught in the way Mr. Wilson has stated. They seize their prey so firmly that their talons get fixed in the animal's flesh, and they are unable to withdraw them.

“In Britain,” continued Uncle Thomas, “several instances of the same kind have been observed. On a very sultry day in the month of July a shepherd, while engaged in searching for some missing Sheep, observed an Eagle seated on the banks of a deep pool, apparently watching its prey. Presently it darted into the

water, and seized, with a powerful grasp, a large Salmon. A desperate struggle now took place, and the shepherd hurrying to the spot found the Eagle unable to extricate itself, and frequently pulled under water by his vigorous antagonist. Seizing a large stone, the shepherd threw it at the combatants with such force that it broke the Eagle's wing, and the Salmon exhausted by its violent struggles, suffered itself to be captured without difficulty.

“An adventure of the same kind,” said Uncle Thomas, “in which, however, the Eagle was victorious, is related by a Scotch clergyman. A large Eagle in one of its hunting excursions observing a Halibut—a large flat fish somewhat resembling a Turbot—within its reach, stooped down and struck his powerful talons into its back ; a struggle now took place, but the fish not possessing the agility of the salmon was at length overcome. It was too large however, for the Eagle to carry off, so, spreading its wings as a sailor would do the sail

of a boat, it remained seated on the back of the Halibut till the wind bore it to the shore. Unhappily for the poor Eagle, however, its troubles did not end here, for its motions having been watched, some people rushed in and took it alive before it could extricate itself."

"Poor creature!" said Jane, "he deserved to escape after displaying so much ingenuity."

"Harry," said Uncle Thomas, "will now have the goodness to read to us Audubon's very charming account of what he calls the Great American Eagle, but which is supposed to be merely the Osprey in its young plumage. Here it is:—

"Never shall I forget the delight which the first sight that I obtained of this noble bird gave me. Not even Herschel, when he discovered the planet which bears his name, could have experienced more rapturous feelings. We were on a trading voyage, ascending the Upper Mississippi. The keen wintry blasts whistled around us, and the cold from which I suffered

had, in a great degree, extinguished the deep interest which, at other seasons, this magnificent river has been wont to awake in me. I lay stretched beside our patroon. The safety of our cargo was forgotten, and the only thing that called my attention was the multitude of Ducks of different species, accompanied by vast flocks of Swans, which from time to time passed us. My patroon, a Canadian, had been engaged many years in the fur trade. He was a man of much intelligence; and, perceiving that these birds had engaged my curiosity, seemed anxious to find some new object to divert me. An Eagle flew over us. ‘How fortunate!’ he exclaimed; ‘this is what I could have wished. Look, Sir! the Great Eagle, and the only one I have seen since I left the lakes.’ I was instantly on my feet, and, having observed it attentively, concluded, as I lost it in the distance, that it was a species quite new to me. My patroon assured me that such birds were indeed rare; that they sometimes followed the hunters, to feed on the

entrails of animals which they had killed, when the lakes were frozen over, but that, when the lakes were open, they would dive in the daytime after fish, and snatch them up in the manner of the Fishing Hawk, and that they roosted generally on the shelves of the rocks, where they built their nests.

“ Convinced that the bird was unknown to naturalists, I felt particularly anxious to learn its habits, and to discover in what particulars it differed from the rest of its genus. My next meeting with it was a few years afterwards, whilst engaged in collecting Cray-Fish on one of those flats which border and divide Green River, in Kentucky, near its junction with the Ohio. The river is there bordered by a range of high cliffs, which, for some distance, follow its windings. I observed on the rocks, which, at that place, are nearly perpendicular, signs of a nest which I fancied might belong to the Owls that might have resorted thither. I mentioned the circumstance to my companions, when one of

them, who lived within a mile of the place, told me it was the nest of the Brown Eagle, meaning the White-Headed Eagle in its immature state. I assured him that this could not be, and remarked that neither the old nor the young birds of that species ever build in such places, but always in trees. Although he could not answer my objection he stoutly maintained that a Brown Eagle of some kind above the usual size had built there, and added, that he had espied the nest some days before, and had seen one of the old birds dive and catch a fish. This he thought strange, having till then always observed that both Brown Eagles and Bald Eagles procured this kind of food by robbing the Fish-Hawks. He said that if I felt particularly anxious to know what nest it was I might soon satisfy myself, as the old birds would come and feed their young with fish, for he had seen them do so before.

“In high expectation, I seated myself at about a hundred yards from the foot of the

rock. Never did time pass more slowly. I could not help betraying the most impatient curiosity, for my hopes whispered it was a Sea-Eagle's nest. Two long hours had elapsed before the old bird made his appearance, which was announced to us by the loud hissings of the two young ones, which crawled to the extremity of the hole to receive a fine fish. I had a perfect view of this noble bird as he held himself to the edging rock, hanging like the Barn, Bank, or Social Swallow; his tail spread, and his wings partly so. I trembled lest a word should escape from my companions.—The slightest murmur had been treason from them. They entered into my feelings, and, although little interested, gazed with me. In a few minutes the other parent joined its mate, and, from the difference in size (the female of rapacious birds being much larger), we knew this to be the mother bird. She also had brought a fish; but, more cautious than her mate, she glanced her quick and piercing eye

around, and instantly perceived that her abode had been discovered. She dropped her prey, with a loud shriek communicated the alarm to the male, and, hovering with him over our heads, kept up a growling cry to intimidate us from our suspected design. This watchful solicitude I have ever found peculiar to the female,—must I be understood to speak only of birds?

“The young having concealed themselves, we went and picked up the fish which the mother had let fall. It was a white Perch, weighing about five pounds and a half. The upper part of the head was broken in, and the back torn by the talons of the Eagle. We had plainly seen her bearing it in the manner of the Fish-Hawk.

“This day’s sport being at an end, as we journeyed homewards we agreed to return the next morning, with the view of obtaining both the old and young birds; but rainy and tempestuous weather setting in, it became necessary to defer the expedition till the third day following,

when, with guns and men all in readiness, we reached the rock. Some posted themselves at the foot, others upon it, but in vain. We passed the entire day without either seeing or hearing an Eagle, the sagacious birds, no doubt, having anticipated an invasion, and removed their young to new quarters.

“ I come at last to the day which I had so often and so ardently desired. Two years had gone by since the discovery of the nest, in fruitless excursions; but my wishes were no longer to remain ungratified. In returning from the little village of Henderson, I saw an Eagle rise from a small enclosure not a hundred yards before me, where a few days before some Hogs had been slaughtered, and alight upon a low tree branching over the road. I prepared my double-barrelled piece which I constantly carry, and went slowly and cautiously towards him. Quite fearlessly he waited my approach, looking upon me with undaunted eye. I fired and he fell; before I reached him he was

dead. With what delight did I survey the magnificent bird ! Had the finest Salmon ever pleased him as he did me ? Never. I ran and presented him to my friend with a pride which they alone can feel who, like me, have devoted themselves from their earliest childhood to such pursuits, and who have derived from them their first pleasures. To others I must seem to prattle out of fashion."

"Mr. Audubon seems to have been a very keen sportsman," remarked Mary.

"He is a most enthusiastic naturalist," said Uncle Thomas, "and if we have time this evening before you go I will tell you a little story of his perseverance which I am sure will interest you, but there is still another Eagle which I must first introduce to you, the White-Headed or Bald Eagle It also is an American species, and is thus described by our friend Wilson."—

"Shall I read it, Uncle Thomas ?" asked Harry.

"Or I ?" enquired John.

“Thank you, Harry,” replied Uncle Thomas; “I think we have already taxed you sufficiently for one night; John will be so kind:”—

“This distinguished bird,” says this equally distinguished naturalist, “as he is the most beautiful of his tribe in this part of the world, is entitled to particular notice. The celebrated cataract of Niagara is a noted place of resort for the Bald Eagle, as well on account of the fish procured there, as for the numerous carcasses of Squirrels, Deer, Bears, and various other animals that, in their attempts to cross the river above the Falls, have been dragged into the current and precipitated down that tremendous gulf, where, among the rocks that bound the Rapids below, they furnish a rich repast for the Vulture, the Raven, and the Bald Eagle, the subject of the present account. Formed by nature for braving the severest cold; feeding equally on the produce of the sea, and of the land; possessing powers of flight capable of outstripping even the tempests themselves; unawed by any

thing but man ; and, from the ethereal heights to which it soars, looking abroad at one glance, on an immeasurable expanse of forests, fields, lakes, and ocean, deep below him, he appears indifferent to the little localities of change of seasons ; as in a few minutes he can pass from summer to winter, from the lower to the higher regions of the atmosphere, the abode of eternal cold, and from thence descend, at will, to the torrid or the arctic regions of the earth. He is, therefore, found at all seasons in the countries he inhabits ; but prefers such places as have been mentioned above, from the great partiality he has for fish.

“ In procuring these, he displays in a very singular manner the genius and energy of his character, which is fierce, contemplative, daring, and tyrannical ; attributes not exerted but on particular occasions, but, when put forth, overpowering all opposition. Elevated on the high dead limb of some gigantic tree, that commands a wide view of the neighbouring shore and

ocean, he seems calmly to contemplate the motions of the various feathered tribes that pursue their busy avocations below; the snow-white Gulls slowly winnowing the air; the busy *Tringæ* coursing along the sands; trains of Ducks streaming over the surface; silent and watchful Cranes, intent and wading; clamorous Crows; and all the winged multitudes that subsist by the bounty of this vast liquid magazine of nature. High over all these hovers one whose action instantly arrests his whole attention. By his wide curvature of wing, and sudden suspension in air, he knows him to be the Fish-Hawk, settling over some devoted victim of the deep. His eye kindles at the sight, and, balancing himself with half-opened wings on the branch, he watches the result. Down, rapid as an arrow from heaven, descends the distant object of his attention, the roar of its wings reaching the ear as it disappears in the deep, making the surges foam around. At this moment the eager looks of the Eagle are all ardour; and

levelling his neck for flight, he sees the Fish-Hawk once more emerge, struggling with his prey, and mounting in the air with screams of exultation. This is the signal for our hero, who, launching in the air, instantly gives chase, and soon gains on the Fish-Hawk. Each exerts his utmost to mount above the other, displaying in these rencounters the most elegant and sublime aerial evolutions. The unencumbered Eagle rapidly advances, and is just on the point of reaching his opponent, when, with a sudden scream, probably of despair and honest execration, the latter drops his fish : the Eagle poisoning himself for a moment, as if to take a more certain aim, descends like a whirlwind, snatches it in his grasp ere it reaches the water, and bears his ill-gotten booty silently away to the woods."

"How very naughty!" said Jane.

"I certainly cannot commend the Bald Eagle for such conduct," said Uncle Thomas; "but he is not always thus dependent on the exertions of the Osprey. It is only when he takes a fancy

to a fish dinner that he is so unjust. At other times he seeks his food in the field and the forest, pouncing down upon the smaller animals, and destroying Hares and Lambs, as well as Ducks and Game Birds. One has been known even to attack a Dog.

“The intrepidity of his character,” continued Uncle Thomas, “may be farther illustrated by an incident which occurred a few years ago near New Jersey. A woman, who happened to be weeding in a garden, had set her child down near, to amuse itself, while she was at work, when a sudden scream from the child alarmed her, and, starting up, she beheld the infant thrown down, and dragged along for a short distance, and a large Bald Eagle bearing off a fragment of its frock; which, being the only part seized, and giving way, fortunately saved the life of the infant.”

“That was indeed providential!” remarked Jane.

“There is another trait in the character of

the White-Headed Eagle," said Uncle Thomas ; " namely, its affection for its young, of which I must not omit to tell you, in order to counter-balance the impression which his robbing the Osprey has made upon you. It also is related by Wilson. ' As a proof of the attachment of the Bald Eagle to its young,' says he, ' a person near Norfolk informed me that in clearing a piece of wood on his place, they met with a large dead pine tree, on which was a Bald Eagle's nest and young. The tree being on fire more than half way up, and the flames rapidly ascending, the parent Eagle darted around and among the flames, until her plumage was so much injured, that it was with difficulty she could make her escape, and even then, she several times attempted to return to relieve her offspring.' "

" I should not have expected to find so much affection united with so many evil qualities," said Mary.

" It is only among rational creatures," said

Uncle Thomas ; “ and not even always among them—perhaps it is only certainly to be found in the character of God himself—that we find justice and power going hand in hand ; but affection for their offspring is an instinct which the Creator has implanted in the breasts of all his creatures. I have however already detained you too late this evening, so must bid you good night.”

“ But the story about Audubon, Uncle Thomas ? ” said Harry.

“ Oh, it is soon told,” said Uncle Thomas ; “ but I hope the moral you will long remember. From his earliest years, Mr. Audubon has been an enthusiastic student of Nature. His whole time has been devoted to it, and years spent in traversing the woods and prairies of his native country, studying the habits and manners of Birds. His rambles, he tells us, speaking of these wanderings, invariably commenced at break of day ; and to return wet with dew and bearing a feathered prize was the highest enjoy-

ment of his life. After a long time spent in these enquiries, an accident which happened to two hundred of the drawings which he had made of the various Birds which he found, nearly put a stop to his researches in ornithology. ‘I shall relate it,’ he says, ‘merely to show how far enthusiasm—for by no other name can I call the persevering zeal with which I laboured—may enable the observer of Nature to surmount the most disheartening obstacles. I left the village where I had resided for several years, to proceed to Philadelphia on business. I looked to all my drawings before my departure, placed them carefully in a wooden box, and gave them in charge to a relative, with injunctions to see that no injury should happen to them. My absence was for several months, and when I returned, after having enjoyed the pleasures of home for a few days, I inquired after my box, and what I was pleased to call my treasure. The box was produced and opened; but, reader, feel for me: a pair of

Norway Rats had taken possession of the whole, and had reared a young family amongst the gnawed bits of paper which, but a few months before, represented nearly a thousand inhabitants of the air! The burning heat which instantly rushed through my brain was too great to be endured, without affecting the whole of my nervous system. I slept not for several nights, and the days passed like days of oblivion, until the animal powers being recalled into action through the strength of my constitution, I took up my gun, my note-book, and my pencil, and went forth to the woods as gaily as if nothing had happened. I felt pleased that I might now make much better drawings than before, and ere less than three years had elapsed, I had my portfolio filled again."

CHAPTER III.

UNCLE THOMAS TELLS SEVERAL INTERESTING TALES ABOUT THE FEROCITY AND TENACITY OF LIFE IN THE VULTURE, AND ABOUT THE GREEDINESS WITH WHICH IT DEVOURS ITS PREY.

So interested had Mary and Jane become in Uncle Thomas's Stories that long ere the time for setting out on the following evening they were in readiness. Mary, indeed, wished to set off at once without waiting the arrival of the usual hour, as she was, she said, quite sure that Uncle Thomas would be glad to see them, however soon, and that there was no fear of exhausting his Stories, since he had so many, and really she was so anxious to hear him begin. All her efforts, however, could not convince Mama of the propriety of setting out so early, and she at length found

some occupation on which she soon became so intent that the time seemed to steal imperceptibly away, and she had not quite finished the task which she had appointed to herself, when her Brothers gave notice that it was time to set out.

Uncle Thomas received them in his usual affectionate manner, and when they were once more seated he began :—

“ I am this evening going to tell you,” he said, “ about a Bird which, though in some degree allied to the Eagles, yet differs from them in many essential points—I mean the Vulture. While the Eagle seeks its prey among living animals only, the Vulture confines itself to dead and decaying substances, seeming to prefer such as is in the last stage of decomposition, rather than fresh and recently killed animals.”

“ A singular taste it must have, Uncle Thomas,” remarked John.

“ To our notions it does seem singular,” said Uncle Thomas; “ it yet requires but a

moment's consideration to show us how admirably this 'depraved' taste, as it has been called, fits the animal for the purposes for which the Creator designed it. The Vulture is found in the greatest numbers in hot climates, where, if the bodies of dead animals were left to putrify and taint the air, they would soon cause a pestilence, and thus spread death and destruction among the inhabitants. But against such calamities Providence has guarded, by creating the Vulture with an appetite for such substances which are thus speedily consumed. It is thus that we can readily account for a taste which seems to us at first to be almost inexplicable.

"In most of the towns in Egypt," continued Uncle Thomas, "the Vulture is a privileged citizen, and no one is allowed to molest it. It there executes the office of scavenger, and speedily removes such substances as would soon become offensive."

"Does the Vulture never kill its own prey?" asked Harry.

“ I do not recollect an instance of its so doing,” said Uncle Thomas, “ and indeed its sluggish inactive flight in some measure unfits it for procuring its food in this way, though I dare say they sometimes find it necessary to exert themselves. But they have been gifted by Nature with a power which supplies the place of activity; their extraordinary strength of vision, enabling them to perceive their prey at a distance of many miles. On one occasion, a hunting party in India killed a large Hog, and left it on the ground near their tent. In about an hour afterwards some of the party happening to be walking near the spot where it lay, the sky being perfectly clear, their attention was attracted by a dark spot in the air at a great distance. As they looked at it, it appeared to increase in size, and to move directly towards them. It proved to be a vulture flying in a direct line towards the dead Hog. In an hour seventy others came in all directions.”

“How did they all get notice about the dead Hog?” asked Mary.

“That is a question which I cannot answer,” said Uncle Thomas. “It appears quite inexplicable, except on the principle of the watchful care of God over every living creature. The particular means by which it is accomplished, however, I cannot explain. It has frequently been observed that in crossing the wide-spreading deserts of Africa, where there is neither food nor shelter to be obtained, and consequently there is no temptation to the Vulture frequently to survey it, should a camel or other beast of burden belonging to the caravans which cross these inhospitable deserts drop down, a very short time elapses before numbers of vultures are seen approaching in all directions, and from such distances that when first observed they seem but so many specks in the sky.

“Feeding, as the Vultures do,” continued Uncle Thomas, “at uncertain intervals, when they do happen to fall in with a prey, they gorge

themselves to such a degree as to make themselves quite unable to fly. The natives of South America avail themselves of this voracity to catch the Condor—the Vulture of that country. They expose the carcass of a dead Horse or Cow, which soon attracts plenty of Condors. They allow them to feed heartily, and when they have completely gorged themselves, they approach and throw a noose over their heads, and thus secure them.

“ When, however, they are attacked before they have finished their filthy meal, they fight with great determination. ‘ One day,’ says a traveller, who proceeded up the Nile, ‘ as I was reading in my cabin, my attention was directed by the trackers to three large Vultures on the shore, not forty yards distant. Immediately afterwards two of them retired leisurely into the desert, and the other to a ridge of sand upon the top of a bank. I was quickly landed, and firing at the latter, he appeared to be hit, though not so severely as to prevent his flying

about a mile up the stream, where he again settled. I now passed the ridge in search of his two companions, which had joined a party of four others, and were all sitting together on a sandhill at no great distance. Their wings were spread, their plumage ragged, and they looked bare and hungry as the desert around them. To approach unobserved was impossible. There was not even a mat-rush for shelter. They began to exchange looks, seeming to communicate their suspicions that all was not right, and then taking flight, one by one, the last had gone before I could fire with any fair chance of success. I had scarcely regained the bank in quest of the one I had fired at, when I heard a shot a little higher up, and at the same time saw a Vulture fall into the river, and come paddling down with open wings. But even the old Nile could not befriend her. A bearded and swarthy Arab appeared upon the bank and, running down to the water's edge, stopped as if perplexed respecting his next step. The delay

was momentary ; with one and the same effort he threw his clothes upon the mud and himself into the stream, and reaching forward with alternate arms quickly overtook the wounded Bird. The latter was ready to receive him. Stretching forth his neck and opening his beak, he turned upon his pursuer, who by darting up the stream, eluded his attack. After repeated attempts, the Arab at length reached the end of the wing under water, and swimming gently forward on his side, pulled the bird, apparently exhausted, towards the shore ; but the Vulture no sooner gained his feet than he furiously assailed his naked enemy, who, retreating with a loud yell, first in a straight line, then in a circle round the bird, still held the extreme end of the feathers, and warded off the strokes with its own pinion. The Vulture's beak was frequently within a few inches of the Arabs ribs, and had he succeeded, he would doubtless have made short work of it. Yet the cry of the Arab was not altogether that of fear. There was a mix-

ture of bitter playfulness and triumph, as one sometimes says, 'You will—will you?' It was a Turk who had shot the bird, and he was now watching the affair from the bank. I hastened towards him, and, neither understanding the other's language, we commenced, after the usual salaam, a sort of telegraphic conversation; the bird and our guns being the chief topic. The Turk had taken mine to examine, and appeared much pleased with it, particularly with the locks, when the Vulture renewed his attack upon the man. Requesting permission to end the business with my gun, he ordered his myrmidon to stand aside, and the bird immediately fell. His head was under him, and he bled profusely, and seemed, after being convulsed for a moment to be quite dead. It was shot from less than four yards distance, and the gun contained six small Turkish bullets; notwithstanding this, after we had finished our communications, which lasted some minutes, I saw him struggling again. He stood higher than a full-

sized Turkey-cock, measured about ten feet from point to point of his wings, and his beak and talons were terrific.'

"Another instance of the same kind," continued Uncle Thomas, occurred in South America to an English Miner, who boldly attacked a Condor, single handed. Seeing several of these animals congregated together, and guessing that they were attracted by some dead animal, he rode up to them and found a large flock gathered round the carcass of a Horse. One of the largest was standing with one foot on the ground and the other on the Horse's body, exhibiting great muscular power as he tore off the flesh in large pieces; sometimes pushing with his leg, and sometimes shaking his head in his efforts to detach them. As the Miner approached, one of the Vultures, which seemed to be gorged, flew off to a distance, of about twenty yards; he rode up to it, and jumping from his horse seized the bird by the neck. It struggled violently, and the man declared he

never had such a trial of strength in his life. He put his knee on its breast, and tried with all his might to twist its neck, but the Condor, objecting to this, fought valiantly; the man all the while in the greatest terror lest several of its companions, which were flying overhead, should alight and take part with their comrade. At length, however, he overcame it, and tearing out the pinion quills of its wing he brought them off in triumph leaving the bird as he thought dead, but another horseman, who happened to pass that way some time after, found it still alive and struggling.

“ The tenacity of life of the Vulture is also shown by an adventure which occurred to a recent traveller in Asia Minor. The bird referred to was shot about nine o'clock in the morning, and at the time was washing itself in a stream after its hearty meal upon a dead Camel. ‘ It was wounded on the head and neck, and dropped immediately, but, upon taking it up, its talons closed on the hand of my servant, making him

cry out with pain. He placed it on the ground, and I stood with my whole weight upon its back, pressing the breast bone against the rock, when its eye gradually closed, its hold relaxed, and to all appearance life became extinct. It was then packed up in my leather hood, and strapped behind the saddle. The day was oppressively hot, for we trod upon our shadows as we rode across the plain. Until the evening at eleven o'clock the Vulture remained tightly bound behind the saddle; my servant, on unpacking, threw the bundle containing it into the tent, while he prepared water for cleaning and skinning it. Intending to examine this noble bird more carefully, I untied the package, and what was my surprise, to see it raise its head and fix its keen eye upon me! I immediately placed my feet upon its back, holding by the top of the tent, and leaning all my weight upon it, but with a desperate struggle it spread out its wings, which reached across the tent, and by beating them, attempted to throw me off.

My shouts soon brought my servant, who at length killed it by repeated blows upon the head with the butt end of his gun.’”

“Is the Vulture like the Eagle?” asked Jane.

“It bears some resemblance to it,” said Uncle Thomas, “but it is far from possessing the same bold undaunted bearing. From its habits of feeding on carrion, its head if covered with feathers would soon become coated over with offensive matter, it, as well as the neck of the animal, has been left by nature in some species quite free from feathers, and in others very sparingly furnished. From its habits of foul feeding, it is at all times exceedingly disagreeable to approach them, their smell being extremely offensive. I have already told you how the Condor of South America feeds. A naturalist has recorded a dinner scene of the Black Vulture of the United States; they also were luxuriating on the carcass of a dead horse:—

“ The ground, for a hundred yards beyond it, was black with Carrion Crows ; many sat on the tops of sheds, fences, and houses within sight ; sixty or eighty in the opposite side of a small run. I counted at one time two hundred and thirty-seven, but I believe there were more, besides several in the air over my head, and at a distance. I ventured cautiously within thirty yards of the carcass, where three or four Dogs, and twenty or thirty Vultures, were busily tearing and devouring. Seeing them take no notice, I ventured nearer, till I was within ten yards, and sat down on the bank. Still they paid little attention to me. The Dogs being sometimes accidentally flapped with the wings of the Vultures, would growl and snap at them, which would occasion them to spring up for a moment, but they immediately gathered in again. I remarked the Vultures frequently attack each other, fighting with their claws or heels, striking like a Cock, with open wings, and fixing their claws in each other's heads.

The females, and I believe the males likewise, made a hissing sound with open mouth, exactly resembling that produced by thrusting a red hot poker into water; and frequently a snuffing like a dog clearing his nostrils, as I suppose they were theirs. On observing that they did not heed me, I stole so close that my feet were within one yard of the Horse's legs, and I again sat down. They all slid aloof a few feet; but seeing me quiet, they soon returned as before. As they were often disturbed by the Dogs, I ordered the latter home: my voice gave no alarm to the Vultures. As soon as the Dogs departed, the Vultures crowded in such numbers, that I counted at one time thirty-seven on and around the carcass, with several within; so that scarcely an inch of it was visible. Sometimes one would come out with a large piece of entrails, which in a moment was surrounded by several others, who tore it in fragments, and it soon disappeared. They kept up the hissing occasionally. Some of them

having their whole legs and heads covered with blood, presented a most savage aspect. Still, as the dogs advanced, I would order them away, which seemed to gratify the Vultures; and one would pursue another, to within a foot or two of the spot where I was sitting. Sometimes I observed them stretching their necks along the ground, as if to press the food downwards."

"It seems to be a very filthy creature, Uncle Thomas," said Harry.

"Its habits are disgusting enough," said Uncle Thomas," when regarded merely as habits; but if we look upon them in the light of Providential appointments, they in a great measure cease to be so. That some of the species are not without the lofty bearing which we admire in the Eagle, is evident from the account which Bruce gives of one which resolutely attacked his retinue, and stole away their dinner from before their eyes. 'Upon the highest top of the mountain Lamalmon, in Abyssinia, while my servants were refreshing themselves from the toilsome,

rugged ascent, and enjoying the pleasure of a most delightful climate, eating their dinner in the outer air, with several large dishes of boiled goat's flesh before them, this noble Bird suddenly appeared; he did not stoop rapidly from a height, but came flying slowly along the ground, and sat down close to the meat, within the ring the men had made round it. A great shout, or rather cry of distress, called me to the place. I saw the Vulture stand for a minute, as if to recollect himself; while the servants ran for their lances and shields. I walked up as nearly to him as I had time to do. His attention was fully fixed upon the flesh. I saw him put his foot into the pan, where was a large piece in water prepared for boiling; but finding the smart, which he had not expected, he withdrew it, and forsook the piece that he held.

“There were two large pieces, a leg and a shoulder, lying upon a wooden platter; into these he thrust both his claws, and carried

them off; but I thought he still looked wistfully at the large piece which remained in the warm water. Away he went slowly along the ground, as he had come. The face of the cliff over which criminals were thrown took him from our sight. The Mahometans that drove the Asses were much alarmed, and assured me of his return. My servants, on the other hand, very unwillingly expected him, and thought he had already more than his share.

“As I had myself a desire of more intimate acquaintance with him, I loaded a rifle-gun with ball and sat down close to the platter, by the meat. It was not many minutes before he came, and a prodigious shout was raised by my attendants, ‘He is coming! he is coming!’ enough to have dismayed a less courageous animal. Whether he was not quite so hungry as at his first visit, or suspected something from my appearance, I know not, but he made a short turn, and sat down about ten yards from me, the pan with the meat being between

me and him. As the field was clear before me, and I did not know but his next move might bring him opposite to some of my people, so that he might actually get the rest of the meat, and make off, I shot him with the ball through the middle of the body, about two inches below the wings, so that he lay down upon the grass without a single flutter."

This having exhausted Uncle Thomas's Stories about the Vulture, and it being too late to enter upon another species, the little party bade him good night.

CHAPTER IV.

UNCLE THOMAS TELLS ABOUT THE VARIOUS KINDS OF FALCONS, AND
DESCRIBES THE SPORT OF HAWKING AS ANCIENTLY PRACTISED IN
ENGLAND.

“WHAT is the name of this Eagle?” said Mary, on a subsequent evening, pointing to one of the specimens in Uncle Thomas’s Museum. “It seems to be much smaller than either of those which you have told us about, Uncle Thomas.”

“That,” said Uncle Thomas, “is not an Eagle. It belongs to the Falcon family, and is one of the most elegant of the tribe. It is the Peregrine Falcon, the species principally used when Hawking was practised as a field-sport. It is a very fine specimen, and was caught in the neighbourhood. It measured is

length sixteen inches; and its wings, from tip to tip, three feet.

“The Peregrine Falcon,” continued Uncle Thomas, “is found in all the temperate and colder countries of Europe, but it prefers places where it can find rocky precipices, in which to build its nest. As it has great power of wing, however, it can soon transport itself from place to place. Some one estimates its rate of flight at about an hundred and twenty miles an hour; but even that is not so rapid as the Gyr-Falcon, which is said to fly at the rate of one hundred and fifty!

“A Falcon which belonged to Henry IV., King of France, on one occasion escaped from the Falconry at Fontainebleau, and was caught twenty-four hours afterwards in the island of Malta. The distance between the two places has been reckoned at 1350 miles, so that if the Falcon flew the whole time without stopping, it must have proceeded at the rate of fifty miles an hour. But as the Falcons never fly by night, supposing that it rested during the dark-

ness, and flew only during eighteen hours, its flight was at the rate of seventy miles an hour. Even this computation, however," continued Uncle Thomas, "is liable to considerable objections. The exact moment of its arrival at Malta cannot of course be told, as he might be in the island some time before he was discovered; and it is also probable that the daylight would not serve him to travel so long as eighteen hours."

"I wonder how any bird escapes the Falcon since he flies so fast," said John.

"The Instincts of the birds on which it preys," said Uncle Thomas, "teach them many little wiles to escape their enemy, and it is seldom that the chase is one of mere power of wing. It was to this skill on the part of the birds that much of the interest of the sport was derived when Hawking was practised in England. I will tell you about the various modes of Hawking by and by, but there is a little story of the boldness and sagacity of the Peregrine, which I must first tell you:—A gentleman well known

as an accomplished naturalist (Mr. Selby) relates that on one occasion when he was exercising his Dogs upon the moors, previous to the commencement of the shooting season, he observed a large bird of the Hawk tribe hovering at a distance, which, upon approaching, he knew to be the Peregrine Falcon. Its attention seemed to be drawn towards the Dogs, and it accompanied them whilst they beat the surrounding ground. Upon their having found and sprung a brood of Grouse, the Falcon immediately gave chase, and struck a young bird before they had proceeded far upon the wing, but the shouts of the sportsman, and his rapid advance, prevented it from securing its prey. The issue of the attempt, however, did not deter the Falcon from watching their subsequent movements, and another opportunity soon offering, it again gave chase, and struck down two birds by two rapidly repeated blows, one of which it secured and bore off in triumph."

" The Falcon must have known that

the Dogs were in search of game," remarked Harry.

"Yes," said Uncle Thomas, "and it must also have known that they would put up the birds; and as its general habit is to strike its prey on the wing, it no doubt reckoned that it would be very convenient to have them to do so, as its prey frequently escape by lying close, and undiscovered among the herbage when they see their enemy approaching.

"The Gyr-Falcon, which I mentioned to you as exhibiting extraordinary speed," continued Uncle Thomas, "is a larger bird than the Peregrine; the male generally measuring about twenty-two inches in length, and its wings stretching about four feet. The female, as is universally the case with birds of prey, is larger than the male. It is a native of the most northern countries of Europe; the rocky fastnesses of Iceland being its head quarters. This Falcon, from its great strength of wing, was held in great repute when the amusement of Hawk-

ing was in fashion. In Denmark, to which kingdom the island of Iceland belonged, there was a law which inflicted the punishment of death on any person destroying them, and the King's Falconer, with a couple of attendants went annually thither in great state to receive such animals as had been captured during the year. The rewards paid to the captors were very high, about three pounds for the best, and from ten to forty shillings for others, according to the estimation in which they were held.

“Though naturally one of the wildest of birds, the Gyr-Falcon soon becomes familiar, and, when properly trained, is one of the best ‘Hawkers.’ Even in a state of nature it has been known to throw off its wild habits. An old gentleman in the South of Scotland was in the habit of resting during his morning walk on a seat beneath a wooded precipice. For two or three mornings a young Gyr-Falcon came and sat upon a bough above his head, and at last grew so familiar as to settle upon his shoulders.

The gentleman was highly delighted with his new acquaintance, and brought it such food as, from a knowledge of these birds, he knew to be suitable. At length it ceased to meet him,—probably its wild nature, as it got older, subduing the gentle confidence which had dictated its first approaches. He often spoke with lively regret of this interesting friendship; remarkable in any point of view, but still more so when it is considered that the Gyr-Falcon is almost never seen in the place where the incident happened.”

“Perhaps it was a half-trained bird,” suggested Frank.

“Most likely it was,” said Uncle Thomas, “I cannot on any other supposition account for its familiarity. Besides the Peregrine and Gyr-Falcons, there were several others which were trained to Hawking; such as the Merlin, the Kestrel, the Lanner, the Sparrow-Hawk, &c. The former was held in high estimation as a lady’s Hawk, its weight being only six ounces,

and, besides, being one of the swiftest and boldest of its tribe, it is most easily tamed and trained."

"How are Hawks trained?" asked Jane. "I wonder they ever return when they once fly off after their prey."

"The training of Hawks," said Uncle Thomas, "was practised as an art; and in days when the sport was in high estimation it was one of considerable importance. The young birds were taken out of the nest when ready to fly, or caught in traps, and carefully secured in linen bags, with openings at each end for the head and tail, to preserve their feathers from injury. On their arrival at the falconry a hood was placed over their eyes, so as to blindfold them, and, thus imprisoned, they were left in perfect quiet for a day or two. The training of the novice then began. It was placed upon the wrist of the falconer, and carried about the whole day, and occasionally stroked with a feather, so as gradually to accustom it to being handled. Its

hood was then taken off, and it was fed; the falconer making a particular call, which was invariably used when the bird was fed, and upon no other occasion. When it was so far trained as to alight on the hand when called, it was unhooded and 'put to the lure'—an artificial bird, made of feathers, which was thrown up into the air, and at which it was induced to fly by attaching a live Pigeon, or part of a Chicken, which the Hawk was permitted to eat. To prevent its escape during this part of its education it was secured by a string. When perfect in this lesson it was advanced to the dignity of flying at live game, usually by means of a Duck, which was blindfolded to prevent its escape. By the repetition of the call when it had struck its quarry the Hawk was taught to return to its perch upon its master's wrist, and when this was accomplished its lesson was complete. To prevent its flying off, it was secured by straps of leather or silk, called jesses, which were fastened round its legs, which were also generally

ornamented with little bells, so as not to encumber it or interfere with its flight."

"Is Hawking ever practised in England now?" asked Jane.

"It is occasionally," said Uncle Thomas; "but so seldom that, as some one remarks, when the old gamekeeper of some ancient family crosses us with a Falcon on his wrist, he looks as if he had stepped out of a picture-frame, and the sight serves to remind us of a glory which has departed. It is, however, sometimes to be seen. Here is an account of a day's Hawking, in the county of Norfolk.

"In June, 1825," says the writer, "happening to be in Norfolk, I became an eye-witness to that most ancient and now very rare sport of Falconry; and I now relate what I actually saw, and which was to me most novel and entertaining. The place fixed upon for the sport was in the intermediate country between the Fens and the Heronry, and in the afternoon of the day, with the wind blowing towards the

Heronry. There were four couple of casts of the *female* Peregrine Falcon, carried by a man to the ground upon an oblong kind of frame, padded with leather, on which the Falcons perched, to which they were fastened by a thong of leather. Each bird had a small bell on one leg, and a leather hood, with an oblong piece of scarlet cloth stitched into it, over each eye, surmounted by a plume of various-coloured feathers on the top of the hood. The man walked in the centre of the frame, with a strap from each side over his shoulder; and when he arrived at the spot fixed upon for the sport, he set down the frame upon its legs, and took off all the Falcons, and tethered them to the ground in a convenient shady place. There were four men who had the immediate care of the Falcons (seemingly Dutchmen or Germans), each having a bag, somewhat like a woman's pocket, tied to his waist, containing a live Pigeon, called a lure, to which was fastened a long string; there were also some gentlemen

attached to the sport who likewise carried their bags and lures.

“ After waiting awhile, some Herons passed, but at too great a distance ; at length one appeared to be coming within reach, and preparations were made to attack him. Each falconer was furnished with a brown leather glove on the right hand, on which the Falcon perched ; and there was a small bit of leather attached to the leg of the bird, and which was held by the falconer between the thumb and finger. Each of the men thus equipped, with a Falcon on his wrist, and the bag with the lure tied to the waist, and mounted on horseback, proceeded slowly in a direction towards where the Heron was seen approaching. As soon as the Heron was nearly opposite, and at what I conceived a great height in the air, the falconers slipped the hoods from off the heads of the falcons, and held each bird on the wrist by the bit of leather, till the Falcons caught sight of the Heron, and then a most gallant scene ensued. The instant

“ At length the Falcon soared above the Heron, and struck it on the back.”

they were liberated, they made straight for their prey, though at a considerable distance ahead. As they were dashing away towards the Heron a Crow happened to cross, and one of them instantly darted at him, but he struck into a plantation and saved himself: the Falcon dashed in after him, but did not take him. The other Falcon soon overtook the Heron, and after flying round in circles for some time, at length soared above him, and then struck him on the back, and they both came tumbling down together, from an exceeding great height, to the ground. The other Falcon, having lost some time with the Crow, was flying very swiftly to assist his comrade, and had just come up at the time the Falcon and Heron were falling. At this instant, a Rook happened to fly across; the disappointed Falcon struck at him, and they both fell together within twenty yards of the other Falcon and the Heron. When on the ground, each Falcon began to pull to pieces its victim; but, as soon

as the falconers rode up, the lures were thrown out, and the Falcons suffered to make a meal (having previously been kept fasting) upon the Pigeon, which was laid on the carcass of the Heron; and, after they were satisfied, were again hooded and put up for that day.

“The next cast consisted of two younger birds; and when let loose at another Heron, they flew up to it very well. But the Heron was an old one, and supposed to have been caught before; for the moment he was aware of the presence of his enemies, he began to soar into the air, and set up a loud croak; and these, not so experienced as the first two Falcons, would not attack him, but soared about and left him. Upon this, one of the falconers set up a peculiar call, to which, no doubt, the birds were trained; when one of them, from a very great elevation in the air, immediately closed his wings, darted down to the man who called him, and was taken in hand. This was a very extraordinary manœuvre, and an instance

of tractable sagacity. The other Falcon did not come to the call, but sailed about in the air. At length a Heron crossed, and the Falcon attacked it, but again left it. A third Heron also came in his way; this he also fell to work with, and, after a short struggle, brought him to the ground in the same style as the first. This last Heron had his wing broken, and the falconer killed him; but the first was taken alive, and was afterwards turned out before a single Falcon, which struck him down in a minute. I understood that when a Heron had once been taken by a Falcon he never made any more sport. It was the case with this one; for, the moment he saw his enemy coming towards him, he lost all his powers, and made a ridiculous awkward defence on the ground; where the Falcon would soon have despatched him, if the falconer and his lure had not been near at hand.

“The Heron,” continued Uncle Thomas, “is perhaps the most difficult prey with which the

Falcon has to contend; and it was the skill and perseverance with which it opposed the attack of the Falcon, which gave Hawking this bird its peculiar zest. As it flies very high, it is extremely difficult for the Falcon to rise above it, so as to stoop upon it, in which act birds of this sort can most conveniently put forth all their powers. Even when the Falcon manages to attain the ascendancy its victory is by no means certain. In case the Heron is foiled in this, its most obvious means of escape, it turns its neck back upon its shoulders, and projects its bayonet-like bill upwards, behind its wing, and thus, should its pursuer pounce upon its head and neck, to which the attack of the Falcon is usually directed, it runs the greatest danger of being transfixed upon the long and sharp bill of the Heron. This attitude, indeed, serves another purpose; it protects these most vulnerable parts from injury, and should the Falcon, notwithstanding the danger to which it is exposed, strike at the wing of its prey,

and thus disable it, on reaching the ground, the latter is still able to offer the fiercest resistance.

“Colonel Montague, on one occasion, brought the powers of the two animals to a direct test. He took a Falcon, about a year old, which had been taken from its nest before it could fly, and had never had an opportunity of killing any thing but a small bird occasionally, and having kept it without food for twenty-four hours, he introduced into the room where it was kept an old male Heron. As the object was, however, principally to see how the Instinct of the Falcon would develop itself, part of the Heron’s bill had been cruelly cut off. As soon as the Heron was in motion, the Falcon, which was also deprived of the means of flight, took post on a stool which was at one end of the room, and as the Heron, regardless of his enemy, traversed the apartment, the Falcon, motionless, kept her eyes fixed on her destined prey, till after several turns round the room, she judged the Heron

was sufficiently near to effect her purpose, when she sprung at its head, intending to seize it with her talons. In this, however, she failed, the stool not having given her sufficient elevation to reach the high erect head of the Heron. This failure would probably have cost the Falcon her life, had the bill of her antagonist been perfect; for she received a blow on her body that must otherwise have inflicted a severe, if not a mortal wound from so pointed an instrument, urged with such power. Baffled in this attempt, and having received a severe blow, it was conjectured that no farther attack would be made till the calls of hunger became more urgent. The Falcon, however, soon regained her station, and it was not long before the Heron, regardless of his foe, again passed very near, when the Falcon, in a second attempt to seize her prey, as before, was equally foiled, and again received a severe check from the bill of the Heron. Finding her efforts had failed from want of the advantages Nature had assigned

her, Instinct directed the Falcon to a box that stood on the opposite side of the room, which was somewhat higher. Here she again seemed to meditate another attack, by watching every motion of the Heron, who continued his rounds with a view to make his escape; and it was not long before an opportunity offered for the Falcon to make an assault from her more elevated station. Here she had found a humble substitute for those powers with which Nature so amply furnished her, but of which she had been deprived, and at last succeeded in springing from her perch, and seizing the unfortunate Heron by the head and upper part of the neck with her talons, which instantly brought him to the ground. Now the unequal contest was soon determined, for in vain did the superior weight and strength of the Heron drag and flounder with his enemy across the floor; in vain did he flap his unwieldy pinions to shake off the tyrant of the air, nor could even his gigantic legs force her from the bloody grasp; her work was short

and certain ; no efforts could compel her now to quit her deadly gripe, the powerful and only dreaded weapon of her antagonist was secured and thus disarmed, he became a sure and easy prey. Scarcely was the gigantic bird prostrate on the ground than death ensued ; for in this noble race of Falcons, destined for blood and slaughter, torture makes no part of its nature ; but, like what we are told of the generous Lion, exulting in death, but disdaining cruelty, in less than half a minute did the Falcon tear out the gullet and windpipe of the Heron, and regale on the head and neck."

" It was very cruel to cut off the Heron's bill, Uncle Thomas," said Mary.

" I cannot in any view commend the experiment," said Uncle Thomas ; " though it certainly does in a very striking manner illustrate the Instinct of the Falcon in securing its prey. Here was a bird taken and domesticated before it could have seen its parents attack the animals on which they feed, yet we find that it exhibited

all those peculiarities which distinguish its assaults in its native state—at once fixing on the most vulnerable part of its victim, and availing itself of the advantages which it could derive from pouncing down upon it from above, and thus giving additional force to its blow.

“Some of the Falcons” continued Uncle Thomas, “are very bold in pursuit of their prey. A Sparrow-Hawk has been known to enter a church while the congregation was retiring and bear off a Swallow which had taken refuge within the building. On another occasion a Kestrel pursued a Sparrow in at the window of a house, and so eager was it to secure its prey that the window was closed, and both were taken before it could escape. A person once saw a Falcon, called in America the Duck-Hawk, pursuing an aquatic bird, called the Razor-Bill, which, instead of assaulting as usual with the death-pounce from the beak, he seized by the head with both claws, and made towards the land; his prisoner croaking, screaming, and

struggling lustily; but being a heavy bird he so far overbalanced his aggressor that both descended fast towards the sea, when just as they touched the water, the Falcon let go his hold and ascended; the Razor-Bill as instantaneously diving below.

“Wilson mentions an instance in which the Sparrow-Hawk was not deterred from pouncing on its prey even by the presence of a sportsman, with his gun ready to shoot it. ‘One day,’ says he ‘I observed a bird of this species perched on the highest top of a large poplar, on the skirts of a wood; I was in the act of raising the gun to my eye, when he swept down with the rapidity of an arrow into a thicket of briars about thirty yards off, where I shot him dead, and on coming up found a small Field-Sparrow quivering in his grasp. Both our aims had been taken at the same instant and unfortunately for him both were fatal.’

“A gentleman, who brought up a young Sparrow-Hawk, has published a very interest-

ing account of its habits in a state of domestication. The experiment of domesticating such an animal was rather a hazardous one, as he had at the same time a stock of fancy Pigeons which he greatly prized. It seems, however, that kindness and ease had softened the nature of the Hawk, or the regularity with which he was fed rendered the usual habits of his family unnecessary to his happiness; for, as he increased in age and size, his familiarity increased also, leading him to form an intimate acquaintance with a set of friends who have been seldom seen in such society. Whenever the Pigeons came to feed, which they did oftentimes from the hand of their almoner, the Hawk used also to accompany them. At first the Pigeons were shy, of course; but, by degrees, they got over their fears, and ate as confidently as if the ancient enemies of their race had sent no representative to their banquet. It was curious to observe the playfulness of the Hawk, and his perfect good nature during

the entertainment ; for he received his morsel of meat without any of that ferocity with which birds of prey usually take their food, and merely uttered a cry of lamentation when the carver disappeared. He would then attend the Pigeons in their flight round and round the house and gardens, and perch with them on the chimney-top, or roof of the mansion ; and this voyage he never failed to make early in the morning, when the Pigeons always took their exercise. At night, he retired with them to the dove-cot ; and though for some days he was the sole occupant of the place, the Pigeons not having relished this intrusion at first, he was afterwards merely a guest there ; for he never disturbed his hospitable friends, even when their young ones, unfledged and helpless as they were, offered a strong temptation to his appetite. He seemed unhappy at any separation from the Pigeons, and invariably returned to the dove-house after a few days purposed confinement in another abode, during which

imprisonment he would utter most melancholy cries for deliverance: but these were changed to cries of joy on the arrival of any person with whom he was familiar. All the household were on terms of acquaintance with him; and there never was a bird who seemed to have won such general admiration. He was as playful as a kitten, and literally as loving as a dove.

“But that his nature was not altogether altered, and that, notwithstanding his education, he was still a Hawk of spirit, was proved on an occasion of almost equal interest. A neighbour had sent us a very fine specimen of the smaller Horned Owl, which he had winged when flying in the midst of a covey of Partridges; and after having tended the wounded bird, and endeavoured to make a cure, we thought of soothing the prisoner’s captivity by a larger degree of freedom than he had in the hen-coop, which he inhabited. No sooner, however, had our former acquaintance, the Hawk, got sight

of him, than he fell upon the poor Owl most unmercifully; and from that instant, whenever they came in contact, a series of combats commenced, which equalled in skill and courage any of those which have so much distinguished that hero, who to the boldness and clearness of vision of the Hawk, unites the wisdom of the bird of Athens. 'The defence of the poor little Owl was admirably conducted; he would throw himself upon his back, and await the attack of his enemy with patience and preparation; and, by dint of biting and scratching, would frequently win a positive, as he often did a negative victory. Acquaintance-ship did not seem in this case likely to ripen into friendship; and when his wing had gained strength, taking advantage of a favourable opportunity, the Owl decamped, leaving the Hawk in possession of his territory.

“The fate of the successful combatant was, however, soon to be accomplished; for he was shortly after found drowned in a butt of water,

from which he had once or twice been extricated before, having summoned a deliverer to his assistance by cries that told he was in distress. There was great lamentation, when he died, throughout the family; and it was observed by more than one person, that that portion of the dove-cot in which he was wont to pass the night was, for some time, unoccupied by the Pigeons, with whom he had lived so peaceably even during the wars of the unfortunate Owl.

“In the East,” continued Uncle Thomas, “Hawking is still practised. In Persia, Sir John Malcolm saw the mode in which it is conducted in hunting Deer and smaller game. The hunters proceed with Hawks and Greyhounds to the places frequented by these animals. When the Antelope is seen, they endeavour to get as near it as possible, but the timid animal, the moment it sees its enemies approach, darts off at a rate swifter than the wind. The horsemen, having slipped the Dogs, follow at full speed. If it is a single Deer they at the

same time fly the Hawk; but if a herd, they wait till the Dogs have selected a particular animal. Skimming along the ground, the Hawk soon overtakes the Deer, and as it is trained, pounces upon its head, and either stops it altogether by pecking out its eyes, or retards it so much that it is soon overtaken by the dogs. When he was at Shiraz, Sir John was presented with a very fine Royal Falcon. 'Before going out,' says he, 'I had been amused at seeing Nuttee Beg, our head Falconer, a man of great experience in his department, put upon his bird a pair of leathers, which he fitted to its thighs, with as much care as if he had been the tailor of a fashionable horseman. I enquired the reason for so unusual a proceeding, 'You will learn that,' said the consequential master of the Hawks, 'when you see our sport,' and I was convinced, at the period he predicted, of the old fellow's knowledge of his business. The first Hare seized by the Falcon was very strong, and the

“The Hawk soon overtakes the Deer, pounces upon its head, and pecks out its eyes.”

ground rough. While the bird kept the claws of one foot fastened in the back of its prey, the other was dragged along the ground, till it had an opportunity to lay hold of a tuft of grass, by which it was enabled to stop the course of the Hare, whose efforts to escape would, I do think, have torn the Hawk asunder, if it had not been so provided.'

"These," said Uncle Thomas, "are nearly all the stories which I recollect about Hawks and Hawking, so I must stop for the night. I must not, however, omit to mention, as a curious fact in the natural history of these animals, that though in confinement Hawks do not retain their vigour more than a few years, it is probably a very long-lived bird. One is said to have been caught in Southern Africa, in the year 1793, wearing a gold collar, dated 1610, and known at that time to have belonged to James I. Though more than 180 years old, it was still in complete vigour."

His little auditors then bid him good bye.

CHAPTER V.

UNCLE THOMAS TELLS ABOUT OWLS, AND OF THE CURIOUS PECULIARITIES
IN THEIR STRUCTURE WHICH ENABLE THEM TO SEEK FOR AND SECURE
THEIR PREY DURING THE NIGHT.

“THE Owls,” said Uncle Thomas, on their next meeting, “are perhaps one of the most interesting families of Birds of Prey. They are, with one or two exceptions, night birds; that is, they seek their prey during the night, or in the dim twilight when scarcely any other animal can see.”

“But how, then, can they perceive their prey?” asked Jane.

“By a peculiar formation,” said Uncle Thomas, “the eye of the Owl has been fitted for use just when from the habits of the bird it is most wanted. The pupil of its eye, which,

when there is little light, expands to a great extent, and enables it to see distinctly the smallest objects, is of such extreme sensibility that if light is admitted it contracts, and prevents the bird from seeing at all. You will understand this better if you examine carefully the eye of a Cat, which to a certain extent has the same property as that of the Owl. When it is subjected to a moderate light, you will perceive that the pupil is of a certain size, but if a much stronger light is admitted it contracts till you scarcely perceive it, and in this state it is nearly as useless as if it was covered by the eyelid."

"But Cats can see to hunt in the sunshine," said Mary; "I saw Puss watching some birds in the garden to-day."

"Though I used the Cat's eye as an illustration," said Uncle Thomas, "I did not mean you to understand that those of the Owl and it are exactly the same. From possessing less sensibility, perhaps, that of the Cat can be used in

broad day-light, when the Owl is nearly blind. Accordingly, when one happens to be dislodged by any accident during sunshine, it is immediately attacked with impunity by whole flocks of small birds, who never cease their persecutions till it again finds refuge in some dark and snug retreat.

“ Besides this singular power of vision, which it has in common with all animals which seek their prey in the twilight,” continued Uncle Thomas, “ the Owl has other peculiarities in its structure, which are in a great measure confined to itself. Its skull is larger in proportion to the size of the bird than that of most other animals, and the bone is thin and fine, so that no space is lost, nor is it troubled with more weight than is absolutely necessary. A considerable part of the interior of the skull is occupied by two large cavities, in which the nerve by which the impression of sound is conveyed to the brain is expanded to an unusual size, and thus the sense of

hearing is much more acute than in most other animals."

"What can it want with this?" asked Harry. "At night, when every thing is so still there can be no difficulty in hearing, I should think."

"One minute, if you please, Harry," said Uncle 'Thomas; "there is another peculiarity in the structure of the Owl, of which I wish to tell you; and when I have pointed out their nice adaptation to each other, and the beautiful manner in which they all subserve the habits of the animal, I think you will admit that they are all made in wisdom. The other peculiarity to which I refer is in the plumage of the bird. The wings of some birds, as they fly along, make a whistling noise, which arises from the air acting on their hard and rigid feathers. Not so those of the Owl. The feathers of its wings are fringed with a sort of silky down, so remarkably soft and elastic that they seem scarcely to stir the air. It can thus noise-

lessly pounce down upon an unwary Mouse as it stirs among the leaves in the waning twilight, before it has the slightest suspicion of the presence of its enemy, who has, perhaps, been guided to the spot by the tiny stirring of a decayed leaf. You will thus perceive how the various peculiarities of which I have told you act upon each other. The Owl hears a squeak or a rustle among the leaves, and flies noiselessly to the spot; were it not, however, for the acuteness of its sight, its prey must still escape; but thus, provided, it soon spies it out and secures it.

“That the ear is greatly used by the Owl in directing it to its prey,” said Uncle Thomas, “is evident, from the fact that they are frequently attracted to the spot where the rustic sportsman has stationed himself for the purpose of shooting them, by imitating the squeaking of a Mouse.

“With us,” continued Uncle Thomas, “the Owl generally inhabits hollow trees, old ruins,

church steeples, or the dark recesses of some uninhabited building, where it can roost undisturbed during the day. Wilson, the delightful writer from whose work I have often read to you, thus describes the haunts of the Great Tufted Owl:—‘ His favourite residence is in the dark solitudes of deep swamps covered with a growth of gigantic timber; and here, as soon as the evening draws on, and mankind retire to rest; he sends forth such sounds as seem scarcely to belong to this world, startling the solitary pilgrim as he slumbers by the forest fire: —

‘ Making night hideous.’

Along the mountainous shores of the Ohio, and among the deep forests of Indiana, alone, and reposing in the woods, this ghostly watchman has frequently warned me of the approach of the morning, and amused me with its singular exclamations;—sometimes sweeping down and around my fire, uttering a loud and sud-

den waugh O! waugh O! sufficient to have alarmed a whole garrison. He has other nocturnal solos no less melodious, one of which very much resembles the half-suppressed screams of a person suffocating or throttled, and which cannot fail of being extremely entertaining to a lonely or benighted traveller, in the midst of an Indian wilderness.’”

“Entertaining, does he say?” asked Jane. “I should rather think terrifying, Uncle Thomas.”

“He speaks ironically,” said Uncle Thomas, “and thinks exactly as you do. The hooting of the Owl, however, we must not regard as a mere incident in nature, without any use but that of frightening benighted travellers. It is one of those wise provisions to assist it in procuring its prey. As it sits in waiting on some solitary eminence, or pursues its stealthy flight over the places where it knows they frequent, it utters its well known, and dis-

cordant note. Terrified at the unexpected presence of their enemy, its prey shrink and endeavour to escape, and it is ten chances to one if the Owl is close at hand that he discovers them either by the eye or the ear.

“Some of the larger Owls, such as the Great Tufted one, of whose haunts I have just read you Wilson’s description, feed on small birds, Squirrels, Rabbits, and young Partridges, and as they are very voracious eaters, it is astonishing how many they will destroy. On one occasion a sportsman fired at a very large one, and broke its wing. He took it home to a farm house, where, after remaining for several days, it disappeared, no one could tell how. Almost every day after its mysterious departure Hens and Chickens also vanished, one by one, in the same unaccountable manner, till in eight or ten days very few were left remaining. The Fox and the Weasel were alternately the reputed authors of the mischief, until one morning the old lady of the house,

herself, rising before day to bake, in passing towards the oven surprised her late prisoner, the Owl, regaling himself on the body of a newly-killed Hen! The thief instantly made for his hole under the house, from which the enraged matron soon dislodged him with the brush-handle, and dispatched him without mercy. In this snug retreat were found the greater part of the feathers and many very large fragments of her whole family of Chickens.

“It is only the large Owls, however,” continued Uncle Thomas, “which prey upon poultry; the lesser ones confine their depredations to the smaller animals, such as Mice, Rats, &c., and are thus very useful to mankind in destroying such animals as would otherwise do much mischief to the crops. Some of the species also feed on fish, a fact as to which naturalists were long incredulous, on account of the want of adaptation in the structure of the Owl, as they thought, to capture such a description of

prey. Recent observation has, however, confirmed the fact beyond a doubt. Not only have they been seen to carry fish to feed their young, but the bones have frequently been observed close under the nest. Many years ago the Duchess of Portland had a quantity of gold and silver fish in a pond in the flower garden at Bulstrode. As the fish were frequently missed, and suspecting that they were stolen, a watch was kept in order to detect the thief. He was soon discovered in the shape of several common brown Owls, which alighted on the side of the pond, and, waiting, the approach of the fish, captured and devoured them. A naturalist, speaking of this singular habit of the Owl, relates that, on one occasion, a person standing on a bridge in the twilight of a July evening, watching an Owl carrying Mice to its nest, was surprised to see it suddenly drop perpendicularly into the water. Thinking that it had been seized with a fit, or had met with some unaccountable accident, he ran to the end of the

bridge to procure a boat to go to its rescue, but, before he could do this, he saw the Owl rise out of the water, bearing a fish in its claws, and convey it to its nest."

"The Owl must be very clear sighted, indeed, to see a fish in the water at night," said Harry.

"The fact is so well established," said Uncle Thomas, "that it admits of no doubt. The explanation which some naturalists give of the manner in which the fish are decoyed towards it is, I admit, a little more questionable. They suppose that the luminous appearance of its large bright eyes attract the fish, and that it stares at them till they come within reach of its beak or talons."

"I have seen the Cat's eyes glaring in a dark room," said Jane; "I suppose it is something of the same kind, Uncle Thomas."

"Quite so," said Uncle Thomas; "and though, from its very great singularity, the supposition at first startles us, one of the

American Bitterns possesses a power something akin to it. The bird lives almost entirely on fish, and, when in search of its prey, it is said to decoy them within reach by a light from its breast of considerable brilliancy, which is described, by those who have seen it, as equal to the light of a common torch."

"But are fish attracted by light?" asked Mary.

"Oh, yes," said Uncle Thomas; "sportsmen in every country use torches to take them, spearing them as they come to the surface of the water, to gaze on the singular and unusual appearance.

"In America," continued Uncle Thomas, "some species of Owls are very numerous. A rambler among the forests of the 'Far West' says, that it is almost impossible to travel eight or ten miles in any of the retired woods there without seeing several of them, even in broad day; and, at the approach of night, their cries are heard proceeding from

every part of the forest around the plantations. Should the weather be lowering, and indicate the approach of rain, their cries are so multiplied during the day, and especially in the evening, and they respond to each other in tones so strange, that one might imagine some extraordinary fête about to take place among them. On approaching one of them, its gesticulations are of a very extraordinary nature. The position of the bird, which is generally erect, is immediately changed. It lowers its head and inclines its body, to watch the motions of the person beneath; throws backward the lateral feathers of the head, which thus has the appearance of being surrounded by a broad ruff; looks towards him as if half blind, and moves its head to and fro in so extraordinary a manner as almost to induce a person to fancy that part dislocated from the body. It follows all the motions of the intruder with its eyes; and should it suspect any treacherous intentions, flies off to a short distance, alighting with its

back to the person, and immediately turning about, with a single jump, to recommence its scrutiny.'

"Another writer," continued Uncle Thomas, "relates a very amusing story of the terror of a party of hunters, which shows how strongly superstitious feelings sometimes affect the mind:—'The Virginian Horned Owl,' says Richardson, 'is found in almost every quarter of the United States, and occurs in all parts of the fur countries, where the timber is of a large size. Its loud and full nocturnal cry, issuing from the gloomy recesses of the forest, bears some resemblance to the human voice, uttered in a hollow sepulchral tone, and has been frequently productive of alarm to the traveller, of which an instance occurred within my own knowledge. A party of Scottish Highlanders, in the service of the Hudson's Bay Company, happened in a winter journey to encamp after night-fall in a dense clump of trees, whose dark tops and lofty stems, the

growth of centuries, gave a solemnity to the scene that strongly tended to excite the superstitious feelings of the Highlanders. The effect was heightened by the discovery of a tomb which, with a natural taste often exhibited by the Indians, had been placed at this secluded spot. Our travellers, having finished their supper, were trimming their fire preparatory to retiring to rest, when the slow and dismal notes of the Horned Owl fell on the ear with a startling nearness. None of them being acquainted with the sound, they at once concluded that so unearthly a voice must be the moaning of the spirit of the departed, whose repose they supposed they had disturbed, by inadvertently making a fire of some of the wood of which his tomb had been constructed. They passed a tedious night of fear, and with the first dawn of day hastily quitted the ill-omened spot.’”

“ Have not all Owls got horns ?” asked Mary.
“ This one,” pointing to one of the specimens

“The slow and dismal notes of the Horned Owl fell on the ear, with startling nearness.”

in Uncle Thomas's collection, "seems to have none."

"No!" said Uncle Thomas; "it is only particular species which are so ornamented. They are, however, improperly called 'horns,' and sometimes 'ears,' as the protuberance consists merely of a little bunch of feathers, without any corresponding configuration of the skull; indeed, in some species the tuft is imperceptible when the bird is in a state of repose, but is elevated whenever its attention is excited; so that in a dead bird it requires a very careful examination to perceive them.

"In ancient times," continued Uncle Thomas, "the Owl was regarded as the symbol of wisdom; and in the present day a superstition of the same kind lingers among the North American Indians. We are told that among the Creeks the younger priests constantly wear a white mantle, and have a skin of the Great White Northern Owl cased and stuffed very

ingeniously, so well executed as almost to appear like the living bird, having large sparkling glass beads, or buttons, fixed in the head for eyes. This insignia of wisdom and divination they wear sometimes as a crest on the top of the head, at other times the image sits on the arm, or is borne in the hand. The bearers are also distinguished from other people by their taciturnity, grave and solemn countenance, dignified step, and by their singing to themselves songs or hymns, in a low sweet voice as they stroll about the town.

“Owls,” continued Uncle Thomas, “have been remarked as showing very great affection for their young, frequently visiting them and feeding them long after they have been taken from the nest, and even when placed in a state of confinement. It is thus that we get glimpses of the surpassing wisdom and beauty of the works of the Almighty. The whole of the Owl tribe, as I have already told you, are extremely voracious feeders; and in the earlier

stages of their existence, from the time that they leave the nest until their powers are sufficiently matured to enable them to provide entirely for themselves, they must be unable to procure sufficient food to satisfy their almost insatiable appetite. Here, then, is both the necessity and the cause for this extraordinary affection, of which I will by and by give you one or two examples. If the parent Owls were not endowed with this extraordinary affection, the young would starve, and the race soon become extinct. A young Owl having, on one occasion, escaped from the nest before it was fully fledged, was caught and placed in a hen-coop. To the surprise of the captors, in the morning a fine young Partridge was found lying dead before the door of its place of confinement. For fourteen days the same mark of attention was repeated, the provision sometimes consisting of one kind, and sometimes of another. Though he well knew whence the supply proceeded, the gentleman to whom the

captured bird belonged kept watch for several nights, accompanied by his servant, to observe when and how the supply was brought, but they watched in vain. So long as they remained at the window nothing was brought, but whenever it was left for a short time unoccupied, the Owls deposited their provision and escaped unobserved. This continued till the usual time when the Owls leave their young to shift for themselves."

"I suppose if one was to attempt to rob an Owl's nest of its young, it would fight very fiercely," said Harry.

"Some of the species are occasionally very bold in defence of their nestlings," said Uncle Thomas; "and, if their territory is invaded, evince great alarm. A carpenter, some years ago, passing through a field near Gloucester, was suddenly attacked by an Owl that had a nest in a tree near the pathway. It flew at his head, and the man struck at it with his adze that he had in his hand, but missed his blow.

The enraged bird repeated the attack, and fastening her talons in his face, lacerated him very severely.

“ Before I conclude my account of the Owl,” continued Uncle Thomas, “ I must tell you of a very curious experiment made by a gentleman named Waterton, who lives in Yorkshire. Some years ago he resolved to establish a colony of Owls, and accordingly had a dwelling made for them on the ruins of an old gateway. The place was about four feet square, a nice perch was fixed for them to sit upon, and the ivy which grew round the gateway was trained to cover and conceal the whole. In about a month after these preparations were made for their reception, it was duly examined and fixed upon as a desirable place of residence by a pair of Barn Owls. Their example was soon followed, and in time not only filled the ‘ ivy mantled tower,’ but extended into the trees in the vicinity. Mr. Waterton had so constructed the tower that he could see into the colony without

disturbing the Owls, and as they were never injured, they soon became familiar, showing no symptoms of fear, even when strangers mounted the ladder to look into their retreat."

"How very curious!" said Mary.

"Singular it certainly is," said Uncle Thomas, "but it has other and better qualities to recommend it. From diligently observing the habits of the Owls, Mr. Waterton discovered several curious facts connected with their natural history, which, besides their interest merely as pieces of information, are very useful, and show the adaptation of the various parts of the creation to each other. For instance, the Owl is by many persons deemed a noxious creature, and is hunted and killed whenever opportunity offers. On the contrary, it is one of the greatest friends of mankind. Mr. Waterton estimates that when the Owls have their broods to provide for, they bring to the nest from four to five mice every hour, so that in the course of a year the quantity of mice consumed must be

immense: how much to the advantage of the farmer's crop it is impossible to say. Again, whenever an Owl is discovered near a pigeon-house, it is immediately attacked and killed, from the idea that they destroy the young pigeons. Mr. Waterton's observations show that, instead of doing damage, they are of great use in freeing such places from Rats and other vermin, by which they are generally frequented, and his remarks are confirmed by other observers. A person whose Pigeons were frequently destroyed laid it to the charge of a pair of Owls which visited the dovecot. He accordingly watched, and at last shot one of the birds as it flew out. On picking it up, however, he was astonished to find that, instead of a young Pigeon, its prey consisted of a huge Rat. Mr. Waterton's experience amounted to this: as soon as the Rats were excluded from his pigeon-house, the Pigeons rapidly increased in number, notwithstanding that it continued to be frequented by the Owls, and they were

encouraged all about the place. On one occasion, when he was seeking to destroy some Rats, he killed a large one as it emerged from its hole. Expecting to get another shot, he remained still, and allowed the Rat to lie where it had fallen. In a short time a Barn Owl pounced upon it and carried it off, though, had it chosen, it might as readily have flown into the Pigeon-house and feasted on the young brood.

“These instances,” said Uncle Thomas, “are sufficient to show how much mischief may be done by ignorance of the habits of an animal, and how useful it is to study the nature of the creatures with which Providence has surrounded us. We may at all times feel assured that they have been so placed for our good, and that this good can only be realized by availing ourselves of, or at least by not counteracting the instincts and habits with which He has endowed them.”

Uncle Thomas then dismissed his little

charge for the evening, informing them that to-morrow night he would narrate some Tales about Storks and Cranes, of both of which he had some very interesting information to communicate.

CHAPTER VI.

UNCLE THOMAS TELLS ABOUT THE HERON, AND ITS PLACE OF RETREAT;
AS WELL AS ABOUT THE AFFECTION AND GENTLENESS OF THE STORK
AND THE CRANE.

“ Good Evening, Uncle Thomas! Good Evening!” said each of the little circle, as on the following evening they drew their chairs around him, to listen to the Stories which he had promised to tell them about the Storks and Cranes. They knew from what Uncle Thomas had said, as he bid them good bye on the previous evening, that he had something curious to tell them, and although both Mary and Jane had some questions to ask him, they restrained their curiosity for the present, and Uncle Thomas began :—

“ The Herons, Storks, and Cranes,” said

Uncle Thomas, "were formerly comprehended by the naturalists in one family, but they vary so much in their habits and structure that they are now generally regarded as distinct. The Heron stays with us all the year, while the Storks and the Cranes are birds of passage, most of them never appearing in England at all. The Heron lives almost entirely on fish, which he watches with great assiduity, sitting on some solitary place, the very picture of patience, waiting till an unwary fish comes within its reach, when it darts its powerful bill at it, and so quick and certain is it in its movements that it seldom fails to secure its prey."

"Are Herons found elsewhere than in England?" asked Harry.

"Oh yes," said Uncle Thomas, "there are a great many varieties, some of which are to be found in almost every part of the world. They have been seen in all parts of America; and when some adventurous traveller penetrates into the wild deserts of Africa, he sees the soli-

tary Heron sitting in the same watchful attitude on the banks of those unfrequented rivers and marshes, seeking his prey just as we see them here. They like those countries most, however, which are covered with tall forests, and which abound in rivers and stagnant waters, as in those places they can most readily obtain their food, which they devour in immense quantities. In the Backwoods of America, accordingly, they are very abundant. Here is a description of the haunts of the Great Heron, and of his habits, which will convey more information to you in a few lines than I could give you in as many pages:—

“Their favourite places for building and rearing their young are generally in the gloomy solitudes of the tallest cedar swamps, where, if unmolested, they continue annually to breed for many years. These swamps are from half a mile to a mile in breadth, and sometimes five or six in length, and appear as if they occupied the former channel of some choked-up river,

stream, lake, or arm of the sea. The appearance they present to a stranger is singular: a front of tall and perfectly straight trunks, rising to the height of fifty or sixty feet, without a limb, and crowded in every direction, their tops so closely woven together as to shut out the day, spreading the gloom of a perpetual twilight below. On a nearer approach they are found to rise out of the water, which, from the impregnation of the fallen leaves and roots of the cedars, is of the colour of brandy. Amidst this bottom of congregated springs, the ruins of the former forest lie piled in every state of confusion. The roots, prostrate logs, and in many places the water, are covered with green mantling moss; while an undergrowth of laurel, fifteen or twenty feet high, intersects every opening so completely as to render a passage through laborious and harassing beyond description; at every step you either sink to the knees, clamber over fallen timber, squeeze yourself through between the stubborn laurels, or

plunge to the middle in ponds made by the uprooting of large trees, and which the moss concealed from observation. In calm weather the silence of death reigns in these dreary regions; a few interrupted rays of light shoot across the gloom; and, unless for the occasional hollow screams of the Herons, and the melancholy chirping of one or two species of small birds, all is silence, solitude, and desolation. When a breeze rises, at first it sighs mournfully through the tops; but, as the gale increases, the tall, mast-like cedars wave like fishing-poles, and, rubbing against each other, produce a variety of singular noises, that, with the help of a little imagination, resemble shrieks, groans, or the growling of bears, wolves, and such-like comfortable music.

“ On the tops of the tallest of these cedars the Herons construct their nests; ten or fifteen pairs sometimes occupying a particular part of the swamp. The nests are large, formed of

sticks, and lined with smaller twigs; each occupies the top of a single tree. The eggs are generally four in number, of an oblong pointed form, larger than those of a Hen, and of a light greenish blue, without any spots. The young are hatched about the middle of May, and remain on the trees till they are full as heavy as the old ones, being extremely fat before they are able to fly. They breed but once in the season. If disturbed in their breeding place, the old birds fly occasionally over the spot, sometimes crying like a Goose, sometimes uttering a coarse hollow grunting noise, like that of a Hog, but much louder. The Great Heron is said to be fat at the full moon, and lean at its decrease; this may be accounted for by the fact of their fishing regularly by moonlight, through the greater part of the night, as well as during the day. The principal food of the Heron is fish, for which he watches with the most unwearied patience, and seizes them with surprising dexterity. At the edge of the river,

pond, or sea-shore, he stands fixed and motionless, sometimes for hours together. But his stroke is as quick as thought, and as sure as fate to the first luckless fish that approaches within his reach; these he sometimes beats to death, and always swallows head foremost. He is also an excellent mouser, and is of great service in our meadows in destroying the Short-tailed, or Meadow Mouse, so injurious to the banks. He also feeds eagerly upon Grasshoppers, and various winged insects, particularly Dragon-flies, which he is very expert at striking."

"But there are no such places in England for Herons to frequent, are there?" asked Harry.

"None exactly answering the description which I have just read," said Uncle Thomas; "but there are nevertheless several Heronries in England, and as they are both rare and ornamental, they are very carefully preserved. That the Herons still continue in England, and

and are not quite extirpated, like some other species which have altogether passed away before the progress of cultivation, is partly owing to the care of the proprietors of the heronries, and partly to their own extreme vigilance, and the determination with which they resist the attacks of their enemies. A gentleman on one occasion managed to get within shot of a Heron, which was watching for its prey, wading in the stream a little above a waterfall. He fired, and wounded the bird, and sent his Dog into the river, to bring it to land. As soon as the Dog came within its reach the Heron drew back its head, and struck the Dog with all its force with its sharp and powerful bill. With such power had this been done, that it transfixed the poor little Dog; and on the sportsman again firing and killing the Heron, both it and the Dog floated down the foaming waterfall.

“They are, moreover,” continued Uncle Thomas, “very kind and affectionate to their

young. Mr. Jesse, a pleasing writer on Natural History, relates that a young bird having fallen out of a nest, at Walton-on-Thames, where there is a fine heronry, it was taken away in the evening by a gentleman, who carried it to his house at some miles distance, and turned it into a walled garden. The next morning, one of the old birds was seen to feed it, and continued to do so till the young one made its escape. This bird must have gone over a very considerable space of ground in search of the young Heron."

"What is the difference between a Stork and a Heron?" asked Jane. "We were looking at a picture of them to-day and did not observe much difference?"

"In their appearance," said Uncle Thomas, "there is considerable similarity; but the Stork is smaller than the Heron, and its habits are very different. In every country in which the Stork is found it is a bird of passage, and does not remain stationary like the Heron.

Which of you can tell me in what part of the Bible the migration of the Stork is mentioned ?”

This was rather a puzzling question to Uncle Thomas's young friends. They all had seen it, or thought they had, but no one could tell where it was to be found. Harry and John were quite certain that it occurred in Genesis, and Mary thought it was in the Psalms; but on Uncle Thomas telling them that neither was correct, Jane wisely declared her ignorance of the matter, and Frank declined to offer an opinion.

“ Here it is, then,” said Uncle Thomas, “ in the Book of Jeremiah, chap. viii. v. 7, in which the Prophet contrasts the wilful ignorance of his countrymen with the instinctive knowledge of the Stork. ‘ Yea,’ he says, ‘ the Stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times, and the Turtle and the Crane and the Swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord.’ ”

“ In the countries which the Storks inhabit,” continued Uncle Thomas, “ they are most useful birds, performing, to a certain extent, the office of the Vulture, by consuming such small animals as are left after the periodical subsidence of the rains with which those countries are regularly visited, as well as for the quantities of reptiles and other noxious creatures which they destroy. In Holland, where, from its flatness and humidity, such animals are very numerous, the Stork is carefully protected by the inhabitants; and in all the Eastern cities they look upon it with a feeling little short of veneration, considering it a sacred bird, which they are forbidden to kill. At Constantinople so secure are they from molestation that they are said to build their nests in the streets; but, in other countries, they prefer a lofty situation, such as the roof of a house, or the steeple of a minaret. A recent writer describes the scenes of affection which are exhibited during the breeding season

as very interesting. ‘Nothing,’ says he, ‘can be more pleasing than to view an assemblage of the nests of the Stork. Divided as they always are into pairs, sometimes only the long elastic neck of one of them is seen peering from its cradle of nestlings, the male standing by on one of his long slim legs and watching with every sign of the closest affection; while other couples on the adjacent walls are fondly entwining their pliant necks and mixing their long bills; the one sometimes bending her neck over her back, and burying her head in the soft plumage, while her companion, clacking his long beak with a peculiar sharp and monotonous sound, raises her head and embraces it with a quivering delight; while from the holes and crannies of the walls below the storks’ nests, thousands of little blue Turtle-doves flit in all directions, keeping up an incessant cooing by day and night.’”

“Dear kind creatures!” exclaimed Jane, as Uncle Thomas finished the sentence.

“ Kind they certainly are,” said Uncle Thomas, “ beyond any thing recorded of unreasoning animals. The young Storks have often been observed to lavish the most affectionate and assiduous care on their aged and infirm parents, when they were no longer able to seek food for themselves; and so kind and attentive are they to their young, that both parents never leave the nest at the same time, one of them always remaining to watch over it during the other’s absence, and steadily keeping its eyes all the while fixed on its little charge. A great many years ago, a fire broke out in a house in Holland, on which was built a Stork’s nest containing a brood of young nestlings unable to fly. On the mother’s returning laden with food, she discovered the danger which threatened her offspring, and made several attempts to save them, but finding all her efforts ineffectual, she at length spread her wings over the nest to protect them, and in that attitude expired with them in the flames !”

“ He once saw a tame Stork, frolicking with some children, who were playing at ‘hide and seek.’ ”

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“ Even when reduced to a state of domestication,” continued Uncle Thomas, “ and excluded from the society of its species, the kindness of the Stork shows itself towards human beings. A gentleman relates that he once saw a tame Stork frolicking with some children which were playing at ‘ hide and seek,’ running its turn when touched, and distinguishing the child whose turn it was to pursue the others so well as to be on its guard as watchfully as any of its young companions.”

“ Wouldn’t you like to have a Stork in our garden, Harry ?” asked Jane.

“ Yes,” said Harry, “ if it would run about like this one ; but I want to hear about the migration of the Stork. It must surely be something singular, since it is spoken of in the Bible.”

“ I do not know that there is any thing peculiar in the migration of the Stork,” said Uncle Thomas, “ or that it displays more instinctive sagacity in the matter than the ‘ Turtle

and the Crane and the Swallow,' with which it is mentioned. Perhaps their abundance in the Holy Land, and the reverence in which the Stork was held, had some influence on the Prophet's language. A traveller in the East says, 'Returning from Cana to Nazareth, I saw the fields so filled with flocks of Storks that they appeared quite white with them; and when they arose, and hovered in the air, they seemed like clouds.'

"They generally leave their more northerly winter-quarters," continued Uncle Thomas, "about the month of July or August. Previous to their departure, they assemble in large flocks, and appear to hold a consultation as to their future movements, and sometimes several meetings take place before they take flight. When they fairly set out, they mount high into the air; so high as to be invisible to the eye, unless when passing a ridge of mountains. A traveller tells us of several flights which he saw passing over Mount Carmel, each of which ex-

tended more than half a mile in breadth, and was upwards of three hours in passing. Here is a fine poetical description of a meeting of Storks preparing to migrate:—

“ Where the Rhine loses its majestic force
In Belgian plains,—won from the raging deep
By diligence amazing, and the strong
Unconquerable hand of Liberty,—
The Stork assembly meets ; for many a day
Consulting deep and various, ere they take
Their arduous voyage through the liquid sky.
And now, their route design’d, their leaders chose,
Their tribes adjusted, clean’d their vigorous wing,
And many a circle, many a short essay,
Wheel’d round and round, in congregations full
The figured flight ascend, and, riding high
The aerial billows, mixes with the clouds.”

“ Is not the Crane a bird of the same sort as the Stork, Uncle Thomas ? ” asked Harry.

“ It belongs to the same family, the long-legged or stilt-birds,” said Uncle Thomas, “ and their manners and habits are very similar to those of the Stork. They also are very affectionate birds. A gentleman residing in Eng-

land had for some years been possessed of two brown Cranes; one of them at length died, and the survivor became inconsolable. He was apparently following his companion, when his master introduced a large mirror into the aviary. The bird no sooner beheld his reflected image, than he fancied she for whom he mourned had returned to him; he placed himself close to the mirror, plumed his feathers, and showed every sign of happiness. The scheme answered completely, the Crane recovered his health and spirits, passed almost all his time before the looking-glass, and lived many years after, at length dying from an accidental injury.

“There is another bird,” said Uncle Thomas, “which some naturalists have classed with the Cranes, whose long legs and scarlet plumage cause them to look at a distance like so many soldiers. Mr. Rennie, in his ‘Architecture of Birds,’ mentions that during the French Revolutionary war, when the English were expected to make a descent upon St. Do-

mingo, a negro having perceived, at the distance of some miles, in the direction of the sea, a long file of Flamingos, ranked up and preening their wings, forthwith magnified them into an army of English soldiers. Their long necks were mistaken for shouldered muskets, and their scarlet plumage had suggested the idea of a military costume. The poor fellow accordingly started off to Gonalves, running through the streets, and vociferating that the English were come. Upon this alarm the commandant of the garrison instantly sounded the tocsin, doubled the guards, and sent out a body of men to reconnoitre the invaders; but he soon found, by means of his glass, that it was only a troop of red Flamingos, and the corps of observation marched back to the garrison, rejoicing at their bloodless expedition. During Captain Owen's voyage, the officers found them so numerous on the coast of Africa, that every shoal was covered with them 'looking at a distance,' as they describe them, 'like large variegated plains, and

upon nearer approach resembling files of soldiers. When the sun was shining upon them, nothing could surpass the beauty of their dazzling appearance.' ”

“ They should be called soldier-birds, I think,” said Jane.

“ They deserve the name,” said Uncle Thomas, “ as well from their smart scarlet uniform as from their habits, which seem, from all accounts, to be strictly military. They assemble into large flocks, and while fishing or reposing they form themselves into long lines of regular rank and file, and post sentinels, whose duty it is to give the alarm in case of danger. If any thing suspicious attracts the attention of these watchful guardians, they utter a loud trumpet-like cry, and the whole body marches off in regular order.

“ There are two other peculiarities about the Flamingo,” continued Uncle Thomas, “ of which I must not fail to tell you, they differ so much from those of any other bird. The one is in the

construction of the bill, which is crooked in such an extraordinary manner as at first sight to seem a deformity, and to excite wonder as to the mode in which the animal feeds. The wonder soon ceases, however, when we see it in the act of scooping up its food, which consists of the spawn of fishes and other soft substances. It turns its head quite round, so as to have the crown close to the ground, and thus converts its upper mandible into a sort of spoon, which its long and flexible neck easily enables it to do. So serviceable, indeed, is its long neck to it, that on one occasion, when a Flamingo had its leg broken, it continued to walk about by using its neck as a crutch!"

"Oh, indeed!" said Harry; "how very odd! What a strange figure it would be!"

"The other peculiarity to which I alluded," said Uncle Thomas, "is in the construction of its nest, which, instead of being built in a tree, or some elevated place, like the Storks, and Herons, is generally constructed on the ground;

but as the long legs of the bird would, if it were quite close to the ground, be constantly in the way, it heaps up a quantity of mud and earth into a conical shape, and places its nest on the top, so that, when sitting on the nest, its legs hang on each side without inconvenience."

"A most singular contrivance, indeed!" said Harry.

"And a most wise one, too," said Uncle Thomas, "when we consider, that in the creature's haunts it would have the greatest difficulty, if it did not find it altogether impossible, to fall in with a tree or bush of sufficient height to place its nest upon. But I must stop for the evening. To-morrow I mean to tell you about another long-legged bird, but one differing very much from those which we have spoken of to-night, both in its haunts and its habits; and we shall see, too, how God has adapted it for the station in which He has placed it. So, good night."

"Good-night, Uncle Thomas!"

CHAPTER VII.

UNCLE THOMAS TELLS ABOUT SOME INTERESTING PECULIARITIES IN THE HABITS OF THE OSTRICH AND THE EMU, AS WELL AS ABOUT THOSE OF THE TURKEY IN ITS NATIVE FORESTS.

“ Good evening, Uncle Thomas !” said half-a-dozen little voices at once, as the party burst into the room. They had been romping as they came along the pleasant green lane leading to Uncle Thomas’s cottage, and, fond as they were of his Stories, it was some time before they could settle down to listen to his account of the Ostrich.

When, at length, order was sufficiently established, Uncle Thomas began. “ The Ostrich,” he said, “ is one of the most singular of birds, whether we regard its structure or habits. Though possessing wings, like other birds, it

never flies, but, as it runs rapidly across the plains, it uses them to assist its speed. It inhabits the barren deserts of Africa, and the adaptation of the animal to the mode of life for which it is intended is one of the most striking proofs of God's superintending care, the comprehensiveness of which is such, that we are assured that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without His knowledge and consent.

“ Though, from the shyness of the animal,” continued Uncle Thomas, “ and the difficulty of watching its habits in a state of nature, less is known of them than could be wished, we still know enough to cause us to wonder and admire. It feeds on the stunted herbage of the desert, and has sometimes to pass over long ranges of sterile plains in search of food. It builds no nest, but merely hollows out a place in the sand and deposits its eggs; not, however, to leave them entirely, as has been sometimes said, to be hatched by the fostering heat of the sun. During the day, when the heat is very powerful,

and the sun beats directly into the nest, there is no necessity for her remaining to cover them, as they thus derive quite as much warmth as she could impart, or is useful. Besides, from the cause already explained, the Ostrich is often under the necessity of absenting herself for considerable periods in search of food ; but no sooner does the evening set in, than she hastens to resume her place on the nest, and sits patiently till the bright sunshine of another day sets her again at liberty.

“ A traveller in Africa, who had an opportunity of observing the Ostrich, says that it runs as rapidly as a good saddle-horse at full speed ; and a philosophical writer, speaking of the providential arrangements of nature, says, ‘ There is not in the whole range of nature a more beautiful instance of adaptation than that which subsists between the Ostrich and the desert. The desert is a singular locality in nature, and the Ostrich is singularly formed and fitted for the severe labour which it has there to encounter.

In its walking structure this bird is not excelled by any animal, even by those swift Antelopes which are her near neighbours. We find, too, that wherever one species of action is required in a very high degree, the organization of the animal is in a great measure concentrated upon that. Flight would have been of comparatively little use to such a bird, in the situation in which it has been placed by nature. Wings for flight, to bear up so weighty a bird as the Ostrich in swift motion through the air, would have demanded a waste of muscular exertion, for the supply of which sufficient food could not have been found in the Ostrich's country. Besides, wings would have been of no use in the desert, because there is nothing there which a vegetable-feeding bird could catch upon the wing, and the height of the Ostrich is quite sufficient to reach the top of the tallest vegetable in her pastures. There is, therefore, a very fine instance of economy in the wings of the Ostrich being so little developed,

as that they are useful for flight, because this enables the whole power of the bird, in so far as motion is concerned, to be concentrated upon the legs, and the muscles by which these are moved.'

"A very interesting story," continued Uncle Thomas, "is told of the affection of a pair of Ostriches which were formerly in the Jardin du Roi, at Paris. The sky-light in the roof of the apartment in which they were kept having been broken, the glaziers proceeded to repair it, and, in the course of their work, let fall a triangular piece of glass. Not long after this, the female Ostrich was taken ill, and died after an hour or two of great agony. The body was opened, and the throat and stomach were found to have been dreadfully lacerated by the sharp corners of the glass which she had swallowed. From the moment his companion was taken from him, the male bird had no rest; he appeared to be incessantly searching for something, and daily wasted away. He was removed from the

spot, in the hope that he would forget his grief; he was even allowed more liberty, but in vain, and he literally pined himself to death."

"Are Ostriches very strong birds?" asked Jane.

"So strong," said Uncle Thomas, "that when caught and tamed by the natives of Africa, they sometimes mount the children on their backs, and the Ostriches run about quite easily with their burdens. Here is a print of a scene of this kind, in which the little riders and their fond mamas seem highly pleased with the amusement."

"Oh, delightful!" cried Jane.

"It is said," continued Uncle Thomas, "that one of the ancient Egyptian monarchs had a chariot drawn by Ostriches; and such is their power of limb, that they can readily lay a Dog prostrate by a single blow."

"But they are very stupid birds, are they not?" asked Harry. "When about to be taken by their pursuers, they thrust their heads into

“ Children mount on their backs, and the Ostriches
run about quite easily with their burdens.”

the bushes, expecting that, as they do not see their enemy, he may not be able to see them."

"I know that such an impression exists," said Uncle Thomas; "but it is an erroneous one. Like many other fabulous tales, however, this seems to retain its hold on the public mind, even in spite of the great increase of our knowledge within the last few years."

"Oh!" cried Jane, who, during the conversation which we have just recorded, had been turning over the pages of the book from which Uncle Thomas read the extract about the adaptation of the Ostrich to the locality in which it is found. "See here!" pointing to the figure of an Emu; "here is a very singular bird; I thought at first it was an Ostrich; it is very like one!"

"No, my dear," said Uncle Thomas, "that is the Emu; a bird which in some measure resembles the Ostrich, but it is only found in New Holland. If you compare it with the figure of an Ostrich, you will find that it differs

considerably. Its legs are shorter, its body not so handsome in its form, and its foot has three toes, while that of the Ostrich has two only. There are, besides, some other points of dissimilarity.

“The Emu,” continued Uncle Thomas, “inhabits the plains and ‘bushes’ of Australia, but so numerous are the enemies by which they are now surrounded,—settlers, bushmen, Wolves, and Wild-Dogs, that the race seems threatened with extirpation. Not only are their eggs reckoned good food, but some parts of their flesh, though not highly prized, is still palatable. Besides their swiftness, in which they resemble the Ostrich, they kick with great vigour; and are thus able to defend themselves against the Dingo or native Dog, but the trained one, which is brought to attack them on the side, is almost certain of victory.

“There is a curious provision of nature,” continued Uncle Thomas, “in the construction of this bird, consisting of an internal pouch, con-

nected with the wind-pipe, the use of which long puzzled naturalists. At length some one more ingenious than his neighbours, or better acquainted with the animal's habits, solved the difficulty by pointing out that it was intended to enable it to escape from the inundations to which the plains of New Holland are particularly liable, and without which provision the heaviness of the Emu would probably cause it to sink and be drowned."

"How can it prevent it from sinking?" asked Mary.

"Pretty much in the same manner," said Uncle Thomas, "as fishes are enabled at pleasure to rise to the surface of the water. Fishes, you know, are furnished with what is called an air-bladder, which they have the power of filling and emptying at pleasure; when they wish to sink they force out the air, and their bodies, being thus rendered specifically heavier than water, descend; and, on the contrary, when they wish to rise, by inflating it they ascend

The ‘air-bladder,’ if I may so call it, of the Emu acts much in the same way. As the animal walks about it is, of course, of no use, and is allowed to remain empty; but, whenever it is threatened with drowning it is inflated, and the Emu is thus enabled to float with its head above the surface of the water.

“Mr. Jesse gives an account of a singular peculiarity in the habits of the Emu,” continued Uncle Thomas, “so contrary to the usual operations of Nature, that I am inclined to suppose it a mere accidental circumstance; it is this:— ‘The only instance,’ he says, ‘which I have met with in which the hen bird has not the chief care in hatching and bringing up the young is in the case of the Emu at the farm belonging to the Zoological Society, near Kingston. A pair of these birds have now five young ones: the female, at different times, dropped nine eggs in various places in the pen in which she was confined. These were collected in one place by the male, who rolled them gently and carefully

along with his beak. He then sat upon them himself, and continued to do so with the utmost assiduity for nine weeks, during which time the female never took his place, nor was he ever observed to leave the nest. When the young were hatched, he alone took charge of them, and has continued to do so ever since, the female not appearing to notice them in any way. On reading this anecdote, many persons would suppose that the female Emu was not possessed of that natural affection for its young which other birds have. In order to rescue it from this supposition I will mention that a female Emu, belonging to the Duke of Devonshire, at Chiswick, lately laid some eggs; and as there was no male bird, she collected them together herself and sat upon them."

"That is a very curious circumstance," said Frank, "do you think the birds do so in their native haunts?"

"I should think not," said Uncle Thomas. "I once heard a similar instance of a Tur-

key-cock hatching a brood of young. On one occasion, a female Turkey belonging to a gentleman in Sweden was sitting upon eggs, and as the cock in her absence began to appear uneasy and dejected, he was shut up with her. He immediately sat down by her side; and it was soon found that he had taken some eggs from under her, which he covered very carefully. The eggs were put back under the female, but he soon afterwards took them again. This induced the owner, by way of experiment, to have a nest made, and as many eggs put in it as it was thought the Turkey-cock could conveniently cover. The bird seemed highly pleased with this mark of confidence; he sat with great patience on the eggs, and was so attentive to the care of hatching them as scarcely to afford himself time to take the food necessary for his support. At the usual period, twenty-eight young ones were produced; and the cock, who was in some measure the parent of this numerous offspring, appeared perplexed

on seeing so many little creatures pecking around him, and requiring his care."

"Does the Turkey come from New Holland as well as the Emu?" asked Mary.

"The Turkey," said Uncle Thomas, "is a native of North America, and was unknown to Europeans before the discovery of that country. In some parts of America, however, it is now quite extinct as a wild bird, being only found in a state of domestication; but in the more western parts, where the native forests exist, it is still plentiful. The best account of the Turkey in its native haunts is that afforded by Prince Lucien Buonaparte, which Harry will have the goodness to read to us:—

"The wild Turkeys do not confine themselves to any particular kind of food; they eat maize, all sorts of berries, fruits, grasses, Beetles, and even Tadpoles; young Frogs and Lizards are occasionally found in their crops; but when the pecan nut is plentiful, they prefer that fruit to any other nourishment. Their more general pre-

dilection is, however, for the acorn, on which they rapidly fatten. When an unusually profuse crop of acorns is produced in a particular section of country, great numbers of Turkeys are enticed from their ordinary haunts in the surrounding districts. About the beginning of October, while the mast still remains on the trees, they assemble in flocks, and direct their course to the rich bottom lands. At this season they are observed in great numbers in the Ohio and Mississippi. The time of this irruption is known to the Indians by the name of the *Turkey month*.

“ The male Turkeys, usually termed *gobblers*, associate in parties, numbering from ten to a hundred, and seek their food apart from the females; whilst the latter either move about singly with their young, then nearly two-thirds grown, or, in company with other females and their families, form troops, sometimes consisting of seventy or eighty individuals, all of whom are intent on avoiding the old males, who,

whenever opportunity offers, attack and destroy the young, by repeated blows on the skull. All parties, however, travel in the same direction, and on foot, unless they are compelled to seek their individual safety by flying from the hunter's Dog, or their march is impeded by a large river. When about to cross a river, they select the highest eminences, that their flight may be the more certain ; and here they sometimes remain for a day or more, as if for the purpose of consultation, or to be duly prepared for so hazardous a voyage. During this time the males gobble obstreperously, and strut with extraordinary importance, as if they would animate their companions, and inspire them with the utmost degree of hardihood ; the females and young also assume much of the pompous air of the males, the former spreading their tails, and moving silently around. At length the assembled multitude mount to the tops of the highest trees, whence, at a signal note from a leader, the whole together wing their way

towards the opposite shore. All the old and fat ones cross without difficulty, even when the river exceeds a mile in width; but the young, meagre, and weak, frequently fall short of the desired landing, and are forced to swim for their lives. 'This they do dexterously enough, spreading their tails for a support, closing their wings to the body, stretching the neck forwards, and striking out quickly and forcibly with their legs. If, in thus endeavouring to regain the land, they approach an elevated or inaccessible bank, their exertions are remitted, they resign themselves to the stream for a short time, in order to gain strength, and then with one violent effort escape from the water. But in this attempt all are not successful; some of the weaker, as they cannot rise sufficiently high in air to clear the bank, fall again and again into the water, and thus miserably perish. Immediately after the Turkeys have succeeded in crossing a river, they for some time ramble about without any apparent unanimity of pur-

pose, and a great many are destroyed by the hunters, although they are then least valuable.

“ When the Turkeys have arrived in their land of abundance, they disperse in small flocks, composed of individuals of all sexes and ages intermingled, who devour all the mast as they advance: this occurs about the middle of November. It has been observed that, after these long journeys, the Turkeys become so familiar as to venture on the plantations, and even approach so near the farm-houses as to enter the stables and corn cribs in search of food; in this way they pass the autumn, and part of the winter. During this season great numbers are killed by the inhabitants, who preserve them in a frozen state, in order to transport them to a distant market.

“ Early in March they begin to pair; and, for a short time previous, the females separate from and shun their mates, though the latter pertinaciously follow them, uttering their gobbling note. The sexes roost apart, but at no

great distance, so that, when the female utters a call every male within hearing responds, rolling note after note, in the most rapid succession; not as when spreading the tail and strutting near the hen, but in a voice resembling that of the tame Turkey, when he hears any unusual or frequently repeated noise. When the Turkeys are numerous, the woods from one end to the other, sometimes for hundreds of miles, resound with this remarkable voice of their wooing, uttered responsively from their roosting-places. This is continued for about an hour; and, on the rising of the sun, they instantly descend from their perches, and the males begin to strut, for the purpose of winning the admiration of their mates.

“ If the call be given from the ground, the males in the vicinity fly towards the individual, and, whether they perceive her or not, erect and spread their tails, throw the head backwards, distend the comb and wattles, strut pompously and rustle their wings and body feathers, at the

same moment ejecting a puff of air from the lungs. Whilst thus occupied, they occasionally halt to look out for the female, and then resume their strutting and puffing, moving with as much rapidity as the nature of their gait will admit. During this ceremonious approach, the males often encounter each other, and desperate battles ensue, when the conflict is only terminated by the flight or death of the vanquished.

“ About the middle of April, when the weather is dry, the female selects a proper place in which to deposit her eggs, secure from the encroachment of water, and, as far as possible, concealed from the watchful eye of the Crow. This crafty bird espies the hen going to her nest, and, having discovered the precious deposit, waits for the absence of the parent, and removes every one of the eggs from the spot, that he may devour them at leisure. The nest is placed on the ground, either on a dry ridge, in the fallen top of a dead leafy tree, under a thicket of sumach or briars, or by the side of a log; it is

of a very simple structure, being composed of a few dried leaves. In this receptacle the eggs are deposited, sometimes to the number of twenty, but more usually from nine to sixteen; they are whitish, spotted with reddish brown, like that of the domestic bird. Their manner of building, number of eggs, period of incubation, &c., appear to correspond throughout the Union, as I have received exactly similar accounts from the northern limits of the Turkey range to the most southern limits of Florida, Louisiana, and the western wilds of Missouri.

“ The female always approaches her nest with great caution, varying her course so as rarely to reach it twice by the same route; and on leaving her charge, she is very careful to cover the whole with dry leaves, with which she conceals it so artfully as to make it extremely difficult, even for one who has watched her movements, to indicate the exact spot; hence few nests are found, and these are generally discovered by fortuitously starting the

female from them, or by the appearance of broken shells, scattered around by some cunning Lynx, Fox, or Crow. When laying or sitting, the Turkey hen is not easily driven from her post by the approach of apparent danger; but if an enemy appears, she crouches as low as possible, and suffers it to pass. A circumstance related by Mr. Audubon will show how much intelligence they display on such occasions: having discovered a sitting hen, he remarked that, by assuming a careless air, whistling, or talking to himself, he was permitted to pass within five or six feet of her; but if he advanced cautiously, she would not suffer him to come within twenty paces, but ran off twenty or thirty yards with her tail expanded, when, assuming a stately gait, she paused on every step, occasionally uttering a chuck. They seldom abandon their nests on account of being discovered by a man, but should a Snake, or any other animal, suck one of the eggs, the parent leaves them altogether. If the eggs be removed, or

destroyed, she again commences laying, although otherwise she lays but one nest of eggs during the season. Several Turkey hens sometimes associate, perhaps for mutual safety, deposit their eggs in the same nest, and rear their broods together.

“ When the process of incubation is ended, and the mother is about to retire from the nest with her young brood, she shakes herself violently, pecks and adjusts the feathers about the belly, and assumes a different aspect; her eyes are alternately inclined obliquely upwards and sideways; she stretches forth her neck, in every direction, to discover birds of prey or other enemies; her wings are partially spread, and she softly chucks to keep her tender offspring close to her side. They proceed slowly, and, as the hatching generally occurs in the afternoon, they sometimes return to pass the first night in the nest. While very young, the mother leads them to elevated dry places, as if aware that humidity during the first few days of their life

would be very dangerous to them, they having then no other protection than a delicate, soft, hairy down. In very rainy seasons wild Turkeys are scarce, because, when completely wetted, the young rarely survive.

“ At the expiration of about two weeks, the young leave the ground on which they had previously reposed at night under the female, and follow her to some low branch of a tree, where they nestle under the broadly curved wings of their vigilant and fostering parent. The time then approaches in which they seek the open ground or prairie land, during the day, in search of strawberries, and subsequently of dewberries, blackberries, and Grasshoppers; thus securing a plentiful food, and enjoying the influence of the genial sun. They frequently dust themselves in shallow cavities of the soil or on ant-hills, in order to clean off the loose skin of their growing feathers, and rid themselves of ticks and other vermin. The young Turkeys now grow rapidly, and in the month of August, when several

broods flock together, and are led by their mothers to the forest, they are stout and quite able to secure themselves from the unexpected attacks of Wolves, Foxes, Lynxes, and even Cougars, by rising quickly from the ground, aided by their strong legs, and reaching with ease the upper limbs of the tallest tree. Amongst the numerous enemies of the Wild Turkey, the most dreaded are the large diurnal and nocturnal birds of prey, and the Lynx, who sucks their eggs, and is extremely expert at seizing both parent and young: he follows them for some distance in order to ascertain their course, and then, making a rapid circular movement, places himself in ambush before them, and waits until, by a single bound, he can fasten on his victim.

“Turkeys are very watchful birds, and act as guardians of each other; the first who observes a Hawk, Eagle, or other enemy, giving a note of alarm, on which all within hearing lie close on the ground. As they usually roost in flocks, perched on the naked

branches of trees, they are easily discovered by the large Owls, and when attacked by these prowling birds, often escape by a somewhat remarkable manœuvre. The Owl sails around the spot to select his prey; but notwithstanding the almost inaudible action of his pinions, the quick ear of one of the slumberers perceives the danger, which is immediately announced to the whole party by a *chuck*; thus alarmed, they rise on their legs and watch the motions of the Owl, who, darting like an arrow, would inevitably secure the individual at which he aimed, did not the latter suddenly drop his head, squat, and spread his tail over his back; the Owl then glances over without inflicting any injury, and at the very instant that the Turkey suffers himself to fall headlong towards the earth, when he is secure from his dreaded enemy."

"Thank you, Harry!" said Uncle Thomas. "We shall now stop for the evening; but before you go, I must tell you of a little adventure

with a Lynx, which happened to a gentleman who was enjoying the sport of Turkey-shooting:—‘ Having seen a large flock of ‘Turkeys at some distance,’ says he, ‘ I approached them with great caution, when singling out a large cock, and being just on the point of firing, I observed that several young cocks were affrighted, and, in their language warned the rest to be on their guard against an enemy, who I plainly perceived was industriously making his subtle approaches towards them, behind the fallen trunk of a tree, about twenty yards from me. This cunning fellow-hunter was a large Wild-cat or Lynx; he saw me, and at times seemed to watch my motions, as if determined to seize the delicious prey before me, upon which I changed my object, and levelled my piece at him. At this instant my companion, at a distance, also discharged his gun, the report of which alarmed the flock of ‘Turkeys, and my fellow-hunter, the Lynx, sprang over the log, and trotted off.’”

“ He seemed to watch my motions, as if determined to seize the delicious prey.”

CHAPTER VIII.

UNCLE THOMAS TELLS ABOUT PARROTS, THEIR SEEMING INTELLIGENCE,
AND RELATES SEVERAL CURIOUS STORIES OF THEIR POWER OF
IMITATING THE HUMAN VOICE.

“TO-NIGHT,” said Uncle Thomas, on the following evening, “I am going to tell you about a family of Birds, which, from the splendour of their plumage, and the ease with which they can be taught to imitate the human voice, have continued to be great favourites ever since their introduction into Europe.”

“Oh! it is Parrots you mean, I suppose, Uncle Thomas!” said Jane.

“It is so, Jane,” said Uncle Thomas; “and I have many very curious stories to tell you about them.”

“Where do Parrots come from?” asked Mary.

“They are found in all the tropical countries,” said Uncle Thomas; “in the West Indies, in Africa, in the Islands of the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and one species is a native of America. There are a great many varieties which are known by the names of Parrots, Macaws, Cockatoos, Parrakeets, Lories, &c., but notwithstanding the favour which is shown to them when domesticated, very little is known of their habits in a wild state. This arises in a great measure from the nature of their places of resort. They chiefly inhabit the luxuriant forests of the tropics, feeding on the nuts and berries, of which there exists an everlasting succession; but so luxuriant is the growth of the vegetable kingdom in these regions, that the forests are in most cases quite impenetrable by man. Many of the most luxuriant, indeed, grow in marshes, so as to be quite inaccessible, and in all of them the exhalations, which are constantly given out by decaying vegetable matter, renders the air pestilent to

human beings; and should a traveller attempt to explore them, he would never return to publish the tale of his adventures."

"Do they talk as they fly about in a wild state?" asked Harry.

"No," said Uncle Thomas, "they do not; that is entirely the effect of education. Their native cry is harsh and discordant, and has been not inaptly called a scream. It is their faculty of imitation which enables them to utter words and phrases in tones so like the human voice as to be readily mistaken for it. Many curious stories are told of their powers in this way, and some of them would almost lead us to believe that the creature was endowed with human intelligence. Mr. Jesse was so surprised by what he saw and heard of one at Hampton Court, that he requested the sister of its owner to furnish him with some particulars respecting it. Here they are in her own words:—

"As you wished me to write down whatever I could collect about my sister's wonderful Par-

rot, I proceed to do so, only premising that I will tell you nothing but what I can vouch for having myself heard. Her laugh is quite extraordinary, and it is impossible to help joining in it oneself, more especially, when in the midst of it she cries out, 'don't make me laugh so, I shall die, I shall die,' and then continues laughing more violently than before. Her crying and sobbing are curious, and if you say 'Poor Poll, what is the matter?' she says, 'So bad, so bad, got such a cold,' and after crying for some time, will gradually cease, and making a noise like drawing a long breath, say 'better now,' and begin to laugh.

"The first time I ever heard her speak was one day when I was talking to the maid, at the bottom of the stairs, and heard what I then considered to be a child call out, 'Payne (the maid's name), I am not well, I'm not well!' And on my saying, 'What is the matter with that child?' she replied, 'It is only the Parrot, she always does so when I leave her alone, to make

me come back;' and so it proved, for on her going into the room, the Parrot stopped, and then began laughing quite in a jeering way.

“ It is singular, that whenever she is affronted in any way she begins to cry, and when pleased, to laugh. If any one happens to cough or sneeze, she says, ‘ What a bad cold.’ One day when the children were playing with her, the maid came into the room, and on their repeating to her several things which the Parrot had said, Poll looked up, and said quite plainly, ‘ No I didn’t.’ Sometimes when she is inclined to be mischievous, the maid threatens to beat her, and she often says, ‘ No you won’t.’ She calls the Cat very plainly, ‘ Puss, Puss,’ and then answers, ‘ *Mew* ;’ but the most amusing part is, that whenever I want to make her call it, and to that purpose say, ‘ Puss, Puss,’ myself, she always answers, ‘ *Mew*,’ till I begin mewing, and then she begins calling ‘ Puss’ as quick as possible. She imitates every kind of noise, and barks so naturally, that I have known her to

set all the Dogs on the parade at Hampton Court barking, and I dare say, if the truth was known, wondering what was barking at them! and the consternation I have seen her cause in a party of Cocks and Hens by her crowing and chuckling has been the most ludicrous thing possible. She sings just like a child, and I have more than once thought it was a human being; and it is most ridiculous to hear her make what we should call a false note, and then say, 'Oh la!' and burst out laughing at herself, beginning again quite in another key. She is very fond of singing, 'Buy a Broom,' which she says quite plainly; but, in the same spirit as in calling the Cat, if we may say, with a view to make her repeat it, 'Buy a broom,' she always says 'Buy a *brush*,' and then laughs as a child might do when mischievous. She often performs a kind of exercise which I do not know how to describe, except by saying that it is like the lance exercise. She puts her claw behind her, first on one side and then on

the other, then in front, and round over her head, and whilst doing so, keeps saying, ‘Come on, come on!’ and when finished, says ‘Bravo, beautiful!’ and draws herself up. Before I was as well acquainted with her as I am now, she would stare in my face for some time, and then say, ‘How d’ye do, Ma’am?’ this she invariably does to strangers. One day, I went into the room where she was, and said, to try her, ‘Poll, where is Payne gone?’ and to my astonishment, and almost dismay, she said, ‘Down stairs.’

“That looks very much as if it understood what was said to it,” remarked Harry.

“It does so,” said Uncle Thomas; “and can only be accounted for by supposing it to be one of those curious coincidences which sometimes surprise us. I can, however, tell you a story in which, though the Parrots could only utter a couple of phrases each, they used them as naturally as if they had a whole vocabulary at command:—

“A tradesman who had a shop in the Old

Bailey, opposite the prison, kept two Parrots, the one green, and the other grey. The green Parrot was taught to speak when there was a knock at the street door; the grey put in his word whenever the bell was rung; but they only knew two short phrases of English a-piece, though they pronounced these very distinctly. The house in which their owner lived had a projecting old-fashioned front, so that the first floor could not be seen from the pavement on the same side of the way; and one day when they were left at home by themselves, hanging out of a window, some one knocked at the street door. "Who's there?" said the green Parrot, in the exercise of his office. "The man with the leather!" was the reply; to which the bird answered with his farther store of language, "Oh, ho!" The door not being opened immediately as he expected, the stranger knocked a second time. "Who's there?" said the green Parrot again. — "Who's there!" said the man with the leather,

flying into a passion, ‘Why don’t you come down?’ to which the Parrot again made answer, ‘Oh, ho!’ This response so enraged the visitor that he dropped the knocker and rang furiously at the house bell; but this proceeding brought the grey Parrot, who called out in a new voice, ‘Go to the gate.’—‘To the gate?’ muttered the appellant, who saw no such convenience, and imagined that the servants were bantering him. ‘What gate?’ cried he, getting out into the kennel, that he might have the advantage of seeing who it was that spoke to him. ‘Newgate,’ responded the grey Parrot, just at the moment when his species was discovered.

“Capital!” said Frank, laughing.

“So you see, Frank,” said Uncle Thomas, “that the appropriate answers given by Parrots are not always the result of intelligence.

“Perhaps the most celebrated Parrot,” continued Uncle Thomas, “whose sayings and doings figure in history, is one—a blue Macaw

—which belonged to the late Dr. Thornton, who bought it for fifteen guineas, to grace his museum. When in a confined exhibition-room in Bond-street, where it was kept chained by the leg, it made those screaming noises so offensive in its tribe, and seemed sulky and unhappy ; but being brought to the doctor's house (his botanical exhibition having closed), from motives of humanity, the chain was removed that confined it to its perch. At first its feet were so cramped, and the muscles so much weakened from long disuse, that it could not walk. It tottered at every step, and appeared, in a few minutes only, greatly fatigued. Its liberated feet, however, soon acquired uncommon agility, its plumage grew more resplendent, and it became completely happy. It no longer indulged in screams of discontent, and all its gestures denoted gratitude. Its food, was now changed, it breakfasted with the family, having toast and butter ; and dined upon potatoes, hard dumplings, with fruit occasionally after dinner. Like other

Parrots, it never drank. Its sense of smell was uncommonly quick. It soon learned to know the time of meals, which it marked by a continued agitation of the wings, and anxiously running up and down its pole.

“When it received food it half opened its wings, and contracted the pupils of its eyes, and uttered a pleasing note of thankfulness. If it got any food of which it was not very fond, it held it in his left foot, and having eaten a little, threw the rest down; but if the food was nice and abundant, it carefully conveyed it to its tin reservoir, and left for another repast that which it could not immediately consume. It soon forgot its barbarous sounds, and imitated words; and for hours together amused itself by saying, ‘Poll,’—‘Macaw,’—‘Turn him out,’—‘Pretty fellow,’—‘Saucy fellow,’—‘What’s o’clock,’ laughing, and calling out the names of the doctor’s children. If any of them were hurt, it gave the first alarm; nor did it desist until they were attended to. The doctor’s son, observing

the sagacity of this bird, undertook to instruct it. He taught it at the word of command to descend from its perch and stand upon his finger; then, by another order, it turned itself downwards, and hung upon the fore-finger by one foot, although the body was swung about with considerable violence. Being asked how a bad person should be served? it seized its master's finger, suspended itself by its bill, like one hanging. At the command of its master it extended his wings to show their beauty. It would then fan the spectators with his wings; it was next put on the ground, and walked as readily backwards as forwards, with its two toes in front, and two behind. It would then clamber like a sailor up the mizen-mast and with its two open mandibles embraced its perch, which was nearly two inches in thickness. Placed there, it was asked—if a certain gentleman were to come near him, how he should be served? It shook its head several times, raised its wings, erected its feathers and

opening its mouth, laid hold of a finger, seemingly in earnest, and kept biting it, as though it would have taken it off, opposing every resistance; and when it liberated the finger, uttered a scream. It was then asked how it would serve its master?—when it would gently bite his finger, caress it with its beak and tongue, and hold its head down, as expecting it to be scratched. Nor is this all: a nut being given to it, while on the lower part of his stand, it mounted the upright stick, and the nut disappeared without the spectator being able to tell how. At the word of command it presented the nut to the company, held it in its paw, and then cracked it. It had been taught to conceal the nut under its tongue, in the hollow of the under mandible. When a peach-stone was given to it, it found out its natural division, and by repeated efforts contrived to open it and eat the kernel. When nuts were presented to it, it became agitated, and had so much sagacity that, without

cracking, when it took up a bad nut, it very indignantly threw it on the ground. It was remarkably fond of music; and with motions of its feet along the perch, movements of its wings, and its head moving backwards and forwards, it danced to all lively tunes, and kept exact time. If, however, any person sung or played in wrong measure it quickly desisted.

“ This interesting animal was very friendly to strangers, but put on a terrific appearance towards children, and was very jealous of infants. In rainy weather the blue feathers looked green; and also in clear weather when there were vapours in the sky; hence it was an admirable weather-gauge. What proved a peculiar sagacity in its imitations was, that these it effected sometimes without its voice: for example, there was a scissors-grinder who came into the street, where the bird was kept, every Friday. All Parrots have a file in the inside of the upper mandible, with which they grind down the under bill, and in this they are

employed for an hour every evening. This sound people usually mistake for snoring. This scraping was attempted, but its nice ear marked the difference, and had recourse to his claws, which it struck against the perch, armed with tin, and, observing the time of the turning of the wheel, it effected a most exact imitation, which it repeated every Friday."

When each of his little auditors had expressed their admiration of the fine Macaw about which he had told them, Uncle Thomas proceeded to relate several other interesting stories about Parrots.

"A gentleman who resided at Gosport in Hampshire, and frequently had occasion to cross the water to Portsmouth, was astonished one day on going to the beach to look for a boat, and finding none, to hear the words distinctly repeated,—“Over, Master? Going over?” Which is the manner that watermen are in the habit of accosting people when they are waiting for passengers. The

cry still assailing his ears, he looked earnestly around him, to discover from whence it came; when, to his great surprise, he discovered that it proceeded from a Parrot in a cage suspended from a public-house window on the beach.

“Another very amusing incident,” continued Uncle Thomas, “occurred some years since in Boston. An American Parrot, that had been taught to whistle in the manner of calling a Dog, was sitting in his cage at the door of a shop. As he was amusing himself in exercising his talents in this way, a large Dog happened to pass; the animal imagining that he heard the call of his master, turned suddenly about and ran towards the cage of the Parrot. At this moment, the bird, somewhat alarmed, exclaimed vehemently, ‘Get out, you brute!’ The astonished dog hastily retreated, leaving those who were within hearing to enjoy the joke.

“Though the power of speech is entirely an imitative one in the Parrot,” said Uncle

Thomas, "you must not consider it as deficient in the qualities which recommend birds in general to our regard. Parrots are very affectionate creatures, though, as with us they are generally kept solitary, we have seldom an opportunity of observing their conduct towards each other.

"A French writer records a very interesting instance of affection in a pair of these birds. A solitary gentleman, whose principal delight had been in observing the manners and habits of animals, gives the following account of the affection of two Parrots. They were of that kind of Parroquet called Guinea Sparrows, and kept in a square cage, such as is usually appropriated to that species of bird. The cup which contained their food was placed in the bottom of the cage. The male was almost continually seated on the same perch with the female. They sat close together, and viewed each other from time to time with evident tenderness. If they separated, it was but for

a few moments, for they hastened to return and resume their situation. They commonly took their food together, and then retired to the highest perch of the cage. They often appeared to engage in a kind of conversation, which they continued for some time, and seemed to answer each other, varying their sounds, and elevating and lowering their voices. Sometimes they seemed to quarrel, but those emotions were but of a momentary duration, and succeeded by additional tenderness. This happy pair thus passed four years in a climate greatly different from that in which they had before lived. At the end of that period the female fell into a state of languor, which had all the appearance of old age. At length she was no longer able to move about to take her food, but the male, ever attentive and alert in whatever concerned her, brought it in his bill, and emptied it into hers. She was in this manner supplied by her vigilant purveyor during the space of four months. The infirmities of his dear companion

increased daily. She became at last unable to sit upon the perch ; and remained, therefore, crouched at the bottom of the cage, and from time to time made a few ineffectual efforts to regain the lowest perch. The male, who ever remained attentive and close by her, seconded these her feeble efforts with all his power. Sometimes he seized with his beak the upper part of her wing, by way of drawing her to him ; sometimes he took her by the bill and endeavoured to raise her up, repeating these efforts many times. His motions, his gestures, his countenance, his continual solicitude, every thing in this interesting bird, expressed an ardent desire to aid the weakness of his mate, and to alleviate her sufferings. But the scene became still more interesting when the female was on the point of expiring. The unhappy male went round and round the dying female without ceasing. He redoubled his assiduities and tender cares. He tried to open her bill, with a design to give her nourishment. His

emotion increased every instant ; he paced and repaced the cage in the greatest agitation, and, at intervals, uttered the most plaintive cries. At other times he fixed his eyes upon the female, and preserved the most sorrowful silence. It was impossible to mistake these expressions of his grief or despair; the most insensible of mankind would have been moved. His faithful consort at last expired. From that moment he himself languished, and survived her but a few months."

"An instance of the same kind," continued Uncle Thomas, "is related by Mr. Audubon, in an account which he gives of an experiment to teach a Carolina Parroquet to speak. — 'Anxious,' says he, 'to try the effects of education on one which I had but slightly wounded in the wing, I fixed up a place for it in the stern of my boat, and presented it with cockle-burs, the favourite food of the American Parrot, which it freely fed on in less than an hour after being on board. The intermediate

time between eating and sleeping was occupied in gnawing the sticks that formed its place of confinement, in order to make a practicable breach; which it repeatedly effected. When I abandoned the river and travelled by land, I wrapped it closely up in a silk handkerchief, tying it tightly round, and carried it in my pocket. When I stopped for refreshment, I unbound my prisoner and gave it its allowance, which it generally despatched with great dexterity, unhusking the seeds from the bur in a twinkling. In recommitting it to 'durance vile,' we generally had a quarrel, during which it frequently paid me in kind for the wound I had inflicted, and for depriving it of liberty, by cutting and almost disabling several of my fingers with its sharp and powerful bill. The path through the wilderness, between Nashville and Natchez, is, in some places, bad beyond description. There are dangerous creeks to swim, miles of morass to struggle through, rendered almost as gloomy as night

by a prodigious growth of timber, and an underwood of canes and other evergreens; while the descent into these sluggish streams is often ten or fifteen feet perpendicular into a bed of deep clay. In some of the worst of these places, where I had, as it were, to fight my way through, the Parroquet frequently escaped from my pocket, obliging me to dismount and pursue it through the worst of the morass before I could regain it. On these occasions I was several times tempted to abandon it, but I persisted in bringing it along. When, at night I encamped in the woods I placed it on the baggage beside me, where it usually sat with great composure, dozing and gazing at the fire till morning. In this way I carried it upwards of a thousand miles in my pocket, when it was exposed all day to the jolting of the horse, but regularly liberated at meal-times and in the evening, at which it always expressed great satisfaction. In passing through the Chickasaw and Choctaw

nations, the Indians, wherever I stopped to feed, collected around me—men, women, and children—laughing and seeming wonderfully amused with the novelty of my companion. The Chickasaw called it in their language *Kelinky*, but when they heard me call it Poll they soon repeated the name, and wherever I chanced to stop among these people we soon became familiar with each other through the medium of Poll. On arriving at Mr. Dunbar's, below Natchez, I procured a cage and placed it under the piazza, where by its call it soon attracted the passing flocks; such is the attachment they have for each other. Numerous parties frequently alighted on the trees immediately above, keeping up a constant conversation with the prisoner. One of them I wounded slightly in the wing, and the pleasure Poll experienced at meeting with this new companion was really amusing. She crept close up to it as it hung on the side of the cage, chattering to it in a low tone of voice, as if sympathizing in its misfor-

tune, scratched about its head and neck with her bill, and both at night nestled as close as possible to each other, Poll's head being thrust among the plumage of the other. On the death of this companion she appeared restless and inconsolable for several days. On reaching New Orleans I placed a looking-glass beside the place where she usually sat, and the instant she perceived her image all her former fondness seemed to return, so that she could scarcely absent herself from it for a moment. It was evident that she was completely deceived. Always when evening drew on, and often during the day, she laid her head close to that of the image in the glass, and began to doze with great composure and satisfaction. In this short space she learned to know her name, to answer and come when called on; to climb up my clothes, sit on my shoulder, and eat from my mouth. I took her with me to sea, determined to persevere in her education. But, destined to another fate, poor Poll, having one

morning about daybreak wrought her way through the cage while I was asleep, instantly flew overboard, and perished in the Gulf of Mexico."

"Poor Poll!" said Mary.

"A very amusing story is told," continued Uncle Thomas, "of the lady of a worthy citizen, who, by a laudable attention to business, had accumulated a considerable fortune, and retired to the enjoyment of a nice villa not a hundred miles from Hampstead. It happened that the lady had a daughter by a former marriage; and, as her great desire was to see the girl well settled in life, she spared neither pains nor expense to effect her object. The old lady was moreover extremely parsimonious in her family arrangements; her ruling maxim being to save all she could in secret in order to be better able to spare no expense in public, so as to pass off for richer than she really was. She accordingly daily furnished her husband's table with the humblest fare—to which the good-

natured old gentleman submitted without a murmur. One of the good lady's grand economical schemes was the establishment of a piggery; and on one occasion having made a very profitable sale to a butcher of some half-a-dozen of the fatted inhabitants of her sty, that she might make the most of every thing, she supplied the table with little else than fried pig's liver as long as it lasted. As the worthy citizen was generally pretty ready for his dinner on his return from his forenoon's walk, the Parrot often heard and joined in the call which the master's arrival produced to 'make haste to bring the pig's liver,' which the lady vociferated over the stair to Rebecca, her only domestic, a great red-cheeked, raw-boned girl, fresh from the country. In the midst of these daily commons, the good lady was sparing no expense in preparing for a grand dinner which she was about to give. By some means or other she and her daughter had become acquainted with a young man of quality, who appeared to have

fallen in love with the young lady. Speculations and plots followed, and with the decision of an able general, the fond mother resolved to complete her daughter's conquest by a bold stroke. The young gentleman having ridden out that way with two of his fashionable companions, she lost not a moment in asking them all to what she called a family dinner at the villa, on an early day, which she named. Her invitation having been accepted, the choicest viands and the finest wines were provided, and a French cook and a powdered waiter were procured, and a quantity of plate was hired for the occasion.

“ The eventful day at length arrived. Dinner was served. The lady so managed matters that her daughter was seated next to her admirer. Operas and balls were talked of; every thing was in apple-pie order; the soup and fish course had passed away, and a haunch of venison was announced, ambiguously stated to be from the park of a noble friend —

the real fact being that it was purchased from a butcher who had it from his lordship's keeper. During the interval that took place before its appearance, John was despatched for the Champagne. The company waited, but neither venison, nor champagne, nor servant appeared. A dead silence ensued—a silence that was agony to the lady. Minutes were added to minutes. The good old citizen rose from his chair, and rang the bell; it tingled in the ears of the company for a while, but its tingling was fruitless. The suspense became fearful. 'What a pretty Parrot you have got,' said the young gentleman at last, in despair. 'He is a very pretty bird indeed!' said the lady of the house, 'and a very intelligent fellow too, I assure you. What have you to say for yourself, Poll?' 'Becky! Becky! the Pig's liver and a pot of beer! quick, quick, make haste!' cried the Parrot. 'The horrid sailors teach the creatures to be so vulgar,' said the young lady, in a die-away tone.—

‘Becky! Becky!’ cried the Parrot, ‘the Pig’s liver! quick, quick! Becky, Becky!’ And having been once roused from his lethargy he continued to bawl out the same words at the top of his voice, till, to the inexpressible horror of the good lady and her fair daughter, and the no less irrepressible mirth of the three youths, the great slip-shod country wench entered the room, her left arm embracing an ample dish of smoking-hot fried pig’s liver, and her right hand swinging a creaming pewter pot full of beer! ‘Lucky indeed it was that I had it ready, Ma’am,’ she said, as she set the dish and pot down before her mistress with a self-satisfied air that seemed to crave applause; ‘for Jowler, the big watch-dog, has runned away wi’ the leg of carrion, an’ Mounseer wi’ the white night-cap, and t’other chap wi’ the flour on his head, will ha’ enough ado to catch un!’ ”

The whole of Uncle Thomas’s little audience burst out in an uncontrollable fit of laughing

as he concluded this story, and it was not without a feeling of deep regret that they heard from him that it was now necessary to bring his Tales about Birds to a conclusion. He told them, however, that at no distant period he hoped once more to have the pleasure of their company to listen to a new series of Stories which he had in preparation, and they then bade him good night.

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