

Miscellaneous.

ORNITHOLOGY.

BY S. P. FOWLER.

There is probably no branch of Natural Science that has enlisted so many ardent admirers as Ornithology. The readers of the *Farmer* are no doubt aware of the enthusiasm displayed by Wilson, Audubon and Nuttall. William Bartram, one of our earliest naturalists, was a great lover of our feathered tribes. He remarks, "birds are in general, social and benevolent creatures, intelligent, ingenious, volatile, active beings." J. P. Girard, the author of the *Birds of Long Island*, says, "it is his opinion that those who pass through life without stopping to admire the beauty, organization, melody or habits of birds, rob themselves of a very great share of the pleasures of existence. In spring when nature has recovered from the chilling blasts of winter, and again puts forth her rich foliage, what can be more delightful than to listen to the rich melody of our songsters, robed in their nuptial plumage, perched on the branch of the rich magnolia, arranging their splendid attire with studied care, as if jealous the swelling buds would put forth blossoms that would rival them in beauty?" John Ray, the father of British Natural History, in his work entitled "The Wisdom of God manifested in the Works of Creation," published in London in 1727, remarks, when speaking of birds, "by their melodious accents they gratify our ears; by their beautiful shapes and colors they delight our eyes; being very ornamental to the world, and rendering the country where the hedges and woods are full of them, very pleasant and cheerily, which without them would be no less lonely and melancholy; not to mention the exercise, diversion and recreation which some of them give us." We are informed by Montagu, that the venerable Dr. Latham, a distinguished English ornithologist, when in his ninety-first year, was as delighted in seeing a specimen of a new bird, as a boy on finding his first bird's nest!

The eccentric English ornithologist, Charles Waterton, has given us an amusing account of the means employed by his instructors to counteract in his boyhood the growing passion for the study of birds. How poorly they succeeded in their endeavors to destroy his enthusiasm, may be learned from his autobiography, and the reading of his admirable "Third Series on Natural History," published in 1857, when in his seventy-sixth year. In his account of his life and adventures, he says, "when I was not quite eight years old I had managed to climb upon the roof of an outhouse, and had got to a starling's nest under one of the slates. Had my foot slipped, I should have been in as bad a plight as was poor Ophelia in the willow tree, when the 'envious sliver broke.' The ancient housekeeper, mentioned in the account of the barn owl, had cast her rambling eye upon me; seeing the danger I was in, she went and fetched a piece of gingerbread, with which she lured me down, and she seized me as though I had been a malefactor. At nine years old, I was sent to school in the north of England, where literature had scarcely any effect upon me, although it was duly administered in large doses, by a very scientific hand; but I made vast proficiency in the art of finding birds' nests. It was judged necessary by the master of the school to repress this inordinate relish for ornithological architecture, which, in his estimation, could be productive of no good. Accordingly, the birch rod was brought to bear upon me when occasion offered; but the warm application of it, in lieu of effacing my ruling passion, did but tend to render it more distinct and clear. Thus are bright colors in crockery ware made permanent by the action of fire; thus is dough turned into crust by submitting it to the oven's heat.

To my mind, language used by modern naturalists, expressive of their great love for birds, appears tame when compared with the enthusiasm discovered by some of the old authors. The most enthusiastic language we remember to have read upon the importance, or rather pleasure, to be derived from the knowledge of birds, was recorded in a work originally written in High German, in rollicking style, by Peter Kolben, in 1731, in his preface to the "Natural History of the Cape of Good Hope;" wherein he says, "The beauty, the variety and music of the feathered nations are enchanting delights and their instincts and habits often nobly instructive and amusing. I cannot help adding a reflection or two more here with regard to the feathered world, those beautiful merry nations, which seem designed by Heaven as a kind of soothers and softeners."