

# THE WEEKLY MIRROR.



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## The Weekly Mirror,

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## NATURAL HISTORY.

### BIRDS.

Of all the classes of the animated creation, there is no one more calculated at once to afford pleasure and excite astonishment than that which consists of the feathered tribes. That a living creature, often of great magnitude, should be able to traverse rapidly and to remain buoyant in so thin a medium as the atmosphere, is alone sufficient to excite wonder. When we come to examine the means by which this is effected, we shall find abundant reason to admire the wisdom of the Creator, in so perfectly adapting each part to answer its intended purpose. The feathers are furnished with glands to secrete an oily matter, that they may not absorb wet; the bones are exceedingly light, yet strong; the muscles which belong to the wings are of such magnitude that they constitute not less than one-sixth of the body; air vessels are extended through the whole frame, to prevent the respiration from being stopped by the rapidity of flight; the sight is piercing, and the eyes are defended from injury by a membrane, which can be dropped over them at will: and the shape of the bird is that which is the most proper for moving rapidly, with the least possible resistance through the regions of the air.

According to the Linnæan system, the Land Birds are divided into four classes; the Rapacious Birds (accipitres); the Pies (pies); the Passerine Birds (passeres); and the Gallinaceous Birds (gallinæ): the Water Birds consist of two classes, the Waders (grallæ); and the Swimmers (anseræ). Of the Rapacious Bird, the bills are hooked, and there is an angular projection on the upper mandible; of the Pies, they are sharp edged, compressed on the sides, and convex on the upper surface; of the Passerine Birds, conical and sharp pointed; of the Gallinaceous Birds, the upper mandible is considerably arched; the Waders have a

roundish bill, and a fleshy tongue; and of the Swimmers, the bills are broad at the top, and covered with a membranaceous skin.

## BIOGRAPHICAL CURIOSITY.

It is asserted that the greatest characters the world has known, have arisen from obscure origin. The following list in proof of this assertion, might be greatly enlarged, and particularly those who have been, or now are, eminent in the United States. Demosthenes was the son of a forgerman; Virgil of a baker; Horace of a freedman; Theophrastus of an old clothes man; Rousseau, the poet, of a shoemaker; Rollin, the historian, of a cutler; Massillon of a tanner; James Cook of a very indigent peasant; Shakspeare of very poor parents; Benjamin Franklin of a tallow chandler, and himself a printer; James Monroe was the son of a brick-maker; Rittenhouse was a goldsmith. Here is encouragement for young men of genius. Through the means of industry, perseverance and good habits, every obstacle to the road of everlasting fame has often been surmounted: if a young man of talents resolves to be eminent, and pursues the requisite course, he will become eminent.

## MY CRISTMAS DINNER.

CONTINUED.

I dozed and dreamed away the hours till day break. Sometimes I fancied myself seated in a roaring circle, roasting chestnuts at a blazing log; at others, that I had fallen into the Serpentine, while skating, and that the Hamane Society were piling upon me a Pelion, or rather Vesuvius of blankets. I awoke a little refreshed. Alas! it was the twenty-fifth of the month—it was Christmas-day! Let the reader, if he possesses the imagination of Milton, conceive my sensations.

I swallowed an atom of dry toast—nothing could calm the fever of my soul. I stirred the fire and read Zimmerman alternately. Even reason, the last remedy one has recourse to in such cases, came at length to my relief: I argued myself into a philosophic fit. But, unluckily, just as the Lethæan tide within me was at its height, my landlady broke in upon my lethargy, and chased away by a single word all the little sprites and pleasures that were acting as my physicians, and prescribing balm for my wounds. She paid me the usual compliments, and then—“Do you dine at home to-day, Sir?” abruptly enquired she. Here was a question. No Spanish inquisitor ever inflicted such complete dismay in so short a sentence. Had she given me a Sphinx to expound, a Gorgian tangle to untwist; had she set me a lesson in algebra, or asked me the way to Brobdignag; had she desired me to show her the North Pole, or the meaning of a melodrama,—any or all of these I might have accomplished. But to request me to define my dinner—to inquire into its latitude—to

compel me to fathom that sea of appetite which I now felt rushing through my frame—to ask me to dive into futurity, and become the prophet of pies and preserves!—My heart died within me at the impossibility of a reply.

She had repeated the question before I could collect my senses around me. Then for the first time, it occurred to me, that in the event of my having no engagement abroad my landlady meant to invite me!

“There will at least be the two daughters,” I whispered to myself, “and after all, Lucy Matthews is a charming girl, and touches the harp divinely. She has a very small pretty hand, I recollect; only her fingers are so punctured by the needle—and I rather think she bites her nails. No, I will not even now give up my hope. It was yesterday but a straw—to-day it is but the thistle-down; but I will cling to it to the last moment. There are still four hours left; they will not dine till six, One desperate struggle and the peril is past; let me not be seduced by this last golden apple, and I may yet win the race.” The struggle was made: “I should not dine at home.” This was the only phrase left me; for I could not say that “I should dine out.” Alas, that an event should be at the same time so doubtful and so desirable, I only begged that if any letter arrived, it might be brought to me immediately.

The last plank, the last splinter, had now given way beneath me. I was floating about with no hope but the chance of something impossible. They had “left me alone,” not with my glory, but with an appetite that resembled an avalanche seeking whom it may devour. I had passed one dinnerless day, and the half of another; yet the promised land was as far from sight as ever. I recounted the chances I had missed. The dinners I might have enjoyed, passed in a dioramic view before my eyes. Mr. Phiggins and his six clerks—the Clapham beef-eaters—the charm of Upper Brook street—my pretty cousins and the pantomime writer the stock-broker, whose stories one forgets, and the elderly lady who forgets her stories—they all marched by me, a procession of apparitions. Even my landlady's invitation, though unborn, was not forgotten in summing up my sacrifices. And for what?

Four o'clock, hope was perfectly ridiculous. I had been walking upon the hair bridge over a gulf, and could not get into Elysium after all, I had been catching moon-beams, and running after notes of music. Despair was only convenient refuge; no chance remained unless something should drop from the clouds.

In this last particular I was not disappointed; for on looking up I perceived a heavy shower of snow. Yet I was obliged to venture forth; for being supposed to dine out, I could not of course remain at home. Where to go I knew not; I was like my first father—“the world was all before me.” I slung my cloak around me, and hurried forth with the feelings of a bandit longing for a stiletto. At the foot of the stairs, I staggered against two or three smiling rascals, priding themselves upon their punctuality. They had just arrived to make the tour of Turkey. How I hated them! As I rushed by the parlor, a single glance disclosed to me a blazing fire, with Lucy and several lovely creatures in a semi-circle. Fancy, too, gave me a glimpse of a spring of a stiletto—I vanished from the house, like a spectre at day-break.

How long I wandered about is doubtful. At last I happened to look through a kitchen window, with an