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INTRODUCTION.

Of all the classes of animals by which we are surrounded in the ample field of nature, there are none more remarkable in their appearance and habits than the feathered inhabitants of the air. They play around us like fairy spirits, elude approach in an element which defies our pursuit, soar out of sight in the yielding sky, journey over our heads in marshalled ranks, dart like meteors in the sunshine of summer, or seeking the solitary recesses of the forest and the waters, they glide before us like beings of fancy. They diversify the still landscape with the most lively motion and beautiful association; they come and go with the change of the season, and as their actions are directed by an uncontrollable instinct of provident nature, they may be considered as concomitant with the beauty of the surrounding scene. With what grateful sensations do we involuntarily hail the arrival of these faithful messengers of spring and summer, after the lapse of the dreary winter, which compelled them to forsake us for more favored climes. Their songs, now heard from the leafy groves and shadowy forests, inspire delight, or recollections of the pleasing past, in every breast. How volatile, how playfully capricious, how musical and happy, are these roving sylphs of nature, to whom the air, the earth, and the waters are almost alike habitable. Their lives are spent in boundless action, and nature, with an omniscient benevolence, has assisted and formed them for this wonderful display of perpetual life and vigor, in an element almost their own.