

THE ROCKWOOD REVIEW

LETTERS.

HATCHLEY.

DECEMBER 17TH, 1892.

I dare say you received the weasel skin which I mailed to you in the folds of a newspaper last Friday on Saturday, 31st ult.

A Shirke (or rather two of them) have lately been frequently seen about our cattlesheds, and the flock of ten or twelve English Sparrows that have been living there all the autumn are gone away, and to-day, 17th December, one of the Shirkes struck in among a flock of Winter Finches, (Pine Siskins, I think), that have been lately congregating among the tall weeds about the border of the orchard, and the Finch, selected and closely pursued by the Shirke, and squealing at the imminence of the danger, flew in at the open door of my workshop, and found a hiding place in one corner. The baffled Shirke alighted on the lower limb of an apple tree that stood near, and his demoniacal frown, and threatening aspect were interesting to observe: he evidently believed a great wrong and injustice had been put upon him, by being threatened with blows if he entered the shop! His crest quills were "on end," his mandibles worked incisively, and the threats lurking in his eye, showed that he had half resolved to "peck my eyes out." He soon however beat a retreat, and after the lapse of a few minutes, out came the still trembling Finch, from its hiding, and after a momentary enquiring gaze or two, as to the whereabouts of its scattered comrades, flew off to the nearest bushes. Myson with two assistants had just been slaughtering several hogs, which were hanging from a tree near by, and perhaps the Shirke's indignation was justifiable, and he seemed to think his morality was quite on a par with

that of the higher order of "Butchery," and that "killing" was evidently "no murder."

Soon after the ground became covered with snow, a small Screech Owl, whose nocturnal jarring notes had been heard among the evergreens around our house, domiciled himself in the barn, for mousing facilities, (as outside the snow is a great protection to the field and wood mice). The Owl would sit on the edge of a fanning mill, and capture the mice as they crossed the barn floor to the granary. The other day we saw a young mouse evidently not more than a month old, emerge from a crack in the floor, but on taking a quick survey of the situation, he went back into his retreat. What interested one most about the incident was the impress of sagacity and cuteness that gleamed from the visage of the very diminutive rodent; his mental alertness and decision of movement was most admirable for a mere baby mouse.

He showed more rapidity of apprehension than did a full grown rat, (and rats are not slow in that regard), on a certain occasion some years ago. The rats had gnawed through the planks at the bottom of the manger in the cattle-byre, and a friend of ours who visited us one day, had with him a dog that was said to be rough on rats, and he tried his skill for half a day about the foundation of the cattle stable without apparent success; yet the next morning, hearing the rats at work again under the plank floor, I thought I located a spot whence the rustle proceeded. So loosening the tie chain of one of the bovine beasties, and letting it go outside, I uplifted (rather suddenly) a wide plank, which was quite warm with the heat from the reclining bovine, (the season was winter). Under the plank which