

NATURAL HISTORY.

THE KITE.

The kite (*Falco milvus*) is a native of Europe, Asia and Africa. It generally breeds in large flocks and in the mountains. It lays its eggs—two or three at most—in a nest composed of rags, rope, flannel, and such like. Its colour is white spotted with dingy yellow. Its movements in the air are peculiar: sometimes it remains motionless for a considerable time, and at others it glides through the air, its wings being apparently motionless—hence its name glide, or glead. They are found in the north of Europe, which, however, they leave for a warmer climate in winter. Like the vulture, they abound about Cairo, where they breed in the winter, and a second time in the summers of the north, contrary to our birds prey. In Great Britain they are found throughout. "Independent of his manners," says of Mr. Gilpin, "he (the kite) is one of the most harmonious appendages of the forests, where Mr. Pennant makes him indigenous.—He is too small for picturesque use, but highly ornamental to the natural scene. His motions are easy and beautiful in a great degree: he does not flap his pinions like the rook or magpie, and labour through the air; he sails along with steady wing, as if he were lord of the elements on which he rode. But what harmonizes chiefly with the forest, are his wild screams, which strike notes in peculiar unison with those scenes over which he sails:

—Kites that swim sublime
In still repeated circles, screaming loud,
Have charms for me;
Sound inharmonious in themselves and harsh,
Yet, heard in scenes where peace for ever reigns,
Please highly for their sake."

It is remarkable that we seldom see more than two of this species together, the male and female. They seem to divide the forest into provinces; each bird hath his own, and with more than princely caution, avoids his neighbours. It is his great employment to circle through the air, as the poet describes him above, in various evolutions over his own woody dominions; where, with keen eyes and keener falcons, he still preserves the spirit of the old forest law."

"The kite," adds Sir T. D. Lauder, "is a remarkable cunning bird. A kite, which happened to be caught by some accident, was brought to us alive in a basket: it soon began to manifest symptoms of dying, and, as we looked at it in the open basket in the house, its form gradually stiffened; it turned over upon its back, thrust out its legs, and closed its eyelids as if in the last agony of death. Compassion for the creature induced us to take it out of doors, and we set down the basket on the airy brink of a bank that sloped suddenly downwards. To our great astonishment our bird came suddenly alive again, and in one instant its wings were spread, and it soared away down over the grassy lawn, and by degrees, sweeping round and round in successive circles, it towered into the upper regions of the sky; the whole of its sickness was manifestly nothing more than a mere feint." In the passage already referred to from Job xxxviii. 7. it is supposed that the bird spoken of as the vulture, is our kite.

THE FLYING FISH.

To those who are voyaging to far distant lands, the frequent tedium of day after day, consequent on a long confinement on shipboard, combined with the painful anxiety which naturally arises when, as in the case of St. Paul's voyage to Rome, "neither sun nor stars have appeared in many days," is often materially relieved by those splendid tokens of his wisdom and power "whose is the sea, and he made it," and whose wonders are especially manifested in the great deep. What a variety of new objects present themselves, all calculated to impress the mind of the true Christian more fully with the glorious goodness of that Being whom he esteems it a privilege to serve!

In tropical climates, the flying fish often presents much intersting amusement to the voyager. It is a small animal, seldom found above the size of a herring. Bishop Heber, writing of the change in the aspect of the ocean as he proceeded southward, observes, "Of the blue water, of a warmer region I had heard much, and it certainly does not fall short of my expecta-

tions. In bright weather it is, as compared with our green sea, richly and strikingly beautiful; and the flakes of foam streak it like lapis lazuli, inlaid with silver. For the rest, I have seen dolphins, flying fishes, and a grampus, a whale and a shark have paid a visit to the ship, but I was not then on deck. The flying fish are as yet very small, and the flocks, in which they skim along the surface of the water, give them so much the appearance of water-wagtails, that a repeated and attentive view is required to convince a stranger of their actual fishhood."

One of the chief enemies of the flying fish is the dorado, often erroneously termed by sailors the dolphin. It is not unlike the streaked eel-head, found on the shores of Japan and the Red sea. It is chiefly to be seen in the tropical climates; and is at once the most active and the most beautiful of the finny race. It is about six feet long; the back enamelled with spots of a bluish green and silver. The tail and fins are of a gold colour; and all have a brilliancy of tint. The eyes are placed on each side of the head, large and beautiful, surrounded with circles of shining gold. They are always in motion, and play round ships in full sail, with ease and security: either pursuing or pursued, they are seen continually in a state of warfare; either defending themselves against the shark, or darting after the smaller fishes.

By means of the wings, or large pectoral fins, composed of six or eight ribs or rays, connected by a transparent membrane, which are also used in swimming, the timid flying-fish rises from the water, and flutters over its surface, for two or three hundred yards, till the muscles employed in moving the wings are enfeebled by that particular manner of exertion. By this time, however, it has acquired a fresh power of renewing its efforts in the water; and the animal is capable of proceeding with some velocity by swimming; still, however, the active enemy keeps it in view, and dives it again from the deep; and now, almost worn-out, it is seen to flutter with increasing efforts, until at length it is compelled to drop, a ready prey to the voracity of its enemy.

The scorpæna volitans, in the fresh water of Amboyna and Japan (less than the river perch), thus rises and suspends itself for a time, when pursued. So the trigle-volitans, of the Mediterranean and Asiatic seas, flies out of the water in every direction, when endangered. The exæcetus volitans is the most celebrated for this exertion. It is done in all by the pectoral fins, but the flight can be supported only while they are wet. Captain Tobin watched them about Oranheite. They use their tail to supply their pectoral fins with the needed moisture. He frequently saw the dolphins and bonitos in pursuit of them; but none could go beyond one hundred yards without dipping for a fresh supply of water.

How strange to the unthinking—or probably infidel mind—must such apparent inconsistencies in the dispensations of God's providence appear: one creature called into existence merely to become the sport and prey of another! Let me just remind such an individual that one animal, ordained by God to be the allotted food of another, has been so for some wise purpose. God never created any being to become a sufferer; and cruelty, in its true legitimate sense, is that which is exercised by man alone. The wolf is not cruel because it pounces upon the lamb: the common cat is not cruel because it plays with the mouse: its instinct is to do so. Let the assault of the brut' animal be prevented; but let it never be forgotten that the professing Christian is a far greater example of cruelty, the poor wretch whose god is his belly, and who, to pamper his own depraved appetite, would put a poor animal to a lingering and torturing death, because, by a particular process, its flesh would be more palatable and its taste more delicious. Let not the cock-pit be patronised, or the racing ground attended; for verily these are heart rending testimonies that the habitations of cruelty abound not in the dark places of the earth—the darkened understanding, the depraved heart, the unmerciful disposition, with their inevitably wretched consequences, are to be found in a land blessed with the light of gospel truth.

Perhaps this paper cannot be better concluded than in the words of Mr. Burnett, on this very point, which especially bear on the case of the flying fish,

"It should be observed, that provision for complete security from danger, inasmuch as it is incompatible with the scheme of providence, must not be looked for in the mechanical arrangements of organised beings. Many animals come into life principally for the purpose of furnishing subsistence to the creatures that surround them. If, therefore, their instruments of defence were applicable to every mode of assault, one of the greatest ends of creation would be defeated. To assist them in avoiding their enemies, as well as injuries resulting from organic bodies, we find them gifted with means of defence in an instinctive power, in addition to the organization of their bodies; yet, notwithstanding these organic and instructive contrivances, animals become a prey to their more formidable opponents. Thus flying fish can raise themselves out of the water high enough to avoid the shark; but in doing so they are frequently devoured by voracious birds, such as the albatross, which are continually on the look out for them. Beyond 22° latitude, Humboldt found the surface of the sea covered with these fish, which sprang into the air to the height of twelve, fifteen, and even eighteen feet, and sometimes fell on the deck. The great size of the swimming bladder in these animals (it being two-thirds the length of their body), as well as of the pectoral fins, enables them to traverse at one time in the air a space of twenty-four feet horizontally. They are incessantly pursued by dolphins while in the water, and when flying are attacked by frigate birds, and other predatory species."—*Church of England Magazine.*

GENERAL LITERATURE.

ARABIA AND THE ARABIANS.

BY THE REV. DR. WOLFF.

(Continued from page 281.)

Now some remarks on their religion—that altar of the eternal God, around which all nations have rallied from age to age—religion, which teaches the hero, the sage, and the philosopher to look up to his Creator with the confidence of the babe on its mother's knees. The book of nature and history are only hidden mysteries, which, in order to be solved, require a key, and that key is afforded by religion.

"It was the conviction of all nations," as is well observed by Jacobi, the president of the Philosophical Academy at Munich, "that religion inspired by heaven alone can produce real virtue. The conviction, that religion is the only means of giving support to the helpless, has been forced on all nations; and the sages of every age have taught us, with one consent, that knowledge, whose only object is things of this world, is not worthy of that name. They have taught us that in order to arrive at the knowledge of heavenly things, a heavenly mind is required; that God manifests himself to the heart as well as to the intellect, and he hides himself from those (as Schiller says) who seek him with their reason. The Arab in the desert, as well as the Turkoman, has felt that the laws of God are wings for the soul, by which it is able to soar up to his presence; and it was beautifully observed by Jacobi (vol. iv. 242. 243). "The Almighty willed, and it was so." This is the limit of our philosophy, where Newton himself stopped with adoration; and the philosopher who goes further, and attempts to build worlds of his own, loses himself in eternal darkness, and at last loses sight of his Creator.

It is not known how long the belief in one true God was preserved in Arabia; still, we may perceive by that ancient Arabian production, the book of Job, that the belief of the only true God was known at least in Idumæa, one part of Arabia, and worship and sacrifices were offered to him; whilst, long before, the Egyptians and Chaldeans were sunk into pantheism or polytheism. However, the human mind took the same turn among the Arabs as among other nations. When once the sacred standard and clue of truth are lost—when the true order of things and destinies are inverted—then the mind of man often associates the sublime, the mysterious, and the wonderful, with the mean, the perverse, and wicked.

The course of the sun and moon, and especially the resplendent stars on the nocturnal horizon, must have early become an object of particular