

# THE WEEKLY MIRROR.

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## The Weekly Mirror,

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## NATURAL HISTORY.

### THE PROTEUS.

Among many animals, which for their singularity have excited the attention of the scientific world, there is none more interesting than the proteus. The order of nature often observed, appears to follow a series of links, forming a chain, which the zoologist finds it convenient to divide; and, indeed, which resolves itself into natural sections, but yet without any abruptness, so that the beings of one class or order, or family, blend insensibly into those of another, rendering it almost a matter of indifference where the line of demarcation is drawn. As a forcible example of the opinion thus briefly stated, nothing can be more in point than the animal which we now introduce to the notice of our readers, an animal which constitutes a link between reptiles air-breathing creatures, furnished with true lungs, and fishes, water-breathing creatures, without lungs, but furnished instead with gills or *branchiae* in which apparatus the blood is submitted to the action of oxygen, and undergoes the changes essential to the maintenance of life. Now the proteus, strange to say, is furnished with both, the branchiae not indeed being covered as in fishes, but exposed and forming a beautiful pink coloured tuft on each side of the head; nor is the general figure of the animal less intermediate, having much of the lizard in its general contour, and much of the eel, to which it is very similar in its movements.

The place of its abode is also not a little singular. The proteus is a subterranean dweller; to it light is useless; nay, it appears too high a stimulus for the very skin of the creature to bear with comfort; hence it has no eyes, but a small black dot, scarcely to be discovered beneath the skin, indicat-

ing the situation of these organs, which here are rudimentary at the lowest ebb. It is time, however, to be more explicit. At Adelsberg, in the duchy of Carniola (belonging to Austria), there is one of the most romantic and splendid caverns in Europe; it is commonly known by the name of the Grotto of the Maddalena. The whole of this part of the country consists of bold rocks, and mountains of limestone formation, full of subterranean caverns, containing lakes, and vast reservoirs of water, hundreds of feet beneath the surface, whence many rivers take their secret origin. These subterranean waters communicate with and supply a small lake in the celebrated cavern we have alluded to; and it is in this lake, where no sunlight ever enters, enclosed by barriers of piled up rocks, deep in the bowels of the earth, that the proteus is found reposing on the soft mud, precipitated by the fluid, and lining the rocky basin. This animal has been taken of various sizes, from the thickness of a quill to that of the thumb; the length of a moderate sized individual is about a foot; the tail is compressed laterally, like that of an eel, and is used in the same manner in swimming. The head is elongated and depressed, the mouth is wide and furnished with numerous teeth, whence we may conclude the animal to be carnivorous in its propensities; but what its food truly consists of, and how it procures it, are beyond conjecture. The limbs are small, feeble, and almost useless; the toes are minute, and, in number, three on each foot before, and two behind. The skin is quite smooth, and of a pale flesh colour, but when the animal is removed from its native situation, and exposed to light, it assumes a darker tint, approaching olive brown; and the branchial tufts become deeper. The light, however, is evidently distressing, and the animals are glad to creep beneath the shelter of any substance which may serve as a protection from its influence. For some time after its first discovery, the proteus, was supposed to be the larva or tadpole of some unknown animal inhabiting the deep subterranean cavities, and whose form it would finally assume, as the common tadpole of our ponds becomes the frog. This idea is now abandoned, its true character has been made out by observation and anatomical research, and its relative situation in the chain of animated beings ascertained; still as it regards many points in its economy, we are yet in the dark.

## BIOGRAPHY.

### ROBERT POLLOK.

Robert Pollok is one of those who, by the mere efforts of his mind, burst forth all at once, from an obscure original into the highest eminence. His name was not known, as an author, till it was rendered illustrious by the publication of his poem.\* This work on which his well earned reputation almost exclusively rests, furnishes the best elements for an instructive and useful biography. The history of the infancy, growth, and maturity of his genius, is to be gathered from his poem.

The poet was born at North Muirhouse, in the parish of Eaglesham, about eleven miles south east from Glasgow, in October, 1798. He was the youngest son of an intelligent farmer, who still resides in the same place. By the care of his parents, he received such an education as is common in that part of Scotland among persons in their station of life. After this, he was employed to give what assistance he could in the labours of his father's farm, till his fourteenth year, when he was sent to the village of Eaglesham to learn the business of a cartwright. It is probable that the exertions necessary to this employment, accorded but ill with the views of a youth of his imagination, although it is not known that he estimated his talents at a higher rate than became his humble hopes. But it is understood that he was induced by the advice and example of his elder brother, who was pursuing his studies with a view to the holy ministry, to abandon all thoughts of following up his mechanical profession, and to prepare for the same sacred vocation.

His parents, with that fondness for the ministerial office, so congenial to the middle and lower orders of the Scottish people, warmly seconded his views, and put him in the way of realizing them by sending him to a school in the Parish of Fenwick, to gain a knowledge of the Latin language. This was done in the year 1813.

In 1816, he entered the university of Glasgow, where, after attending the several classes during five successive Sessions, he obtained the degree of A. M.

On leaving the University he prosecuted his Theological studies at the Divinity Hall for the same number of Sessions, and was licensed to preach the gospel in connexion with the United Associate Synod

\*Course of Time.