

## The Weekly Mirror,

Is Printed and Published every Friday,

BY M. W. BLACKBURN,

At his Office, head of Mr. M. G. Black's wharf.

WHERE

All kinds of Job PRINTING will be executed at a very cheap rate.

Terms of the Mirror Five Shillings per annum payable in advance.

### NATURAL HISTORY.

#### THE FRIGATE BIRD.

The habits and manners of the feathered race possess so much of intrinsic interest, and display so much of the wisdom of the Almighty, that we cannot for a moment wonder at the delight which a mind rightly tuned experiences in the study of this department of the kingdom of nature. The examination of a single feather may lead to the most important deductions; its lightness, its warmth, its fitness, are at once evident; but in addition to all this, an experienced naturalist will be able to tell by the index alone which it affords, the habits, the leading features, nay, often the very genus to which its possessor belongs; so marked is the evidence of design—so clearly are the means in connexion with the end.—Let us, to illustrate our position, take the frigate-bird (*taehypetes aquilus*, Vieill.) as an example.—This bird is among the most singular of the feathered race: while on the one hand its place in nature would appear, from its webbed feet, to be among the water birds that sport on the ocean's surface, on the other hand, its rapacious habits ally it to the falcons, or the birds of prey that strike their quarry on the wing. The truth is, that it forms the link which unites these two extremes of a long chain of gradations, and either party may claim it with almost equal propriety. Although an ocean-bird, its province is not the water, but the air; it neither swims nor dives, nor rests on the billows like the gull. Its feet are indeed webbed, but the webs are very partial: the tarsi or legs, as they are generally called) scarcely half an inch in length, the whole limb very short, and covered to the feet with long loose feathers; the tail is long and forked, the wings of extraordinary spread, and the general plumage deficient in that close and silky texture which always characterizes a bird whose *habitat* is the surface of the deep. Its conformation, on the other hand, as manifestly declares it to be aerial;—aerial, not with the land below, on which it may repose and rest when weary—but aerial with the ocean below, on which it never rests, and which, affording it its food, does all that is required.

The frigate-bird is to be met with principally between the tropics, hundreds of leagues from land, to which, except for the purpose of hatching its young, it never resorts. It is ever on the wing, often soaring so high as to be scarcely visible, at other times skimming at a moderate distance from the water, and darting with the rapidity of an arrow upon any unfortunate fish which approaches the surface so as to be within the reach of its beak. The flying-fish are its special prey: driven by the dolphin out of the water to trust to their fan-like wings, they are pounced upon by this voracious bird, who, not content to limit himself to the procuring of food by his own labours, the gulls and other sea-birds that have made a successful capture, and obliges them to give up their booty.—We have said that he is met with hundreds of leagues from land; in fact there is but one purpose, that of hatching and rearing the young, for which this bird ever resorts there; under ordinary circumstances, it continues ever on the wing over the ocean, reposing on outspread pinions in the higher regions of the air, where, without any effort, it can remain suspended. The strangeness of this fact will be removed, when we inform our readers of the mechanical contrivance with which the bird is furnished. Beneath the throat is situated a large pouch, capable of being distended with air from the lungs, with which, as well as with the hollow bones of the wings, it immediately communicates. The bones of the wings themselves, besides being hollow, are extremely long and light—thus this pouch or sack beneath the throat, and these tubes, are filled with rarified air, forming an apparatus analogous to a balloon, which requires little else but the wings themselves to be spread, to be enabled by its buoyancy to sustain the weight of the body in the atmosphere.—The length of the male, including the long forked tail, is three feet; expanse of wing, eight; the air pouch, red; the general plumage dark umbre brown. Its motions in the air are very graceful and sweeping. It is said to build in rocks or tall trees; but of its nidification little is correctly ascertained.

### BIOGRAPHY.

#### WILLIAM FALCONER.

This ingenious poet was born about 1730, and was the son of a poor but industrious barber at Edinburgh, all of whose children, with the exception of William, were either deaf or dumb, William received such common education as might qualify him for some inferior employment, and appears to have contracted a taste for reading, and a desire for higher attainments than his situa-

tion permitted. In the character of Arion, unquestionably intended for his own, he hints at a farther progress in study than his biographers have been able to trace:

"On him fair Science dawn'd in happier hour  
Awakening into bloom young Fancy's flower;  
But soon Adversity, with freezing blast  
The blossom wither'd, and the dawn o'ercast,  
Forlorn of heart, and by severe decree  
Condemn'd reluctant to the faithless sea."

It must indeed have been with reluctance that a boy who had begun to taste the sweets of literature, consented to serve an apprenticeship on board a merchant vessel at Leith, which we are told he did when very young. He was afterwards in the capacity of a servant to Campbell the author of *Lexiphanes*, when purser of a ship, Campbell is said to have discovered in Falconer talents worthy of cultivation; and when the latter distinguished himself as a poet, used to repeat with some pride, that he had once been his scholar.

Falconer, probably by means of this friend, was made second mate of a vessel employed in the Levant trade, which was shipwrecked during her passage from Alexandria to Venice, and only three of the crew saved. The date of this event cannot now be ascertained; but what he saw and felt on the melancholy occasion made the deepest impression on his memory, and certainly suggested the plan and characters of his celebrated poem. Whether before this time he had made any poetical attempts we are not informed. The favours of a genuine muse are usually early, and it is at least probable that the classical allusions so frequent in "The Shipwreck," were furnished by much previous reading.

He is supposed to have continued in the merchant service until he gained the patronage of his Royal Highness Edward Duke of York, by dedicating to him "The Shipwreck," in the spring of 1762; and it is much to the honour of his highness's taste that he joined in the praise bestowed on this poem, and became desirous to place the author in a situation where he could befriend him. With this view, the Duke advised him to quit the merchant service for the royal navy; and before the summer had elapsed, Falconer was rated a midshipman on board Sir Edward Hawke's ship the Royal George, which at the peace of 1763, was paid off.

His *Marine Dictionary* was published in 1769, before which period he appears to have left his naval retreat at Chatham for an abode in the metropolis of a less comfortable kind. Here depressed by poverty, but occasionally soothed by friendship, and by the affectionate attentions of his wife, he subsisted for some time on various resources. In 1768 he received proposals from the late Mr. Murray, the bookseller, to be admitted a