

MISCELLANEOUS.

SONNET.

(By Serjeant T. N. Talfourd, composed in view of Eton College, after leaving his eldest son there for the first time—The junction of pictorial effect, and learned recollection, and the father's affection and hope, which breathes an air of sanctity over the whole, make the Sonnet one of deep interest and beauty.)

How often have I fixed a stranger's gaze
On yonder turrets clad in light as fair
As thus soft sunset lends—pleas'd to drink air
Of learning that from calm of ancient days
Breathes round them ever.—now to me they wear
The tinge of dearer thought, the radiant haze
That crowns them thickens, as with fonder care,
And by its flickering sparkles, sense conveys
Of youth's first triumphs.—for amid their seats
One little student's heart impatient beats
With blood of mine. O God, vouchsafe him power
When I am dust to stand on this sweet place
And, through the vista of long years, embrace
Without a blush this first Etonian hour!

NATURAL HISTORY.

(How delightfully do enquiries into this delightful department, exhibit the extraordinary skill, wisdom and goodness, displayed by the Creator among the inferior animals. The beauty and sagacity, so visible in the tribes that animate the globe, form a study ever entertaining and instructive. We copy, below, some notices of the denizens of the grove, contained in a review by the London Spectator, of a new and splendid work, called Gould's Birds of Australia.)

The birds of Australia appear to be no less peculiar in their characteristics than the animals and vegetation; and of the seventeen plates forming this fasciculus, several specimens are entirely new, and others have been but imperfectly described. The most singular, on account of its habits, is the Wattled Talegalla, or Brush Turkey, hitherto known as the New Holland Vulture, but which Mr. Gould decides to belong to the gallinaceous tribe. The breed is threatened with extermination, by the extraordinary insensibility to danger which the birds manifest in allowing themselves to be shot at repeatedly without taking wing. The most curious characteristic, however, is the mode of incubation, which, though resembling that of an ostrich, is different in many particulars. A few weeks previous to the laying-season, several birds combine their labours to accumulate an immense heap of decaying vegetable matter, to the amount of from two to four cart-loads, which they collect together by scratching it up and throwing it back towards a central point. It forms a mound of pyramidal form—when the heat generated by the process of decomposition is sufficient, the hens deposit their eggs in an upright position, which prevents the necessity of turning them as in other cases, and with the broad end uppermost, to admit of the escape of the chick; each egg is placed twelve inches apart, and at the bottom of a hole an a.m.'s-length deep: the large size of the eggs—three inches and three-quarters long, and two inches and a half wide—allows of the chick to assume its plumage before breaking the shell; from which Mr. Gould infers that the young ones support themselves without the assistance of the parent. The number of eggs contained in each pyramid is very great, some of them yielding a bushel. Another bird, of a totally different genus, the Ocellated Leipoa, or Pheasant of Western Australia, which is found at two hundred miles distance, adopts a similar method of incubation; using sand, however, as the basis of the egg-hills.

The most beautiful in form and plumage are the graceful little birds of the Parrot tribe, of which there are four species in this part, two Lorrikeets, and two Parrikeets. One of the latter, the Warbling Parrakeet, is extremely elegant in form, and delicately plumed, the body being bright green and the head and wings yellow, mottled with

crecent-shaped stripes of brown: and it is remarkable for the 'sweet warbling song' which it keeps up during the day, and, if stimulated by the lights and conversation of a room, for part of a night. Mr. Gould has preserved a pair of these lovely pets alive, and they have continued in perfect health, delighting all visitors with their sprightly animation and dulcet notes, no less than their exquisite form and markings. The Kingfishers, of which there are two species, brilliant in colour though not in form, are birds that one would not expect to meet with in a country where drought is so prevalent; but these birds, Mr. Gould says, do not drink, nor dive into the water for their prey, but adapt their habits to the scorched and barren plains of Australia. The nest of the Fan-tailed Fly-catcher, slanted like a wine-glass or egg cup with a long stem, is another feature worth noting. Besides the Owllet Night-jar, which inhabits hollow trees, there is the Podargus, another night bird, that sleeps so soundly during the day as only to be disturbed by being knocked off its perch, when it flies lazily to another tree and resumes its slumbers. The delicate foliage and bloom of the various gum-trees and the beautiful grasses which are introduced to indicate the food and proportional scale of the birds, give pictorial completeness to the plates.

All the drawings on stone are executed by Mrs. Gould, whose style unites to the minute accuracy of definition required by the naturalist, an artistical feeling and arrangement that leaves nothing to be wished for. The colouring is fresh from nature, and each plate is as highly finished as if it were a drawing.

THE BLACKBIRD.—It is not in the wild valley, flanked with birchen slopes, and stretching far away among craggy hills that the music of the blackbird floats upon the evening breeze.—There you may listen delighted to the gentle song of the mavis; but here, in this plain, covered with corn fields and skirted with gardens, sit these down on the green turf by the gliding brook, and mark the little black speck stuck as it were upon the top twig of that tall poplar. It is a blackbird, for now the sweet strain, loud, but mellow by distance, comes upon the ear, inspiring pleasant thoughts and banishing care and sorrow. The bird has evidently learned his part by long practice, for he sings sedately, and in full consciousness of superiority. Ceasing at intervals he renews the strain, varying so that although you can trace an occasional repetition of notes, the staves are never precisely the same. You may sit an hour or longer, and the song will be continued; and in the neighbouring gardens many rival songsters will sometimes raise their voices at once, or delight you with alternate strains. And what is the purpose of all this melody. We can only conjecture that it is the expression of happiness which the creature is enjoying, when untroubled by care, conscious of security, and aware of the presence of his mate, he intently pours forth his soul in joy and gratitude and love. He does not sing to amuse his mate, as many have supposed, for he often sings in winter, when he is not yet mated; nor does he sing to beguile his solitude, for now he is not solitary, but he sings because all his wants are satisfied, his frame glowing with health, and because his Maker has gifted him with the power of uttering such sweet sounds."

A soldier came to Gonzale Feronandez, and told him that he thought a fortress of the enemy might be won with the loss of some few men, on which Gonzale said, "but you be one of them?"

Milk is said to be an antidote to that thirst which afflicts men who have been confirmed drunkards, when they attempt to break off from their habits.

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