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WHERE

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NATURAL HISTORY.

THE OWL.

Of Owls there are about fifty species. It has not unaptly been said of these birds that they are to falcons that which moths are to butterflies; as, generally speaking, they prey only in the night time, while the falcon never preys but in the day. The head of the Owl is round, somewhat like that of a cat, of which animal, indeed, the bird has all the mice-destroying propensities. The eyes also of the Owl, like those of the cat, are so constructed that its visual faculties are far more perfect in the dusk than in the glare of day. Owls retire in the winter to holes in old walls and towers, and pass the inclement season in sleep. In most countries the owl is foolishly considered as a bird of ill omen, but it was anciently courted by the Athenians, and regarded as the favourite bird of Minerva.

BIOGRAPHY.

MAHOMET, or MOHAMMED.

Mahomet, or Mohammed, a famous impostor, was born in 570 at Mecca, a city of Arabia, of the noble family of Koreish. Losing his father in his infancy, the guardianship of him devolved on his uncle Abu Taleb, who employed him to go with his caravans from Mecca to Damascus. In this employment of camel driver he continued till he was twenty-eight years of age, when he married Cadiga, a rich widow. Having remarked in his travels the infinite variety of sects which prevailed, he formed the design of obtaining the sovereignty. He accordingly spent much of his time in a cave near Mecca, seemingly alone, and employed in meditation and prayer, but in reality he called to his aid a Persian jew, well versed in the history and laws of his persuasion, and two Christians, one of the Jacobite and

the other of the Nestorian sect. With the help of these men he framed his *Koran*, or the book which he pretended to have received at different times from heaven by the hands of the angel Gabriel. At the age of forty he publicly assumed the prophetic character, calling himself the apostle of God. At first he had only his wife and eight other followers; but in three years his disciples were considerably numerous. On these he imposed the most marvellous tales, and pretended to have passed into the highest heavens in one night, on the back of a beautiful ass called Al Borak, and accompanied by the angel Gabriel. There he had an interview with Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus Christ, who acknowledged his superiority, which was confirmed to him by the Deity himself. This romance staggered even some of his best friends, and a powerful confederacy being formed against him, he was forced to quit Mecca, and to seek refuge in Medina. This retreat occasioned the foundation of his empire, and of his religion. The Mohammedans adopt it as their chronological standard, calling it the *Hegira*, that is the *Flight* or *Persecution*, being the first day of our July, A. D. 622. Mahomet had still a number of disciples, upon whom he inculcated this principle, that they were not to dispute about their religion by word but by the sword. The Jewish Arabs were the first who experienced its effects. Mahomet committed upon them the most shocking cruelties, put numbers to death, sold others for slaves, and distributed their goods among his soldiers. In 627 he made a treaty with the inhabitants of Mecca, which two years after he violated, and stormed the place with fire and sword. Having made himself master of Arabia, he extended his conquests into Syria, where he took several cities, and laid some of the princes under tribute. While engaged in this victorious career, a jewess poisoned a shoulder of mutton, which was laid before him, and of which he and his companions ate heartily. One of them died immediately, but the prophet lingered some time. When the woman was examined, she declared that she had perpetrated the deed on purpose to try whether he was really a true prophet. Of the effects of this poison he died, A. D. 632, and of the *hegira* 8, aged 62. After the death of Cadiga he had several wives and concubines, by whom he had many children, but left only a daughter named Fatima, who married his successor

Ali. The best printed edition of the *Koran* is that of Maracci, in Arabic and Latin, Padua, 2 vols. fol. 1698. It has been well translated into English by Sale, in 2 vols. 4to. and 2 vols. 8vo.; and into French by Du Ryer and Savary.

MY CHRISTMAS DINNER.

DISAPPOINTMENTS OF AN UNFORTUNATE GENTLEMAN.

It was on the 20th of December last that I received an invitation from my friend Mr. Phiggins, to dine with him, in Mark-lano, on Christmas Day. I had several reasons for declining this proposition. The first was, that Mr. P. makes it a rule, at all these festivals, to empty the entire contents of his counting-house into his little dining parlor; and you consequently sit down to dinner with six white-waistcoated clerks, let loose upon a turkey. The second was, that I am not sufficiently well read in cotton and sugar to enter with any spirit into the subject of conversation. The third was, and is, that I never drink Cape wine. But by far the most prevailing reason remains to be told. I had been anticipating for some days, and was hourly in the hope of receiving, an invitation to spend my Christmas Day in a most irresistible quarter. I was expecting, indeed, the felicity of eating plum-pudding with an angel; and, on the strength of my imaginary engagement, I returned a polite note to Mr. P. reducing him to the necessity of advertising for another candidate for cape and turkey.

The twenty-first came. Another invitation—to dine with a regiment of roast-beef eaters at Clapham. I declined this also, for the above reason and for one other, viz. that on dining there ten Christmas days ago, it was discovered, on sitting down, that one little accompaniment of the roast-beef had been entirely overlooked. Would it be believed?—but I will not stay to mystify—merely mention the fact. They had forgotten the horse-radish!

The next day arrived, and with it a neat epistle-sealed with violet-colored wax, from Upper Brook street, "Dine with the ladies—at home on Christmas Day." Very tempting, it is true; but not exactly the letter I was longing for. I began, however, to debate with myself upon the policy of securing this bird in the hand, instead of waiting for the two that were still hopping about the bush, when the consultation was suddenly brought to a close, by a prophetic view of the portfolio of drawings, fresh from a boarding-school—moths and roses, on embossed paper—to say nothing of the album, in which I stood engaged to write an elegy on the Java sparrow that had been a favorite in the family for three days. I rung for gilt-edged, pleaded a world of polite regrets, and again declined.

The twenty-third dawned. Time was getting on rather rapidly, but no card time. I began to despair of any more invitations, and to repent of my refusals. Breakfast was hardly over, however, when the servant brought up—not a letter—but an aunt and a brace of cousins, from Bayswater. They would listen to no excuse; consanguinity required me, and the Christmas was not my own. Now, my cousins keep no albums, and they are really as pretty as cousins can be; and when violent hands, with white kid