

The Naturalist.

SOME ACCOUNT OF WALTON HALL, THE SEAT
OF CHARLES WATERTON, ESQ. ----- BY JAMES STUART
MENTEATH, ESQ., OF CLOSEBURN HALL. (1)

"The birds,
Securely there they build, and there
Securely hatch their young."

WALTON HALL, a place that must, like Selborne, be ever dear to the lover of ornithology, from the many attractive objects it presents in the way of that engaging pursuit, is situated in the parish of Sandal-Magna, about four miles from Wakefield, in the county of York. This district of country forms part of the great coal formation of Yorkshire. The soil usually overlying the coal stratification is a clay, which, being of a stiff, tenacious texture, is unfriendly to the better kinds of herbage, unless it be extensively drained, and well mixed with calcined limestone; but the clayey soil of the park of Walton rests immediately upon a thick stratum of the coal sandstone, which, mouldering down, yields it a due proportion of siliceous earth, and makes it an excellent soil for the growth of the richer species of grasses. Trees of nearly all kinds flourish luxuriantly upon it. Among these, especially, the sweet Spanish chestnut, one of our most valuable trees, and in the present day far too little encouraged as forest timber, is this year profusely laden with fruit, not much inferior to that which is imported from the south of Europe.

The climate is equally favourable with the soil for the growth of the delicate kinds of vegetation. The vine grows on walls in the open air, and scarcely ever fails to bear each season tolerable grapes; this year there has been an abundant crop of fine grapes as those raised under glass. The sweet-water and black Hamburgh vines are the only varieties that have been cultivated.

Walton Hall stands upon an island included in a small lake well stocked with fish, and has been the residence of the Watertons time out of mind. The present elegant Grecian mansion occupies the site of an ancient castellated house, which, encircled by water, and accessible only by a drawbridge, must have been, before the use of cannon, an impregnable strong-hold. During the civil wars of Cromwell and Charles I., this family, staunch adherents to the house of Stuart, defied old Noll's vengeance, and gallantly kept his forces for some time at bay, though the venerable castle was reduced almost to a heap of ruins.

All that now remains to tell the tale of its former chivalry is an ivy-clad tower. This tower will be visited with no small interest and curiosity by the ornithologist. The days of rapine and violence having happily passed away, never, we hope, to return, this tower, by many ingenious devices and contrivances, has been made a commodious and undisturbed habitation for many a family of the feathered race. In a snug corner, thickly grown over with ivy, can be seen in any day of the year, a pair of common white owls taking their nap; and, at night, the ears of the admirer of such music may enjoy their nocturnal serenades.

"From yonder ivy-mantled tower,
The moping owl does to the moon complain, Of such as,
wandering near her secret bower,
Molest her ancient, solitary reign."

During the breeding season, every movement of this industrious couple may be overlooked from the windows of the hall, as they flit to and fro to cater for their hungry young family. Though the owl finds in this tower an unmolested haunt, the pretty starling, the blackbird, the thrush, the wild duck, the wood pigeon, "sweet sequestered bird," and several others, reposing a confidence in the humane owner which is never abused, resort to this delightful retreat, either to enjoy the shelter or to bring up their young.

Leaving the venerable tower and its inhabitants to enjoy that quiet which nothing disturbs, let us enter the hospitable mansion. Its doors are ever open to the poorest visiter who craves a view of its rare and curious collection of objects of natural history; and nothing is allowed to be offered to any domestic who attends : in this Mr. Waterton sets a noble example to others, who suffer their servants to receive money.

Among the most choice of the rarities of this collection none are more interesting than the birds.

"Their plumage, neither dashing shower,
Nor blasts that shake the dripping bower,
Shall drench again or decompose ;
But, screen'd from every storm that blows,
It boasts a splendour ever new,
Safe with"

the amiable wanderer, who, often at the hazard of his life, and suffering dangers by land and water, while exploring the wilds of South America, got them together. The fierce, ill-looking cayman or crocodile on whose back Mr. Waterton fearlessly mounted,(2) while his men were dragging the monster of the deep from his native element; the snake of gigantic size, which nearly cost the intrepid traveller his life, when he grappled with it; splendidly beautiful plumaged species of birds; and numerous other animals, are seen, preserved in such a manner as to give them an appearance of life, which one can see in no other museum of natural history.

Among these interesting objects, none interests more the observer than the "nondescript" animal, concerning which so much has been affirmed only from conjecture. Under what genus it is to be classed, Mr. Waterton best knows ; as yet he has not disclosed it: only one individual, we believe, has been intrusted with its habits, manners, and character.

On leaving the house, and its island, and its old ivied tower, we next enter upon the park. This piece of ground embraces almost 300 acres, surrounded by a high wall to keep out the poacher and other intruder. As no gun is ever fired within its precincts, that

"clamour of rooks, daws, and kites,
The explosion of the level'd tube excites."

is never heard, nor any dog suffered to disturb its peace, it may easily be supposed it will be the favourite resort of many kinds of birds. Abounding in extensive woods and groves, and an ample space of water, ever] fowl can suit its own taste for a sheltering-place, for a haunt to build its nest, and rear its little brood; all those birds which elsewhere suffer from the gamekeepers ruthless gun and trap, and from those whom the bird-stuffer employs to take them prisoners, receive protection Within the walls of Walton park. The owl is an especial favourite. Besides our slumbering two friends, whom we left in the old ivied tower in the island, eleven pairs of

others occupy holes in trees, and other comfortable dormitories, purposely contrived and fitted up for their dwelling-places.

The rapacious birds also find a home in Walton park, and a friend in its proprietor. The raven is now and then seen, though but rarely, as the hand of the enemy has fallen heavily upon this noble bird. Great flights of the carrion crow, even* evening of the year, may be seen repairing from all directions for their roosting-place in its woods; magpies in equal numbers may likewise be seen taking up in them their sleeping-quarters; different varieties of hawks resort for the same purpose, and here their "aeries build."

Some might suppose, from the presence of so many birds of prey, that no game would be found in the park: it is quite the reverse; game abounds in it. In 1833, a wood pigeon built in a tree four feet below that of a magpie; both lived in the greatest harmony, hatched their eggs, and reared their young. Many similar instances of the rapacious birds and the others living here peaceably together might be adduced. The pheasant, the partridge, the woodcock, in their season, and the hare, are very numerous. Were it not for the shelter they meet within the walls of the park, Mr. Waterton believes that they would have been ere this rooted out of his district of country, as some species of birds, such as the larger variety of woodpecker and others, have been.

The pheasant receives every attention. Except for about four months of the year, he can provide himself with food by living upon the beech mast, the sweet chestnut, acorns, and other sorts of food. To provide him with winter provisions, Mr. Waterton plants a quarter of an acre with the thousand-headed cabbage, which is sown in April, and transplanted in June. This cabbage the pheasant eats voraciously in the winter time. Beans are preferred to any kind of grain, as being less pilfered by the smaller birds.

The grasshopper,

"sallitans per herbas,
"Æstatis est chorista,"

whose sweet summer song was unceasingly heard, is now silent and scarce ever heard; this insect is a dainty repast of the pheasant.

Though the park has not been above two or three years quite inclosed by high walls, its complete privacy and security have attracted a small family of herons to form a colony on some of the aged oaks that overhang the lake: this year there have been four nests, all of which have been hatched, and some able-bodied youngsters have been sent out to swell the rising population of the heronry. The herons repay their kind landlord's assiduous care of them by destroying numbers of the water-rat, that infests all our waters, and even houses.

Being on the verge of that range of country which the nightingale visits in its annual migrations, Walton park has generally the enjoyment of the mellifluous notes of one or two of these heavenly musicians, who, each

"in his ev'ning bow'r,
Makes woodland echoes ring.
* * * * *

And sings the drowsy day to rest.

When the season of the sere and yellow leaf draws on, the migratory birds, all knowing the moment when to forsake for a time their loved homes, flock into Walton park, as a place of refuge after their long voyage. Among this assemblage are seen the woodcock, the fieldfare, with its inseparable dear fellow-traveller, the redstart, and several others, emigrants from distant lands. Such are a few of the daily and occasional inhabitants of the woods and groves of Walton park.

Notwithstanding several pairs of wood pigeons breed in the confines of the park, when winter sets in, immense numbers flock in to feed on the beech mast. These appear to have come from foreign countries.

If the land birds of all kinds and dispositions receive an invitation, and find a true friend in Mr. Waterton, no less so do the water birds; and that most beautiful of all the British birds, the kingfisher, which may be considered as the link which unites these two classes together.

The lake, abounding in a variety of fish, which we have described as encircling the hall of Walton, is the continual and occasional resort of many of our waterfowl. The wild duck, the wigeon, the teal, the coot, are seen on its pleasant waters in great numbers. The wild duck is a continual inhabitant of the lake. Several pairs hatch and bring up their young. But during the winter season great flocks of them migrating from the frozen north, as well as of the wigeon and of the teal, pass their inclement season here.

Though the wild ducks are seen on the waters during the day time, at nightfall they repair to the sea-side, the shores of which are distant nearly a hundred miles, for their supper; and, by return of dawn, these active travellers, far surpassing, in speed of wing, the rapidly moving locomotive steam-engine, are seen on the bosom of the lake, quietly pruning and careening their plumage. The wigeon, feeding like geese on the grasses and aquatic plants, does not go so far for his nightly meal. If, however, he be undisturbed, he will feed during the day time.

Not unfrequently the wild goose and the wild swan take up their abode in severe weather in the lake.

The seamew is also not an unfrequent visitor: the abundance of eels and other fish tempts the voracious cormorant to leave the stormy ocean, and pass his winter pleasantly at Walton. This bird usually travels with his mate; and it is interesting to observe the loving couple, an example of conjugal affection to human kind, fishing and diving in company. Tired with the sports of the deep, and finding an unmolested landing-place on the island, they often rest themselves from their labours on its pretty shores, within a gunshot from the windows of the hall.

An instance of the humane and paternal care and solicitude Mr. Waterton evinces for the comfort of the feathered family, during winter, had nearly escaped me. He encourages the growth of ivy around the stems of his trees, which not only shelters many a poor, starved, benumbed bird, when the storm rages, but offers it an agreeable place for its nest in the spring.

From these few and hastily collected observations while visiting Walton hall, it will appear that Mr. Waterton possesses the finest and most extensive

zoological garden in the kingdom, or perhaps in Europe. Here roaming unconstrained and at free liberty, every bird and animal can be examined in its true character. In possession of a powerful telescope, which is often used, Mr. Waterton watches and examines the habits and movements of his varied feathered population. Almost constantly abroad, nothing escapes him.

The perfect seclusion of the park enables him to experiment harmlessly on his subjects. In the spring of 1833, he made a carrion crow hatch two rook's eggs, a magpie those of a jackdaw, and the daw those of the pie.

In concluding these very imperfect remarks on Walton hall, I am sure that every one who, like myself, has shared the hospitality and enjoyments of a visit to this second White of Selborne, will join with me in these words of the Latin poet:—

"Hinc tibi copia,
Manabit ad plenum benigno,
Ruris honorum opulenta cornu.
"Here to thee shall plenty flow,
And all her riches show,
To raise the honour of the quiet plain."

The following particulars have been derived from another source:—

"Walton park consists of 260 acres. The wall around it is, for above a mile, 10 feet high ; the remainder of it 9 feet at the lowest part. There is no public road or footpath through this park, and no gun is ever allowed, upon any score, to be fired in it. The park abounds with fine timber; and Mr. Waterton, in laying out some new grounds about twenty-six years ago, did every thing that love for birds could suggest, to make them come and settle there. This protection to the birds enables them to perform their daily functions without fear and trembling.

"In the centre of the park is a sheet of water, of 24 acres in extent; upon which, in winter, from 2,000 to 3,000 wild fowl may sometimes be seen. In the lake is a rock, and on this rock stands Walton hall; now a modern building, but, in times long gone by, a place of strength."

1. Abridged from the Magazine of Natural History.
2. See his Wanderings.

The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction, 1835.

John Limbird (1796?-1883) was an English stationer, bookseller and publisher, characterised by an obituarist as "the father of our periodical writing".

From 1822 to 1847 Limbird published a twopenny weekly, *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction*, which has been characterized as "the first long-lived cheap periodical" in Britain. It was edited by Thomas Byerley, John Abraham Heraud, Percy Bolingbroke St John, and John Timbs. Late in 1847 it became the *Mirror Monthly Magazine*; and from 1849 to 1850 appeared finally as the *London Review*.