

THE AVIARY,  
OR  
NATURAL HISTORY  
OF  
BIRDS.

WITH  
FINE WOOD ENGRAVINGS.



WORCESTER :  
PUBLISHED BY J. GROUT, JR.



Chenyer Freeman's Book presented  
to him by Albert Palmer

THE  
AVIARY.

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WITH BEAUTIFUL ENGRAVINGS.


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WORCESTER:  
PUBLISHED BY J. GROUT, JR.

*Charles Freeman*





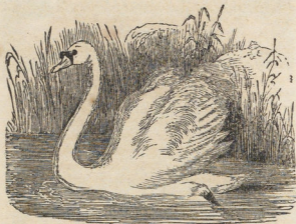
## THE AVIARY.

### BALD EAGLE.

The white-headed or Bald Eagle is spread over nearly the whole northern part of America, but abounds particularly near the falls of Niagara, where it subsists on fish and on such animals as are accidentally floated down the stream. It also feeds upon pigs, lambs, fawns, and other small animals that it can overpower. It builds its nest on the top of a tall tree, of sticks, weeds, and moss. The young are usually three in number, and do not, like many other birds, leave the nest till they are fully fledged. The parent birds are very fierce in their defence, and feed them with the greatest assiduity.

This splendid bird is about three feet long, and seven feet from the tip of one wing to the other. The head, neck and tail are pure white, the rest of the plumage is nearly black. The representation of the Bald Eagle forms the national emblem of the United States. The mode in which this bird obtains his prey is thus

graphically described by Audubon. The scene is in Mississippi, and the eagle is perched on the top of the tallest tree, on the margin of the stream.



THE SWAN.

“The wild, trumpet-like sound of a yet distant but approaching swan is heard. The eagle shakes the whole of his body, and with a few touches of his bill, he arranges his plumage in an instant. The snow-white bird is now in sight; her long neck is stretched forward; her eye is on the watch, vigilant as that of her enemy; her large wings seem with difficulty to support the weight of her body, although they flap incessantly. So irksome do her exertions seem, that her legs are spread beneath her tail to aid her flight. She approaches, however.

The eagle has marked her for his prey. As the swan is passing, he starts from his perch, in full preparation for the chase, with an awful scream, that, to the swan's ear, brings more terror than the report of the large duck-gun.

“Now is the moment to witness the eagle's power. He glides through the air like a falling star, and like a flash of lightning comes upon the timorous quarry, which now, in agony and despair, seeks, by various manœuvres, to elude the grasp of his cruel talons; it mounts, doubles, and willingly would plunge into the stream, were it not prevented by the eagle, which, long possessed of the knowledge that by such a stratagem the swan might escape him, forces it to remain in the air by attempting to strike it with its talons from beneath.

“The hope of escape is soon given up by the swan. It has already become much weakened, and its strength fails at the sight of the courage and strength of its antagonist. Its last gasp is about to escape, when the ferocious eagle strikes with his talons the underside of its wing, and, with unresisted power, forces the bird to fall in a slanting direction upon the nearest shore. He presses down his powerful feet, and drives his sharp claws deep into the heart of the dying swan. He then, with his mate, gorges himself with the blood of the luckless victim.”



### THE OLD OWL.

#### I.

The owl is a bird that flaps along  
 With a lonely loud halloo ;  
 He has but one unceasing song,  
                                   *To whit, to whit, to woo,*  
 In dusky light he takes his flight,  
 The twilight dim is the time for him,  
 And when the moonlight scowls,—  
 'Tis then he silently prowls,  
 And hunts the mice and moles.

#### II.

A lonely owl once built her nest  
 In the hole of a hollow tree,  
 And she with a fine young brood was blest  
 As ever owl could be.



She loved her young, and as they clung  
    Beneath her downy wing,  
She o'er them oft on a branch aloft,  
    As they reposed below,  
Would shout and sing, while the woods would  
    ring,

*To whit, to whit, to woo.*

## III.

A boy came by that hollow tree,  
    With a fierce and wild halloo ;  
And this the birds, all startled heard,  
    And answered, *to whit, to woo.*  
As the old bird shrieked, the young ones squeak-  
    ed ;

    “ Oh ho ! ” said the boy,

    In a frantic joy,

“ An owl is the bird for me,  
And here are its young ones three.”

    Then with eager look,

    He that bird's nest took ;

        While plaintive and slow,

        Rose a note of wo

From the owl in its hollow tree,

*To whit, to whit, to woo.*

## IV.

That boy now took his victims home,  
    And put them in a cage ;  
        And cooped up there,  
        In their despair,  
They bit and scratched in rage ;

They caught his finger once or twice,  
 And made him scream with pain ;  
 And then he vowed,  
 In curses loud,  
 That they should all be slain.  
 He tied them to a stake, and got  
 An iron pin, and made it hot,  
 To burn out their young eyes.  
 " Ha, ha !" said he, " you'll not bite me,  
 You'll not bite me again :"  
 Then in the sky  
 A wing flapped by  
 That seemed to stop his breath ;  
 'Twas the old owl, with a heavy scowl,  
 Lamenting her young ones' death—  
*To whit, to whit, to woo.*

## v.

That boy grew up—became a man,  
 A *cruel* man was he,  
 His heart had grown as hard as stone,  
 Which none but God could see.  
 One dreary night,  
 In the wan moonlight,  
 Beneath that hollow tree  
 He vengeful stood, to spill the blood  
 Of a hated enemy.  
 With a furious blow, he laid him low,  
 Then plunged his knife, to take his life,  
 Deep to its haft,  
 And wildly laughed,—  
 " You will not again plague me."

But yet as he knelt  
O'er that foe, he felt  
A shudder that quailed all his blood's full glow,  
For oh, he heard,  
On the tree that bird,  
The same old owl, o'er that murder foul,  
Cry, *whit, whit, to woo.*

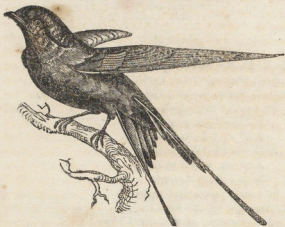
## VI.

He fled—the owl's reproaching cry  
Still ringing in his ears ;  
But ah, 't was in vain for the wretch to fly,  
So loaded with guilt and fears.  
He quick was caught,  
And to justice brought,  
And soon in prison lies.  
And oh, while there,  
In his deep despair,  
In lonely tears and sighs,  
He thought of the iron cage !  
And he thought of the cruel rage !!  
And the red-hot pin, that he once thrust in,  
To burn out the young bird's eyes.

Condemned to die—'t was his destiny  
To die on that hollow tree,  
And there as he hung  
And there as he swung  
In the night-wind to and fro,  
That vengeful bird  
Was often heard,  
When scarcely a breath the forest stirred,

In screamings high,  
All the night to cry,

*To whit, to whit, to woo.*  
*To whit, to whit, to woo.*



### SWALLOWS.

Of these birds there are several kinds, but I am going to speak of only one or two of them now. The common barn swallow is one of the most interesting. It does not come much amongst us at the north, till the settled warm weather of May. A straggler now and then appears before, which has led to the adage, "One swallow does not make summer."

The flight of the swallow is often low, but

distinguished by great rapidity, and sudden turns and evolutions, executed as if by magic. Over fields and meadows, and the surface of pools and sheets of water, all the day may this fleet, unwearied bird be seen, skimming along, and describing, in its oft repeated circuit, the most intricate mazes. The surface of the water is indeed its delight; its insect food is here in great profusion; and it is beautiful to observe how dexterously it skims along, and with what address it dips and emerges, shaking the spray from its burnished plumage, as, hardly interrupted by the plunge, it continues its career. Thus it feeds, and drinks, and bathes upon the wing.

The swallow breeds twice a year, and constructs its nest of mud or clay, mixed with hair and straw; the clay is tempered with the saliva of the bird, (with which nature has supplied it,) in order to make it tenacious and easily moulded. The shell or crust of the nest, thus composed, is lined with fine grass or feathers, firmly fixed against the rafters of barns or out-houses. The writer has heard of a pair that yearly built in the rafters of a wheelwright's shop, undisturbed by the din of the hammer or the grating of the saw. The propensity which these birds, in common with their family, exhibit to return to the same spot, and to build in the same barn year after year, is one of the most curious parts of their history. During their sojourn in foreign climes, they forget not their old home, the spot where they were bred, the spot where they have

reared their offspring; but, as soon as their instinct warns them to retrace their pilgrimage, back they hasten, and, as experiments have repeatedly proved, the identical pair that built last summer in the barn, again take up their quarters, passing in and out by the same opening.

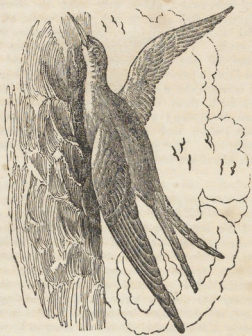
It is delightful to witness the care which the swallow manifests towards her brood.—When able to leave the nest, she leads them to the ridge of the barn, where, settled in a row, and as yet unable to fly, she feeds them with great assiduity. In a day or two they become capable of flight, and then they follow their parents in all their evolutions, and are fed by them while on the wing. In a short time they commence an independent career, and set up for themselves.

The notes of the swallow, though hurried and twittering, are very pleasing; and the more so as they are associated in our minds with ideas of spring, and calm serenity, and rural pleasures. The time in which the bird pours forth its melody is chiefly at sunrise, when, in “token of a goodly day,” his rays are bright and warm.

“The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,  
The swallow, twittering from the straw-built shed,”

unite alike to call man from his couch of rest, and to praise “the God of seasons as they roll.”

After the work of rearing the young, ere autumn sears the leaf, the swallow prepares to



depart. Multitudes, from various quarters, now congregate together, and perch at night in clusters on barns or the branches of trees, but especially among the reeds of marshes and fens, round which they may be observed wheeling and sinking and rising again, all the time twittering vociferously, before they finally settle. It was from this circumstance that some of the older naturalists supposed the swallow to become torpid and remain submerged beneath the water during winter, and to issue forth from its liquid tenement on the return of spring; a theory utterly incompatible with reason and facts, and now universally discarded. The great body of these birds depart about the end of September.

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### THE CRANE FAMILY.

I AM not going to talk of Ichabod Crane, or Jeremiah Crane, or of their wives or families. I shall leave these respectable people for the present, and say a few words about certain long-legged birds which are very interesting, though not very familiarly known to most of us. The storks and cranes are so nearly alike that they might seem to be cousins. They have both enormously long legs and bills, and seem particularly well fitted for wading in the water—a thing they can do without rolling up their pantaloons. Look at this tall fellow at the head of the next page, and



tell me if he need be afraid of wetting his clothes by taking a ramble in the brook.



The engraving represents a crane. Let me first say a few words of his cousin stork.—This bird, that is spoken of in the Bible as one that “knoweth her appointed time,” is not found among us, but it is well known in some parts of Europe. In Holland, it arrives in small bands or flocks, about the first of April, and universally meets with a kind and welcome reception from the inhabitants. Returning year after year to the same town, and the same chimney-top, it re-occupies its deserted nest; and the gladness these birds manifest in again taking possession of their dwelling, and the attachment they testify towards their benevolent hosts, are familiar in the mouths of every one. Nor is the stork less remarkable for its affec-



STORK.

tion toward its young; and the story is well known of a female bird, which, during the conflagration at Delft, chose rather to perish with her young than abandon them to their fate. Incubation and the rearing of the young being over by August, the stork, in the early part of the month, prepares for its departure. The north of Africa, and especially Egypt, are the places of its winter sojourning, for there the marshes are unfrozen, its food is in abundance, and the climate is congenial. Previous to setting out on their airy journey, multitudes assemble from the surrounding districts, chattering with their bills as if in consultation. On the appointed night, a period which appears to be universally chosen by the migratory tribes, they mount into the higher regions of the air, and sail away southwards to their destined haven.

The nest of the stork is formed of twigs and sticks, and the eggs, from three to five in num-

ber, and nearly as large as those of a goose, are of a yellowish white. Of the countless multitudes in which the stork assembles in order to perform its periodical migrations, some idea may be entertained from Dr. Shaw's account of the flocks which he witnessed leaving Egypt and passing over Mount Carmel, each of which was half a mile in breadth, and occupied a space of three hours in passing. When reposing, the stork stands upon one leg, with the neck bent backwards, and the head resting between the shoulders. Such also is its attitude when watching for its prey. Its motions are stately, and it stalks along with slow and measured steps. Its plumage is pure white.

The cranes bear a close resemblance to the white stork, which we have been describing, but become even more familiar in some of the countries they inhabit, and, in consequence of their larger size, render more essential service in the removal of carrion, offal, and other nuisances. This important office they share with the vultures, and, like those birds, are universally privileged from all annoyance, in return for so meritorious an exertion of their natural propensities. They seem to be constantly attracted by the heaps of offensive substances collected in the villages and towns, which they devour without scruple, and in immense quantities.

The adjutant arrives in Bengal, in India, before the rainy season. Its gape is enormous, and its voracity astonishing; not that it is ferocious towards man; quite the contrary,

for it is peaceable, and even timid; but small quadrupeds are swallowed without any scruple. In the stomach of one, as Latham states, were found a land tortoise ten inches long, and a large black cat entire.



### PELICAN.

There are several kinds of Pelicans; the more common is about the size of a common goose. Their general color on the old continent is said to be white; on the new continent a light gray, or ash-color; the middle part of the back feathers is blackish, the neck of a yellowish cast. Its beak is commonly about fifteen inches in length; attached to the under part of it is a large bag, or pouch, capable of holding two or three gallons of water. It is a bird of the aquatic kind, of strong wing, but rather sluggish in its habits. When impelled by hunger, it takes its flight to the water, and when over a shoal of fish, it darts

down with unerring aim, seizes the fish it has its eye upon, places it in its pouch, and rises in the air; it presently darts down again, and continues thus to do, till its expansive receptacle is filled. It then retires to some solitary place, and feeds upon its store, in a half dormant state, till it is exhausted. When hunger again impels, it goes again in quest of food.

The female lays her eggs to the number of five, or six, and hatches them without nest upon the bare ground; she feeds them with masticated flesh from her pouch, till they are able to provide for themselves; but she discovers no energy in defending them, when attacked. The young may be easily tamed, but are useless and expensive domestics, for they are very voracious, and their flesh is not eaten.

It is said by a certain naturalist that he had a Pelican, which at the command of its master, would go off in the morning, and return at night with his pouch filled with prey, a part of which it would unload for its master, and a part retain for its own use. Another speaks of a tame Pelican, the property of the Emperor Maximilian, that always attended his army, and that lived till 80 years of age.

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### THE IBIS.

The Ibis is a tall bird, with a body about the size of a goose, and having wings, not feathered as is usual with birds, but like the wings of the bat. There are two kind of ibis, the white and



black; the white ibis is a real stork, found in all parts of Egypt; the black ibis is peculiar to Damietta. At a distance it looks black; but upon nearer inspection, its plumage is visibly colored with green, blue, and purple: the back is of a bright scarlet, and about eighteen inches long; the neck about fourteen inches. They build their nests upon the palm tree, and though constantly frequenting the banks of the Nile, never go into the water. They were valued for destroying the serpents with which Egypt was greatly infested, as well as the insects generated from the mud of the Nile. After the death of an ibis the Egyptians embalmed it, and performed a kind of funeral for it; and a very curious circumstance is recorded in history, arising from this veneration of the Egyptians for the ibis.—Cambyses, king of Persia, placed a number of these birds in front of his army, when he attack-

ed Damietta; and the Egyptians, not daring to direct their arms against their sacred birds, suffered their town to be taken without resistance.



### HERON.

The species of Herons are numerous. The common Heron of Great Britain is three feet in length, and five feet in the spread of its wings, and yet it weighs but little more than three lbs. Its body is ash colored, its head and neck white, spotted with black, with a crest of long black feathers on the back part of the head; its beak is about five inches long, and its legs very long. It is exceedingly voracious and very destructive to the tenants of brooks and fish pools. It has been known to devour fifty fish of considerable size in one day. For the purpose of holding its slippery prey the middle claw of the foot is serrated, or has teeth like a saw. It is usually seen standing alone by the sides of ponds

and brooks, waiting for its prey, which, when it comes near, it seizes with a quick and sure grasp. It often wades to the depth of its legs in water, and there stands, waiting the approach of those fish upon which it feeds. In early times it was among the sports of the Britons to take Herons by the help of the Falcon; one of these birds was taken in Holland, which, by a silver plate fastened to its leg, appeared to have been taken by a Falcon forty years before. They build their nests on high cliffs, and on large, high trees, and each nest usually contains five or six large, pale green eggs.

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### CORMORANT.

The Cormorant, is somewhat more than three feet in length, and four feet in the expansion of its wings, and weighs about seven pounds. The back and coverts of the wings are deep green edged with black, and glossed with blue; the quill and tail feathers dusky, the breast and belly black. It frequents the highest parts of stupendous rocks, hanging over the sea; it is extremely voracious, has a sudden digestion, its smell is rank and disagreeable; it takes its prey from the sea, darting upon it with great swiftness; it takes the fish cross-wise, carries it into the air, throws it up, seizes it by the head, and swallows it though larger than its neck. In England it was formerly tamed, and trained to fish with a ring round its neck to prevent its swallowing its



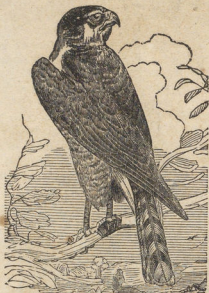


prey ; it is used in China for the same purpose.

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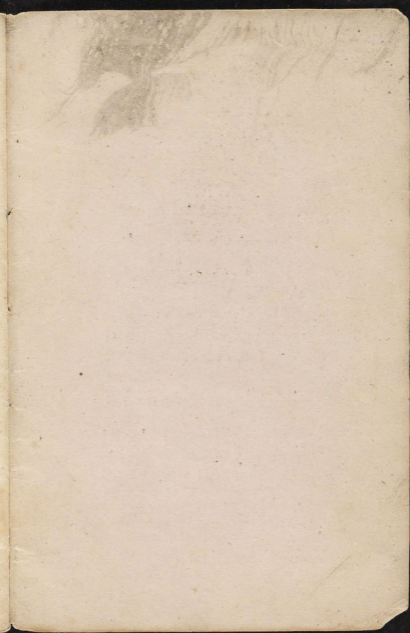
### SPARROW HAWK.

The Sparrow hawk is rather larger than a good sized pigeon. It is a spirited and well-shaped bird. It has a short hooked beak, of a bluish color, but black at the tip. Its eyes are



round and bright, the crown of its head is dark brown, its wings and the upper part of its body is a lighter brown. The wings when closed reach to the middle of the tail, which is rather long. It has strong thighs, slender yellow legs, with long toes, and black claws.

The Hawk is remarkably sharp sighted, and flies with swiftness. For its size is it very bold, and will often conquer birds larger than itself, but it usually feeds on smaller birds and mice.





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