

THE NEW BIRD.—BALÆNICEPS REX.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "CURIOSITIES OF NATURAL HISTORY."

If the reader will look at a map of Africa, he will see that the Nile is represented as flowing from sources which still remain a problem to the geographer. This difficulty, however, is more or less got over by the map draughtsman, who delicately pencils out the black line which represents the course of the river to a point where or whereabouts it ought to rise, if it behaves like other rivers. Now, just about this part of the world, which is represented by a white spot on the map, are to be found many of the most curiously-formed birds and beasts in the whole of creation.

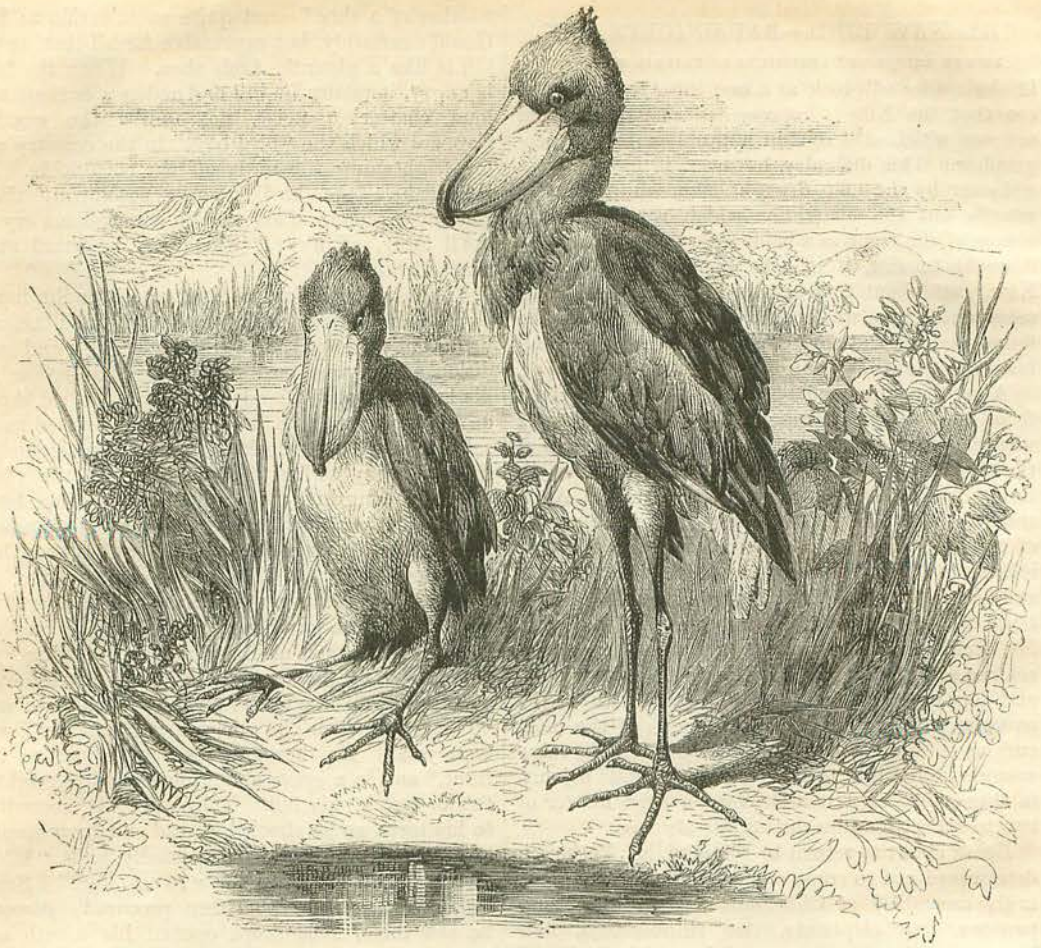
A gentleman named Petherick has lately arrived from these distant regions. He is her Majesty's vice-consul at a place called Chartoum, situated at the junction of the Blue and the White Niles, in Sudan, about fifteen hundred miles above Alexandria. This Chartoum is a large town, the capital of thirteen provinces, and contains about 60,000 inhabitants. Few Europeans find their way there, and Mr. Petherick thinks himself lucky if he sees three fresh white faces in the course of the year. Mr. Petherick makes excursions, for the sake of science and commerce, southwards from Chartoum, and has, on one occasion, got as far south as the equator, meeting in his travels some of the most curious specimens of the human family. The rainy seasons oblige him to return after a certain sojourn in these climates, but he leaves an Arab hunter or two to collect for him during his absence.

Being about to return to England, Mr. Petherick determined not to come empty-handed; he accordingly assembled at Chartoum, as travelling companions, two elephants, two rhinoceroses, four hippopotami, and nine rare birds, which he hoped to bring home with him alive to England. Out of this number of animals and birds, collected with much care and pains during his arduous explorations, three only arrived at Southampton docks, namely, one hippopotamus and two of these curious birds, the *Balænicæps rex*, which name, literally translated, means "the whale-headed king." The first specimen of this bird was brought (but not alive) to England in 1851, by Mr. Marsfield Parkyns, and submitted to our learned ornithologist Mr. Gould, who has been very happy in determining its name. I was fortunately present at the Regent's Park gardens when the present specimens arrived, and could see at a glance the meaning of the name.

When put down in the aviary, the bird at once reminded one of a stork and of a pelican (as will be seen by the accompanying engraving); of a stork by its upright, "royal" (hence the term *rex*) appearance; and of a pelican by its head. The bill, however, is not exactly like that of a pelican: it is more like a fisherman's boat turned upside down on the sea-shore, or the head of a whale. Into this great, horny, dome-shaped cavity, the lower mandible fits with almost mathematical accuracy, the line of junction being exactly of the same shape as is seen in the whalebone whale, namely, of a beautiful semi-curved graceful shape. The Arabs call this bird by a name signifying

"father of a shoe"—not quite so scientific as Mr. Gould's certainly, but expressive for all that, as the bill is like a gigantic Arab shoe. When the bird is angry, it rattles its bill and makes a curious and loud chattering noise, not unlike the wooden clappers which the "bird boys" in the country use for frightening the birds off the corn-fields. In Oxfordshire the bird-watchers accompany their rude instruments of alarm with a melodious cry of "All away, all away," which can be heard at a great distance.

Two birds alone out of five were brought home by Mr. Petherick; both were dirty and travel-worn, but nevertheless in excellent health and condition. The younger bird was quite overcome by his late fatigues by land and water; he sat down on his haunches, (see Engraving,) he refused to be set on his legs, he looked about as miserable as the "new boy" when first turned into the playground among his future schoolmates: time, however, in both cases brings changes, and *Balænicæps Rex*, junior, is beginning to hold up his head like his fellow bird. On the arrival of travellers, refreshment is always provided; the keeper, therefore, appeared with a number of little fish in a bucket; *Balænicæps* looked at them with a knowing eye, (which eye, by the way, is occasionally covered with a white curtain-like membrane,) as much as to say, "I never saw fish like you, but nevertheless I will taste you." He therefore took "one step to the front," and in a grave and king-like way caught a fish or two in his bill. They were not according to his taste, so he shook his head and great mouth, like the little boy who unexpectedly finds "bitter aloe" where he looked for "sweet stuff." Some large whiting were therefore procured; directly he saw them, *Balænicæps* opened his mouth and threw his head back like a young unfledged rook when expecting a dainty worm from the maternal bill. No young bird can equal our friend *Balænicæps* in gaping when he opens his bill; you saw a wide-gaping, red-coloured abyss, into which the hand and arm might easily be placed. Down into this abyss the fish was gulped, or rather slid, for there was plenty of room for a twenty-pound salmon to pass without a wince from the bird. During this operation the tongue was seen—a tongue that could not have been "put out" to the most learned of physicians, for it consisted of a very small finger-shaped projection, not unlike the human uvula. During the gaping process, we learned that the lower mandible was "floored," so to say, with a flexible and soft membrane, of about the substance of ordinary wash-leather. This would doubtless act as a bag, should the captured fish be too energetic in his endeavours to escape, and retain the creature much on the same principle as does the landing-net of the angler. The tip of the bill, moreover, is armed with an exceedingly strong and hard hook, so that, the fish being once inside the big bill, there is no way of escape save one, and that is down the "red lane," as the nursery authorities have it, into the bird's kitchen (his stomach) below. The birds will also eat carrion, or rather the entrails of dead animals, and they find the hook on their bill is of great service in



BALANICEPS REX.

helping them at their dainty repast, such as a dead crocodile, deer, hippopotamus, etc., which they find stranded on the banks of their haunts.

These birds, in their native home, live among the vast morasses and the deserts of high reeds which abound about latitude 4° ; they have been said to feed on tortoises; possibly they would not object to a nice little tortoise that swam past them in a fish-like manner: but their proper food is fish, and fish of a large size. The Arab "Salamah"—who nurses the young hippopotamus, and who, I believe, caught these birds, and also found the eggs, which Mr. Petherick has brought with him—testifies to their eating large fish, and large fish only. This I should think likely to be the case, for a pound of sprats would be but a small pill, a salmon "dinner for twenty persons" but a mouthful, for *Balaniceps Rex*. They will also eat water-snakes, and doubtless relish them.

A few weeks since, Mr. Petherick himself read a paper on his new birds, to a crowded meeting of the Zoological Society, Hanover Square; and I am enabled, with his permission, to add the following particulars relative to this bird. Mr. Petherick, starting on one of his hunting excursions, sailed up the White Nile, and, finding a passage from it, pushed his way up through a dense forest of reeds

till he arrived at the lake above mentioned, which the Arab hunters called Bahr-il-gazal, or the "lake of the gazelle." His passage was disputed by swarms of hippopotami and crocodiles, and it was here that he found, sleeping on the reeds, the young hippopotamus he has brought with him to the gardens. Here, too, he saw, for the first time, *Balaniceps Rex*, alive and flying about. He stated that this bird was never found on the banks of the Nile itself, as the water is too deep and the banks too high. For their fishing occupations they frequent, on the contrary, the tanks, the morasses, and the spots where shallow water is to be found. They are seen in flocks of a hundred or so together, wading about in the water. When disturbed, they fly low, and, after hovering about, settle on the highest trees. They do not, however, roost in the trees, but on the islands in the lake. It was difficult to capture the old birds alive, or to rear the young ones; so Mr. Petherick caused his men to collect the eggs during the rainy season, in July and August, when he himself was obliged to be absent.

The eggs are found in holes excavated in dry spots on the islands, etc., and as many as twelve eggs are found in one nest. These eggs he ordered to be placed under hens; he thus obtained several

specimens, which delighted to bathe and feed in an artificial pond he had made for their accommodation near the camp. The two he has brought with him were hatched in this manner, and alone survive out of twenty chicks he had at one time running about alive and well. The foster-mother, the hen, was always much astonished and puzzled at the strange habits of the ugly-faced gigantic chicks she had hatched, and seemed much distressed when they went near the water, and almost frantic when they were in it. He had a boy to look after and feed his pets, and they liked to play with the boy, running after him and rattling their gigantic bills with feigned anger. Mr. Petherick brought also some of the eggs home with him. They are white in colour, oval in shape, and not unlike the egg of the pelican. After the meeting, a discussion among the learned ornithologists took place as to whether the bird was a stork or a pelican, and good arguments were brought forward on either side. Whether stork or pelican does not much matter to the visitors to the Zoological Gardens. They should go at once to see the "whale-headed king," and they will, I am sure, back my vote of thanks to Mr. Petherick for taking so much trouble and pains to bring over this remarkable specimen of the bird family to this country.

A FORTNIGHT IN BARBARY.

GIBRALTAR and Ceuta form the two pillars—the keystones—of the Straits; and, were they both in the hands of the same power, the command of the entrance to the Mediterranean would be complete. The possession of Ceuta to a certain extent compensates to the Spaniards for the loss of Gibraltar. The two fortresses are kept up at all times on a war footing, and it is necessary for those who are not of the same nation as their respective owners to obtain permission to enter either town. Ceuta is almost equal, in its natural capabilities of defence, to compete with its rival on the opposite side of the Straits; but bad government and lack of funds render it essentially inferior. It stood in imminent danger of being captured by the French, or possibly the Moors, through the incapacity and neglect of the Spanish Junta during the time of the Peninsular war; but so disastrous a fate was averted by the decision of Sir Colin Campbell, who, on his own responsibility and against the wish of the Spaniards, sent over 500 men to defend it.

Ceuta is a very ancient place, of Phœnician origin. On the decline of the Roman empire it was occupied first by the Goths, and afterwards by the Moors, in whose hands it increased in wealth and refinement until captured by John I of Portugal, at whose death it fell to the share of the Spaniards, who have since retained it and converted it into a convict station—a kind of Spanish Botany Bay. It was from this very place that, more than 1100 years ago, the Moors, in the time of Roderic the last Gothic king, crossed over to achieve the conquest of Spain. The feud between the Spaniards and Moors continued without cessation for the next 800 years. Ill feeling, though suppressed, has never been extinguished, and but a

spark was needed to rekindle the flames of animosity which have lately blazed forth *fiercely as ever*.

Ceuta is most easily visited by crossing the Straits in a *felucca*, which leaves the Spanish seaport town of Algesiras every second day. On a hot day in May, 1859, before the outbreak of hostilities between Spain and Morocco, we set sail; our fellow passengers were not exactly such as we could have desired, had choice been given us, the deck being crowded with miserable-looking, half-fed convicts, chained together in pairs. The voyage, however, was short, and in a few hours we were landed on the African shore. Ceuta differs in no respect from an ordinary second-class Spanish town. The graceful black-eyed women, with flowing mantillas reaching to the waist, and fans with which they are skilled to express every passion and emotion; the gaily-dressed *majo*, with velvet breeches, embroidered leggings, and broad crimson sash; the sombre-clad ecclesiastics, with long black cloaks, and hats upwards of a yard in length, curled up at the sides; all proclaim a Spanish population. The houses with their latticed windows, and the churches with bells exposed, are characteristic of a Spanish town; while the one and only *posada* presents that utter want of all comfort peculiar to Spanish inns, and the profuse use of oil and garlic in all the cooking speaks forcibly of Spanish diet. A mimic warfare had long been going on at Ceuta, the Spaniards having been strictly confined within their boundary lines by the Moors, who took the opportunity to shoot at them the moment they stirred beyond. Consequently, it was impossible to proceed from Ceuta to Tetuan, or any other Moorish town, by land; but the journey is easily accomplished by going by sea to the mouth of the small river Martil on which Tetuan is situated, and which enters the Mediterranean about five miles from the town. A custom-house and passport-office have been built here, in an essentially European style, and the traveller is provided with a soldier, armed with his scimitar and *espingarda*, (a very long-handled gun,) as an escort, to preserve him from robbery or insult on his way to the town.

As we approached the gate of the city, we felt that now indeed we were in another continent, and not, as at Ceuta, in a transplanted European town. The Moorish arch of the gateway was before us, and there, as in times of old, sits the judge to dispense justice and settle disputes. At Tetuan resides the remnant of the people who fled thither after their expulsion from Granada, and who, it is said, still retain the title deeds of their estates, in the hopes of again returning to their native place. It is a good sample of a purely Moorish town, and is quite unaffected by European influence, either in its appearance or in the manners and customs of its inhabitants. It is beautifully situated on a rising eminence, about four miles inland, and commands a fine view of the Straits of Gibraltar and the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea in one direction, with the Spanish coast in the distance, from which "the Rock" stands out prominently. Towards the south the view is bounded by the bold outline of the Atlas range of mountains, rising crag above crag. The streets are very narrow and