

EAGLE STORIES.



ANY of you, perhaps, have seen in a menagerie a bird called an eagle, sulking in its cage, dull, lifeless, and stupid; but if so you have a very poor notion of what the eagle is in his natural home, among the rocks and mountains, where he may well be called the King of Birds. Of all birds the eagle flies highest, for which reason the ancients called him the Bird of Heaven. A large eagle weighs about twelve pounds. Its length is about three feet, and the extent of its wings from seven to ten feet.

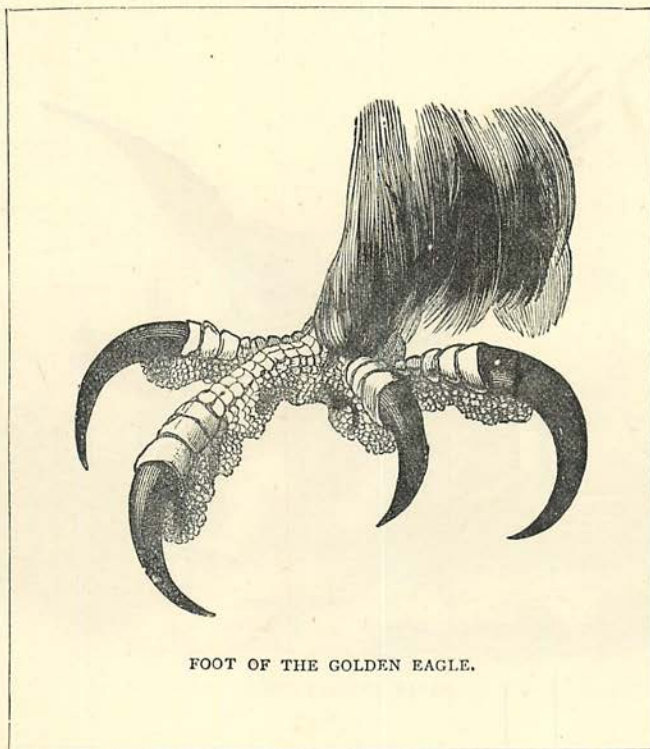
The Golden Eagle is the largest and noblest of these magnificent birds. Its head and neck are covered with narrow, sharp-pointed feathers, of a deep brown colour, bordered with tawny; in very old birds those on the crown of the head turn grey. The whole body is of a dark brown, the feathers of the back

being beautifully shaded with a deeper hue of the same colour. The wings when fully clothed reach to the end of the tail. The quill-feathers are of a chocolate colour, the shafts white; the tail is of a deep brown, irregularly marked with ash colour, and generally white at the roots of the feathers. The legs are yellow, short, and very strong, being three inches in circumference, and feathered to the very feet. The toes are covered with large scales, and armed with most formidable claws, some of which are two inches long.

There are many different kinds of eagles, but all are equally rapacious, and have the same general form, the same habits, and the same manner of bringing up their young. They are found chiefly in mountainous and thinly-peopled countries, and among the loftiest cliffs, choosing the places most remote from man. Like the lion, the eagle likes to keep the desert to himself alone; it is as unusual to see two pairs of eagles

in the same mountain as two lions in the same forest. In some other respects the lion and the eagle resemble each other; both exercise a powerful sway over the other inhabitants of the forest, and both despise small plunder. Eagles are most voracious in their appetites. Some feed largely on fish, and as if aware of the uncertainty of having always a good supply for themselves

I have read a curious account of an eagle's nest-larder found upon a rock in Scotland, which for several summers two eagles had occupied. There was a stone within a few yards of it, about six feet long, and nearly as broad; and upon this stone, whenever the eagles had young ones, used to be found a number of grouse, partridges, hares, rabbits, ducks, snipes, ptarmigans, rats, mice,



FOOT OF THE GOLDEN EAGLE.

and their young, they will collect an over-abundance to be stored up on the high rocks where their nests are built, so as to have a plentiful stock in hand. So well known are these stores to the North American Indians, that an eagle's nest is called the Indian's larder, from which the wild hunters frequently supply themselves with hares, ducks, and geese, besides fish.

and sometimes kids, fawns, and lambs, When the young eagles were able to hop the length of this stone, to which there was a narrow road hanging over a dreadful precipice, the old birds often brought hares and rabbits alive, and placing them before their young, taught them to kill and tear them to pieces. Sometimes the hares, rabbits, or rats, managed to get away from the young

ones, and on one occasion a fox's cub, after fighting hard, and severely biting them, tried to escape up the hill, until stopped by a shepherd. A gentleman who lived near, whenever visitors came to him unexpectedly, used to send his servants to the eagle's storehouse to see what they could find, and they generally brought back some delicacies for his table, the game being all the better for

among the Hebrides, or Western Islands of Scotland, gave a curious account of their way of catching the mountain deer, viz., by pouncing down and fixing their talons between the animal's horns, flapping at the same time their powerful wings, which so frightened the deer that they lost all control over themselves, and setting off at full speed, generally fell down some rock, where they were



EAGLE AND ITS PREY.

having been kept a certain time. While the hen-eagle was hatching, the table or shelf on the rock was usually kept well furnished for her use, and the male bird would tear off for her a wing or leg from the fowls or other animals captured.

A good many years ago, when eagles were far more numerous than they are now, the natives of the Shiant Islands, a cluster of wild, retired rocks, situated

either killed, or so much hurt as to become an easy prey. But the way in which the eagle contrived to kill even oxen, as witnessed in Heligoland, a small and now deserted rocky island in the German Ocean, was still more wonderful. It would first fly away to the sea, and then plunging into the waves, return to land, where it rolled itself on the shore, till its wings were covered with

sand. It then rose again and hovered over its victim. When close to it it shook its wings, and thus scattered the gravel and sand into the eyes of the ox, while it frightened the animal by blows with those powerful wings. The blinded creature ran about wildly, and at last fell down exhausted; or, like the deer in the Shiant Islands, dashed itself to death by falling over some cliff, when the eagle devoured it at its leisure.

Many years ago, in order to get rid of these terrible birds, there was a law in the Orkney Islands entitling any one who killed an eagle to a hen out of every house in the parish.

So great is the strength of the eagle, that it has been known to strike and kill its prey with a stroke of its pinions, before touching them with its claws; and there is no doubt that eagles have at different times carried off both children and lambs. Sad complaints used to be made of their carrying off infant children in India, and many stories have been told of their taking them to their nests, from which in some instances they were happily rescued.

On Tirst Holm, one of the Feroe Islands, an eagle seized an infant lying at a little distance from its mother, and carried it to its nest, situated on a point of high rock so steep that the boldest bird-catchers had never dared to climb it; the mother, however, ascended the rock and reached the nest, but too late, for the child was dead.

More fortunate was a mother on another occasion, who, after climbing the precipitous cliff, had her labour rewarded and her anxious fears relieved, by finding her baby boy alive and crowing with glee in the midst of the screaming eaglets. The sight nerved her arm to strike the robber of her home, and to rescue her darling from the nest to which he had been taken.

Two boys, the one seven and the other five years old, living near New York, were amusing themselves by try-

ing to reap, while their parents were at dinner. A large eagle came sailing over them, and with a sudden swoop attempted to seize the elder, but luckily missed him. The bird, not at all dismayed, alighted at a short distance, and in a few moments repeated his attempt. This bold little fellow, however, gallantly defended himself with his sickle; and when the bird rushed upon him, he boldly struck at it. The sickle entered under the left wing, and the blow having been given strongly, went through the ribs, and piercing the liver, proved fatal. On opening the bird's stomach it was found empty, which may explain in some degree the cause of so unusual an attack. The brave boy did not receive a scratch, though there can be little doubt that had the bird not been weakened by hunger, a blow or two from its sharp, strong beak would have penetrated through the skull into the brain, and caused instant death.

The well-known crest of the eagle and child, borne by the Stanley family, is supposed to have been founded upon a tradition of one of their ancestors, when a child, having been carried off by an eagle. And in a very old book on English history we read that "Alfred, king of the West Saxons, went out one day a hunting, and passing by a certain wood, heard, as he supposed, the cry of an infant from the top of a tree, and forthwith diligently inquiring of the huntsmen what that doleful sound could be, commanded one of them to climb the tree; when in the top of it was found an eagle's nest, and lo! therein a pretty sweet-faced infant, wrapped up in a purple mantle, and upon each arm a bracelet of gold—a clear sign that he was born of noble parents. Whereupon the king took charge of him, and caused him to be baptized; and because he was found in a nest, he gave him the name of Nestingum, and, in after-time, having nobly educated him, he advanced him to the dignity of an earl."

A curious story is told of a celebrated navigator, Captain Flinders, who, after landing in New South Wales, was walking with some of his officers, when "a large eagle, with a fierce aspect and outspread wing, was seen bounding



WILD LIFE IN THE ALPS.

towards them, but stopping short about twenty yards off, he flew up into a tree. Soon after, another bird of the same kind discovered himself, and flying above

their heads, made a sudden pounce downwards, but checked himself before he actually touched them. Captain Flinders supposed that they took him and

his party for kangaroos, which, when sitting up on their hind legs, according to their usual habit, are about the height and form of a man. On these animals the eagles were observed to feed, having been seen watching quietly in the trees till a kangaroo made its appearance, when down they flew, and tore it in pieces. Probably this was the truth, for the country was very desolate, and, as far as they could judge, uninhabited, so that the eagles might never have seen men."

A weasel, when carried off by an eagle, has been known to get under its wing, and suck the blood until the bird fell from exhaustion. A similar story is told of a stoat. In both these instances the eagle, after fluttering for a short time, suddenly flew upwards in a straight line to an immense height, till nearly out of sight, and then ceasing to flap its

wings, fell headlong to the ground like a stone.

The eagle is gifted with extraordinary clearness of sight, and can discern its prey when nearly two thousand feet above it in the air; it will even distinguish fish swimming near the surface of the water, and shooting down as swiftly and straight as an arrow, will plunge in and seize them with its talons. An eagle has sometimes been drowned in the struggle with a very strong fish; this, however, very rarely happens. He is furnished with a projecting curtain, or eyebrow, which both protects his eye from the sun, and guards his prey from his attacks. For as he can only see what is beneath him after having slain a bird or animal, he must rise again from the ground ready for a stoop before he can strike another.

