

THE EAGLE FAMILY.



THE golden eagle was once common in many of the hilly districts of England, and even till lately bred annually in Westmoreland, Cumberland, and the Peak of Derbyshire. In Scotland and Ireland it still frequents the mountains; and is occasionally seen in Wales. On the continent it is extensively spread, and we have specimens from India. Wooded mountain scenery, with bold abrupt rocks, and steep craggy precipices, are its favourite abode, but it also takes up its residence in depths of extensive forests. The golden eagle, like the rest, is solitary in its habits, and ferocious and daring in its disposition; disdainful of the loathsome repast upon which the vulture luxuriates, it lives, like the fierce hunter of the wilds, on the produce of the chase, which, if not too large, it invariably carries to its lonely eyry, there to feast in undisturbed solitude. The larger birds, together with hares, fawns, sheep, goats, etc., constitute its prey. Its nest, composed of a bed of sticks, is placed upon the jutting ledge of some inaccessible precipice; and here it rears its young, which are usually two in number, feeding them with bleeding morsels of the yet warm victim. The destruction which a pair of eagles occasion among the game of the surrounding district for many a league is almost incredible. Bechstein says, that in one eyry, in Germany, were found "the skeletons of three hundred ducks, and forty hares." There are instances, it is said, on record of children having fallen victims to its ferocity. The golden eagle does not appear to be confined exclusively to the older continents, as it is described by Dr. Richardson as a native of the northern

portions of the American continent, where he states it to be held by the aborigines as an emblem of might and courage, the young Indian glorying in the eagle plume as his proudest ornament. In its immature stage of plumage, which continues till the end of the third year, the basal portion of the tail, for more than half its length, is of a pure white: whence the older writers on ornithology supposed it to be a distinct species, and described it as such under the name of the ringtail eagle, a mistake which accurate observations have now corrected. The golden eagle is feathered to the toes, a characteristic of the genus *Aquila*, to which it belongs; the general colour of a rich blackish brown; the feathers of the top of the head and back of the neck are slender and pointed, and of a golden rufous; the tail (except in immature state) is of a deep grey, barred and tipped with broad bands of blackish brown. Cere and feet yellow. Length, three feet, or three feet six inches; expanse of wings, eight to nine feet.

Of all the eagles, the great sea eagle, from the changes it undergoes in its plumage from youth to age, has been productive of the greatest confusion; so that this bird has been described under various names. In all its stages the cere and under parts of its legs are yellow; the under part of the body is of a lighter hue than the upper, and more thickly interspersed with pale cinereous spots; and the claws are completely black. The great sea eagle is equal in size to the golden eagle, but not in courage and energy; it is, however, fierce and strong; inhabiting the rocks and mountains along the shores of the sea, whence it derives its chief subsistence. The nest is built either on the summit of some lofty tree, or, for want of this, on the

ledge of a precipitous rock, the young being two in number. The species is spread throughout the whole of the northern parts of Europe and Asia, and is by no means uncommon on our wilder coasts.

The great sea eagle is not a native of the American continent, its place being supplied by the white-headed eagle, a bird which, in its youthful plumage, closely resembles its relative, but which, after the third year, has the head, neck, and tail pure white, the rest of the plumage being deep chocolate, approaching black. In size, however, it is rather less, being about thirty-four or thirty-six inches in length, and upwards of seven in the expanse of its wings.

This noble bird is, if ever seen in Europe, to be regarded only as an accidental visitor; in America, it is spread throughout nearly the whole of the northern division, and abounds in the vicinity of the falls of Niagara, not merely for the purpose of obtaining fish, but of seizing on such unwary animals as are hurried down the stream to destruction. It is emblazoned on the national standard of the United States. The food of this eagle consists of fish, pigs, lambs, fawns, waterfowl, and putrid carcasses. Wilson says, "We have seen the bald eagle," its common name in America, "while seated on the dead carcass of a horse, keep a whole flock of vultures at a respectful distance, until he had fully sated his own appetite;" and he also mentions an instance in which flocks of vultures, feeding on some thousands of tree-squirrels, drowned in attempting to pass the Ohio, during one of their migrations, were all dispersed by a bald eagle, who drove them from the feast, of which he kept sole possession for several successive days. "To give you," says Audubon, "some idea of the nature of this bird, permit me to place you on the Mississippi, on which you may float gently along, while approaching winter brings millions of waterfowl, on whist-

ling wings, from the countries of the north, to seek a milder climate in which to sojourn for a season. The eagle is seen perched in an erect attitude on the highest summit of the tallest tree, by the margin of the broad stream. His glistening but stern eye looks over the vast expanse; he listens attentively to every sound that comes to his quick ear from afar, glancing now and then on the earth beneath, lest even the light tread of the fawn may pass unheard. His mate is perched on the opposite side, and, should all be tranquil and silent, warns him by a cry to continue patient. At this well-known call the male partly opens his broad wings, inclines his body a little downwards, and answers to her voice in tones not unlike the laugh of a maniac. The next moment he resumes his erect attitude, and again all around is silent. Ducks of many species, the teal, the wigeon, the mallard, and others, are seen passing with great rapidity, and following the course of the current; but the eagle heeds them not, they are at that time beneath his attention.

The next moment, however, the wild, trumpet-like sound of a yet distant but approaching swan is heard. A shriek from the female eagle comes across the stream; for, kind reader, she is fully as alert as her mate. The latter suddenly shakes the whole of his body, and with a few touches of his bill, aided by the action of his cuticular muscles, 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 very 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 the dreaded pair, the male bird starts from his perch, in full preparation for the chase, with an



THE-EAGLE AND ITS PREY.

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 powers. 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 his 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 swiftness of its antagonist. Its last gasp is about to escape, when the ferocious eagle strikes with his talons the under side of its wing, and with unresisted power forces the bird to

fall in a slanting direction upon the nearest shore. It is then, reader, that you may see the cruel spirit of this dreaded enemy of the feathered race, whilst, exulting over his prey, he for the first time breathes at ease. He presses down his powerful feet, and drives his sharp claws deeper than ever into the heart of the dying swan. He shrieks with delight as he feels the last convulsions of his prey, which has now sunk under his unceasing efforts to render death as painfully felt as it can possibly be made.

The female eagle has watched every movement of her mate, and if she did not assist him in capturing the swan, it was not from want of will, but merely because she felt full assurance that the power and courage of her lord were quite sufficient for the deed. She now sails to the spot, where he eagerly awaits her, and when she has arrived, they together turn the breast of the luckless swan upwards, and gorge themselves with gore."



RAFTING ON THE TIGRIS.

IN these days of novels and novelties it may not be unprofitable to describe a novel method of floating, though it is probably the oldest method now in use.

We had occasion to visit Mosul, which is directly opposite the site of the palaces of Sennacherib and Sardanapalus on the Tigris, and determined to raft it down the river from Diarbekir. The pastor of the Mosul church, and the civil head of the Protestant community there, with my servant Yakob and myself making quite a party, we decided to take a raft all to ourselves, and a native brother of Diarbekir was delegated to make a written contract with a builder

of rafts. No foreigner should ever attempt to treat directly with a contractor in this country, because he cannot anticipate the many points to be guarded against at which the contractor will find a door of escape from the conditions under which he is to act, the government also assisting him should the case of non-fulfilment come into the courts. The main points of our contract were these: 1. A raft of 150 new goatskins. 2. The raft to cost 880 piastres, or about 44 dollars, this sum to be paid when the raft was finished. 3. The raft to be ready in four days. 4. Two able-bodied and experienced raftsmen to work the craft through to Mosul.

The fulfilment was a thoroughly Oriental pattern of exactness and honesty, as will appear from the following show-