

# VARIOUS

THE MIRROR OF  
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13, NO. 361,  
SUPPLEMENTARY ISSUE  
(1829)

Various

**The Mirror of Literature,  
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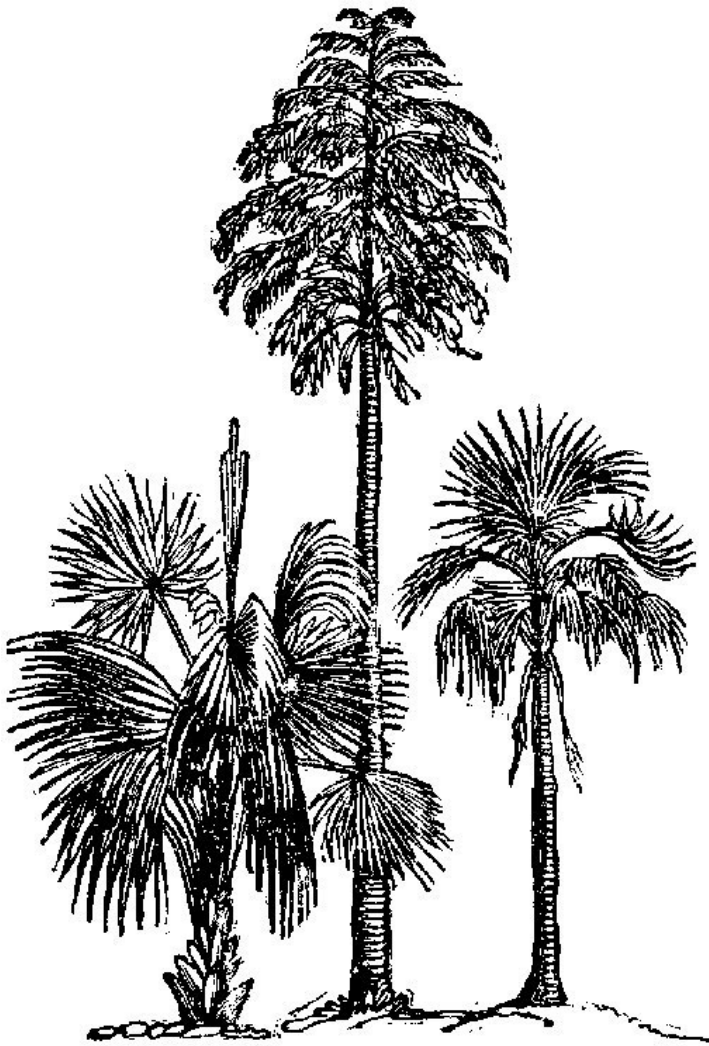
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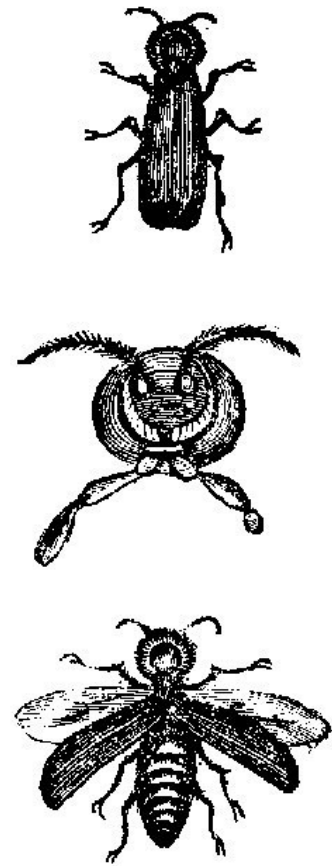
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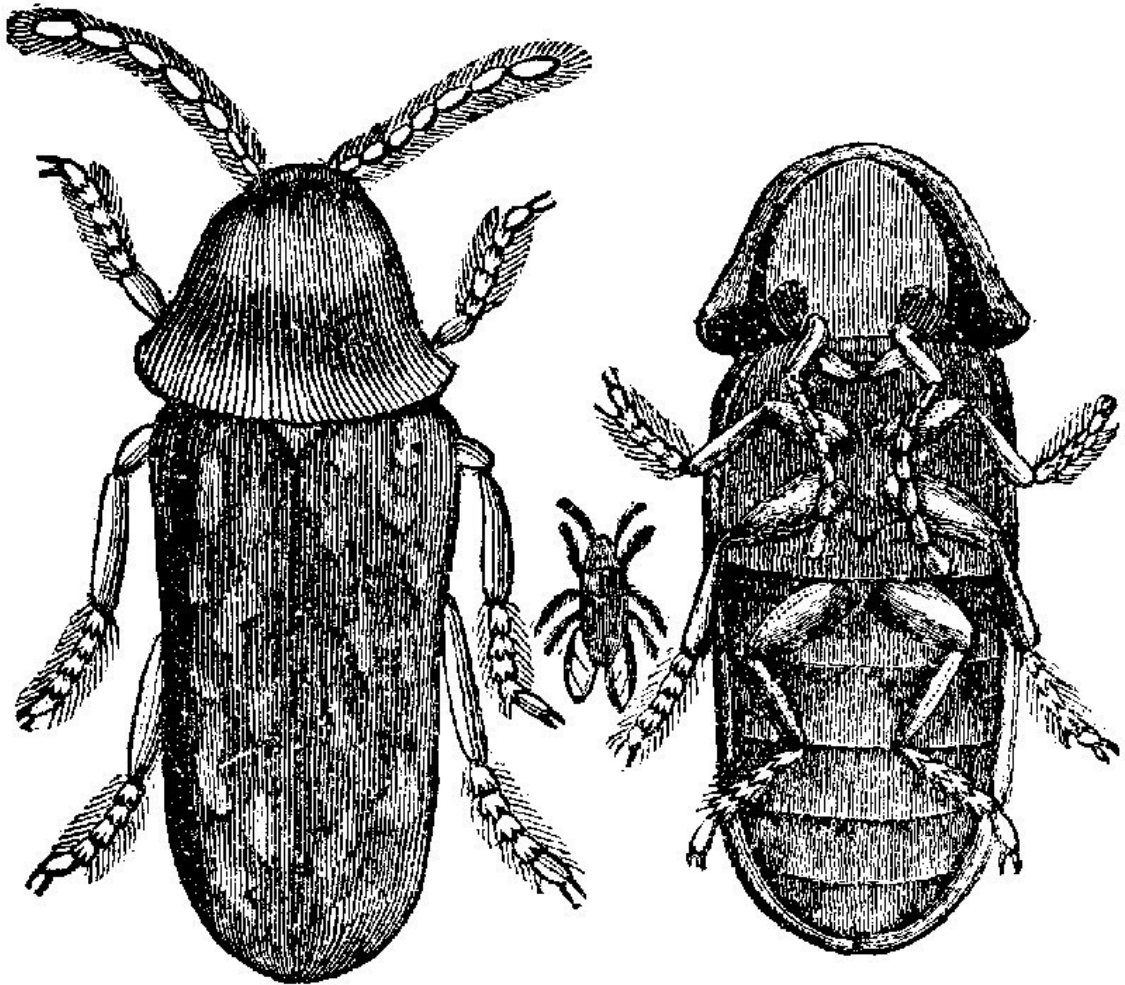
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**THE TALIPOT TREE.**



**THE GLOWWORM.**



**THE DEATHWATCH MAGNIFIED.**

## THE NATURALIST

### See the Engravings

A delightful volume, of title almost synonymous with this division of the MIRROR, has just been published. It is entitled *The Journal of a Naturalist*,<sup>1</sup> with the very appropriate motto of

—Plants, trees, and stones, we note,  
Birds, insects, beasts, and many rural things.

The author in his preface, says, "Many years have now passed away since we were presented with that very interesting and amusing book, the 'Natural History of Selborne;' nor do I recollect any publication at all resembling it having since appeared."<sup>2</sup> He then acknowledges the impression which this book left on his mind; and its having given rise to the present work, to which, in our humble opinion, it is a worthy companion.

Our "Naturalist" resides in a village upon a very ancient road, connecting Bristol and Gloucester, in a limestone district, numbering among its picturesque beauties, the broad estuary of the Severn, the mountains of Glamorgan, Monmouth, and Brecon, and their peaceful vales and cheerful cottages; Thornbury, with its fine cathedral-like church and castle, the red cliffs of the Severn, and numberless antiquities of our ancestors—as roads, encampments, aggera, watch-hills, coins, lances, and other relics of those warlike times. Labour and healthful enjoyment reign in this district: for it is neither torn up for its mineral wealth, nor are its natural beauties annihilated, or the habits of its population corrupted by speculation or avarice. A portrait of "a worthy peasant," introduced by our author, reminds us of

—A bold peasantry, their country's pride,  
When once destroyed, can never be supplied.

A passage quoted by the late Mr. Canning, in one of his finest speeches; and we often contrast this vigorous outline of the people of "merry England" with her artificial state of after times. Next are a page or two of agricultural chemistry (*analysis of soils*) unfettered with technicals; double the space of what may strictly be called rural economy, (*grass lands*) succeed; next the culture and history of the potato, and some new observations on "*the Teazle*."

Several pages on *trees* possess great interest, as do those on *flowers*.

We regret we have room but for a few heads—the *maple*—the *Naturalist's Autumnal Walk*—the *Economy of Animals*, especially of *Birds*: we must pass them over to elucidate our engraving of

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<sup>1</sup> We are pleased therefore to commence our Supplementary Sheet with such a volume as the present, which we have reserved for this purpose. The feelings which it must engender in the reader will be doubly grateful in these troublous times of strong political excitement: they enjoin "peace on earth, and goodwill towards men." the Divine antidote to the storms of conflicting interests and passions, and the balm which heals the thorny wounds of the world, that cross every path and tear the finest sympathies of our nature. It adds, moreover, a pleasant variety to the contents of our sheet, and alternates with the vicissitudes of enterprise, in the progress of infant liberty in the New World, as in the Memoirs of the patriot *Miller*;—the daring and recklessness of crime, as in the vivid sketch of *First and Last*;—the picturesque country and ceremonies of Arabia and its religious people, as drawn by *Burckhardt*;—and the architectural embellishment of the Metropolis, as shown in *Britton's Picture of London*.

<sup>2</sup> In the MIRROR, dated March 1, 1828, we noticed "Gilbert White's Natural History of Selborne, is one of the most delightful household books in our language, and we are surprised at the rarity of such works." The publication of the *Journal of a Naturalist*, early in March, 1829, is "a coincidence."

## THE GLOWWORM

That pretty sparkler of our summer evenings, so often made the ploughboy's prize, the only brilliant that glitters in the rustic's hat, the glowworm, (*lampyrus noctiluca*,) is not found in such numbers with us, as in many other places, where these signal tapers glimmer upon every grassy bank; yet, in some seasons, we have a reasonable sprinkling of them. Every body probably knows, that the male glowworm is a winged, erratic animal, yet may not have seen him. He has ever been a scarce creature to me, meeting perhaps with one or two in a year; and, when found, always a subject of admiration. Most creatures have their eyes so placed, as to be enabled to see about them; or, as Hook says of the house-fly, to be "circumspect animals;" but this male glowworm has a contrivance, by which any upward or side vision is prevented. Viewed when at rest, no portion of his eyes is visible, but the head is margined with a horny band, or plate, being a character of one of the genera of the order *coleoptera*, under which the eyes are situate. This prevents all upward vision; and blinds, or winkers, are so fixed at the sides of his eyes, as greatly to impede the view of all lateral objects. *See Figures*. The chief end of this creature in his nightly peregrinations is to seek his mate, always beneath him on the earth; and hence this apparatus appears designed to facilitate his search, confining his view entirely to what is before or below him. The first serves to direct his flight, the other presents the object of his pursuit: and as we commonly, and with advantage, place our hand over the brow, to obstruct the rays of light falling from above, which enables us to see clearer an object on the ground, so must the projecting hood of this creature converge the visual rays to a point beneath.

Glowworms emit light only for a short period in the year; and I have but partially observed it after the middle of July. I have collected many of these pretty creatures on a bank before my house, into which they retire during the winter, to shine out again when revived by the summer's warmth; but in this latter season I have frequently missed certain of my little protegés, and have reason to apprehend, that they formed the banquet of a toad, that frequented the same situation.

Observing above, that the glowworm does not emit light after the 14th of July, I mean thereby that clear, steady light, which has rendered this creature so remarkable to all persons; for I have repeatedly noticed, deep in the herbage, a faint evanescent light proceeding from these creatures, even as late as August and September. This was particularly manifested September the 28th, 1826. The evening was warm and dewy, and we observed on the house-bank multitudes of these small evanescent sparks in the grass. The light displayed was very different from that which they exhibit in warm summer months. Instead of the permanent green glow, that illumines all the blades of the surrounding herbage, it was a pale transient spot, visible for a moment or two, and then so speedily hidden, that we were obliged, in order to capture the creature, to employ the light of a candle. The number of them, and their actions, creeping away from our sight, contrary to that half lifeless dulness observed in summer, suggested the idea, that the whole body had availed themselves of this warm, moist evening, to migrate to their winter station. A single spark or so was to be seen some evenings after this, but no such large moving parties were discovered again. If we conclude, that the summer light of the glowworm is displayed as a signal taper, the appearance of this autumnal light can have no such object in view, nor can we rationally assign any use of it to the creature itself, unless, indeed, it serves as a point of union in these supposed migrations, like the leading call in the flight of night-moving birds. The activity and numbers of these insects, in the above-mentioned evening, enabled me to observe the frequent presence and disappearance of the light of an individual, which did not seem to be the result of will, but produced by situation. During the time the insect crawled along the ground, or upon the fine grass, the glow was hidden; but on its mounting any little blade, or sprig of moss, it turned round and presented the luminous caudal spot, which, on its falling or regaining its level, was hidden again.

A summary of the peculiarities of the year 1825, very appropriately concludes the volume, from which we may be tempted to make future extracts.

## THE TALIPOT TREE,

The first of our Engravings is a species of palm, a native of Ceylon, and is one of the most magnificent wonders of the vegetable kingdom. The leaf is circular, terminating in the most beautiful rays, and folding up into plaits like a fan, which, in figure, it nearly resembles.

This leaf is used in the maritime provinces of Ceylon as a mark of distinction, each person being allowed to have a certain number of these leaves, folded up as fans, carried with him by his servants; and also in the Kandian country, in the shape of a round, flat umbrella on a long stick. The talipot leaves are likewise used by the common people to shelter themselves from the rain, *one leaf affording sufficient shelter for seven or eight persons*. It is also used in making tents.

In 1818, Sir Alexander Johnston gave to Sir Joseph Banks a very fine specimen of a tent made of their leaves, large enough to hold a party of ten persons at table.

All the books of importance in Pali and Cingalese, relative to the religion of Buddhoo, in Ceylon, are written on lamina of these leaves, with either a brass or an iron style. There are some of these books in Sir A. Johnston's collections, which are supposed to be from 500 to 600 years old, and which are still very perfect. In the museum of the Asiatic Society, there is a complete copy of the Pali book, called the *Pansyapanas Iatakah*, written on 1,172 laminae of the finest description of this sort of palm leaf. Large as the dimensions of the talipot leaf may appear, it is exceeded in size by the *troolie* of Surinam, which extends on the ground, and has frequently been known to attain the width of three feet, and the length of thirty.

Our Engraving is copied from the *Gardener's Magazine*, where it is reduced from the Transactions of the Asiatic Society.

## THE DEATHWATCH MAGNIFIED

Although the present may be a late hour to dissipate the faith placed in signs and tokens, we are persuaded that a more intimate knowledge of this insect will not prove uninteresting to our readers.<sup>3</sup>

The name *death watch* was evidently derived from the importance attached to the beatings of the insect, which, by superstitious people, were formerly supposed to prognosticate death to some one of the family in whose house it was heard. The natural size of the insect is about a quarter of an inch in length, of a dark brown colour, spotted, with transparent wings under the *vagina*, or sheath, a huge cap or helmet on the head, and two *antennae*, or feelers, from beneath the eyes.

It is chiefly in the advanced period of spring that these insects commence their noise; and which is the call or signal by which they are mutually attracted to each other, and may be considered as analogous to the call of birds. This noise does not arise from their voice, but from the insect beating on hard substances, with the shield or fore part of its head. The general number of successive distinct strokes is from 7 to 9 or 11. These are given in pretty quick succession, and are repeated at uncertain intervals; and in old houses, where the insects are numerous, they may be heard, if the weather be warm, almost every hour in the day. The noise exactly resembles that made by beating moderately hard with the finger on a table. Mr. Stackhouse carefully observed its manner of beating. He says, the insect raises itself upon its hinder legs, and with the body somewhat inclined, beats its head with great force and agility against the place on which it stands.

This insect, which is the *real death-watch* of the vulgar, must not be confounded with another minuter insect, which makes a ticking noise like a watch; but instead of beating at intervals, it continues its noise for a considerable time without intermission. This latter belongs to a very different tribe. It is usually found in old wood, decayed furniture, neglected books, &c.; and both the male and the female have the power of making this ticking noise, in order to attract each other. The Rev. Mr. Derham seems to have been the first naturalist who examined and described this species; and he says that during the month of July, in one particular summer, they scarcely ever ceased to beat either in day or night. The eggs are generally hatched about the beginning of March: many of them live through the winter; but during that time, to avoid the frost, they bury themselves deep in dust.

Mr. T. Carpenter (of whose paper in *Gill's Repository* we have already availed ourselves) tells us that these insects are excellent anatomists: in order to render them useful in making some delicate dissections for his microscope, Mr. Carpenter placed a few of the insects within a pill-box, with the heads of three dead flies. He found some time afterwards, that they had cleared the interior of some of the eyes completely from all the blood-vessels, leaving the lenses in the cornea beautifully transparent.

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<sup>3</sup> Philosophers and wits have written on this subject. Sir Thomas Brown, who wrote a book of *Vulgar Errors*, remarks with great seriousness that the man "who could eradicate this error from the minds of the people, might prevent the fearful passions of the heart, and many cold sweats taking place in grandmothers and nurses"—Swift lets fly the shafts of satire in these lines.—A woodwormThat lies in old wood, like a hare in her form;With teeth, or with claws, it will bite, or will scratch;And chambermaids christen this worm a death-watch;Because, like a watch, it always cries click;Then woe be to those in the house who are sick;For sure as a gun they will give up the ghostIf the maggat cries click when it scratches the post.Gay, too, in a *pastoral dirge*, says,The wether's bell,Before the drooping flock, toll'd forth her knell;The solemn deathwatch click'd the hour she died.

## BIRDS' NESTS

The structure of the nests of birds affords, perhaps, one of the most agreeable lessons in Natural History.

Among the most curious nests of our *English* birds may be named that of the *Wren*, the *long-tailed Titmouse*, the *Thrush*, the *Goldfinch*, the *Chaffinch*, the *Magpie*, and the *House Sparrow*; to these may also be added the *Swallow's*, the *Martin's*, the *Wood Pigeon's*, and the *Wood-Pecker's*. Of the nests of *Rooks*, it may be sufficient to observe, that they are often found to the number of six, or even more in a cluster. *Crows'* nests are always solitary; they are similar in structure to those of the rook.

Among the nests of Foreign birds, that of the *Taylor Bird* deserves especial mention; the bird itself is a diminutive one, being little more than three inches long; it is an inhabitant of India. The nest is sometimes constructed of two leaves, one of them dead; the latter is fixed to the living one as it hangs upon the tree, by sewing both together in the manner of a pouch or purse; it is open at the top, and the cavity is filled with fine down; and, being suspended from the branch, the birds are secure from the depredations of snakes and monkeys, to which they might otherwise fall a prey.

In Dr. Latham's collection is a specimen of the taylor bird's nest, composed of a single large leaf, of a fibrous rough, texture, about six inches long independent of the stalk, five inches and a half in breadth, and ending in a point. The sides of this leaf are drawn together so as to meet within three-quarters of an inch; within is the nest, about four inches deep and two broad, opening at the top; the bottom of the leaf is drawn upwards, to assist in the support of it. The interior nest is composed of white down, with here and there a feather and a small portion of white down intermixed.

Another nest of this bird has also been described as composed of several leaves, like those of some kind of hazel sewed together; the inner nest formed of dry bents, fibres, and hairs, suspended from a tree. It is, therefore, probable that this bird, as well as some others, varies the structure of its nest as occasion and the materials may require. These singular works are performed by the bird's using his bill instead of a needle, and vegetable fibres for thread.

The *Rufous Bee-eater*, or *Merops Rufus*, constructs also a very singular nest. This bird is a native of Buenos Ayres; the nest is built generally on the naked great branch of a tree, sometimes on the windows of houses, a fence, or a projecting beam of a high house or other building; it is composed of earth, in the form of a baker's oven, and is often built in the short space of two days, both birds being engaged in its construction; it is six inches in diameter, and one thick; a division is within, beginning at the entrance, and carried circularly, so that the eggs are deposited in the inner chamber, on a bed of grass. The swallow and other birds often attempt to obtain possession of this nest, but are generally repulsed by the owners.

Many of the *Orioles'* nests are also deserving notice. The *black and yellow Oriole*, inhabiting South America, has a pendent nest, shaped like an alembic; it is affixed to the extreme branches of trees; sometimes, it is said, so many as four hundred nests are found hanging on the same tree.

The *Philippine* and *Pensile Grosbeak* make also very curious nests.

In concluding this account of the nests of birds, I may notice here the nest of the *Hirundo esculenta*, or *Esculent Swallow*, an inhabitant of China and the Islands of the Indian Ocean. The nest consists of a gelatinous substance, in shape resembling an apple cut down the middle. The nests are found in great numbers together, and are by the luxurious Asiatics made into broths, and otherwise cooked, and are esteemed one of the greatest dainties of the table; they are also occasionally used for glue.—*Jennings's Ornithologia*.

## FINE ARTS

### METROPOLITAN IMPROVEMENTS

**Abridged from the "Introduction" to Britton's  
Picture of London, 26th edition, just published**

*The year 1825* will ever be memorable in the annals of the metropolis; for more novel improvements, changes, and events occurred in that one year than during any other corresponding period. *Schemes* for the formation of new *Companies*—the vast speculations arising out of them, tending to the aggrandizement of a few persons, and to the ruin of others, with the utilities of some, and the futilities and impositions of many,—may also be said to belong to this year.

Let us, however, take a brief review of the real improvements and useful novelties that have been progressing, or have commenced in London since that singular and eventful era. Commencing at the court, or west end, we will take an imaginary tour to the east, adverting to such new buildings as are calculated to arrest the attention of the stranger in our progress. Without remarking on the general improvements of the age, we shall find enough to engross our attention in the particular objects before us. The most noted, or conspicuous of these are:—1. The New Palace, with the adjoining Park and Gardens. 2. A Terrace, Street, and Public Buildings on the site of Carlton House. 3. Belgrave Square, and the adjoining Squares and Streets. 4. The Entrance Lodges and Bridge in Hyde Park, with the improvements in the Roads and Walks of the same. 5. The Regent's Park, with its Terraces, Villas, Public Buildings, Zoological Gardens, and Colosseum. 6. The London University. 7. The British Museum. 8. The Post Office. 9. London Bridge, and its Vicinity. 10. St. Katherine's Docks. 11. The New Buildings and Alterations connected with the Houses of Parliament, the Ministerial Offices, and others, at Charing Cross. All these rank among the novelties and embellished features of London; and whilst the design and execution of so many public works manifest the increasing taste, or luxury of the age, they employ and give encouragement to numerous artists, artisans, and tradesmen.

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