



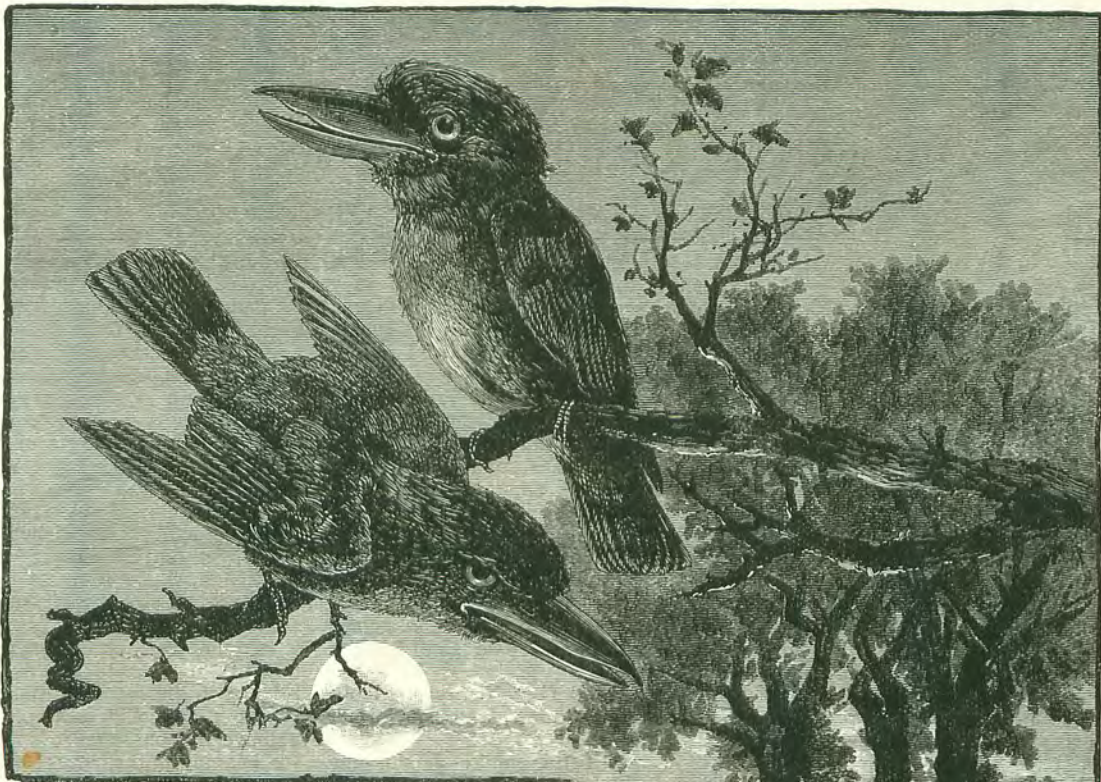
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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]

LAUGHING JACKASSES.

By RICHARD GURNEY, F.Z.S.



THE GIANT KINGFISHER, OR LAUGHING JACKASS.

To many it may not occur at first sight that this name indicates a bird, but such is the fact, and is that of a funny large creature with what looks like an enormous cap or hood, from which projects a formidable bill between two bright sparkling eyes. This droll-looking fellow is by race a kingfisher; and again our thoughts are likely to get on a wrong track, as one naturally thinks of a "fisher" as one who catches fishes for his dinner; so do many of this tribe, but it is a very large family, settled in all parts of the world, and when their locality happened to be deserts (or at least the waterless parts) of Africa or Australia, they, or rather their ancestors, had to give up their primeval

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diet and take to large insects, lizards, or any small reptiles that exist and flourish in such dry and hot climates.

So it came to pass that this particular branch of the great kingfisher family being located in Australia, became land-lubbers and lizard-eaters. Apparently their habits are very active, as one reads of them perpetually flying in a very jay-like manner from tree to tree, all the while uttering loud calls. Their cry, which is very peculiar, has given rise to their name, being supposed to be somewhat like the bray of a donkey, commencing with several loud laughs, and ending with a long-drawn-out and most absurd gurgle.

I recently heard of some great ecclesiastical function in Australia, which aroused the curiosity of one of these birds, who boldly approached one of the open church doors, and scornfully laughed through it, making such a noise that it had to be speedily shut, upon which the jackass flew to another entrance the other side of the building, and mockingly began his cry again.

But our story concerns only one pair, who lived for some time in the London Zoological Gardens, whence I purchased them from one of the annual lists of the Society's "over-stock."

By-the-bye, there are few pets whose price seems to vary so much as laughing jackasses, owing, I suppose, to Australian animals arriving in particularly large consignments, thus glutting the market at intervals.

Our pair, which we dubbed "Darby and Joan," from their being so extremely devoted to each other, proved delightfully tame. Both would sit on the hand; Darby unwillingly and with much agitation, Joan with real pleasure, and she would cock her head and erect to the utmost her great feather head-dress in the most confiding manner imaginable. Evidently these birds are of an affectionate disposition, and when not laughing, like to spend all their time smiling blandly, but if frightened their plumage is at once depressed, though they soon regain their usual state of blissfulness, perhaps with some fond hope that the visitor will produce some tempting morsel, which in the entire absence of reptiles, has to be a bit of rat or piece of bird. This food, however, seems very acceptable, the skin and bones (so needful for their health) being thrown up in pellets.

This couple would eat from the hand, but preferred to have the food thrown, which they would adroitly catch with their powerful and curiously-shaped bills and they would proceed to forcibly strike it many times against their perch, doubtless with the view of "killing" their victim. Once Joan received the neck of a fowl with the plumage still adhering, and it was most comical to see the repeated efforts to fit this little feather-bed into her capacious throat; but at last the indigestible dinner was safely tucked away, after which, as usual, the happy couple always "sit awhile," very often with a rat's tail hanging out of the beak,

which has the droll effect of a pipe being enjoyed after a siesta.

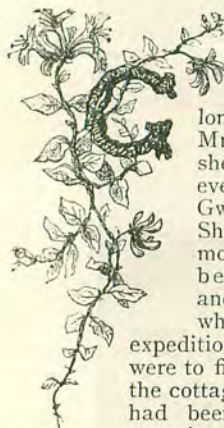
Though Darby and Joan were so tame, we never let them out, lest liberty should prove too "tempting," but instead often took them into the large aviary to gobble up worms as we dug for them, which afforded them endless delight, particularly to the knowing old lady Joan, who, after a happy reign, departed in honoured old age. Darby still continues a contented and placid life, but when he follows his wife, we should, I think, hesitate to replace these pets, though so amusing, for they must live indoors in the winter months, and they require such a good-sized cage, that it naturally becomes an objection in an ordinary-sized house. In the summer out-of-door cages answer perfectly.

It is curious that though laughing jackasses are not uncommon pets, there is, I believe, no record of their nesting in England, which one would have expected would often have been the case with such easy-going dispositions.

With us it was only the cock that uttered the curious cry, and that he confined almost entirely to the early morning. His strange performance was at all times uncertain, but something unusual, like a strange dog passing by, would generally set him off. Once it was a lady in rather unusual dress roused his sense of humour, but he only half got through his usual long laugh. We will suppose his manners got the better of his amusement.

THE WHITE ROSE OF THE MOUNTAIN.

By ANNE BEALE, Author of "The Queen o' the May," "Seven Years for Rachel," etc.



CHAPTER XXXIV.

WENLLEAN had been spending a long day alone with Mr. Lloyd, the last she would probably ever spend with him as Gwenlleean Llewellen. She had promised her mother to return early, because Mr. Grant and Lord Hastings, who had gone on an expedition up the mountains, were to finish the evening at the cottage. The afternoon had been stormy, and an occasional flash of light-

ning, a peal of distant thunder, or a few large drops of rain, seemed to presage tempestuous weather. The sea-gulls had collected together as if for mutual protection, and flew about like moving clouds, uttering their melancholy scream in concert. The bosom of the sea heaved and fell, as if agitated by passion, and Walter the clerk, who was a sailor and fisherman, said he feared there would be rough work at sea, and bad weather at home.

Gwenlleean begged him to hasten to get the large ferry boat for her, as she wished to leave before the storm came on. Mr. Lloyd asked her to remain the night; but she thought it better to refuse, knowing that she should be expected at home. Gwenlleean had been accustomed to cross the little bay in all weathers,

therefore feared nothing; and, besides, she said, the summer storms, if they had one, soon passed away. A heavy peal of thunder was heard as she spoke, and a flash of lightning darted across the window. Thick clouds were lowering in the heavens, and the atmosphere was dense and oppressively hot. The birds ceased to sing, and covered amongst the bushes, whilst the sheep that were grazing upon the mountains ran to covert.

"The boat is ready, miss," said Walter; "and I have got Morgan to come along, and to help the ferrymen to row you across quickly. We shall be able to get over before the storm comes on, though I am afraid we shall have a rough row."

Mr. Lloyd and Gwenlleean were looking out of the window, and the former said—

"You had better make haste, my love, for the sooner you get over the better;" then he added, in a whisper, "I shall see you again before the day; but you must excuse an old man like me from joining a wedding party, as well as from officiating at the ceremony. It would be too much for me."

Mr. Lloyd's involuntary sigh was interrupted by Watty, who exclaimed—

"There is a vessel out yonder, just coming up. She looks sadly tossed about. I hope she won't strike upon the sands."

"God forbid," said Mr. Lloyd.

The sands alluded to were dangerous quicksands, at a distance from the little

bay, in the open sea; upon which many vessels had been wrecked, and to which, shameful to relate, some had been known to be guided by false lights placed by wreckers, who, here and there, infested the coast. Gwenlleean looked towards the sea, and saw a ship battling with the waves in the extreme distance; but some way from the frightful quicksands, though out of the right line of sail. She shuddered as she gazed, having already witnessed some fearful scenes near the spot. She wished Mr. Lloyd good-bye, and accompanied Watty to the beach, where Morgan was waiting, with a good-sized safe boat, and two sailors to row her over.

It generally took from twenty minutes to half an hour to get across—in the present turbulent condition of the elements they could scarcely expect to achieve the passage so speedily, since the heaving of the waves tossed the boat about, and made the oars difficult to manage. The sailors had thrown up a kind of tarpauling-awning for Gwenlleean, under which she sat, fearless of rain or wind, watching the movements of the ship, that tossed about in the distance. But there was more difficulty, and perhaps danger, in her own passage than she imagined; and so the sailors found when they were about a quarter of the way across. The wind increased, and the sea became more and more tumultuous, whilst the sky was black as ink, and the storm that had been so long brewing began to come on in good earnest. Still the boat