HIRUNDO RUSTICA, *Linn.*

Swallow.

Hirundo domestica, Ray, Syn., p. 71.
——— *rustica*, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 343.

"Yea, the Stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed times; and the Turtle and the Crane and the Swallow observe the time of their coming." (Jeremiah, chap. viii. v. 7.)

With such a passage as the above before us for more than two thousand years, surely it is time to clear the mist from our eyes with regard to the history of the Swallow, or rather its going and coming, and to state its true whereabouts during the months of winter. How absurd have been the notions entertained on this subject; till very recently, I fear, the belief has prevailed that the Swallow retires beneath the waters, or hybernates in holes and caverns, until the genial spring calls it forth to life again. On this subject my friend Professor Owen has favoured me with the following remarks :—" When an animal is restricted to a particular kind of food, and that fails, it must either die, or be able to live without food, or migrate to the place where the food may abound. In the case of certain insectivorous animals indigenous to this climate, such as the hedgehog, lizard, and toad, the animals, not being endowed with the requisite powers of migration, have a constitution which enables them to live through the season of the absence of their food in a state of torpidity, during which there is little waste of power or tissue. The Swallow and other birds, in a similar predicament in regard to periodical absence of insect food, are as conspicuously endowed with the requisite powers of locomotion, enabling them to migrate to the suitable locality; whilst the energies and structure of their circulatory and respiratory organs, and the nature of their tegumentary covering, equally militate against the hypothesis of their passing our winter in a torpid state, especially in the element, water, which some lingering popular belief and repeated allegations of inaccurate observers assign as the hybernating medium of the *Hirundinidæ*. The ablest reasoners and most accurate observers amongst the physiologists and naturalists who have investigated this subject have so completely exhausted the question, that the winter submersion of the Swallow, like the great sea-serpent, ceases to trouble the naturalist, writing for naturalists; but in a work which addresses a wider sphere of readers, it may be needful to renew a protest against a still occasionally revived 'vulgar error.'"

Every person is acquainted with the Swallow. Its habits are not recluse, neither is it of a timid disposition; as the fly is to the room, so is the Swallow to the open air—always before our eyes, always astir, gliding here and there, sporting over the mead, skimming the surface of the newly ploughed fields, or flitting about in mid-air in such a manner that, if we look up, we perceive the blue vault crossed, recrossed, and encircled, as it were, by the bird in the course of its evolutions. Our admiration of its movements is enhanced by their reflection in the water when its flies over the surface; and we are cheered with its slight twittering song when it settles for repose on the house-top or the edge of the chimney in which it has made its nest.

True harbinger of spring, the Swallow arrives in the British Islands at the commencement of April—sometimes during the first week, at others in the second, according as the season is late or early. Like the prodigal child, it has come home again, and we give it a true welcome. But where has the Swallow been wandering? "In obedience to one of the great laws of nature, the Swallow has been spending the winter in a warmer climate, where its natural food was to be procured in abundance; and thither it goes again when it has performed some other duties assigned to it, and when the seasons are no longer suited to its existence. The sun is its guide; it follows in his course, dwells under his genial influence, lives upon and thereby keeps in check the numbers of insects vivified by the great luminary: in a word, it is a migrant, wandering to and fro, and, like the Lapp, the Reindeer, and the Lemming in the Arctic regions, passes from north to south, and *vice versâ*, at the proper seasons; that is, it spends its winters in Morocco, and its summers in the British Islands."

As autumn approaches, the Swallows leave us for the headlands of France, Portugal, and Spain, through which countries they pass by gradual stages to Gibraltar, where they cross the Straits to Africa; here they pass the winter, after which they again return to their former places of abode, and even to the same nests for many years. Previous to the autumnal migration, the Swallows collect in vast multitudes upon house-tops, church-roofs, telegraphic wires, and the trees beside rivers and ponds. It is said that the young birds do not accompany the older ones, but proceed by themselves, guided by that wonderful faculty of instinct which regulates all their actions, and directs them to those countries whence their parents came.

The above remarks, relative to the migratory movements of this bird, are equally applicable to those which frequent all parts of the Continent, from Calais to Sebastopol, or as far east as the bird is known, which