

**THE OWLET OF OWLSTONE
EDGE: HIS TRAVELS, HIS
EXPERIENCE, AND HIS
LUCUBRATIONS, PP. 2-235**

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The Owllet of Owlstone Edge: His Travels, His Experience, and His Lucubrations, pp. 2-235 by Francis Edward Paget

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FRANCIS EDWARD PAGET

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Paget, Francis Edward



The
Owlet of Owlstone Edge:

His Travels,
His Experience,
and
His Lucubrations.

"On Brignall cliffs, and Scargill brake
The Owlet's homilies awake." Scott.

By the Author of "S. Antholin's," &c.

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and in my first year's plumage, I do you to wit that I am an owlet of the nineteenth century; and let me tell you that the chick of a puffin of this age has more philosophy about it than a full-fledged schoolman of mediæval times; and as for fowls of my own race, the dullest and most neglected agricultural owlet of three months old is more than a match, any day, for that high functionary of State, whose personal appearance is made to resemble our own so closely, and to whom, indeed, we are under considerable obligations (seeing that through his instrumentality, the finest properties in the kingdom are wont to be delivered over to the keeping of the owls and the bats)—of course I mean my Lord Chancellor.

Having premised this, (which must be within the personal knowledge of every reader of the smallest experience and discrimination,) I beg I may hear nothing as to the antecedent improbability of the connection between owls and authorship; (as if half the books in existence have not been either written or read by owls!) no *à priori* arguments upon the difficulties which owls would experience in committing their thoughts to paper; no anatomical inferences that owing to the structure of our claws, we either could not write at all, or that if we did, the result would be so cramped a production that nobody could read it (as if those who can read Lord Brougham's

handwriting could not read mine!) no insinuations that birds of the air cannot be competent judges of the sayings and doings of men.

I do trust that for their own credit's sake, those chilly and unfortunate two-legged creatures whom nature has sent into the world without so much as a single feather upon their backs to cover their nakedness, and who, calling themselves lords of the creation, make up in arrogance for what they want in plumage, and who, with all their boastings, have actually been obliged to plunder birds of their quills, before they could write at all,—I say, I do trust that the coat-and-hat-wearing animals will have so much consideration for their own reputation as not to question either the genuineness or authenticity of the present volume. I trust that no reader will be so injudicious as to infer that I can know nothing about the matters concerning which I am about to speak, or that it would be out of my power to ascertain the facts, or overhear the conversations which I am about to record. What I know, I know. What I have seen, I write. What I write is well worthy of the consideration of my featherless friends. For I am the bird of wisdom. And therefore, were a man or a woman to say that because they could not have done what I have done, it was *not* done, is simply to expose their own presumption and incapacity. Had you, good

Master Critic, stood upon Owlstone Edge (I should like to see you there !) to make your reconnoissances of the plain below ; had you sailed through the sky from tower to steeple, from manor-house to barn ; had you made it your business, as I have made it mine for weeks together, to light upon the chimney-pots, and peep down through the rising smoke upon what was going on in the apartments below ; had you listened on the ledge of the window, or peered through the crack in the shutter ; had you watched for coming events through a hole in a hollow tree, or from the ridge of the stable roof ; had you skimmed your noiseless flight, so as to dodge the traveller's steps, 'tis ten to one but that it would have been all wasted opportunity,—labour in vain. Had you even stood at my very elbow all the time I was making my observations, you might have seen, and heard, and learned next to nothing. That is just the difference between eyes and no eyes, ears and no ears.

Rather your misfortune than your fault, I dare say, good Critic : for you are sharp enough by inclination, if all tales be true. But as one of your own proverbs says, shrewdly enough, " One can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear." You are rather to be pitied than blamed.

Only don't undervalue *us*, lest *you* should thereby get your own estimation lowered.

“ Our worth the Grecian sages knew ;
 They gave our sires the honour due,
 They weigh'd the dignity of fowls,
 And pry'd into the depth of owls :
 Athens, the seat of learned fame,
 With general voice rever'd our name :
 On merit title was conferr'd,
 And all ador'd the Athenian bird.”

And good cause had they for doing so, as Pancirollus has well shown ; and Hemmerlin, and Pfaffius, and Trinicavellius. But let that pass. Only I beseech you speak not scornfully of our powers of observation, lest you come to be classed with the moles and the bats yourself. I wonder whether any of you critical gentlemen ever looked at an owl's *ear*. I wonder whether you would even know where to look for it. I wonder what you would think of it when you had found it. I wonder what you know about owls' *eyes*. I wonder whether you imagine that your own green spectacles are an improvement on our nictitating membrane.¹

Well, well, comparisons are odious. And I don't wish to be arrogant myself while preaching against arrogance. But it was only proper

¹ By the way, I observe that one of you has lately asserted that “ barn owls,” as he calls us, do not hoot. I wish I knew whereabouts the garret was located which he occupies. I think I could undertake, before the end of a week, to make him wish himself in Iceland ; where, on the authority of Horrebrow's famous chapter, he, no doubt, believes that there are no owls.