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## Gilbert White to Thomas Pennant: Two Original Letters at Harvard

IN 1767 Gilbert White began the correspondence with Thomas Pennant that, toward the end of his life, he revised and published in *The Natural History of Selborne* (1789).<sup>1</sup> Two letters of that correspondence, the originals of Letter XXXIII and part of Letter XLII of the *Natural History*, acquired by the Harvard College Library in 1954, are here transcribed in full. Each contains material excluded from the *Natural History* and not available to White's editors and biographers.<sup>2</sup>

The first letter, dated 26 November 1770, neatly illustrates the continuous process of collecting, exchanging, and correcting information that was carried on by eighteenth-century naturalists, for whom personal correspondence served the same purpose as do notes in the learned journals for modern scholars. White's younger brother John, military chaplain at Gibraltar, where he was compiling 'Fauna Calpensis,' a never-published natural history of the peninsula, and, after 1771, correspondent of both Pennant and Linnacus, periodically sent Gilbert shipments of birds and other wild life from Gibraltar, along with conjectures and queries about them. After examining the specimens, answering some of John's questions and proposing others, White regularly shipped them on to Pennant at Downing in Flintshire, who was steadily augmenting his *British Zoology* (first edition 1766). Pennant would study them, have his artist make drawings of certain ones for the next edition of *The British Zoology*, and then return answers

<sup>1</sup> White's presentation copy to Pennant of the first edition is in the Harvard College Library, along with twelve original drawings made by Samuel Grimm for this edition, copies of scores of other editions, and several boxes of letters and papers of the White family. These were collected by Samuel Henshaw, and, through the gracious consent of the Bodleian Library, were acquired by Harvard in 1943.

<sup>2</sup> The first letter is hitherto unpublished. The second was first printed in the spring of 1956, in a pamphlet issued (in an edition of seventy-five copies) by the Harvard class in bibliography, directed by W. A. Jackson and W. H. Bond, whose members included Gaynor Bradish, Alfred David, Joan Larsen, Stanley Miller, Jack Stillinger, and David Weber. The originals of most of the letters to Pennant in the *Natural History* are in the British Museum.

and further queries, which, through White, were relayed back to John at Gibraltar. Meanwhile new observations rapidly circulated, and other correspondents, like White's 'Sussex friend' of the letter, contributed and received information.

Of this letter — White's interim report to Pennant on a shipment of birds that he received in the last week of August 1770 and subsequently forwarded to Pennant on January 12 of the following year<sup>3</sup> — parts of the third and fourth paragraphs and all of the fifth (including the friend's remarks) and sixth paragraphs were incorporated, after some revision, into the *Natural History* as Letter XXXIII. The letter is written on all four pages of a double folio measuring 8 by 12 ¼ inches, and, having been sent in a franked cover provided by Pennant, is unaddressed. Except for the restoration of text lost through damage to the manuscript (as indicated by pointed brackets < >) the text that follows is unemended. Quotation marks beginning and ending lines within quoted matter and dots under superscript letters have been omitted. The square brackets are White's.

Selborne: Nov<sup>r</sup> 26: 1770.

Dear Sir,

Supposing from your last letter that you are returned from Lancashire, & are settled at Downing for the winter; I employ your frank to inform you that I have got an other cargo of birds from Gibraltar, which I have studyed over, & am ready to communicate such as are worthy of your notice & examination.

The birds are as follow:  
 Falco Nisus from Barbary:  
 Lanius collurio:  
 Strix flammea:  
 - - - passerina:  
 Upupa epops:  
 Tetrao rufus from Barb:  
 - - - a variety from Spain:  
 Merops apiaster:  
 Alauda calandra:  
 - - - - cristata:

Motacilla stapa:zina:  
 Iunco Raij:  
 Muscicapa atricapilla:  
 Parus, erroneously so called:  
 you say it is a nondescript:<sup>4</sup>  
 Emberiza hortulana:  
 Motacilla ficedula:  
 The female, I believe, of Edwards's  
 grey redstart:  
 Vulturis percnopteri caput  
 - - & pedes.

<sup>3</sup> The shipment's arrival is recorded in an unpublished letter from Gilbert White to John, 6 November 1770 (item 114 in the Henshaw collection of White family letters and papers). The second date is established by a letter that he wrote to Pennant when he sent him the specimens; see Rashleigh Holt-White, *The Life and Letters of Gilbert White of Selborne* (London, 1901), I, 192. (In subsequent documentation Holt-White's biography is cited as 'H-W'.)

<sup>4</sup> 'Nondescript': a species not hitherto described.

Hirundo melba:  
 - - - - - apus: - -  
 for comparing.

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White throat;  
 Stoparola Raij.

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You will please to let me know whether the variety in the necks of the red partridges are casual, sexical,<sup>6</sup> or the effects of different ages(;) my Brother is of opinion that they are two sorts, invariably so. The body of the grey-necked one was too far gone to be preserved. The Hirundo melba is a swift to all intents & purposes, white belly & size excepted: my Bro<sup>r</sup> very judiciously sent an Hirundo apus, that they might be compared. Is not my Bro<sup>r</sup>'s parus very like a black cap? The claws of the vulture sure are very particular; the middle toe has three joints, & is long: but the two outer are very short indeed, & have but one joint apiece.

Tho' the two birds between the lines are far from curiosities, being very common in England; yet I can't say but that I was much ple(as)ed to see them among the collection; because they are some of those short-winged summer birds of passage<sup>6</sup> concerning whose departure we have made so much enquiry. Now if these birds are found in Andalusia to migrate to & from Barbary; it may easily be supposed that those that appear with us may migrate back to the continent, & spend their winters in some of the warmer parts of Europe. This is certain, that many softbilled birds<sup>7</sup> seen at Gibraltar, appear there only in spring & autumn: advancing in pairs towards the northward in the spring for the sake of breeding during the summer months; & retiring in broods & parties towards the south at the decline of the Year. So that the rock of Gibraltar is the great rendezvous, or diversorium from whence they take their departure each way towards Europe or Africa.

Scopoli seems to me to have found the Hirundo melba in Tirol without knowing it. For what is his Hirundo Alpena, but the afore-mentioned bird in other words? Says he "Omnia prioris: [scil: Hirundinis apodis] sed pectus album": & again "paulo major priore." I can't suppose this a new species. It is true also of the melba, that "nidificat in excelsis Alpium rupibus." Notwithstanding he is (in my opinion) an excellent Naturalist; & describes often in a masterly manner. Some of his new generic strokes are great. Pray indulge me with y<sup>r</sup> sentiments concerning this new Hirundo.

My Sussex friend, a man of observation, but no naturalist, to whom I applied on account of the cedcnemus sends me the foll(o)wing remarks:

"In looking over my Journal for the month of April, I find the Curlews are first mentioned on the 17: & 18: which seems to me rather late. They live with us all the spring & summer: & at the beginning of autumn pre-

<sup>6</sup> 'Sexical' does not appear in the *NED*.

<sup>6</sup> 'Birds of passage': migratory birds. In modern usage the term is often restricted to passage migrants, birds that traverse a place without continuing in it.

<sup>7</sup> The word 'birds' is inserted above the line.



pare to take leave. They seem to me a bird of passage(,) that may travel into some dry hilly country south of us, probably Spain, because of the abundance of sheep-walks in that kingdom. I hazard this conjecture, as I have never met with any one that has seen them in England in the winter. I believe they never drink, or are fond of going near the water; but feed on worms that are common on sheep-walks. They breed on fallows, & downs abounding with grey flints, which much resemble their young in colour. They make no nest, but lay their eggs on the bare ground, producing in common but two at a time. I believe their young run soon after they are hatched; & that the old ones do not feed the(m), but o(n)ly lead them about at the time of feeding, which for the most part is in the night." Thus far my friend.

In the manners of this bird you see there is some thing very analagous to those of the bustard; w(h)om it also some what resembles in habit & make, & in (the) structure of it's feet. When the ædienemus flies it stre(t)ches it's legs straight out behind like an heron. For a long time I have desired my Bro<sup>r</sup> to look out for these (birds) in Andalusia: & now he writes me word that for the first time he saw one dead in the market at Gibraltar on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of Septem<sup>r</sup>

Hopi(n)g (to hear) from you soon, with some more particulars of y<sup>r</sup> N: American acquisitions;

I remain with great esteem,  
Y<sup>r</sup> obliged, &  
humble Servant.  
Gil: White.

P: S:

In damp weather my birds want frequent airings by the fire; because the salt with which they were cured relaxes, & makes them wet.

You will be so kind as to let me know what my fishes are: they need not be returned: nor the birds 'til you have an other parcel.

I returned y<sup>r</sup> drawings by the first post; & expressed my obligations for the favour.

The specimens of the Gibraltar cargo are now lost. Pennant no doubt returned them to Selborne, where they were kept until John arrived in England in 1772. 'All y<sup>r</sup> birds, &c: are preserved with care,' White wrote to John at Gibraltar, 'so that when ever you return you may (as will be very needful) re-examine them with more care & exactness.'<sup>8</sup> It appears that John's specimens were ultimately deposited

<sup>8</sup> Undated fragment of a letter in the Henshaw collection, item 107.

in the London museum of his friend Sir Ashton Lever,<sup>9</sup> whose collection was scattered by auction in 1806. Identifications based on the nomenclature and the occasional scant descriptions given by White can not be completely reliable. The following list, corresponding to White's of the first paragraph, attempts to translate his terms into the scientific and British names used today. Brief data regarding status in the region of Gibraltar have been included.<sup>10</sup>

Falco Nisus from Barbary

*Accipiter nisus* (Linnaeus)

Sparrow-Hawk

Passage migrant, resident both sides of Strait of Gibraltar

Lanius collurio

*Lanius collurio* Linnaeus

Red-backed Shrike

Passage migrant

Strix flammea

*Tyto alba* (Scopoli)

Barn Owl

Resident both sides of Strait

Strix passerina

*Glaucidium passerinum* (Linnaeus)

Pygmy Owl

Not found in western Europe or Africa; probably an error for *Athene noctua* (Scopoli), Little Owl, which is resident both sides of Strait

Upupa epops

*Upupa epops* Linnaeus

Hoopoe

Passage migrant, summer resident both sides of Strait

Tetrao rufus from Barbary

*Alectoris barbara* (Bonaterre)

Barbary Partridge

Resident both sides of Strait but not north of Gibraltar; has sides of face and throat gray, so presumably White's 'grey-necked' bird

Tetrao a variety from Spain

*Alectoris rufa* (Linnaeus)

Red-legged Partridge

Resident north of Gibraltar; has sides of face and throat white; for John White's 'opinion' that this and the preceding species 'are two sorts, invariably so' see H-W, I, 199

Merops apiaster

*Merops apiaster* Linnaeus

Bee-eater

Passage migrant, summer resident both sides of Strait

<sup>9</sup> See the note by Alfred Newton in Thomas Bell's edition of the *Natural History* (London, 1877), II, 8.

<sup>10</sup> My sources are primarily the British Ornithologists' Union's *Check-List of the Birds of Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 1952); James L. Peters' *Check-List of Birds of the World*, Vols. I-VII (Cambridge, Mass., 1931-51); and L. Howard Irby's *The Ornithology of the Straits of Gibraltar*, 2nd ed. (London, 1895). I am indebted to G. W. Cottrell, Jr, for help in determining Gibraltar status.

- Alauda calandra*  
*Melanocorypha calandra* (Linnaeus) Calandra Lark  
 Resident both sides of Strait
- Alauda cristata*  
*Galerida cristata* (Linnaeus) Crested Lark  
 Resident both sides of Strait
- Hirundo melba*  
*Apus melba* (Linnaeus) Alpine Swift  
 Passage migrant, summer resident Gibraltar
- Hirundo apus*  
*Apus apus* (Linnaeus) Swift  
 Passage migrant, summer resident both sides of Strait
- Motacilla stapania*  
*Oenanthe hispanica* (Linnaeus) Black-cared Wheatear  
 Passage migrant, summer resident Gibraltar
- Iunco Raij*  
*Acrocephalus arundinaceus* (Linnaeus) Great Reed-Warbler  
 Passage migrant, summer resident both sides of Strait
- Muscicapa atricapilla*  
*Muscicapa hypoleuca* (Pallas) Pied Flycatcher  
 Passage migrant; see under '*Motacilla ficedula*' below
- Parus*  
 ?*Sylvia atricapilla* (Linnaeus) Blackcap  
 Passage migrant, summer resident both sides of Strait; about this specimen White wrote to his brother on 25 January 1771: 'The bird you call a *Parus* (if it be not the common black-cap) is a nondescript; if it should prove new, call it *Motacilla atricapilloides*: Mr. Pennant thinks it a new bird' (H-W, I, 195)
- Emberiza hortulana*  
*Emberiza hortulana* Linnaeus Ortolan Bunting  
 Passage migrant, summer resident Tangier and near Gibraltar
- Motacilla ficedula*  
 ?*Muscicapa hypoleuca* (Pallas) Pied Flycatcher  
 See above under '*Muscicapa atricapilla*'; Linnaeus' two 'species,' *Muscicapa atricapilla* and *Motacilla ficedula* (*Systema naturae*, 12th ed., Stockholm, I, 1766, 326 and 330), are both included in the synonymy of the present *Muscicapa hypoleuca* (*Catalogue of the Birds in the British Museum*, London, IV, 1879, 157) — however, it is possible that White's '*Motacilla ficedula*' was a quite different bird, as, for example, the Garden-Warbler or Pettichaps, *Sylvia borin* (Boddaert), which was in White's day known as '*ficedula*,' '*beccafigo*,'

'fig eater' (Pennant, *The British Zoology*, London, 1766, p. 99), a passage migrant at the Strait

Female of Edwards's grey redstart

*Phoenicurus ochruros* (Gmelin)

Black Redstart

Passage migrant, winter resident both sides of Strait, summer resident north of San Roque above Gibraltar

Vultur percnopterus

*Neophron percnopterus* (Linnaeus)

Egyptian Vulture

Passage migrant, summer resident both sides of Strait; the sending of the head and feet only of the present specimen was explained by White to Pennant in a letter of 12 January 1771: 'The reason that my Brother sent only the head and the feet of the vulture was because he never had any other part. The bird was found dead and floating in the sea . . . some fishermen picked it up, and flayed it, eat the carcase, and threw away the skin, and gave him the head and feet' (H-W, I, 192)

White throat

*Sylvia communis* Latham

Whitethroat

Passage migrant, summer resident Gibraltar

Stoparola Raij

*Muscicapa striata* (Pallas)

Spotted Flycatcher

Passage migrant, summer resident both sides of Strait

The information of the third paragraph concerning the migration of 'short-winged summer birds' was important to White, for he had, as he told John on 6 November 1770, long wanted to know the 'winter retreat' of these birds.<sup>21</sup> To this paragraph in Letter XXXIII of the *Natural History* he added a revised version of a sentence from his letter to Pennant of 12 January 1771: 'It is no small discovery, I think, to find that our small short-winged summer birds of passage are to be seen spring and autumn on the very skirts of Europe: it is a very strong presumptive proof of their migrations' (H-W, I, 192). Arguing in the second Letter IX of the *Natural History* against Daines Barrington's denial of migration, he used the information to show that 'a bird may travel from *England* to the equator without launching out and exposing itself to boundless seas . . . by crossing the water at *Dover*, and again at *Gibraltar*.' It is interesting that when John White first took up the study of natural history Gilbert believed that he would find few birds on Gibraltar. He wrote to Pennant about the matter on 28 November 1768: 'As to birds I fear that the concourse and din of a garrison will

<sup>21</sup> Item 114 in the Henshaw collection.



not prove very inviting to such timid animals' (H-W, I, 165). Two years and several cargoes of birds later, however, he had come to think of Gibraltar as 'the great rendezvous, or diversorium from whence they take their departure each way.'

White was correct both in calling the *Hirundo melba* a Swift and in identifying it with the 'Hirundo Alpena' described by Giovanni Antonio Scopoli in *Annus I historico-naturalis* (1769), which White had received two months earlier (Letter XXXI to Pennant). Forwarding the birds to Pennant on 12 January 1771, he wrote: 'If you should think it proper to have the *Hirundo melba* taken, would it not be right to have it drawn on its back; because the colour of the belly is, size excepted, the chief thing that distinguishes it from the *Hir. apus*. It is a swift to all intents and purposes' (H-W, I, 193). The two sentences praising Scopoli were omitted from Letter XXXIII of the *Natural History*, but White recorded admiration for him elsewhere, in Letter XXXII to Pennant and Letter VII to Barrington.

White's 'Sussex friend' was John Woods of Chilgrove, near Chichester, brother of Henry Woods, who married White's sister Rebecca in 1761. White had visited him as recently as October 18-19.<sup>12</sup> In Letters XX and XXI of the *Natural History* he tells of urging Woods to report on the Stone-Curlew (the modern *Burhinus oedienemus* [Linnaeus]) and to buy a copy of Daines Barrington's *Naturalist's Journal* for recording his observations. With Woods's remarks and those of White in the succeeding paragraph Pennant enriched his description of the Stone-Curlew in the next edition of the *British Zoology*: 'The young run soon after they are hatched. These birds feed in the night on worms and caterpillars. . . . They inhabit fallow lands and downs; affect dry places, never being seen near any waters. When they fly, they extend their legs strait out behind. . . . In habit, make, and manners, these birds approach near to the *Bustard*. . . . They are migratory: appear in *England* about the middle of *April*, and retire in autumn.'<sup>13</sup> John White's report from Gibraltar answered a request of

<sup>12</sup> See E. M. Nicholson's edition of the *Natural History* (London, 1929), pp. 32, 146.

<sup>13</sup> 'Fourth' edition (quarto), I (London, 1776), 245. Published by White's brother Benjamin, it was actually the third edition; White calls it the second in a letter to John of 2 November 1773, which shows that he was aware of his contributions to Pennant's work: 'I have received a most violent complimenting letter from Mr. Pennant lately. He is going to publish a second edition of "British Zoology," and

26 May 1770: 'Have you no stone-curlews . . . ? they certainly leave us for some of the dead months of winter' (H-W, I, 180). White's special interest in the bird is evidenced by frequent notice or discussion in the *Natural History*.<sup>14</sup>

Pennant's 'N: American acquisitions' mentioned at the end of the letter probably were specimens to be described in the natural history of 'Virginia' that he planned about this time. In the Museum of Comparative Zoology Library at Harvard there is a collection by him headed 'Virginian Zoology. Class II. Birds,' which consists of nineteen pages or slips of manuscript and 146 engraved plates from various sources. An accompanying memorandum on the cost of 'printing Faun. Virginica' — 14s. per sheet for 500 copies, 15s. for 600, 16s. for 700; paper at 11s. per ream — manifests early plans for publication. War with the American colonies delayed completion of the work, which ultimately reached the public as *Arctic Zoology* (1784-85), 'begun a great number of years past' (says Pennant in the 'Advertisement') and 'designed as a sketch of the Zoology of North America,' but enlarged in scope to include parts of Europe and Asia when, after 'the fatal and humiliating hour arrived, which deprived Britain of power, strength, and glory,' Pennant lost the opportunity (and, he felt, the right) of compiling a full work on North America alone.

The fishes of the postscript had been sent from Gibraltar in an earlier cargo and transmitted to Pennant. On 30 March 1771 White thanked Pennant for identifying them (H-W, I, 200). The drawings mentioned in the final sentence were ones made by Pennant's artist from another shipment of birds received from John; White had inspected and then returned them late in October (H-W, I, 186). These and other drawings — twenty-nine altogether were taken from the Gibraltar specimens — were intended to illustrate both the *British Zoology* and John's 'Fauna Calpensis.'<sup>15</sup>

Of the second, shorter letter, one of the last in the White-Pennant

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is to do wonders with the information extracted from my letters' (H-W, I, 233). White corrected the proofs of this edition (H-W, I, 309).

<sup>14</sup> See Letters XV, XVI, XX, XXI, XXV, and XXVI to Pennant, and Letter LIX to Barrington.

<sup>15</sup> H-W, I, 195, 255, and the following from an unpublished letter to John of 6 April 1771 (item 116 in the Henshaw collection): 'M<sup>r</sup> Pennant's artist (which he keeps in his house) has drawn all y<sup>r</sup> most curious fishes, & birds: & the Master proposes to give permission that such of them, as may be deemed illustrative of y<sup>r</sup> work may be engraved for that purpose.'

correspondence, the first three paragraphs were revised for inclusion in the *Natural History* as part of Letter XLII, dated 9 March 1775, six days later than its original date. It is written on two pages of a double folio measuring  $7\frac{3}{4}$  by  $12\frac{3}{4}$  inches, and bears lengthwise on a third page the simple address, 'To Thomas Pennant Esq.' Above the address its recipient has written 'answered' and, as if trying to decide how to spell the word, 'spoon bill' and '*spoonbill*.' In the present transcription square brackets indicate a deletion by White, and pointed brackets indicate a restoration of text lost through damage.

Selborne: March 3<sup>rd</sup> 1775.

Dear Sir,

As I have seen no modern map of Scotland, I cannot pretend to say how accurate or particular any such may be: but this I know, that the best old maps of that kingdom are very defective, & continually left me at a loss while I was reading your tour.

The great obvious defect that I have remarked in all maps of Scotland, that have fallen in my way, is a want of a *coloured line*, or *stroke*, that shall exactly define the just limits of the district called the Highlands. Moreover all the great avenues to that mountainous & romantic country want to be well distinguished. The military roads formed by General Wade are so great, & Roman-like an undertaking, that they well merit your attention. My old Map, Moll's map, takes notice of Fort William; but could not mention the other<sup>16</sup> that have been erected long since. Therefore an exact representation of the chain of forts, that bit in the mouth of stiff-necked Caledonia, should be exactly delineated. The celebrated zigzag up the Coryarich must not be passed over. Moll takes notice of Hamilton, Drumlanrig, & some few capital houses: but you no doubt will express every seat & castle remarkable for any great event, or celebrated for its pictures, &c: &c. Lord Breadalbane's seat, & beautiful *policy* made too strong an impression on your imagination to be omitted in your new plan.

It does not appear that you saw the seat of the Earl of Eglintoun near Glasgow in either of your tours. The pine-plantations, & other improvements on that nobleman's estate are very grand & extensive indeed.

You will pardon the following objection. In some part of your tour you express surprize to find that the *Portugal* laurel should thrive in so northerly a climate as Scotland. Now you were led into this mistake by the southerly epithet given to that tree: for I [know] have found by long experience that the laurel in question is one of the hardiest of evergreens.

Vide Miller's Gardener's Dictionary.

Not long since a flock of spoon-bills, *platalea leucorodia*, was seen near Yarmouth in Norfolk; one of which was shot, & sent to London, where

<sup>16</sup> Supply 'forts.'



my Bro<sup>r</sup> Thomas White saw it. These birds are so very rare in England, that they are never mentioned in y<sup>r</sup> Brit: zoöl: not even among the stragglers of the appendix. Willughby says that they abound in Holland, & build in tall trees: these birds therefore must have crossed the German ocean,<sup>17</sup> no narrow frith: & retreated perhaps before that severe & rigorous weather which set-in so early in Novem<sup>r</sup> in almost every northerly region of Europe.

Pray write soon.

I am, with due respect,  
Your most humble servant,  
Gil: White

The comment on the current lack of geographical knowledge of Scotland in the first two paragraphs perhaps serves to document Samuel Johnson's mention of this lack and his tentative definition of 'the verge of the Highlands' in *Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland* (1775),<sup>18</sup> published seven weeks before the letter was written. Basing his recommendations on the deficiencies of one of Herman Moll's smaller maps of Scotland, probably the one included in *A New Survey of the Globe* (ca. 1729) and *Atlas Minor* (ca. 1732), White answers Pennant's request for suggestions concerning a map to be drawn for a subsequent edition of his *Tour in Scotland*, MDCCLXIX (1771).<sup>19</sup> As published in 1777, Pennant's map met only two of White's requirements, containing 'an exact representation of the chain of forts' (Fort William, Fort Augustus, and Fort George) and marking the location of Lord Breadalbane's estate (Taymouth). The 'coloured line, or stroke,' the military roads constructed by Field Marshal George Wade in the late 1720's, and the 'celebrated zigzag up' Corryarrick Hill near Fort Augustus were omitted. White's mention of Lord Breadalbane's 'policy' at the end of the second paragraph derives from a note in Pennant's *Tour*: 'This word here signifies improvements, or demesne: when used by a merchant, or tradesman, signifies their warehouses, shops, and the like.'<sup>20</sup> Dr Johnson also paused to explain the word in his *Journey*.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>17</sup> The North Sea.

<sup>18</sup> Ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford, 1924), pp. 12, 22.

<sup>19</sup> White had mentioned the map in a letter to John of 5 January 1775 (H-W, I, 275). It was published by Benjamin White on 1 May 1777; a copy is inserted in Harvard's copy of the fourth edition of the *Tour* (London, 1776).

<sup>20</sup> *A Tour in Scotland*, MDCCLXIX, 2nd ed. (London, 1772), p. 80; the note was repeated in *A Tour in Scotland*, MDCCLXXII, Part II (London, 1776), p. 34.

<sup>21</sup> Chapman's edition, p. 9. Overlooking Pennant, the NED cites White's and Johnson's uses as the first examples of 'policy' in this meaning.



The fourth paragraph also concerns a passage in Pennant's *Tour* of 1769: 'Trees of all kinds grow here extremely well; and even so southern a shrub as *Portugal* laurel flourishes greatly.'<sup>22</sup> Disregarding White's objection, Pennant allowed the sentence to stand unchanged in the next edition of the *Tour*. To Letter LXIII<sup>23</sup> of the *Natural History*, in which White tells Daines Barrington that during the frost of December 1784 'even my *Portugal* laurels . . . were scorched up,' a note is appended that elucidates White's belief in the tree's hardiness: 'Mr. [Philip] Miller, in his Gardener's Dictionary, says positively that the *Portugal* laurels remained untouched in the remarkable frost of 1739-40. So that either that accurate observer was much mistaken, or else the frost of *December* 1784 was much more severe and destructive than that in the year above-mentioned.'

The last paragraph, which closely resembles a passage in a letter to John of March 9-11 (H-W, I, 281), did effect a change in Pennant's works. The 'fourth' edition of the *British Zoology*, published in the following year, contained for the first time 'among the stragglers of the appendix' (II, 538 f.) a two-page discourse on the Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia* Linnæus), beginning: 'A flock of these birds migrated into the marshes near *Yarmouth*, in *Norfolk*, in *April*, 1774. These birds inhabit the continent of *Europe*. In Mr. *Ray*'s time, they bred annually in a wood at *Sevenhuys*, not remote from *Leyden*:<sup>24</sup> but the wood is now destroyed; and these birds . . . are at present become very rare.' The Spoonbill nevertheless still breeds in some numbers in Holland, and is a regular visitor to Norfolk and a nearly regular or frequent visitor to Suffolk, Hampshire, Devonshire, and Kent (most often from April to November).<sup>25</sup>

Editing the two letters for publication in the *Natural History*, White made about fifty textual changes (other than alterations in spelling, punctuation, and italicization) in the passages that he retained. A few of these were necessitated by the exclusion of introductory material, so that, for example, 'among the collection' became 'among the collection

<sup>22</sup> Second edition, p. 78.

<sup>23</sup> Misnumbered LXII in the original edition; the two letters immediately preceding it were both headed 'Letter LXI.'

<sup>24</sup> The reference, as in the final paragraph of White's letter, is to John Ray's edition of Francis Willughby's *Ornithologia* (London, 1676), pp. 212 f., or to his English translation of it (London, 1678), p. 289.

<sup>25</sup> H. F. Witherby and others, *The Handbook of British Birds*, III (London, 1939), 120.

of birds from *Gibraltar*' at the beginning of Letter XXXIII. Others were factual corrections (like '*stone-curlews*' for 'Curlews'), clarifications (like '*hirundo melba*, the great *Gibraltar* swift' for '*Hirundo melba*,' and 'my Naturalist's Journal' for 'my Journal'), and the results of striving for more accurate description ('seeming to advance' for 'advancing,' and the omission of the remark that Stone-Curlews never drink). Many of the changes in diction are accountable in terms of style or sense (like 'place of observation' for the inkhorn 'diversorium,' and 'country' for 'kingdom' applied to Spain). A few are unexplainable, like the substitution of 'account' for 'remarks' that resulted in an unfortunate repetition: 'My *Sussex* friend . . . to whom I applied on account of the *stone-curlews*, *oediconemus*, sends me the following account.' When not made as corrections or clarifications, expansions were generally dictated by the availability of new information (as in the description of the Stone-Curlews), while omissions served to eliminate redundancies.

The most significant alterations were motivated by two desiderations, restraint and impersonalization. An example of the first is the toning down of this sentence: 'Therefore an exact representation of the chain of forts, that bit in the mouth of stiff-necked Caledonia, should be exactly delineated,' which became in the printed version simply, 'therefore a good representation of the chain of forts should not be omitted.' The removal of personality is effected by brief substitutions (like 'birds that come to *Gibraltar*' for 'birds seen at *Gibraltar*,' and 'There is reason to think' for 'I believe') and by major changes. Though Letter XLII is still nominally addressed to Pennant, all references to him and to his books and travels were omitted in revision, so that a passage like the following, 'you no doubt will express every seat & castle remarkable for any great event, or celebrated for it's pictures, &c: &c. Lord Breadalbane's seat, & beautiful *policy* made too strong an impression on your imagination to be omitted in your new plan,' is considerably modified as printed: 'a new survey, no doubt, should represent every seat and castle remarkable for any great event, or celebrated for it's paintings, &c. Lord *Breadalbane*'s seat and beautiful *policy* are too curious and extraordinary to be omitted.' The alterations of 'my Bro' to 'my relation' and 'the market at *Gibraltar*' simply to 'the market' (now located somewhere in Andalusia!) in the penultimate sentence of the earlier letter further exemplify White's desire to remove the specific details of the original.

In what appears to be the latest manuscript version of the *Natural History* (written out by an amanuensis and corrected by White), now owned by Mr Arthur A. Houghton, Jr, of New York,<sup>26</sup> most of these changes are embodied without signs of revision. Correcting the passages based on the Harvard letters, White introduced only eight significant additional changes to arrive at his final manuscript text, from which the work was set in type. (The negligible variants from corrected manuscript to printed text are easily attributed to the printer.) It is not known how many intermediate versions separate the original letters from Mr Houghton's manuscript. However, because one of these eight final changes was the insertion of 'forts' into the incomplete phrase 'other that have been erected'<sup>27</sup> it may be suggested that the manuscript is removed by not more than one or two stages of re-writing from the earliest versions — though White's progress in shaping the *Natural History* can be merely guessed at until all available materials, letters, journals, manuscripts, printed text, are studied at length. It may be of interest that Letter XXXIII was originally numbered '22' and then '23,' and Letter XLII originally '28' and '32.'

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<sup>26</sup> I am indebted to Mr Houghton and to his assistant, Mrs Mary Jane Beall, for information and photostats.

<sup>27</sup> See footnote 16 above. Though the incompleteness of the phrase is questionable, the latest example cited by the *NED* of 'other' as a plural form meaning 'the remaining ones, the rest' (White's Letter XIX to Pennant, 17 August 1768: 'it is a size larger than the two other') is not a clear instance of the plural substantive, while the second latest example, the last instance given of 'other' as the subject of a plural verb, antedates White's letters by more than a century.

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