

THE
COMPLEAT
ANGLER



IZAAK WALTON

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The Compleat Angler

by

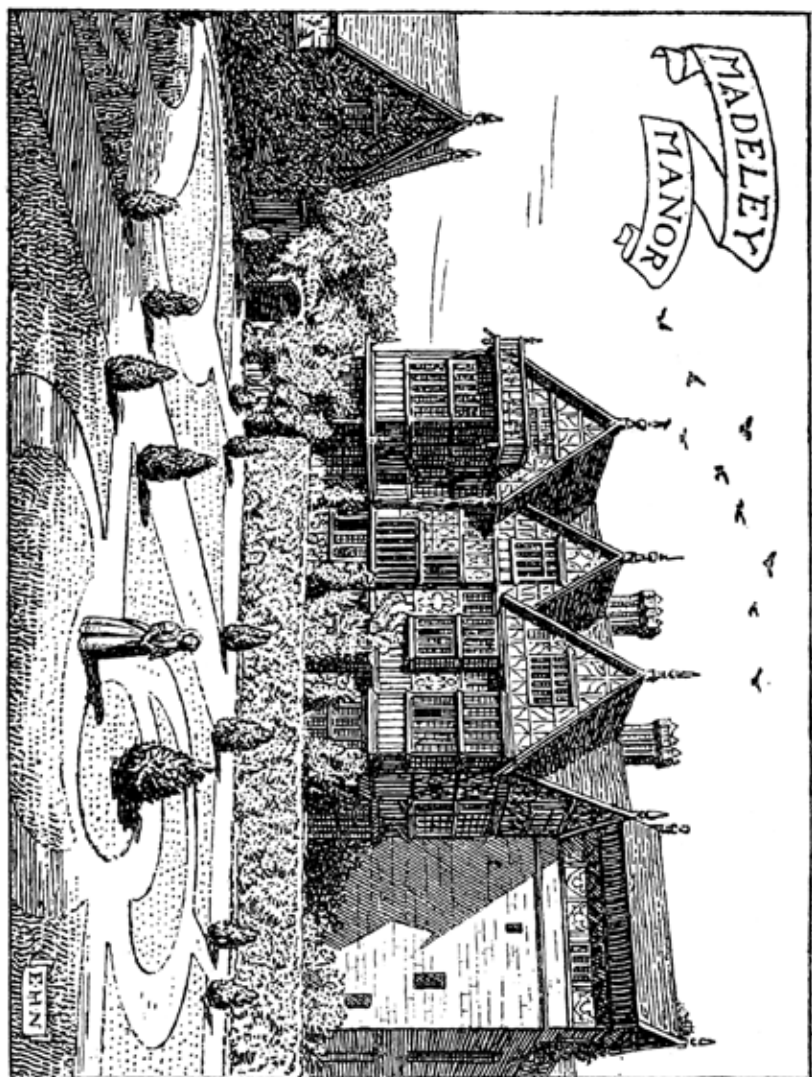
IZAACK WALTON





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(TO ADD)

MADELEY
MANOR





TO THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL

JOHN OFFLEY

OF MADELEY MANOR, IN THE
COUNTY OF STAFFORD
ESQUIRE, MY MOST HONOURED FRIEND



IR, —I have made so ill use of your former favours, as by them to be encouraged to entreat, that they may be enlarged to the patronage and protection of this Book: and I have put on a modest confidence, that I shall not be denied, because it is a discourse of Fish and Fishing, which you know so well, and both love and practice so much.

You are assured, though there be ignorant men of another belief, that Angling is an Art: and you know that Art better than others; and that this is truth is demonstrated by the fruits of that pleasant labour which you enjoy, when you purpose to give rest to your mind, and divest yourself

of your more serious business, and, which is often, dedicate a day or two to this recreation.

At which time, if common Anglers should attend you, and be eyewitnesses of the success, not of your fortune, but your skill, it would doubtless beget in them an emulation to be like you, and that emulation might beget an industrious diligence to be so; but I know it is not attainable by common capacities: and there be now many men of great wisdom, learning, and experience, which love and practice this Art, that know I speak the truth.

Sir, this pleasant curiosity of Fish and Fishing, of which you are so great a master, has been thought worthy the pens and practices of divers in other nations, that have been reputed men of great learning and wisdom. And amongst those of this nation, I remember Sir Henry Wotton, a dear lover of this Art, has told me, that his intentions were to



write a Discourse of the Art, and in praise of Angling; and doubtless he had done so, if death had not prevented him; the remembrance of which had often made me sorry, for if he had lived to do it, then the unlearned Angler had seen some better treatise of this Art, a treatise that might have proved worthy his perusal, which, though some have undertaken, I could never yet see in English.

But mine may be thought as weak, and as unworthy of common view; and I do here freely confess, that I should rather excuse myself, than censure others, my own discourse being liable to so many exceptions; against which you, Sir, might make this one, that it can contribute nothing to YOUR knowledge. And lest a longer epistle may diminish your pleasure, I shall make this no longer than to add this following truth, that I am really,

SIR,
Your most affectionate Friend,
And most humble Servant,
Iz. Wa.





TO ALL READERS OF THIS DISCOURSE, BUT
ESPECIALLY TO THE HONEST ANGLER



THINK FIT to tell thee these following truths; that I did neither undertake, nor write, nor publish, and much less own, this Discourse to please myself: and, having been too easily drawn to do all to please others, as I propose not the gaining of credit by this undertaking, so I would not willingly lose any part of that to which I had a just title before I began it; and do therefore desire and hope, if I deserve not commendations, yet I may obtain pardon.

And though this Discourse may be liable to some exceptions, yet I cannot doubt but that most Readers may receive so much pleasure or profit by it, as may make it worthy the time of their perusal, if they be not too grave or too busy men. And this is all the confidence that I can put on, concerning the merit of what is here offered to their consideration and censure; and if the last prove too severe, as I have a liberty, so I am resolved to use it, and neglect all sour censures.

And I wish the Reader also to take notice, that in writing of it I have made myself a recreation of a recreation; and that it might prove so to him, and not read dull and tediously, I have in several places mixed, not any scurrility, but some innocent, harmless mirth, of which, if thou be a severe,

sour-complexioned man, then I here disallow thee to be a competent judge; for divines say, there are offences given, and offences not given but taken.

And I am the willingest to justify the pleasant part of it, because though it is known I can be serious at seasonable times, yet the whole Discourse is, or rather was, a picture of my own disposition, especially in such days and times as I have laid aside business, and gone a-fishing with honest Nat. and R. Roe; but they are gone, and with them most of my pleasant hours, even as a shadow that passeth away and returns not.

And next let me add this, that he that likes not the book, should like the excellent picture of the Trout, and some of the other fish, which I may take a liberty to commend, because they concern not myself.

Next, let me tell the Reader, that in that which is the more useful part of this Discourse, that is to say, the observations of the nature and breeding, and seasons, and catching of fish, I am not so simple as not to know, that a captious reader may find exceptions against something said of some of these; and therefore I must entreat him to consider, that experience teaches us to know that several countries alter the time, and I think, almost the manner, of fishes' breeding, but doubtless of their being in season; as may appear by three rivers in Monmouthshire, namely, Severn, Wye, and Usk, where Camden observes, that in the river Wye, Salmon are in season from September to April; and we are certain, that in Thames and Trent, and in most other rivers, they be in season the six hotter months.

*Now for the Art of catching fish, that is to say, How to make a man that was none to be an Angler by a book, he that undertakes it shall undertake a harder task than Mr. Hales, a most valiant and excellent fencer, who in a printed book called *A Private School of Defence* undertook to teach that art or science, and was laughed at for his labour. Not but that many useful things might be learned by that book, but he was laughed at because that art was not to be taught by words, but practice: and so must Angling. And note also, that in this Discourse I do not undertake to say all that is known, or may be said of it, but I undertake to acquaint the Reader with many things that are not usually known to every Angler; and I shall leave gleanings and observations enough to be made out of the experience of all that love and practice this recreation, to which I shall encourage them. For Angling may be*

said to be so like the Mathematicks, that it can never be fully learnt; at least not so fully, but that there will still be more new experiments left for the trial of other men that succeed us.

But I think all that love this game may here learn something that may be worth their money, if they be not poor and needy men: and in case they be, I then wish them to forbear to buy it; for I write not to get money, but for pleasure, and this Discourse boasts of no more, for I hate to promise much, and deceive the Reader.

And however it proves to him, yet I am sure I have found a high content in the search and conference of what is here offered to the Reader's view and censure. I wish him as much in the perusal of it, and so I might here take my leave; but will stay a little and tell him, that whereas it is said by many, that in fly-fishing for a Trout, the Angler must observe his twelve several flies for the twelve months of the year, I say, he that follows that rule, shall be as sure to catch fish, and be as wise, as he that makes hay by the fair days in an Almanack, and no surer; for those very flies that used to appear about, and on, the water in one month of the year, may the following year come almost a month sooner or later, as the same year proves colder or hotter: and yet, in the following Discourse, I have set down the twelve flies that are in reputation with many anglers; and they may serve to give him some observations concerning them. And he may note, that there are in Wales, and other countries,

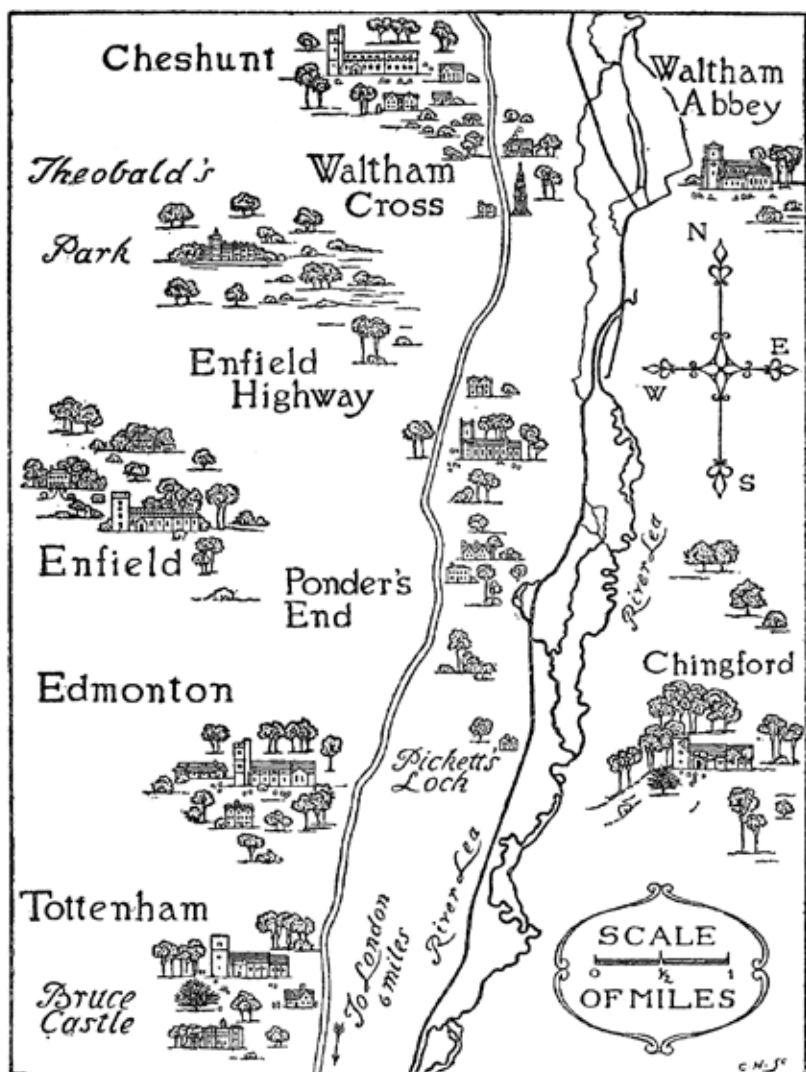


peculiar flies, proper to the particular place or country; and doubtless, unless a man makes a fly to counterfeit that very fly in that place, he is like to lose his labour, or much of it; but for the generality, three or four flies neat and rightly made, and not too big, serve for a Trout in most rivers, all the summer: and for winter fly-fishing it is as useful as an Almanack out of date. And of these, because as no man is born an artist, so no man is born an Angler, I thought fit to give thee this notice.

When I have told the reader, that in this fifth impression there are many enlargements, gathered both by my own observation, and the communication with friends, I shall stay him no longer than to wish him a rainy evening to read this following Discourse; and that if he be an honest Angler, the east wind may never blow when he goes a-fishing.

I. W.

A Conference betwixt an Angler, a Falconer, and a Hunter, each commending his Recreation





CHAPTER I

*Conference betwixt an Angler, a Hunter, and a
Falconer; each commending his Recreation*

PISCATOR, VENATOR, AUCEPS



PISCATOR. YOU are well overtaken, Gentlemen! A good morning to you both! I have stretched my legs up Tottenham Hill to overtake you, hoping your business may occasion you towards Ware, whither I am going this fine fresh May morning.

VENATOR. Sir, I, for my part, shall almost answer your hopes; for my purpose is to drink my morning's draught at the Thatched House in Hoddesden; and I think not to rest till I come thither, where I have appointed a friend or two to meet me: but for this gentleman that you see with me, I know not how far he intends his journey; he came so lately into my company, that I have scarce had time to ask him the question.

AUCEPS. Sir, I shall by your favour bear you company as far as Theobalds, and there leave you; for then I turn up to a friend's house, who mews a Hawk for me, which I now long to see.

VENATOR. Sir, we are all so happy as to have a fine, fresh, cool

morning; and I hope we shall each be the happier in the others' company. And, Gentlemen, that I may not lose yours, I shall either abate or amend my pace to enjoy it, knowing that, as the Italians say, "Good company in a journey makes the way to seem the shorter".

AUCEPS. It may do so, Sir, with the help of good discourse, which, methinks, we may promise from you, that both look and speak so cheerfully: and for my part, I promise you, as an invitation to it, that I will be as free and open hearted as discretion will allow me to be with strangers.

VENATOR. And, Sir, I promise the like.

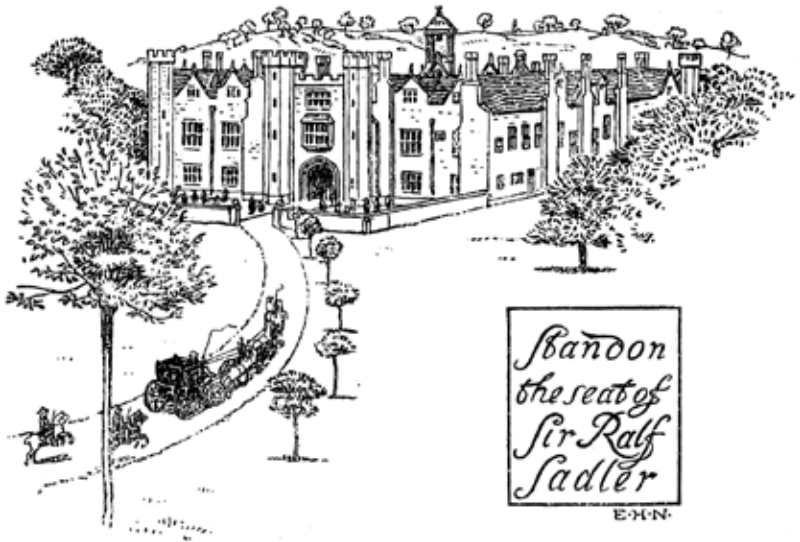
PISCATOR. I am right glad to hear your answers; and, in confidence you speak the truth, I shall put on a boldness to ask you, Sir, whether business or pleasure caused you to be so early up, and walk so fast? for this other gentleman hath declared he is going to see a hawk, that a friend mews for him.

VENATOR. Sir, mine is a mixture of both, a little business and more pleasure; for I intend this day to do all my business, and then bestow another day or two in hunting the Otter, which a friend, that I go to meet, tells me is much pleasanter than any other chase whatsoever: howsoever, I mean to try it; for to-morrow morning we shall meet a pack of Otter-dogs of noble Mr. Sadler's, upon Amwell Hill, who will be there so early, that they intend to prevent the sunrising.

PISCATOR. Sir, my fortune has answered my desires, and my purpose is to bestow a day or two in helping to destroy some of those villanous vermin: for I hate them perfectly, because they love fish so well, or rather, because they destroy so much; indeed so much, that, in my judgment all men that keep Otter-dogs ought to have pensions from the King, to encourage them to destroy the very breed of those base Otters, they do so much mischief.

VENATOR. But what say you to the Foxes of the Nation, would not you as willingly have them destroyed? for doubtless they do as much mischief as Otters do.





PISCATOR. Oh, Sir, if they do, it is not so much to me and my fraternity, as those base vermin the Otters do.

AUCEPS. Why, Sir, I pray, of what fraternity are you, that you are so angry with the poor Otters?

PISCATOR. I am, Sir, a Brother of the Angle, and therefore an enemy to the Otter: for you are to note, that we Anglers all love one another, and therefore do I hate the Otter both for my own, and their sakes who are of my brotherhood.

VENATOR. And I am a lover of Hounds; I have followed many a pack of dogs many a mile, and heard many merry Huntsmen make sport and scoff at Anglers.

AUCEPS. And I profess myself a Falconer, and have heard many grave, serious men pity them, it is such a heavy, contemptible, dull recreation.

PISCATOR. You know, Gentlemen, it is an easy thing to scoff at any art or recreation; a little wit mixed with ill nature, confidence, and malice, will do it; but though they often venture boldly, yet they are often caught, even in their own trap, according to that of Lucian, the father of the family of Scoffers:

*“Lucian, well skilled in scoffing, this hath writ;
Friend, that’s your folly, which you think your wit:
This, you vent oft, void both of wit and fear,
Meaning another, when yourself you jeer.”*

If to this you add what Solomon says of Scoffers, that “they are an abomination to mankind,” let him that thinks fit scoff on, and be a Scoffer still; but I account them enemies to me and all that love Virtue and Angling.

And for you that have heard many grave, serious men pity Anglers; let me tell you, Sir, there be many men that are by others taken to be serious and grave men, whom we contemn and pity. Men that are taken to be grave, because nature hath made them of a sour complexion; money-getting men, men that spend all their time, first in getting, and next, in anxious care to keep it; men that are condemned to be rich, and then always busy or discontented: for these poor rich-men, we Anglers pity them perfectly, and stand in no need to borrow their thoughts to think ourselves so happy. No, no, Sir, we enjoy a contentedness above the reach of such dispositions, and as the learned and ingenuous Montaigne says, like himself, freely, “When my Cat and I entertain each other with mutual apish tricks, as playing with a garter, who knows but that I make my Cat more sport than she makes me? Shall I conclude her to be simple, that has her time to begin or refuse, to play as freely as I myself have? Nay, who knows but that it is a defect of my not understanding her language, for doubtless Cats talk and reason with one another, that we agree no better: and who knows but that she pities me for being no wiser than to play with her, and laughs and censures my folly, for making sport for her, when we two play together?”

Thus freely speaks Montaigne concerning Cats; and I hope I may take as great a liberty to blame any man, and laugh at him too, let him be never so grave, that hath not heard what Anglers can say in the justification of their Art and Recreation;

which I may again tell you, is so full of pleasure, that we need not borrow their thoughts, to think ourselves happy.

VENATOR. Sir, you have almost amazed me; for though I am no Scoffer, yet I have, I pray let me speak it without offence, always looked upon Anglers, as more patient, and more simple men, than I fear I shall find you to be.

PISCATOR. Sir, I hope you will not judge my earnestness to be impatience: and for my simplicity, if by that you mean a harmless, or that simplicity which was usually found in the primitive Christians, who were, as most Anglers are, quiet men, and followers of peace; men that were so simply wise, as not to sell their consciences to buy riches, and with them vexation and a fear to die; if you mean such simple men as lived in those times when there were fewer lawyers; when men might have had a lordship safely conveyed to them in a piece of parchment no bigger than your hand, though several sheets will not do it safely in this wiser age; I say, Sir, if you take us Anglers to be such simple men as I have spoke of, then myself and those of my profession will be glad to be so understood: But if by simplicity you meant to express a general defect in those that profess and practice the excellent Art of Angling, I hope in time to disabuse you, and make the contrary appear so evidently, that if you will but have patience to hear me, I shall remove all the anticipations that discourse, or time, or prejudice, have possessed you with against that laudable and ancient Art; for I know it is worthy the knowledge and practice of a wise man.

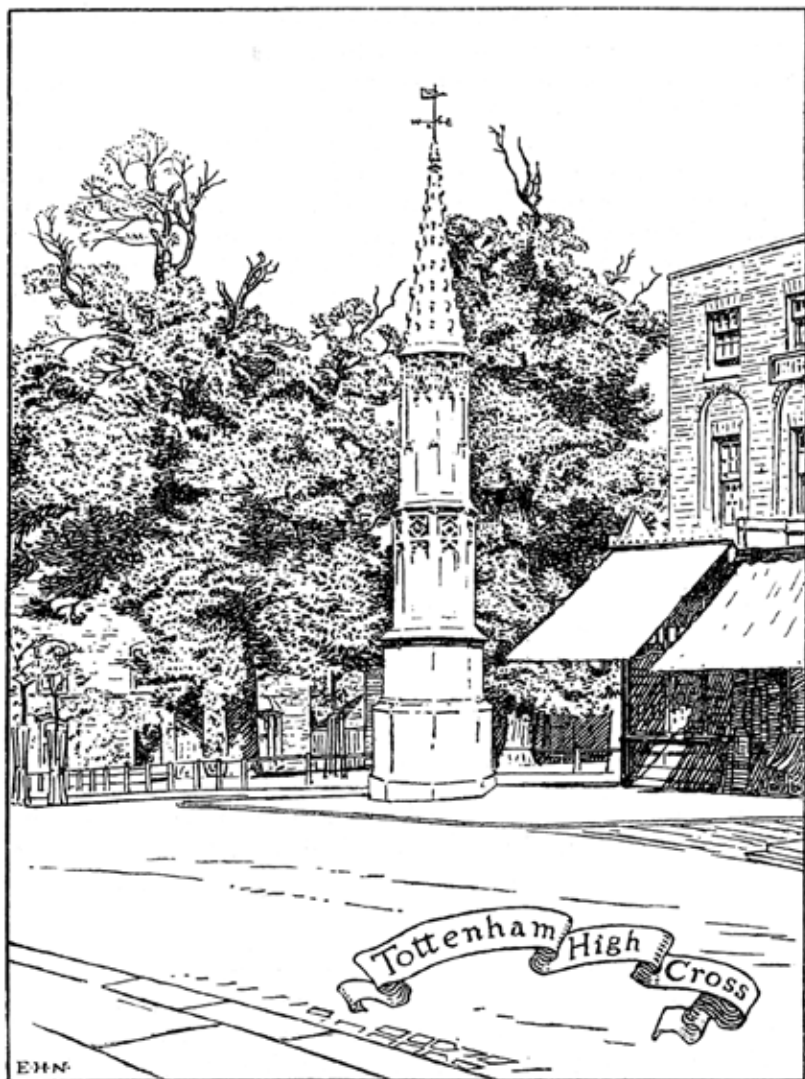
But, Gentlemen, though I be able to do this, I am not so unmannerly as to engross all the discourse to myself; and, therefore, you two having declared yourselves, the one to be a lover of Hawks, the other of Hounds, I shall be most glad to hear what you can say in the commendation of that recreation which each of you love and practice; and having heard what you can say, I shall be glad to exercise your attention with what I can say concerning my own recreation and Art of Angling, and by this means we shall make

the way to seem the shorter: and if you like my motion, I would have Mr. Falconer to begin.

AUCEPS. Your motion is consented to with all my heart; and to testify it, I will begin as you have desired me.

And first, for the Element that I use to trade in, which is the Air, an element of more worth than weight, an element that doubtless exceeds both the Earth and Water; for though I sometimes deal in both, yet the air is most properly mine, I and my Hawks use that most, and it yields us most recreation. It stops not the high soaring of my noble, generous Falcon; in it she ascends to such a height as the dull eyes of beasts and fish are not able to reach to; their bodies are too gross for such high elevations; in the Air my troops of Hawks soar up on high, and when they are lost in the sight of men, then they attend upon and converse with the Gods; therefore I think my Eagle is so justly styled Jove's servant in ordinary: and that very Falcon, that I am now going to see, deserves no meaner a title, for she usually in her flight endangers herself, like the son of Daedalus, to have her wings scorched by the sun's heat, she flies so near it, but her mettle makes her careless of danger; for she then heeds nothing, but makes her nimble pinions cut the fluid air, and so makes her highway over the steepest mountains and deepest rivers, and in her glorious career looks with contempt upon those high steeples and magnificent palaces which we adore and wonder at; from which height, I can make her to descend by a word from my mouth, which she both knows and obeys, to accept of meat from my hand, to own me for her Master, to go home with me, and be willing the next day to afford me the like recreation.

And more; this element of air which I profess to trade in, the worth of it is such, and it is of such necessity, that no creature whatsoever—not only those numerous creatures that feed on the face of the earth, but those various creatures that have their dwelling within the waters, every creature that hath life in its nostrils, stands in need of my element. The waters cannot preserve the Fish without air, witness the not breaking of ice in an extreme



frost; the reason is, for that if the inspiring and expiring organ of any animal be stopped, it suddenly yields to nature, and dies. Thus necessary is air, to the existence both of Fish and Beasts, nay, even to Man himself; that air, or breath of life, with which God at first inspired mankind, he, if he wants it, dies presently, becomes a sad object to all that loved and beheld him, and in an instant turns to putrefaction.

Nay more; the very birds of the air, those that be not Hawks, are both so many and so useful and pleasant to mankind, that I must not let them pass without some observations. They both feed and refresh him; feed him with their choice bodies, and refresh him with their heavenly voices. I will not undertake to mention the several kinds of Fowl by which this is done: and his curious palate pleased by day, and which with their very excrements afford him a soft lodging at night. These I will pass by, but not those little nimble musicians of the air, that warble forth their curious ditties, with which nature hath furnished them to the shame of art.

As first the Lark, when she means to rejoice, to cheer herself and those that hear her; she then quits the earth, and sings as she ascends higher into the air and having ended her heavenly employment, grows then mute, and sad, to think she must descend to the dull earth, which she would not touch, but for necessity.

How do the Blackbird and Thrassel with their melodious voices bid welcome to the cheerful Spring, and in their fixed months warble forth such ditties as no art or instrument can reach to!

Nay, the smaller birds also do the like in their particular seasons, as namely the Laverock, the Tit-lark, the little Linnet, and the honest Robin that loves mankind both alive and dead.

But the Nightingale, another of my airy creatures, breathes such sweet loud musick out of her little instrumental throat, that it might make mankind to think miracles are not ceased. He that at midnight, when the very labourer sleeps securely, should hear, as I have very often, the clear airs, the sweet descants, the natural rising and falling, the doubling and redoubling of her voice, might



well be lifted above earth, and say, “Lord, what musick hast thou provided for the Saints in Heaven, when thou affordest bad men such musick on Earth!”

And this makes me the less to wonder at the many Aviaries in Italy, or at the great charge of Varro’s Aviary, the ruins of which are yet to be seen in Rome, and is still so famous there, that it is reckoned for one of those notables which men of foreign nations either record, or lay up in their memories when they return from travel.

This for the birds of pleasure, of which very much more might be said. My next shall be of birds of political use. I think it is not to be doubted that Swallows have been taught to carry letters between two armies; but ‘tis certain that when the Turks besieged Malta or Rhodes, I now remember not which it was, Pigeons are then related to carry and recarry letters: and Mr. G. Sandys, in his Travels, relates it to be done betwixt Aleppo and Babylon, But if that be disbelieved, it is not to be doubted that the Dove was sent out of the ark by Noah, to give him notice of land, when to him