

Forgotten Feathers

A LETTER FROM DR. LATHAM.

W. B. Alexander, M.A., C.F.A.O.U., writes from Sherwood, Q.

Sir,—I have recently acquired an original letter by Latham, which you may think of sufficient interest to publish, especially as it happens to be just a hundred years old. I enclose a transcript of it. The latter was written when Latham was 83.

The drawings of legs referred to in it are excellent for the purpose of indicating the difference between "booted" and "scutellated" tarsi. Being mainly in pencil they would be difficult to reproduce. We have much about Gould, but the "grandfather of Australian ornithology," as Mathews called him, has been rather neglected, I think. He was born in 1740, and died in 1837. The letter was addressed to a Mr. T. W. Chevalier.

Winchester, May 14, 1823.

Dear Sir,—I am greatly obliged by your communication concerning the *Phaenicophaeus leucocephalus*, and equally so for the account and drawing of the *Cariama*—concerning the latter of which I wish to trouble you to know what kind of sections the shins were composed of, whether divided by scales, or tessellated; also whether the nostrils are at the base or in the middle of the bill, and these being known, I shall be able to identify the bird sufficiently.

In respect to the *Phaenicophaeus*, I do not wonder at your not finding it in my old work, *The Synopsis*, as at that time authors ranked it with the Cuckows—See Syn., Vol. 2nd, p. 544—called there the *Red-headed Cuckow*—and figured in Indian Zoology of Mr. Pennant, pl. 6—but I have fully described this, and four others, in my last *General History of Birds*, Vol. 3rd, p. 252, *et seq.*, under the name of Malkoha, and figured one in Plate 55. This is also described in *Lin. Trans.*, XXII., 287, as *Cucul Sumatranus*, and another in the same, and *Cucul. melanonathus*, my *Sintoh*, No. 4—likewise another, p. 288.—*Cuc. chlorophaeus*, which is new to me, and I did not know of it till my sheets were printed off. Should none of your friends be subscribers to my work, if you will call at Mr. Woods, Bookseller, 428 Strand, he will most readily show you a copy. I have now published 6 volumes, and the other four, to complete the work, will certainly appear at 3 months distance each. It is certain that many valuable and scarce birds may have escaped my researches, for there are new things coming in daily, but you will, I trust, give me credit for not being idle in collecting materials from every source in my power. To make a complete ornithology is impossible—we can only arrive at a certain point, and our successors must do the rest.

I have sketched two legs on the other side that you may know my meaning in respect to the segments of the shins, and you will have the goodness, some future day, to give me a line or two to say with which the legs of the *Cariama* most correspond, or if, as in some birds, they are perfectly smooth, as also the situation of the nostrils.

I beg my best remembrances to your father, and remain,

Dear Sir,

Your obliged humble servant,

JOHN LATHAM.