

snakes in old stone walls, for they shed them every year, and the roughness of the stones helps the snake to pull its skin neatly off its head, turning it inside out like a glove. We generally found them quite perfect and unbroken; in this state they were very pretty, pure white, the little scales glistening in the light with all the colours of the rainbow, just as if they were made of the thinnest fibre of mother-of-pearl, and even the places where the snake's eyes had been were perfect little circles.

But now I must come back to the pets. The tortoises were very quiet, but not very amusing *protégés*; they lived in a little pond with some rock-work in the middle for shelter from the sun. They were no bigger than half-crowns when we first got them, and they grew very slowly. We used to feed them twice a day with raw meat cut up into very fine pieces; at our whistle the tortoises would leave the shelter of their rocks and come paddling slowly towards us, looking out carefully for danger; if anything alarmed them they would draw in their queer little heads, tuck up their fins, or rather feet, and sink down to the bottom of the pond; but we generally took care not to frighten them in any way, and they would eat their dinners very leisurely off the point of a pin. They all disappeared in time, and as we never could find any trace of their bodies, we fancied they must have contrived to escape and make their way to some of the very large reservoirs which were in the paddocks for the cows and horses to drink from, as there was no river near.

Then we had owls and hawks, and once we had a beautiful pair of Egrets given to us. We did not know what these birds were at first, as no one had ever seen any like them, and it was only by hunting through the picture-books about birds that we discovered their likeness under that name. They were flying overhead when some tiresome person who happened to have a gun in his hand shot at them, wounding the female, who fluttered to the ground, and her mate would not desert her, and was easily captured. They were exquisitely beautiful, though with fierce, wild natures. Their legs were bright red and rather long, but their plumage was very peculiar — milk-white, and the feathers which composed their tails and their large crests or top-knots were fluffy, like marabout or the down of the eider-duck. We fed them on raw meat at the risk of having our eyes pecked out, and our fingers were soon covered with wounds, but we bravely persevered, and tried all the surgical art we possessed to heal the poor broken wing of the female, but she only lingered a few days, and then died in great

pain, I fear. Her mate became still more fierce and untameable, and we were afraid to let him out of his large cage lest he should share his wife's fate. He ate well and seemed healthy, but very restless and miserable, and we could only keep him alive for three or four months.

I must tell you how we got our owls. One of the spare rooms had a large open hearth in it which was generally covered up by a board, and against this was placed a chest of drawers, as the fireplace was neither ornamental nor useful, for it was never cold enough to make a fire really necessary, even on the high table-land in the middle of Jamaica, where we spent our summers. However, after a week of heavy rain, Jessie and I took it into our heads that we should like to have a fire in this particular room. I really believe our only reason was a wish to see a blaze again, it was so long since we had enjoyed one; and as some visitors were coming in a few days, we pretended to be very anxious lest the room might have got damp during the late rains. Nothing was easier than to have some sweet-scented chips brought and some great dry logs of cedar, which made a delicious perfume, and Jessie and I rejoiced in a splendid fire, though we were obliged to have all the windows open on account of the heat, and the fire was never replenished. We soon left the room, and one of the housemaids, who looked in on passing, thought the fire was quite out, as she could only see a heap of white feathery ashes, so she carefully replaced the board and moved the chest of drawers back again to its place against it. In a short time the house was filled with the most unpleasant odour; we all began hunting about for the cause, and although we tracked the smell to this spare room, it never occurred to us to have the board removed again until Mamma appeared on the scene and immediately had it taken away. I don't know which was the worst, the sight or the smell. The great draught caused by putting up the board must have carried some of the light ashes which were not quite extinguished up to the top of the chimney, where a whole colony of owls had built their nests for years past. The twigs and straw were soon ablaze, and as the bottom of the nests gave way, the young owls came tumbling down the chimney to meet a lingering death on the hot bricks of the hearth. There were owls in every stage of roasting; some quite dead, and others struggling among the hot ashes. They were more hideous to look at than you can imagine, for, at its best, a young owl is a frightful