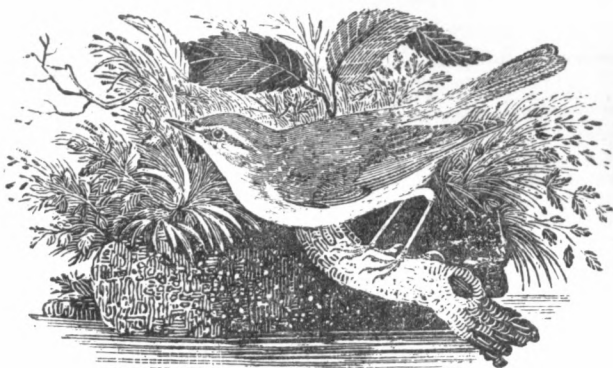


war of 1242, the relations between Henry III and Louis were close and friendly; Henry's wife, Eleanor of Provence, was the sister of Margaret, the wife of king Louis; again in 1264, in the Mise of Amiens, Louis arbitrated between Henry and his barons.³⁰

³⁰ *England under the Normans and Angevins*, p. 459, by H. W. C. Davis.



SEAL OF THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE,
ENGRAVED BY THOMAS BEWICK. SEE P. 126 *post*.



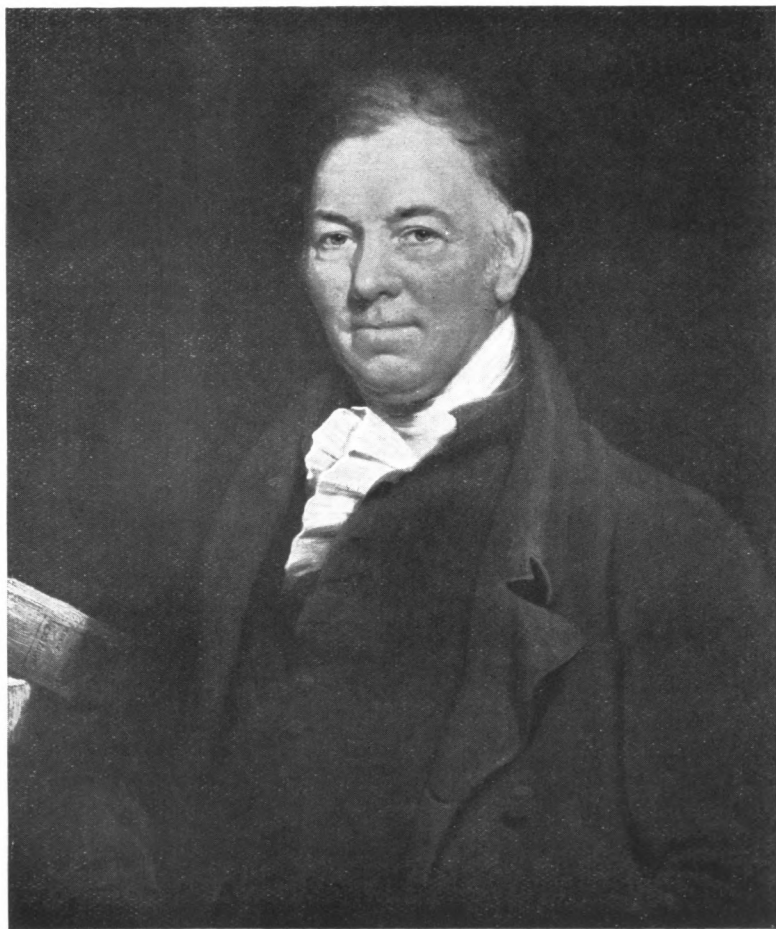
THE WILLOW WREN.

IV.—THOMAS BEWICK: A CENTENARY APPRECIATION.

BY THOMAS WAKE.

[Read on 31st October, 1928.]

In a year particularly noted for the number and distinction of its centenary celebrations, the north of England has had an unusual share. The three prominent have been Josephine Butler, a pioneer in social reform and the emancipation of women; captain Cook, whose adventurous spirit led to the discovery of unknown lands and the enlargement of the British empire; and Thomas Bewick, whose ideals for social and political purity were closely allied to the former, and his engravings to illustrate the voyages of the latter formed with him a definite link. Due recognition has been made of the memory of both Josephine Butler and captain Cook, and the time is now approaching when fitting acknowledgment is to be made of the genius of one more closely associated with our city. Our society honoured Bewick by electing him an honorary



THOMAS BEWICK BY JAMES RAMSAY.

member,¹ and, on the eve of the first centenary of his death, which occurs on November 8, it is appropriate that it should show its continued appreciation of his achievement.

As a wood engraver Thomas Bewick was pre-eminent among his contemporaries; his position stands equally high to-day. As an artist he failed to reach the intellectual conceptions of Dürer, the powerful satires of Holbein, or the poetical fantasies of Blake, but in the delineation of nature and the representation of scenes associated with the common life of the people, he has no equal. His designs are intensely realistic and have a character and



THE STRAYED CHILD.

individuality which arouse admiration. In vigorous action, design, rhythm of line—as in his birds, whimsical humour, and moral content his productions have a remarkable breadth of appeal. His drawings, though mostly miniatures, by their colour, precision and accuracy, have a definite place in the history of British water colour art. As the author of many little descriptive accounts of natural phenomena, he reveals literary abilities of no mean order, and his autobiography² shows that, in addition to being a designer and engraver of superlative merit, he also had an independence of thought and vigour of expression

¹ Elected January 3, 1816.

² *Memoir of Thomas Bewick*, written by himself. 1862.

on subjects of social, political, and moral interest much in advance of the general level of his time. But the inspiration of his creations and reflections was a love of nature and his native district, with every aspect of which he was perfectly familiar.

Of a kindly disposition, Bewick was shrewd in his business dealings; though careful in monetary matters, and in spite of enormous energy and wide interests,³ he was not a wealthy man when he died. His many portraits show him to have been of athletic build, nearly six feet in height, and with a kindly and thoughtful expression, looking in most of them much like a genial farmer. A great amount of literature has been published in appreciation of Bewick, during his lifetime and since, so that it is not necessary to give here more than a brief summary of his history, most of which can be gathered from his own *Memoir*.

Thomas Bewick, the eldest son of John Bewick, was born on August 12, 1753, at Cherryburn House, a small farm on the south bank of the Tyne, in the township of Eltringham, about twelve miles west of Newcastle. He was descended from a family that had been associated with the district for many years—the family had farmed land in the vicinity and worked coal at Mickley from the latter part of the seventeenth century.⁴ In addition to renting the landsale colliery at Mickley, his father occupied the small farm at Cherryburn, where he lived. It is a delightful spot, even to-day. Though now used as a stable for pit ponies, the cottage still presents a pleasant appearance. The thatch roof has been replaced by slates, but its whitewashed walls, appearing above the little dene on its east side, maintain many of the features familiar in Bewick's vignettes. Descendants of his brother William live in the house close by and preserve many relics of their illustrious relative.

³ After his father's death in 1785 he was jointly responsible with his youngest brother William in the direction of the Mickley Bank Colliery. *Vide* correspondence of Thomas Bewick.

⁴ *Northumberland County History*, vol. XII, p. 7.

The early years of Bewick's life were as full of mischief as robust health and good spirits could find an outlet for. He indulged in all kinds of pranks and was punished in consequence. His first experience of school was not happy; the temperaments of master and scholar were not suited to each other. Finally, he was put under the educational care of the rev. Christopher Gregson, vicar of Ovingham, who succeeded in winning from his pupil a fair amount of diligence. But, like many others who achieved distinction in art, a propensity for drawing "objects of his fancy" militated against swift progress

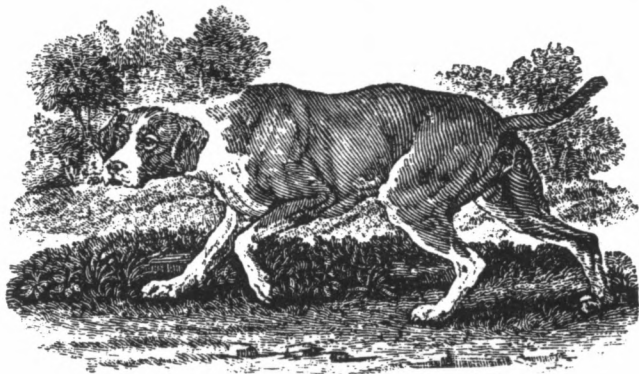


THE GUNNER TOWER—BIRD NESTING.

in his lessons. The flag and hearthstones of his home, the gravestones in the churchyard, as well as his slate and his books, were decorated with his "chalky designs." Both his father and his tutor endeavoured to turn him from these "idle pursuits," but the urge within had to find its appropriate expression. His love of nature and outdoor life and sports, combined with this irresistible impulse to draw, no doubt helped to develop those keen powers of observation and memory manifested in the little masterpieces of nature and rural life associated with his name.

It was one of those fortuitous incidents in history that brought the brothers William and Ralph Beilby from Newcastle to Bywell, one Sunday in the year 1767, on a visit to Mrs. Simons, the godmother of Thomas Bewick. Before they returned to Newcastle, Thomas was engaged as an apprentice engraver to Ralph Beilby, and, on October 1 the same year, he left his home at Cherryburn to enter on his new life in Newcastle, in the shadow of St. Nicholas'.⁵

There is no doubt the versatility of the work done by Ralph Beilby, and the artistic qualifications possessed by the members of the Beilby family, contributed largely to

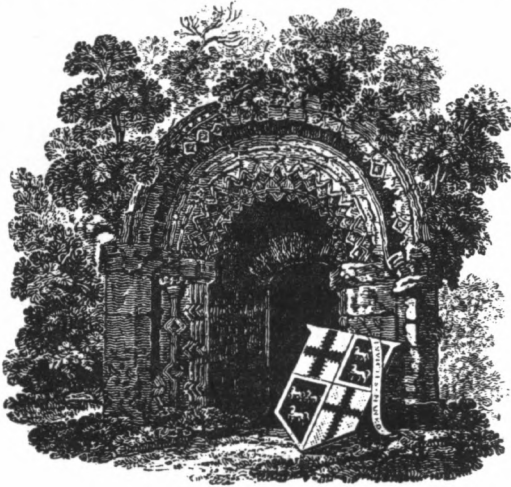


THE SPANISH POINTER.

Bewick's development as an engraver and as an artist. Though Bewick himself said that he never had any lessons in drawing from anyone, yet the fact that both William and Thomas Beilby were drawing masters as well as enamellers on glass and other objects, no doubt proved of great value to him; his own unaided efforts in drawing must have enabled him to profit by observation of the conventions adopted by others. Certainly the

⁵ Beilby's workshop was situated at Amen Corner, near the south porch of the church of St. Nicholas. In 1795 it was removed to the south-east corner of the churchyard.

artistic influence of the Beilby household must have had, at least, a subconscious effect upon his developing æsthetic susceptibilities. He was put to do all kinds of work: engraving clock faces and door knockers, etching sword blades for William and Nicholas Oley of Shotley Bridge, cutting seals, and roughing out wood blocks for illustrations for books. The universality of this training gave him a practical ability which was of much service in his later development. The making of woodcuts seems to have been distasteful to Ralph Beilby, and



THE KEEP DOORWAY—ARMS OF J. TROTTER BROCKETT.

certainly those of this date were not such as would commend themselves to him for imitation. In course of time the apprentice excelled the master at this work and got most of the cuts to do. Dr. Hutton, a noteworthy figure in Newcastle at this period, was writing his book on Mensuration, and it fell to Bewick's lot to cut most of the diagrams on wood for the illustrations. The first woodcut by Bewick of any note appeared in this publication—the cut of the tower of St. Nicholas'; it is crude though interesting. Dr. Hutton, in the *Newcastle Magazine* for June, 1822, claimed to have introduced the

art of wood engraving to Newcastle and to have been the teacher of Bewick. It is a possible claim though the style of engraving performed by Bewick for these illustrations was not the same as that by which he later revolutionized the craft. By the time Bewick had completed his apprenticeship he had so far advanced that his master sent five of his cuts to the Society for the Encouragement of the Arts and Sciences; for these Bewick got a prize of seven guineas. On the completion of his apprenticeship in 1774, he continued in the employment of Ralph Beilby for a few more weeks. He then returned to his home at Cherryburn and there cut wood blocks for T. Angus, a printer in Newcastle, and others. After about eighteen months of this life, in which he drank to the full the joys of rural life and sport, he went on a walking tour to Scotland, visiting Edinburgh and the Highlands. During the tour he made numerous sketches of people and scenes. Shortly after his return to Newcastle he proceeded to London. He met several Newcastle people established there, and was soon introduced to publishers and others who gave him plenty of work. London life did not appeal to him; its contrasts were too great, and he longed for his native air and familiar faces. After about nine months he returned to Newcastle and set up in business for himself as an engraver of all kinds of work, silver and other metals, as well as woodcuts. Shortly after, his former master took him into partnership with him, a connection which lasted about twenty years.

The stimulus given to woodcut illustration by his early efforts led to an increasing demand for such work, and many publications were issued, by T. Saint, a Newcastle publisher, and others, chiefly children's books, including *Gay's Fables* and *Select Fables*, embellished with Bewick's cuts. In the illustrations for these books Bewick's genius found its most suitable form of expression. His keen love of animals and birds became intensified by his representations of them, and his

reflective nature was stimulated by the morals that had to be conveyed in the cuts for the fables. These two tendencies became the dominating feature in his best subsequent productions. The first notable publication was *The Select Fables*, published by T. Saint in 1784. This marks the first real advance of Bewick beyond his contemporaries. In 1790 was published *A History of Quadrupeds* with engravings by Bewick and the descriptive matter by his partner, Ralph Beilby. This was followed in 1797 by *A History of British Birds*, Vol. I (Land Birds), under the same joint efforts. In 1804 the second volume (Water Birds) was published, both



WOMAN AND GEESE.

engravings and letterpress being by Bewick. These contained his finest productions, and ran to eight editions of the *Quadrupeds* and six of the *Birds* during his lifetime.

The next important work was *Æsop's Fables*, published in 1818. Many of the engravings for this were by Bewick's pupils. An indication of the extent of the work done by Bewick and his pupils can be gathered from the several hundred publications issued with woodcuts by them.

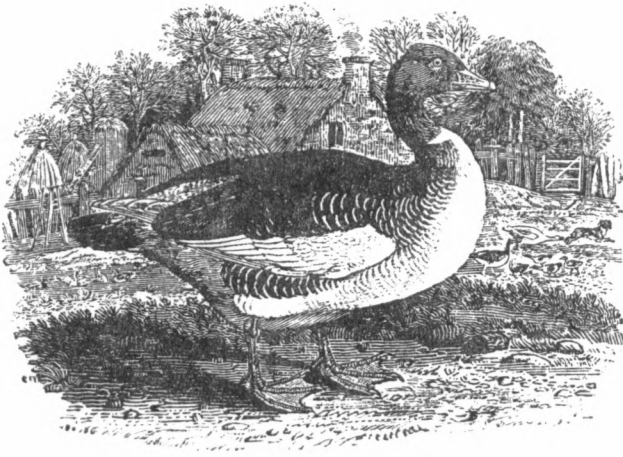
In addition to the engravings for book illustrations he executed single engravings on wood and copper. The chief of these were *The Chillingham Bull*, on wood,

engraved in 1789, *The Whitley Ox*, engraved on copper in the same year, and *The Kyloe Ox*, also engraved on copper, the following year. Book-plates occupied much of his time, and also engravings of a coarser kind. These formed the principal source of his livelihood.

In the year 1785 Bewick lost by death his mother, his eldest sister, and his father. During his apprenticeship, and after his return from London, he had regularly walked to Cherryburn, frequently leaving Newcastle after 7 p.m. on the completion of his day's work. In 1777 he had taken as an apprentice his younger brother John, who generally accompanied him on these walks. During the lifetime of his mother he had felt indisposed to marry, but shortly after the break up of his home he married Isabella Elliot, daughter of Robert Elliot, a farmer at Ovingham. They were married in St. John's church, Newcastle, on April 20, 1786. Bewick had already taken a seventeenth century house in the Forth, formerly occupied by Dr. Hutton, near what is now Bewick Street. Here they resided for nearly twenty-five years, happy in their family life and the enjoyment of the pleasant surroundings in which the house was situated. Their four children were born in this house, one son and three daughters, not one of whom married. After a serious illness which overtook Bewick in 1812, the family removed to what is now 19 West street, Gateshead, a house just newly built, and with an extensive view. This house remained occupied by the Bewick family until 1883, when Isabella, the last remaining member of the family, died at the age of ninety-three. Thomas Bewick suffered his greatest bereavement on February 1, 1826, when his wife died. She was buried in Ovingham churchyard, where nearly three years later Thomas himself was laid to rest on November 13, 1828.

Comparison of Bewick's work with any of the woodcuts produced in the earlier years of the eighteenth century will reveal the extent of the revolution he brought about in this form of illustration. Similar comparison

with the woodcuts of to-day will indicate how much the modern artist engraver on wood is indebted to Bewick for having led the way in the production of creative designs. The three methods by which Bewick brought the craft to technical excellence were not new : the "white line" had been used in Italy in the late fifteenth century, and in the sixteenth century by Giuseppe Scolari and others; engraving across the grain, or on the end, of hard wood, instead of cutting along the grain, or on the plank side, of soft wood, had been used by an "Unknown



THE TAME GOOSE.

Englishman" working in Paris sometime before the advent of Bewick to the engraving world; and lowering the surface of the block to get variety of tone had been used before. Bewick's instinctive genius, however, not only enabled him to see the possibilities of using all three methods together but also to make use of planes as well as lines. The older methods had been used chiefly in imitation of copperplate engraving, but Bewick recognized that wood had potentialities of its own, consequently his engravings are *wooden*. Technical accomplishment was not his only contribution; the eminence to which he lifted wood engraving was as much artistic as technical. His

vigorous personality, instinct for design, and delight in his work gave an impetus to such work that never ceased until the modern mechanical processes of reproduction came into use.

Though Bewick copied many of the earlier woodcuts for the fables, it was always to their improvement; he animated them. His greatest works are *The History of Quadrupeds* and *A History of British Birds*. In the illustrations for these books his love of nature and keen observation are apparent. The animals he was familiar with are remarkable for their life-like rendering, and his birds are represented with a fidelity and feeling for nature beyond praise. Each bird has its own associative value. In the tailpieces by which he gave added interest to the subject, his character is strongly expressed: his prophetic spirit—always pointing a moral, his humour—sometimes sardonic, at times a bit coarse, his sympathy and pathos, and his realism are rendered with an intensity that compels attention.

Few of the woodcuts exceed three inches by two; many are less. The best of his larger engravings is *The Chillingham Bull*. To obtain the drawing for this he walked to Chillingham during the Easter week-end, 1789. The design is boldly conceived, and the animal is rendered with great accuracy of drawing, and conveys all the characteristics of this noted breed. His copperplate engravings of animals are better expressed as wood engravings on copper; they have more of the feeling of wood engravings.

For our society Bewick cut several illustrations: for the seal of the society he received three guineas; for the gold beads found at Chesterhope one guinea; for the plate of the Falstone Runic inscription he received ten guineas; and he also made a few smaller engravings, all of which appear in the first volume of *Archæologia Aeliana*. The view of the keep which appears on the front page of this and other volumes was engraved by a former pupil of Bewick's, Mark Lambert.

In his earlier work, Bewick made the drawings for his engravings direct on the wood. Consequently few of his early drawings remain. Fortunately the drawings for the *Birds* and later publications were first made on paper. Nearly seven hundred of these are in the Hancock museum and about three hundred are in the British museum. The choicest examples are in the latter; they were presented by Miss Isabella Bewick in 1882. The drawings are mostly on a miniature scale; few are larger than the engravings. The accuracy and precision



DISAPPOINTED BEGGARS.

of the drawing gives them a marked affinity to engravings; they are conceived as engravings. But the delicacy and harmony of the colour and the artistic feeling conveyed in their composition bring them into line with the best traditions of the art. In *A Treatise on Wood Engraving*⁶ it is stated that many of the designs for the *Birds* were drawn by Robert Johnson, a native of Ovingham and one of Bewick's early and brilliant pupils. A list of twenty attributed to Johnson is given. Of the twenty, ten are in the Bewick collection at the British museum, and three in the Hancock museum; they are unmistakably by Bewick. Robert Johnson was an exceedingly clever

⁶ *A Treatise on Wood Engraving*, by Chatto and Jackson, 1839, pp. 587-588.

artist, in many respects better even than Bewick, but credit for these designs must be given to the master.

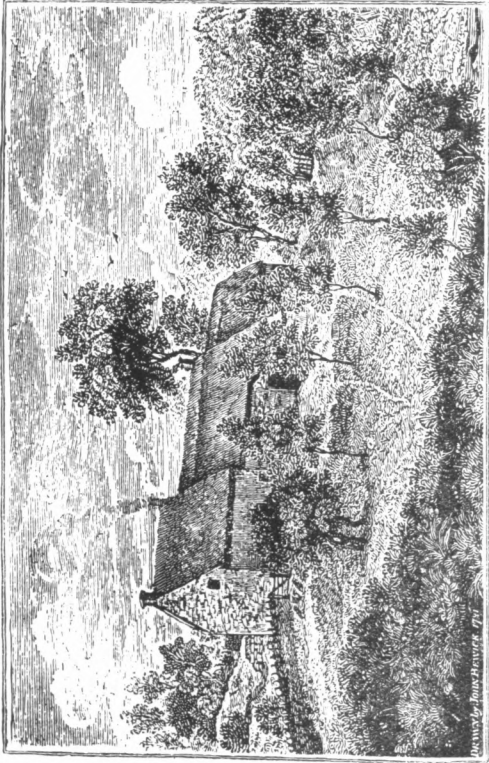
The last few years of Bewick's life were chiefly devoted to compiling a contemplated *History of Fishes*, writing his *Memoir*, and, lastly, engraving a large wood block, *Waiting for Death*. By the latter he endeavoured to obtain greater depth of tone by using more than one block. Unfortunately he did not live to see it completed; he died a few days after the first proofs had been pulled off. In this block he gives an admirable summary of his life's purpose. It shows his love and sympathy for domestic animals, his familiarity with rural life in all its vicissitudes, his experimental activities, and the educational and moral purpose that dominated his work. In the latter aspect he was one with the great advocate of moral art in the nineteenth century—John Ruskin. Ruskin found in Bewick much to admire, and one of the first books he recommended his students to read was Bewick's *Memoir*.

Bewick was a Platonist in many of his views; his ideas for training young people, his opinion about the appointment of rulers, and his conception of art were thoroughly Platonic. He advocated that boys should be trained in physical exercises and outdoor games, and their intellects guided by some good old man;⁷ powers of government should only be given to those best fitted intellectually and morally;⁸ his conception of art was imitation of nature. "In art," he writes, "nothing is worth looking at but such productions as have been faithfully copied from nature."⁹ The philosophic abstractions of to-day would not appeal to him. We speak of the intuitive experience becoming externalized in the work of art, but Bewick's productions were as much the embodiment of intuitive experience as those of the more erudite artists of to-day. We love Bewick because he felt supremely the spirit of the

⁷ *Memoir*, ch. XIX.

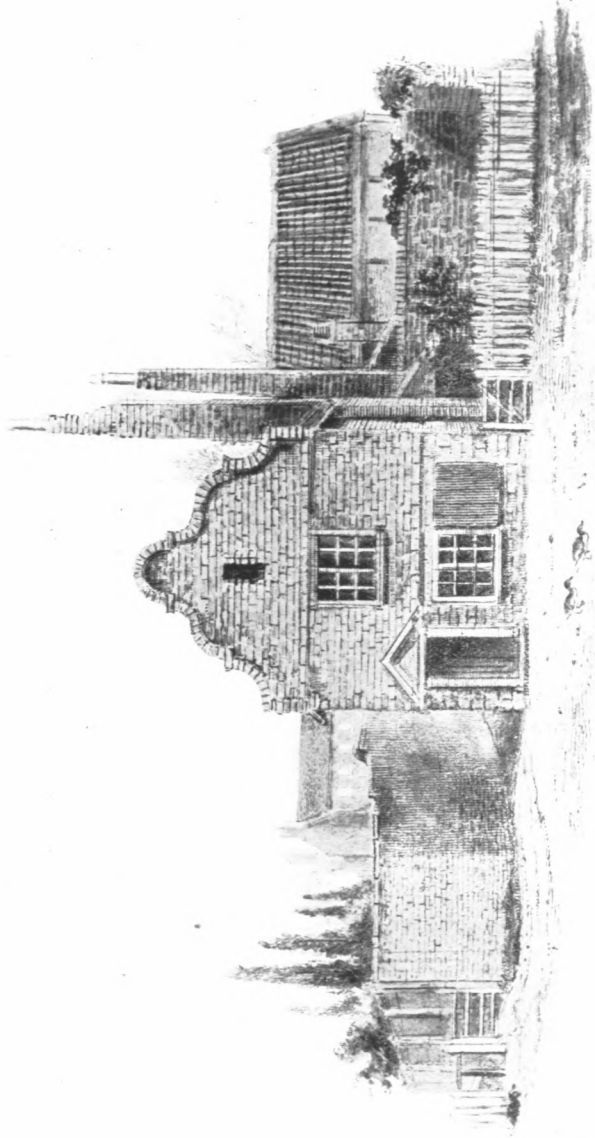
⁸ *Ibid.*, ch. XVIII.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

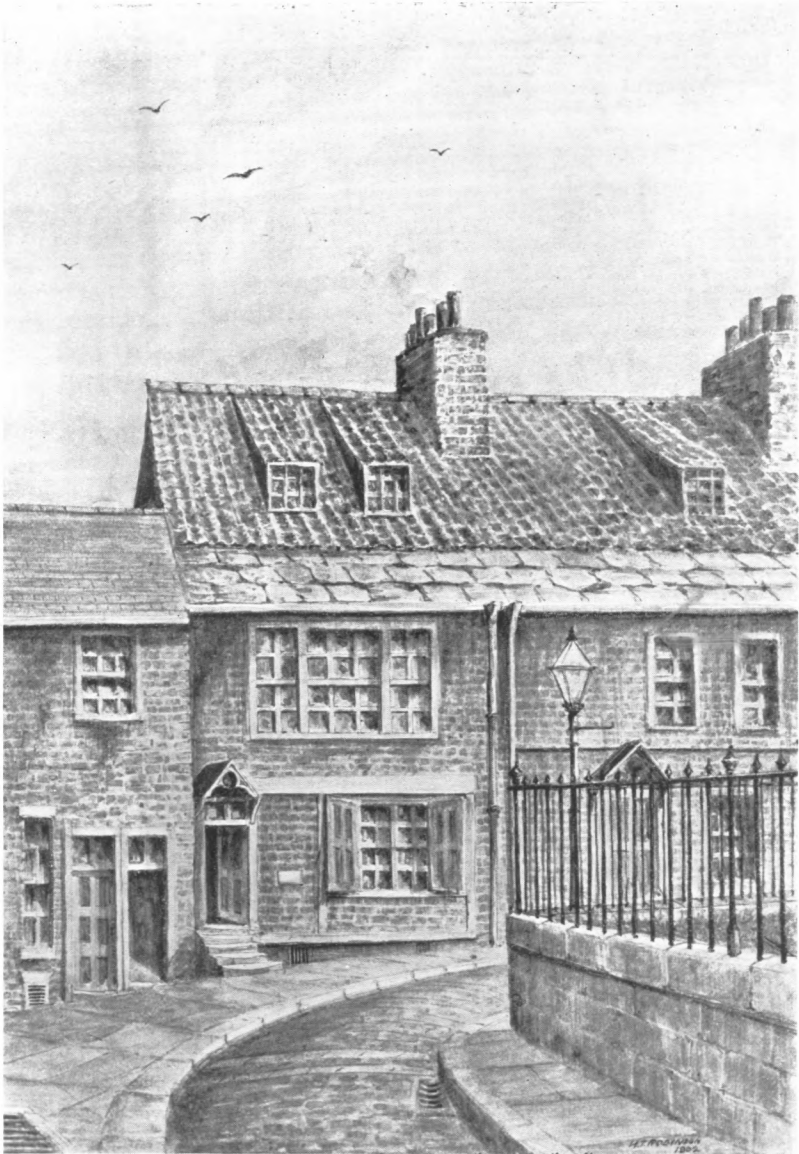


CHERRYBURN HOUSE.

FROM THE ENGRAVING BY JOHN BEWICK.



HOUSE IN THE FORTH, NEAR BEWICK'S RESIDENCE.
FROM A DRAWING BY R. E. BEWICK.



BEWICK'S WORKSHOP IN ST. NICHOLAS' CHURCHYARD.

FROM A DRAWING BY H. T. ROBINSON.



SPARROW HAWK.

FROM A DRAWING BY THOMAS BEWICK.

Tyne valley. All its moods, its varieties of appearance, were stored up in his soul. In his work he has re-embodied that spirit; he has expressed its essence. Antiquaries may feel that he is of little value as an aid to their inquiries, but if archæological research is to help the student to fill in the background of history, then Bewick has equally rendered a service which will become increasingly valued as time progresses.

I am exceedingly indebted to Mr. Anderton for the loan of several slides to illustrate this paper; to Mr. Bewick Ward for the loan of the original blocks and impressions from them; and to our secretary, Mr. Oxberry, for much kind help, and whose enthusiasm for Bewick has added at least one more to the list of Bewick admirers.



ANGLING.