

It has been asked why this bird has been regarded as the symbol of penetration and prudence? and why it was consecrated to the wise Minerva by the ingenious Athenians? How this hideous animal, with its nocturnal hootings, and its awkward, constrained gestures, could delight the goddess of the arts and sciences? According to Aristophanes, cited by Athanæus, this bird was very common among the sterile rocks of Attica, and was the emblem of that city, celebrated throughout all Greece, and which has filled the universe with its renown. According to some, Minerva had the eyes of the owl. Dion Chrysostom cites the apologue of Esop, who says that it was on account of the penetration of this bird into the secrets of futurity, that the divine Pallas delighted in it. In my opinion, the true cause of this predilection of a goddess for so dull and stupid a bird has not yet been ascertained. If we recollect how much the extent and volume of the brain influence the intellectual faculties, and how well this was understood by the Grecian artists, who introduced it into all the statues of their divinities, we shall see that the owl presents a very considerable skull and a face much flattened, which suppose a great increase of intelligence in the animal.

However,