

habit of their parasitical propagation, while opposed to each other in almost every other habit: the *molothrus*, like our starling, is eminently sociable, and lives on the open plains without art or disguise: the cuckoo, as every one knows, is a singularly shy bird; it frequents the most retired thickets, and feeds on fruit and caterpillars. In structure also these two genera are widely removed from each other. Many theories, even phrenological theories, have been advanced to explain the origin of the cuckoo laying its eggs in other birds' nests. M. Prévost alone, I think, has thrown light by his observations¹ on this puzzle: he finds that the female cuckoo, which, according to most observers, lays at least from four to six eggs, must pair with the male each time after laying only one or two eggs. Now, if the cuckoo was obliged to sit on her own eggs, she would either have to sit on all together, and therefore leave those first laid so long that they probably would become addled; or she would have to hatch separately each egg or two eggs, as soon as laid: but as the cuckoo stays a shorter time in this country than any other migratory bird, she certainly would not have time enough for the successive hatchings. Hence we can perceive in the fact of the cuckoo pairing several times, and laying her eggs at intervals, the cause of her depositing her eggs in other birds' nests, and leaving them to the care of foster-parents. I am strongly inclined to believe that this view is correct, from having been independently led (as we shall hereafter see) to an analogous conclusion with regard to the South American ostrich, the females of which are parasitical, if I may so express it, on each other; each female laying several eggs in the nests of several other females, and the male ostrich undertaking all the cares of incubation, like the strange foster-parents with the cuckoo.

I will mention only two other birds, which are very common, and render themselves prominent from their habits. The *Saurophagus sulphuratus* is typical of the great Ameri-

¹ Read before the Academy of Sciences in Paris. L'Institut, 1834, p. 418.