

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08453-6 - Letters from Alabama: Chiefly Relating to Natural History

Philip Henry Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE LIBRARY COLLECTION

*Books of enduring scholarly value*

### **Life Sciences**

Until the nineteenth century, the various subjects now known as the life sciences were regarded either as arcane studies which had little impact on ordinary daily life, or as a genteel hobby for the leisured classes. The increasing academic rigour and systematisation brought to the study of botany, zoology and other disciplines, and their adoption in university curricula, are reflected in the books reissued in this series.

### **Letters from Alabama**

The English naturalist Philip Henry Gosse (1810–88) spent nine months in 1838–9 in a small town in Alabama where he was the teacher at the local school. His time there was unhappy, because of the widespread abuse of slaves he witnessed, the support of the institution by his fellow Methodists being particularly distressing. However, he loved the beauty of his surroundings, and the abundant wildlife, and in 1859 he published this account in the form of nineteen letters. Gosse recounts in detail his voyage from Philadelphia to Mobile, Alabama, and the environment around his new home in the hills, with vivid descriptions of the plants, animals and insects he observed there. He rarely mentions slavery specifically, but the arrogance of the masters and the plight of their ‘possessions’ is a recurring theme in the work. Other books on natural history by Gosse are also reissued in this series.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08453-6 - Letters from Alabama: Chiefly Relating to Natural History

Philip Henry Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press has long been a pioneer in the reissuing of out-of-print titles from its own backlist, producing digital reprints of books that are still sought after by scholars and students but could not be reprinted economically using traditional technology. The Cambridge Library Collection extends this activity to a wider range of books which are still of importance to researchers and professionals, either for the source material they contain, or as landmarks in the history of their academic discipline.

Drawing from the world-renowned collections in the Cambridge University Library and other partner libraries, and guided by the advice of experts in each subject area, Cambridge University Press is using state-of-the-art scanning machines in its own Printing House to capture the content of each book selected for inclusion. The files are processed to give a consistently clear, crisp image, and the books finished to the high quality standard for which the Press is recognised around the world. The latest print-on-demand technology ensures that the books will remain available indefinitely, and that orders for single or multiple copies can quickly be supplied.

The Cambridge Library Collection brings back to life books of enduring scholarly value (including out-of-copyright works originally issued by other publishers) across a wide range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and in science and technology.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08453-6 - Letters from Alabama: Chiefly Relating to Natural History

Philip Henry Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

# Letters from Alabama

*Chiefly Relating to Natural History*

PHILIP HENRY GOSSE



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08453-6 - Letters from Alabama: Chiefly Relating to Natural History

Philip Henry Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge, CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.  
It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of  
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108084536](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108084536)

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2015

This edition first published 1859

This digitally printed version 2015

ISBN 978-1-108-08453-6 Paperback

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect  
the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

Cambridge University Press wishes to make clear that the book, unless originally published  
by Cambridge, is not being republished by, in association or collaboration with,  
or with the endorsement or approval of, the original publisher or its successors in title.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08453-6 - Letters from Alabama: Chiefly Relating to Natural History

Philip Henry Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

LETTERS FROM ALABAMA.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08453-6 - Letters from Alabama: Chiefly Relating to Natural History

Philip Henry Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

LONDON:

B. CLAY, PRINTER, BREAD STREET HILL.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08453-6 - Letters from Alabama: Chiefly Relating to Natural History

Philip Henry Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

LETTERS FROM ALABAMA,

(U.S.)

CHIEFLY RELATING TO

NATURAL HISTORY.

BY

PHILIP HENRY GOSSE, F.R.S.

LONDON: MORGAN AND CHASE,

TICHBORNE COURT, 25, HIGH HOLBORN.

1859.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08453-6 - Letters from Alabama: Chiefly Relating to Natural History

Philip Henry Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---



Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08453-6 - Letters from Alabama: Chiefly Relating to Natural History

Philip Henry Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

## P R E F A C E.

THE following pages contain records of impressions made upon my mind during a residence of seven or eight months in the hilly region of the State of Alabama. It is a part of the United States visited by comparatively few Europeans; and those who have ever seen it have almost exclusively confined their acquaintance with it to the brief glances obtained from the interior of a stage coach, or the deck of a river steamer. The aspect of nature, in particular, presented much that was novel and beautiful to me, and induced me to believe that what had pleased me in the observation might please others in the recital.

The direction of my thoughts was principally towards Natural History; and Ento-

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08453-6 - Letters from Alabama: Chiefly Relating to Natural History

Philip Henry Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

mology was the particular branch which at that period I most studied. Hence a large (perhaps an undue) portion of the remarks concerns Insects; and this may perhaps be the rather tolerated, because less is known in Europe of American Entomology, than of other branches of Zoology, which are popularly studied.

These letters have already appeared in the form of contributions to a magazine entitled "The Home Friend." They have been revised, and are now reproduced, in the hope that they may prove a not wholly valueless contribution to Natural History.

P. H. G.

TORQUAY,

*July, 1859.*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08453-6 - Letters from Alabama: Chiefly Relating to Natural History

Philip Henry Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## CONTENTS.

LETTER I.—*May 12th.*

Philadelphia—Delaware Bay—Delights of Voyaging—Gulf-stream—Floating Weeds—Dolphins—Pilotfish—Suckingfish—Flyingfish—Stormy Petrel—Trade Wind—Bahamas—Hole in the Wall—Florida Reef—Turtle—Portuguese Men-of-War—Groper—Yellowtail—Marketfish—Hogfish—Catfish—Visit to Cayo Boca—Insects—Birds—Shells—Hermit Crab—Swift Crab—Sponges—Gulf of Mexico—Hermit Thrush—Redstart—Kingfish—Storm—Mariners' Lights—Mobile Point and Bay . . . . . 1

LETTER II.—*May 20th.*

Mobile—Forests—Magnolias—Insects—White Skipper Butterfly—Crayfish—Prickly Pear—Alabama River—Fireflies—Night-fires—Dawn—Bats—Whip-poor-Will—Wood-yards—Freshets—Trees—Scarcity of Animals—Blue Heron—Belted Kingfisher—Wood-duck—Tortoise—Sinuous Course of the River—Meeting of two Steamers—King's Landing—Shipping Cotton—Master James—Fox-Squirrels—Tanagers—Hair-streaks—Scarlet Woodbine—Colias—Emerald Dragonfly—Copperbelly—Slaves—Turkey-buzzards . . . . . 25

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08453-6 - Letters from Alabama: Chiefly Relating to Natural History

Philip Henry Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

## CONTENTS.

LETTER III.—*June 1st.*

School—Construction and Furniture of School-room—Pupils—  
 Forest Yard—Early Walk—Breakfast—Hominy—Waffles—  
 Indian Bread—Feather-fan—Mocking-bird—Lizards—Scorpion  
 Lizard—Fast Runner—Ante—Rabbit—Twisting-Stick—  
 Flowers—Butterflies—Zebra Swallowtail—Yellows—Brown  
 Thrush—Cardinal Grosbeak—Browns—Tick—Turkeys—Tur-  
 key-pen—Afternoon Walk—Butterflies—Turtle-dove—Indian  
 Pink—Skippers—Barred Owl—Night-hawks—Calling Hogs  
 —Habits of Hogs—Twilight in the Garden—Marvel of Peru  
 —Hawk-moths—Development of the Imago—Structure of a  
 Moth . . . . . 43

LETTER IV.—*June 10th.*

Night Scene—Chuck-Will's-Widow—Its Note—Boat-fly—Anolis  
 —Its Changes of Colour—Prairies—Their Plants and Flowers  
 —Larkspur—Coral-tree—Swallow-worts—View over the  
 Forest—Blue Swallowtail—Black Swallowtail—Archippus—  
 Green Clouded Swallowtail—Painted Beauty—Pink-wing  
 Moth—Beauty of Butterflies—Scales of Wing—Scarcity of  
 Water—Resources in Drought—Forest Prairie—Goldwing  
 Woodpecker—Carolina Wren—Passalus—Beetles on Flowers  
 —Glycine—White-Spotted Skipper—Its Transformations—  
 Girdling Trees—Spanish Moss—Red-tailed Hawk—Turkey-  
 Buzzard—Ivory-bill Woodpecker—Log-cock—Dragonfly feed-  
 ing on Fish—Forest-Pool—Desolation—Terrapins—Alligator  
 Tortoise—Soft-back . . . . . 69

LETTER V.—*June 16th.*

Ride to Cahawba—Mush Creek—Fords—Hydrangea—Prickly  
 Pear—Blue Heron—Cahawba Town and River—Ferry—Horses  
 tied—Crying Frogs—Leaf-eating Lady-birds—Lepisma—Quail  
 —Anecdote—Scarlet Viper—Trail of Snakes—Intellectual  
 Capacity fairly distributed—Examples—Provincialisms of  
 Speech—Large Cicada—Purple Grackle—Scarlet Trumpet  
 Flower—Humming-bird—Cross-vine—Spanish Moss—Re-

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08453-6 - Letters from Alabama: Chiefly Relating to Natural History

Philip Henry Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## CONTENTS.

ix

markable Fungus—Sensitive Brier—Chestnut—Grandeur of Forest—Purple Underwing Moth—Scolia—Toad—Ringlet Butterflies—Pearly Eye—Black Emperor Swallowtail—Red Spotted Purple—Humble-bee—Hawk-moth—Earwig—Hair Spectre—Squirrels—A valuable Secret—Sylvan Amusements—Driving the Nail—Threading the Needle—Snuffing the Candle—Barking off Squirrels . . . . . 100

LETTER VI.—*July 1st.*

Indian Corn—Cane-brakes—Firing a Brake—Fan-Palm—Lack of Grass—Star Cranefly—Digging out Cossus from a Tree—Economy of Xylophagous Insects—Progress of a Wasp's Nest—Operations of a Carpenter-bee—Sassafras—Spice-wood—Azure Butterfly—Peach Hawk-moth—Mydas—Bombylius—Abnormal Voracity—Variegated Fritillary—Coral Hair-streak—Succession of Butterflies—Their Beauty, Number, and Size—Profusion of Animal Life and Happiness . . . . . 134

LETTER VII.—*July 3d.*

Description of a Southern House—Climbing Plants—Habits of the People—Rude Carpentry—Roofs—Chimneys—Yard—Negro Children—Ducks—Ornamental Trees—Pride of China—Sycamore—Wild Cherry—Woodpeckers—Relation of Colours to Animals—Althea—Humming-birds—Ball-beetle—Its singular Habits—Horns of Beetles—Oryctes—Its Strength—A wonderful Feat—Spines of Longicorns—Their Eyes—Arched Swallowtail—Yellow Emperor Swallowtail—Red-striped Hairstreak—Plane-tree Moth—Other Insects—Bats—Indigo Bird—Tulip-tree—Peculiarity in Vernation—Catalpa . . . . . 151

LETTER VIII.—*July 5th.*

RobbingBee's Nest—Bee-tree—Mode of Proceeding—Katedid—Its Pertinacity—Structure of its Musical Organ—Caterpillar of Archippus—Transformations of Butterflies—Nest of Scorpion Lizard—Summer Flowers—Mullein—Blue-Bird—Indian

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08453-6 - Letters from Alabama: Chiefly Relating to Natural History

Philip Henry Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

## CONTENTS.

Shot—Sorrel-tree—Undulations of Odour—Comfrey—Tree  
Primrose—Banner Pea—Zinnia—Venus' Fly-trap—Heat of  
Weather . . . . . 178

LETTER IX.—*July 15th.*

Peaches—Melons and Gourds—Calabash—Musk Melon—Water  
Melon—Smell Melon—Prickly Cucumber—Locust-tree—  
Wahoo—Sweet Gum—Sour Gum—Story of Irish Emigrant—  
Cotton in Flower—Adam's Needle—Bear's Grass—June Bug  
—Tiger Swallowtail—Eyed Click Beetle—Ringlets—Vanilla  
Fritillary—Snout Butterfly—Skippers—Green Emperor Moth  
—Corn Emperor—Crimson Underwing—Odour of Plant-Bug  
—Parasites on Insects—Chelifer—Strength of Reproductive  
Instinct in Insects—Ephemera—Great Black Locust—Stag  
Beetles—Chequered Bug—Prairie Knoll revisited—Change in  
its attractions—Pink-wing Moth—Predatory *Asilus* . . . 194

LETTER X.—*August 1st.*

Florida Coffee—Cloudless Sulphur Butterfly—Black-banded  
Sulphur—Black-edged Sulphur—Rattlesnake—Snake crawling  
up a Wall—Inference of Age from the Rattles—A Lizard with  
a new Tail—Swallow-tailed Kite—Mississippi Kite—Ticks—  
Their Adhesiveness—Power of Repletion—Depredations of a  
Bear—Reprisals—Singular Rencontre—Nocturnal Evolutions  
of Swallows . . . . . 212

LETTER XI.—*August 15th.*

'Possum Hunting by Night—Preliminaries—The Start—*Drama-  
tis Personæ*—Moonlight and Torch-light—The Melon Patch—  
Moths—Opossums—Raccoon—Exploits of Major Scott—'Pos-  
suming—Figs—Chinquapin—Nest of Yellow Rat—Wood Rat  
—Burning Bush—Dirt Daubers—Their Proceedings—Houses  
built and stored—Instance of Evasion of Labour—Profusion  
of Insects—Drying Peaches—Hawk-moths—Mutilla—Ant-lion  
Flies . . . . . 226

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08453-6 - Letters from Alabama: Chiefly Relating to Natural History

Philip Henry Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## CONTENTS.

xi

LETTER XII.—*September 1st.*

Manners of the South—Lawlessness—Quarrelsomeness—Slavery  
—Its Influence on Character—Torture—Flogging—Desertion  
—Patrols—Bloodhounds—Hunger—Anticipations—Emanci-  
pation—Slavery a Curse . . . . . 250

LETTER XIII.—*September 20th.*

Night in the Swamp—Fan Palms—Gerardia—Cardinal Flower  
—Fox-grape—Haws—Plums—Swamp Beech—Luminous Fun-  
gus—A Challenge—The Eagle Owl—Calls and Responses—  
Cypress Swamp—Desolation—Night Heron—Cypress—Light-  
stand—Blind Hawk-moth—Male Cricket—Its Structure and  
Economy—Its Song . . . . . 256

LETTER XIV.—*October 1st.*

Weather and Health—Deer-hunting—Virginian Deer—Hunt-  
ing-ground—Driving—Forest-riding—Its Danger—Night-  
shooting—A tame Fawn—Hog-hunting—Flavour of Wild  
Pork—A gallant Pig—Lairs of the Wild Hog—Wild Cattle—  
A ferocious Cow shot—Insect-hunting—Abundance of Butter-  
flies—Walking-leaves—Spectres—Mottled Owl . . . . . 266

LETTER XV.—*October 10th.*

Cotton-picking—Beauty of Cotton-fields—Pods—Task-work—  
Defalcations—Cotton Gin—Its Operation—Packing—Mules—  
A Curious Fact—Stinging Caterpillars—Strange Tent-maker  
—Birth of a Moth . . . . . 277

LETTER XVI.—*November 1st.*

A varied Walk—Ipomæa—Poke-weed—Dog-wood—Persimon  
—Opossum—Oaks—Magnolias—Pine-woods—Turpentine—  
A Tree on Fire—Tar-making—Evening Primrose—Willow  
herb—Golden-rod—Caterpillars and Cocoons . . . . . 286

Cambridge University Press

978-1-108-08453-6 - Letters from Alabama: Chiefly Relating to Natural History

Philip Henry Gosse

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xii

## CONTENTS.

LETTER XVII.—*December 1st.*

Association of Ideas—Arrival of Northern Birds—Snow-bird—  
 Song-sparrow—Yellow-bird—Warblers and Thrushes—Bird-  
 beating—Towhe Bunting . . . . . 294

LETTER XVIII.—*December 20th.*

Postponement of Winter—Carolina Parrot—Cockle-bur—Beaver  
 —Deterioration of its Fur—Turkey-hunting—"Yelping"—  
 Fox-hunting—Grey Fox—His Character and Resources—A  
 Run . . . . . 298

LETTER XIX.—*December 31st.*

A heavy Turkey—Voyage down the Alabama—Scenery—A  
 Cotton Cargo—Sailors' Songs—Conclusion . . . . . 303