Tantalus, in ornithology, a genus of birds belonging to the order of grallæ. The bill is long, ſubulated, and ſomewhat crooked ; the face naked ; the tongue ſhort ; and the feet have four toes palmated on the under part. There are, according to Dr Latham, 23 species ; of which the moſt remarkable is the *ibis,* the bird ſo much valued by the ancient Egyptians.

The ibis was formerly held in great veneration in Egypt, on account of its utility in freeing the country from ſerpents. Serpents muſt therefore have been numerous, or they could not have been very offenſive ; and the ibis muſt have been numerous, or they could not have been uſeful. Yet we are allured by Mr Bruce, that the ibis is at present unknown in Egypt, and ſerpents are no nuiſance ; and he thinks it impossible that a country, covered with water for five months of the year as Egypt is, could ever have abounded with ſer­pents. He endeavours, however, to reconcile the accounts of ancient hiſtorians with the ſtate of Egypt.

In former times, when Egypt was in its flouriſhing ſtate, the inhabited country extended much farther than it does at preſent ; reaching even a conſiderable way into the ſandy deſert of Libya, where ſerpents have their abode. Theſe parts were ſupplied with water by immenſe lakes, dug by the magnificent princes of thoſe times, and filled by the an­nual inundation of the Nile. Theſe frontier diſtricts would naturally be infeſted with vipers from the Libyan de­ſert, and the vaſt lakes would as naturally be ſupplied by numbers of water-fowl, of which the ibis is a ſpecies. This bird being likewiſe an enemy to ſerpents, the inhabitants would ſoon become acquainted with his uſe, and their superstition would soon reward him. In after ages, however, when the ancient improvements were lost, and thoſe vaſt Jakes dried up which brought the ibis thither, the ſerpents ceaſed to give any offence, becauſe there were none of the human ſpecies there whom they could annoy ; and in conſequence of the want of water, the birds ceaſed to annoy them, retiring to their native place Ethiopia, where they continue to frequent the great ſtagnant pools which are common in that country.

Mr Bruce found a bird in Abyſſinia, which, after compa­ring it with the deſcription of the ancient writers, and the embalmed ibis of Egypt, he concludes is the ſame with the Egyptian ibis. It is called *abou Hannes,* signifying “ fa­ther John,” from its appearing annually on St John's day.

This bird is minutely described by Mr Bruce. It has a beak ſhaped like that of a curlew, two-thirds ſtraight, and the remaining third crooked ; the upper part of a green horny ſubſtance, and the lower part black. It measures four inches and an hall from the occiput to the place where it joins the beak. The leg, from the lower joint of the thigh to the foot, is six inches ; the bone round and very strong ; and from the lower joint of the thigh to where it joins the body, is five inches and a half. The height of the body from the sole to the middle of the back is 19 inches ; the aperture of the eye one inch ; the ſeet and legs black : three toes before armed with ſharp and ſtraight claws ; and a toe behind. The head is brown, and the plu­mage of the ſame colour down to the back, or the place where the neck and back are joined. The throat is white, as well as the back, breaſt, and thighs ; the largeſt feathers of the wing are of a deep black for 13 inches from the tail; and six inches up the back from the extremity of the tail is black likewiſe.

*Tantalus's Cup.* See Hydrostatics, n⁰ 44. TANZY, or Tansy, in botany. See Tanacetum. TAORMINA, a town in Sicily, is ſituated on a rock which riſes to a conſiderable elevation above the level of the sea. and is surrounded by other rocks, the height of which is ſtill more conſiderable. It is 88 miles south of Meſſina, and was founded by a colony from Naxos, which were pro­bably induced to chooſe the ſituation, not ſo much on ac­count of its grandeur, as for the ſecurity which it would afford. It is alſo very wholeſome. The road to Taormina, up the north side of the hill on which it ſtands, is very ſteep and difficult of ascent.

Of the origin of Taormina, as of other cities, almoſt no­thing is known. A colony from the iſle of Naxos ſettled at the foot of Etna, at no great diſtance from the ſhore, and at about a league or a league and an half from the pre­ſent ſituation of Taormina. Dionyſius the Tyrant attacked this colony, and either took or ſet fire to their city. The inhabitants retired to the rocks of Mount Taurus ; among which they found a tract of ground ſufficiently level, and of ſufficient extent, for them to raise habitations upon it. It was a ſituation in which they might be ſecure from every attack. Here, therefore, they built a city ; which, after the mountain, they named *Tauromenium.* It was at length raised to a very flouriſhing ſtate by trade, and became ce­lebrated as a feat of the arts. There are ſtill many remains to be ſeen, which ſhow that the fine arts muſt have been once ſucceſsfully cultivated at Tauromenium.

Among other remains of the ancient Tauromenium, ſtill to be ſeen at Taormina, there is a ſpacious theatre. Near the theatre is a tomb, and behind the tomb a large natural grotto. The grotto appears to have been anciently adorn­ed within with artificial ornaments. It was poſſibly conſecrated by the Greeks to ſome rural deity, perhaps to the nymphs, to whom the ancient heathens uſed generally to conſecrate grottoes. After the inhabitants of Taormina em­braced Chriſtianity, they ſtill continued to viſit this grotto with devout veneration. Inſtead ot the Pagan divinities to whom it had before been ſacred, they subſtituted a ſaint, the venerable St Leonard, inſtead of the ſportive nymphs. But St Leonard did not long draw crowds to this grotto ; and the Chriſtians have either defaced its Pagan decorations, or ſuffered them to fall into decay by the injuries of time. It is now black and ſmoky ; and it is with difficulty that any remains of the Greek paintings with which it was once or­namented can be diſtinguished. Perhaps it might be ſacred to Pales rather than the nymphs: She was the protectreſs of flocks ; and the circumjacent grounds are, and always have been, excellent for paſture.

There are also to be ſeen in the neighbourhood of Taor­mina a variety of tombs, the remains of a gymnaſium, with a number of other monuments which ſtill preserve the me­mory of the ancient Tauromenium.

TAPE-worm. See Tænia.

TAPER, Tapering, is underſtood of a piece of tim­ber, or the like, when thick at one end, and gradually diminishing to the other; as is the caſe in pyramids, cones, &c.

*To measure Taper-Timber,* &c. See *Sliding Rule.*

*Taper-Bored,* is applied to a piece of ordnance when it is wider at the mouth than towards the breech.

Taper, alſo denotes a kind of tall wax candle, placed in a candleſtick, and burnt at funeral proceſſions, and in other church ſolemnities.

Tapers are made of different ſizes ; in some places, as Italy, &c. they are cylindrical ; but in moſt other countries, as England, France, &c. they are conical or taper ; whence poſſibly the name ; unleſs we rather chooſe to derive ta­per, in the adjective ſenſe from the ſubſtantive taper, in the Saxon *tapen* or *tapon, cereus,* “wax-candle. Both kinds are pierced at bottom for a pin in the candleſtick to enter.— There are two ways of making tapers, the firſt with the ladle, the second by hand: for which, ſee Candle.