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Opening extract from

Lost Journals of Benjamin Tooth

Written by

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Monday 18th April 1768

My name is Benjamin Tooth. This is my journal.

One day I will be remembered as the greatest scientist that the world has ever known and so it is my duty to mankind to record my thoughts that future generations are able to study the progress of a genius.

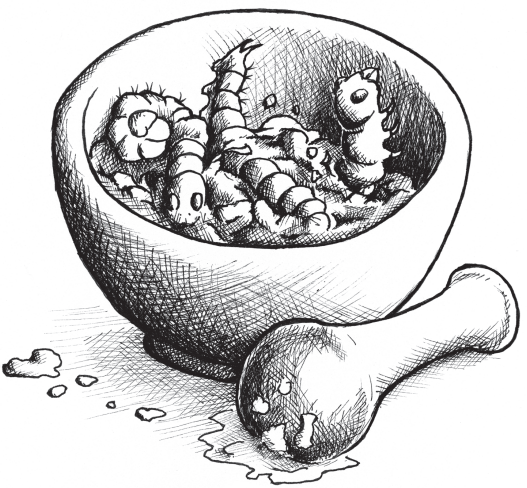
I am eleven years old.

Today for supper I ate of a buttock of ham with plum pudding and greens.

Tuesday 19th April 1768

Up early with the lark collecting caterpillars. I found several interesting specimens and sketched them carefully before mashing them into a pulp.

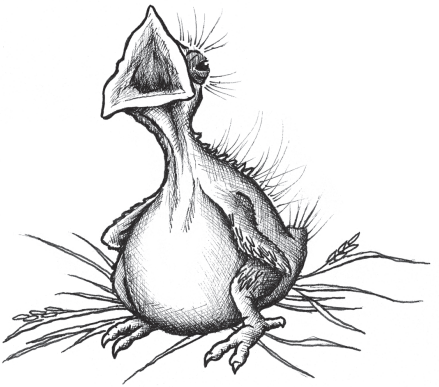
This foul puree I use to feed a hatchling bird that I rescued and am raising.



I have long known that a baby bird should be left alone, for even though it may seem abandoned its parents are usually close by, looking for food. But this particular creature did not fall from or fly the nest, it was pushed. I had been observing a pair of warblers on my way to the schoolhouse. They were a type of warbler I had not seen before and was unable to identify from any picture books. For a week I watched as the birds collected twigs and meticulously built a perfect nest in the hawthorn and lined it with feathers and grass. Soon there appeared two brown speckled eggs. The next day another. Then on the third day a surprise. Another egg, similar in colour but nearly twice the size. I soon realised that this was an intruder. The cuckoo I have heard but never spotted had found my warblers' nest.

This was the most exciting opportunity to study a phenomenon I have oft read about but never witnessed. Within very few days the cuckoo egg hatched, even though it was laid after the warbler's. Its adopted parents must have been horrified when they saw their huge offspring but set to dutifully collecting insects to fill its ever-gaping beak. The next day the first of the warblers hatched and, realising it would now have to share the supply of food, the cuckoo took action and pushed its stepbrother and the remaining eggs out of the nest. I must have arrived soon after this happened as, though the eggs were sadly smashed, the bewildered hatchling was sitting in the grass, indignantly squeaking at the injustice of it all.

The tiny, shivering creature was no more than a wrinkled skin-bag of jelly bones with a beak.



I have named the bird Lucky and he is thriving well on his nutritious maggot-paste diet. I take him with me to school each day in a feather-lined teacup hidden in the pocket of my coat. In the other pocket I keep a snuffbox of caterpillar mash with which to feed him. I have told nobody about Lucky, though his hungry squeaking has almost led to discovery on more than one occasion. Miss Ormeroid is convinced that there is a sparrows nest in the rafters of the schoolhouse roof.

Dined today of a hot boiled green tongue with a butter pond pudding and turnips.

Wednesday 20th April 1768

I should probably say something about my circumstances so that in centuries to come scholars will have a full picture of my life and ascent to excellence.

I live at number 7 Church Street, in the market town of Mereton, with my horrible mother and ancient great-grandfather.

My father Josiah was a merchant in the fur trade and by the time I was born had done well. He decided to put most of his wealth into a ship which would travel to the New World to collect a cargo of beaver skins and sail back to England.