

VARIOUS

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Various

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SOME ANIMAL PROPENSITIES

IT is not quite agreeable to contemplate many of the shortcomings, from a moral point of view, of certain of the animal creation, and even less to be compelled to recognize the necessity of them. Thievery in nature is widely extended, and food is the excuse for it. Civilization has made the practice of the humanities possible among men, but the lower animals will doubtless remain, as they have ever been, wholly subject to the instincts with which nature originally endowed them.

Huber relates an anecdote of some Hive-bees paying a visit to a nest of Bumble-bees, placed in a box not far from their hive, in order to steal or beg the honey. The Hive-bees, after pillaging, had taken almost entire possession of the nest. Some Bumble-bees, which remained, went out to collect provisions, and bringing home the surplus after they had supplied their own immediate wants, the Hive-bees followed them and did not quit them until they had obtained the fruit of their labors. They licked them, presented to them their probosces, surrounded them, and thus at last persuaded them to part with the contents of their "honey-bags." The Bumble-bees did not seem to harm or sting them, hence it would seem to have been persuasion rather than force that produced this instance of self-denial. But it was systematic robbery, and was persisted in until the Wasps were attracted by the same cause, when the Bumble-bees entirely forsook the nest.

Birds, notwithstanding their attractiveness in plumage and sweetness in song, are many of them great thieves. They are neither fair nor generous towards each other. When nest-building they will steal the feathers out of the nests of other birds, and frequently drive off other birds from a feeding ground even when there is abundance. This is especially true of the Robin, who will peck and run after and drive away birds much larger than himself. In this respect the Robin and Sparrow resemble each other. Both will drive away a Blackbird and carry away the worm it has made great efforts to extract from the soil.

Readers of Frank Buckland's delightful books will remember his pet Rat, which not infrequently terrified his visitors at breakfast. He had made a house for the pet just by the side of the mantel-piece, and this was approached by a kind of ladder, up which the Rat had to climb when he had ventured down to the floor. Some kinds of fish the Rat particularly liked, and was sure to come out if the savor was strong. One day Mr. Buckland turned his back to give the Rat a chance of seizing the coveted morsel, which he was not long in doing and in running up the ladder with it; but he had fixed it by the middle of the back, and the door of the entrance was too narrow to admit of its being drawn in thus. But the Rat was equal to the emergency. In a moment he bethought himself, laid the fish on the small platform before the door, and then entering his house he put out his mouth, took the fish by the nose and thus pulled it in and made a meal of it.

One of the most remarkable instances of carrying on a career of theft came under our own observation, says a writer in *Cassell's Magazine*. A friend in northeast Essex had a very fine Aberdeenshire Terrier, a female, and a very affectionate relationship sprang up between this Dog and a Tom cat. The Cat followed the Dog with the utmost fondness, purring and running against it, and would come and call at the door for the Dog to come out. Attention was first drawn to the pair by this circumstance. One evening we were visiting our friend and heard the Cat about the door calling, and some one said to our friend that the cat was noisy. "He wants little Dell," said he – that being the Dog's name; we looked incredulous. "Well, you shall see," said he, and opening the door he let the

Terrier out. At once the Cat bounded toward her, fawned round her, and then, followed by the Dog, ran about the lawn. But a change came. Some kittens were brought to the house, and the Terrier got much attached to them and they to her. The Tom cat became neglected, and soon appeared to feel it. By and by, to the surprise of every one, the Tom somehow managed to get, and to establish in the hedge of the garden, two kittens, fiery, spitting little things, and carried on no end of depredation on their account. Chickens went; the fur and remains of little Rabbits were often found round the nest, and pieces of meat disappeared from kitchen and larder. This went on for some time, when suddenly the Cat disappeared – had been shot in a wood near by, by a game-keeper, when hunting to provide for these wild kittens, which were allowed to live in the hedge, as they kept down the Mice in the garden. This may be said to be a case of animal thieving for a loftier purpose than generally obtains, mere demand for food and other necessity.

That nature goes her own way is illustrated by these anecdotes of birds and animals, and by many others even more strange and convincing. The struggle for existence, like the brook, goes on forever, and the survival, if not of the fittest, at least of the strongest, must continue to be the rule of life, so long as the economical problems of existence remain unsolved. Man and beast must be fed. "Manna," to some extent, will always be provided by generous humanitarianism. There will always be John Howards. Occasionally a disinterested, self-abnegating soul like that of John Woolman will appear among us – doing good from love; and, it may be, men like Jonathan Chapman – Johnny Appleseed, he was called from his habit of planting apple seeds wherever he went, as he distributed tracts among the frontier settlers in the early days of western history. He would not harm even a Snake. His heart was right, though his judgment was little better than that of many modern sentimentalists who cannot apparently distinguish the innocuous from the venomous.

It does seem that birds and animals are warranted in committing every act of vandalism that they are accused of. They are unquestionably entitled by every natural right to everything of which they take possession. The farmer has no moral right to deny them a share in the product of his fields and orchards; the gardener is their debtor (at least of the birds), and the government, which benefits also from their industry, should give them its protection. – C. C. M.

THE PETRIFIED FERN

IN a valley, centuries ago,
Grew a little fernleaf, green and slender,
Veining delicate and fibres tender,
Waving when the wind crept down so low;
Rushes tall, and moss, and grass grew round it;
Playful sunbeams darted in and found it,
Drops of dew stole in by night and crowned it;
But no foot of man e'er came that way,
Earth was young and keeping holiday.

Monster fishes swam the silent main —
Mountains hurled their snowy avalanches,
Giant forests shook their stately branches,
Mammoth creatures stalked across the plain;
Nature reveled in wild mysteries,
But the little fern was not of these,
Did not number with the hills and trees,
Only grew and waved its sweet wild way —
No one came to note it day by day.

Earth one day put on a frolic mood,
Moved the hills and changed the mighty motion
Of the deep, strong currents of the ocean,
Heaved the rocks, and shook the haughty wood,
Crushed the little fern in soft moist clay,
Covered it and hid it safe away.
Oh, the long, long centuries since that day!
Oh, the agony, Oh, life's bitter cost
Since that useless little fern was lost!

Useless? Dost? There came a thoughtful man
Searching Nature's secrets far and deep;
From a fissure in a rocky steep
He withdrew a stone, o'er which there ran
Fairy pencilings, a quaint design,
Veining, leafage, fibres, clear and fine,
And the fern's life lay in every line.
So, methinks, God hides some souls away,
Sweetly to surprise us some sweet day.

— *Anon.*

WATER AND ANIMALS

TO SHOW the importance of water to animal life, we give the opinions of several travelers and scientific men who have studied the question thoroughly.

The Camel, with his pouch for storing water, can go longer without drink than other animals. He doesn't do it from choice, any more than you in a desert would prefer to drink the water that you have carried with you, if you might choose between that and fresh spring water. Major A. G. Leonard, an English transport officer, claims that Camels "should be watered every day, that they can not be trained to do without water, and that, though they can retain one and a half gallons of water in the cells of the stomach, four or five days' abstinence is as much as they can stand, in heat and with dry food, without permanent injury."

Another distinguished English traveler, a Mr. Bryden, has observed that the beasts and birds of the deserts must have private stores of water of which we know nothing. Mr. Bryden, however, has seen the Sand-Grouse of South America on their flight to drink at a desert pool. "The watering process is gone through with perfect order and without overcrowding" – a hint to young people who are hungry and thirsty at their meals. "From eight o'clock to close on ten this wonderful flight continued; as birds drank and departed, others were constantly arriving to take their places. I should judge that the average time spent by each bird at and around the water was half an hour."

To show the wonderful instinct which animals possess for discovering water an anecdote is told by a writer in the *Spectator*, and the article is republished in the *Living Age* of February 5. The question of a supply of good water for the Hague was under discussion in Holland at the time of building the North Sea Canal. Some one insisted that the Hares, Rabbits, and Partridges knew of a supply in the sand hills, because they never came to the wet "polders" to drink. At first the idea excited laughter. Then one of the local engineers suggested that the sand hills should be carefully explored, and now a long reservoir in the very center of those hills fills with water naturally and supplies the entire town.

All this goes to prove to our mind that if Seals do not apparently drink, if Cormorants and Penguins, Giraffes, Snakes, and Reptiles seem to care nothing for water, some of them do eat wet or moist food, while the Giraffe, for one, enjoys the juices of the leaves of trees that have their roots in the moisture. None of these animals are our common, everyday pets. If they were, it would cost us nothing to put water at their disposal, but that they never drink in their native haunts "can not be proved until the deserts have been explored and the total absence of water confirmed." —*Ex.*

THE HERRING GULL

JUST how many species of Gulls there are has not yet been determined, but the habits and locations of about twenty-six species have been described. The American Herring Gull is found throughout North America, nesting from Maine northward, and westward throughout the interior on the large inland waters, and occasionally on the Pacific; south in the winter to Cuba and lower California. This Gull is a common bird throughout its range, particularly coast-wise.

Col. Goss in his "Birds of Kansas," writes as follows of the Herring Gull:

"In the month of June, 1880, I found the birds nesting in large communities on the little island adjacent to Grand Manan; many were nesting in spruce tree tops from twenty to forty feet from the ground. It was an odd sight to see them on their nests or perched upon a limb, chattering and scolding as approached.

"In the trees I had no difficulty in finding full sets of their eggs, as the egg collectors rarely take the trouble to climb, but on the rocks I was unable to find an egg within reach, the 'eggers' going daily over the rocks. I was told by several that they yearly robbed the birds, taking, however, but nine eggs from a nest, as they found that whenever they took a greater number, the birds so robbed would forsake their nests, or, as they expressed it, cease to lay, and that in order to prevent an over-collection they invariably drop near the nest a little stone or pebble for every egg taken."

The young Gulls grow rapidly. They do not leave their nesting grounds until able to fly, though, half-grown birds are sometimes seen on the water that by fright or accident have fallen. The nests are composed of grass and moss. Some of them are large and elaborately made, while others are merely shallow depressions with a slight lining. Three eggs are usually laid, which vary from bluish-white to a deep yellowish brown, spotted and blotched with brown of different shades. In many cases where the Herring Gull has suffered persecution, it has been known to depart from its usual habit of nesting on the open seashore.

It is a pleasure to watch a flock of Gulls riding buoyantly upon the water. They do not dive, as many suppose, but only immerse the head and neck. They are omnivorous and greedy eaters; "scavengers of the beach, and in the harbors to be seen boldly alighting upon the masts and flying about the vessels, picking up the refuse matter as soon as it is cast overboard, and often following the steamers from thirty to forty miles from the land, and sometimes much farther." They are ever upon the alert, with a quick eye that notices every floating object or disturbance of the water, and as they herald with screams the appearance of the Herring or other small fishes that often swim in schools at the surface of the water, they prove an unerring pilot to the fishermen who hastily follow with their lines and nets, for they know that beneath and following the valuable catch in sight are the larger fishes that are so intent upon taking the little ones in out of the wet as largely to forget their cunning, and thus make their capture an easy one.

Very large flocks of Gulls, at times appearing many hundreds, are seen on Lake Michigan. We recently saw in the vicinity of Milwaukee a flock of what we considered to be many thousands of these birds, flying swiftly, mounting up, and falling, as if to catch themselves, in wide circles, the sun causing their wings and sides to glisten like burnished silver.

USEFUL BIRDS OF PREY

IT is claimed that two hundred millions of dollars that should go to the farmer, the gardner, and the fruit grower in the United States are lost every year by the ravages of insects – that is to say, one-tenth of our agricultural product is actually destroyed by them. The Department of Agriculture has made a thorough investigation of this subject, and its conclusions are about as stated. The ravages of the Gypsy Moth in three counties in Massachusetts for several years annually cost the state \$100,000. "Now, as rain is the natural check to drought, so birds are the natural check to insects, for what are pests to the farmer are necessities of life to the bird. It is calculated that an average insectivorous bird destroys 2,400 insects in a year; and when it is remembered that there are over 100,000 kinds of insects in the United States, the majority of which are injurious, and that in some cases a single individual in a year may become the progenitor of several billion descendants, it is seen how much good birds do ordinarily by simple prevention." All of which has reference chiefly to the indispensableness of preventing by every possible means the destruction of the birds whose food largely consists of insects.

But many of our so-called birds of prey, which have been thought to be the enemies of the agriculturist and have hence been ruthlessly destroyed, are equally beneficial. Dr. Fisher, an authority on the subject, in referring to the injustice which has been done to many of the best friends of the farm and garden, says:

"The birds of prey, the majority of which labor night and day to destroy the enemies of the husbandman, are persecuted unceasingly. This has especially been the case with the Hawk family, only three of the common inland species being harmful. These are the Goshawk, Cooper's Hawk, and the Sharp-shinned Hawk, the first of which is rare in the United States, except in winter. Cooper's Hawk, or the Chicken Hawk, is the most destructive, especially to Doves. The other Hawks are of great value, one of which, the Marsh Hawk, being regarded as perhaps more useful than any other. It can be easily distinguished by its white rump and its habit of beating low over the meadows. Meadow Mice, Rabbits, and Squirrels are its favorite food. The Red-tailed Hawk, or Hen Hawk, is another." It does not deserve the name, for according to Dr. Fisher, while fully sixty-six per cent of its food consists of injurious mammals, not more than seven per cent consists of poultry, and that it is probable that a large proportion of the poultry and game captured by it and the other Buzzard Hawks is made up of old, diseased, or otherwise disabled fowls, so preventing their interbreeding with the sound stock and hindering the spread of fatal epidemics. It eats Ground Squirrels, Rabbits, Mice, and Rats.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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