

Some Facts About Ants.

Ants, we know, have many wonderful institutions. They breed and keep cows, possess slaves, sow grain and reap the harvest, and in many other ways offer a rich lesson to the sluggard if he would but bestir himself to read it. And now M. Charles Miessen, a French explorer, has another story of their prowess to tell. Somewhere in Siam he saw an army of grey ants moving through the country. They were accompanied by a few specimens of a larger species. Upon each of these a grey ant was mounted, and the larger ants being also faster than the rank and file of the army, the officers were thus enabled to gallop to and fro and control the movements of their troops. This is an extraordinary story, but whether or not it be more startling than many other known startling feats of the lower orders is another question. The other accomplishments of ants mentioned above are a parallel to one facet of the story; another is to be found in the bird world. The small Canadian owl, which is no larger than a sparrow, has been seen riding on the back of a most unwilling gopher in the way that suggested that it was a habit, at any rate, with that particular individual.

A Thoughtful Bird.

At the Red Lion Inn, Hungerford (writes a contributor to a Home magazine), there lived for many years a raven who, by the care he showed for dogs, might have been a member of the Royal Humane Society. Driving one day into the inn yard with a party, we injured the leg of a dog which was with us, and while we were examining the injury Ralph, the raven, was evidently a concerned spectator. From the minute the dog was tied up, Ralph not only visited him, but brought him bones and attended to him with particular and repeated marks of kindness. I observed it to the ostler, who told me that the bird had been brought up with a dog, and that the affection between them was mutual. Ralph's poor dog after a while broke his leg, and during the long time he was confined Ralph waited on him constantly, carried him his provisions, and scarcely left him alone. One night by accident the stable door had been shut, and Ralph had been deprived of the company of his friend the whole night, but the ostler found in the morning the door so pecked away that had it not been opened Ralph in another hour would have made his own entrance. Several other acts of kindness were shown by this bird to dogs in general, particularly to maimed or sickly ones.

Sparrow Housekeeping.

Have you ever watched a pair of sparrows when first the house hunting and building mania comes on them? How stupendously busy they are, especially the cock, and what a tremendous lot he has to say! As a matter of fact, his mistress does all the real work and he supplies all the theory, which she consistently disregards.

Not that Mrs Sparrow works impetuously, as though time permitted of no deliberation. On the contrary, she uses the greatest deliberation in the performance of every action, however trivial. Watch her when she is considering the eligibility of, let us say, a bit of string which she has found in a garden path, as material

to be used in the building of a nest over which she is busy. First she will sit upon a gooseberry twig a yard or two away and inspect that morsel of string from the south-east.

Then she will flit over to the apple tree close by and study it from the north-west. Then she will examine it from other points of the compass. At last she will hop up to it and pull it about—apparently accepting it, but rejecting it again, still uncertain as to its suitability for some purpose exactly defined in her foolish little mind. At last she will decide to use it, and, seizing it, she will fly up to her nest with the treasure; but, vacillating once again, she drops it at the very threshold and sits upon the roof a little while eyeing it and chattering, explaining to her lord, perhaps, that it would have done well enough if it had been longer or shorter, or thicker or thinner, or heaven knows what. Finally she will flit down and carry it away to use, and behold! to-morrow she has turned it out once more, and it lies upon the garden path a rejected thing. Not for long, however, for either she herself or some other bird has removed it next time one looks for the much considered scrap.

That conceited and self-assertive little person, her lord and master is far less deliberate in his actions. He is more certain of himself, being convinced that he knows everything and that to consider and weigh and deliberate is a waste of time.

He is anxious to help with the nest-making, and holds forth without ceasing while his lady builds. Occasionally he lends a hand. He catches sight of a straw, it may be, or a small piece of stick, and it occurs to him that here is the very thing his foolish wife has sought for days and failed to find. What does not occur to him is that he is a garrulous old incompetent and knows no more about nest-building than he knows about the laying of eggs. His wife knows all about him, however, and the straw is turned out of the nest again as soon as his back is turned. He has probably placed it in some impossible position and—after explaining what a marvellous fellow he is and what a treasure he has brought up in the way of building material—departed, forgetting all about the matter in a moment or two. Even when he sees that straw lying upon the garden path, so conceited is he that he does not recognise it, because he cannot contemplate the possibility of its rejection by the mistress. He thinks he has found another treasure.

There, he says, dumping it down by her side as she sits nesting, perhaps laying a little egg in the semi-completed nest. 'There's another splendid straw, how is it you don't come across them?' I can find them whenever I like!

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