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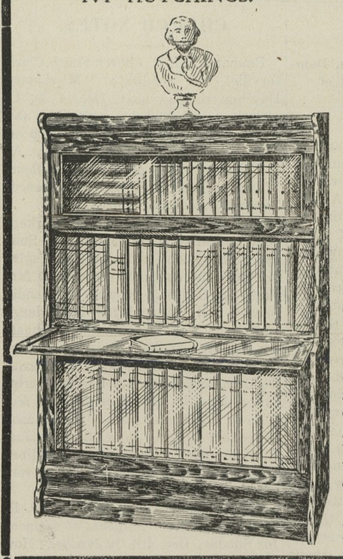

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THE CROWS OF INDIA

THEY ARE THE ARCH VILLAINS OF THE BIRD WORLD.

Two Species of the Feathered Vagabonds Exist Side by Side and Ply Their Tricks of Iniquity In Common—Larceny For the Love of It.

It is quite impossible for any one who has not sojourned in the "Land of Regrets" to appreciate the important part played by crows in the daily life of the Anglo-Indian. India without its crows is unthinkable; it could only be likened to London without its fogs. Wherever human beings have their abodes there are multitudes of corvidae to be found, for the Indian crow is an inseparable appendage of town and village. Two species exist side by side in India, the great blackbird known to Anglo-Indians as the corby and the smaller gray necked species. Both birds lead lives of aimless vagabondage; both are scoundrels of the most pronounced type; both are sinners beyond redemption. Did the black crow exist alone it would be held up as the emblem of all that is evil and mischievous. As things are, its iniquities pale into insignificance beside those of its gray necked cousin. The very name of the latter bird is sufficient to raise the ire of the righteous man. To call the arch villain of the bird world "the splendid" is mere mockery of words. Jerdon, the famous Indian naturalist, "often regrets that such an inappropriate specific name should have been applied to this species, for it tends to bring into ridicule among the unscientific the system of nomenclature."

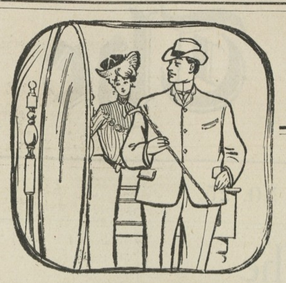
The Indian crow is able to utilize most things. A Calcutta bird has made itself famous for all time by constructing a nest of the wires used to secure the corks of soda water bottles. Bombay is very jealous of Calcutta, and the crows, of course, ape their betters. The Bombay birds determined not to be outdone by the Calcutta corvidae. Accordingly one of the former promptly built her nest of gold and silven spectacle frames stolen from Messrs. Lawrence & Mayo's factory. The value of the materials used in the construction of this nest was estimated at £20. But crows will appropriate things for which they can have no possible use. They commit larceny for the love of the thing. The Indian crow is the incarnate spirit of mischief. The bird will wantonly tear a leaf out of a book lying open on the table. My gardener, adds Mr. Dewar, puts every morning fresh flowers in the vases. This operation is performed on the veranda. One day the man was called away from his work for a couple of minutes. During his absence a crow swooped down and succeeded in taking a beakful of flowers and breaking the vase in which they were placed. A retired colonel of my acquaintance who lives in the Himalayas is a very enthusiastic gardener, and the crows are the bane of his life. They root up his choicest seedlings, sever the heads of his most superb flowers from the stalk and fly away with the little pieces of paper which he places in cleft sticks to mark where seed have been sown.

But it is in towns that the iniquity of the crows reaches its maximum. The Madras corvidae are a byword throughout the length and breadth of India. The hospital is their favorite playground. They are never so happy as when annoying the inmates. They know at once when a person is too ill to move. The consequence is that it has been found necessary to have made for all the tables wire covers which protect articles placed at the bedside from the ravages of the "treble dated birds." I have seen a Madras crow quietly helping itself to the contents of a basket which an old woman was carrying on her head. The bird was possessed of sufficient intelligence to refrain from alighting on the basket. Had it done so its presence would probably have been detected. It flapped along just above the top of the basket, keeping pace with the woman, and so, unperceived by her, made a meal off the contents. The knavish tricks of crows are by no means confined to human beings. As Colonel Cunningham truly says, "Any animal pets are, of course, even more than inanimate objects, subject to their attentions, and unless in wholly inaccessible places are constantly liable to have their food purloined and their lives rendered a burden by persistent and ingenious persecution." I once possessed a greyhound which used to be fed in the garden. A man had to stand over the dog while it was feeding; otherwise the crows would devour the greater portion of the meal. Their plan of campaign was simple and effective. They soon learned the dog's feeding hour and as it drew near would take up a position on any convenient tree. The moment the greyhound began to eat a crow would swoop down and peck viciously at its tail. The dog would, of course, turn on the bird, and the others would seize this opportunity to snatch away some of the food. The process would be repeated until the meal was over. Crows tease and annoy wild creatures with the same readiness that they worry domestic animals. They mob every strange bird in much the same way as the London street arab makes fun of any person in unusual attire.—Longman's Magazine.

Sudden Want of Information.

Tommy—Ma, lend me a lead pencil. Mother—I just left pen and ink on the table for you. What do you want with a pencil? Tommy—I want to write to the editor of the paper to ask him what'll take ink stains out of the parlor carpet.—Philadelphia Ledger.

Think much and often, speak little and write less.—Woman's Life.



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