

## The Crow.

BY MRS. C. S. NOURSE.

OF all the abused birds, and they are not a few, the family of the crows is, perhaps, the most slandered and ill-used. One reason for the evil repute into which it has fallen, is the fact that being a very extensive family it, like most large families, includes in its numerous branches some rather disreputable members, and after the way of the world, they have been taken as the representatives of the race; but then the world does not know they have aristocratic relations, of no less pretension than the birds of paradise who are their own blood relations. But though this is true, we cannot deny that some of the English cousins bear an extremely bad reputation among those who know them well. But we maintain that on the whole they have been abused from time immemorial.

The raven, a prominent member of the family, has been regarded in all countries and in all ages as a bird of evil omen, and the most courageous Roman warrior quailed at seeing one alight upon his banner; while if we come down to mediæval times, we find the poor bird strongly suspected of having dealings with the devil. Both facts, however, give evidence that he must have been possessed of superior intelligence and talent in order to have acquired such a character; for whatever other qualities may be attributed to the devil, no one accuses him of stupidity, and accordingly we find these birds possessed of extraordinary powers. The raven, the magpie, the chough, all belonging to the *Corvidæ*, can be taught to speak, and all crows have the faculty of imitating sounds.

The whole genus is fond of the company of man, and, notwithstanding shabby treatment, always remains in his neighborhood, partly, it may be, for sociability, and partly from inter-

ested motives—for the advantage of sharing the products of his labor.

The general characteristics which distinguish the appearance of this race of birds are, a head rather flat than round, a strong bill slightly blunt at the end, and stiff, bristle-like feathers which are placed at its base, and lie forward covering the nostrils. In the raven the feathers about the neck are loose and

proverb of rarity, yet instances do occasionally occur. They are sometimes entirely white—bill, feathers, legs, and claws—and found so in the nest, thus refuting the very ancient error that they became white from old age. On the contrary it has been ascertained that where the young birds are quite white, they turn black as they grow to maturity, and gain their full strength.

Naturalists attribute the want of color to weakness of the secretions, which increase in vigor as the bird becomes strong and healthy.

The American crow is a different variety from the English, and has many genuine Yankee characteristics; shrewd and knowing, he possesses a degree of cool assurance which is worthy of his nationality. The race is found from Maine to Florida, and from the Atlantic to the Pacific, but is most numerous in the States of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The largest crow roost in the world is upon the Delaware River. They resort in untold numbers in the neighborhood of the town of Bristol, opposite Burlington, N. J., upon that river. They may be seen on a cloudy day in the late Autumn rising in such numbers that they darken the air like a thunder cloud, from the western bank of the river, and crossing above it to the Jersey side, and sending the echoes of their gathering cries far up and down the stream. They alight upon a field of ripened corn, by wide circling flights and suspend their "caw, caw, caw," for a time while they are engaged in tearing open the dry husks or searching among the stalks for small game, worthy of their pursuit. Upon the top of some small tree or high fence-rail, close in the vicinity, may be



THE COMMON CROW AND WALNUT TREE.

longer and somewhat rough in appearance, but in the crows proper, they lie smooth and close. The claws are large and strong, suited to the purpose of seizing and retaining their prey. The plumage is generally black, with a strong purple reflection from above and green upon the under side. The hooded crow of Europe has a hood like a monk's cowl, and is gray below the wings. A white crow is a

seen one of their number stationed as a sentinel. He appears to be most faithful to his trust, if we may judge by the quick turning of his head this way and that, and the keen peering glances of his bright eye when he is approached. A carriage or wagon driving upon the road, no matter with what noise of wheels, or snapping of whip, does not disconcert him in the least; a woman, or child, will be allowed to come quite

close to his perch, without his betraying any sign of uneasiness, but let a man be seen coming and the closest scrutiny is at once instituted; if he carry anything over his shoulder, as a rake or a hoe, the head turns about rapidly and a warning note is uttered with a kind of uncertain sound, as if he admitted to himself that his fears might not be well founded; but if he carry a fowling-piece, the cry of warning will be clear, sharp, and decided, and in an instant the whole flock will rise from their feast, and with a clamorous noise take instant flight. The difficulty of scaring them off a field by scare-crows is well known to every farmer. When the hat and coat, which are generally used, are first set up in the middle of the field, so, as much as possible, to resemble a man, the birds are very shy indeed; they hover over the place at quite a height, but gradually, as they become more and more convinced of the hoax, circle nearer and lower, examining closely, until one more adventurous than the rest will alight upon the suspicious figure, and the matter ends perhaps by placing their sentinel upon the top of the scarecrow's hat. In truth, the scarecrow is a mistake, as such a mistake as the act of Henry the Eighth which set a price upon a crow's head; for the corn which the birds eat may well be spared them, for the sake of the insects and other troublesome marauding animals which they destroy, such as mice, moles, etc.; though it must be confessed they do sometimes snatch a young chicken in the spring when other food is somewhat scarce. But on the whole they do more good than harm. If they could be persuaded to pursue the grasshopper and the potato bug, they would be indeed public benefactors: but they are not numerous in the region where the latter most abound.

A crow once attempted to take a chicken from the callow brood, with the intention of making a dainty meal, but the plucky mother pursued him so pugnaciously, that when he took refuge in a neighboring apple-tree, she followed, making such a din, that in sheer terror, it would seem, at her noise, for of course he could soon have carried his victim out of her reach, he dropped her nursling at her feet, and flew off in ignominious fright at the feminine power of vociferation.

In building their nests, these birds are extremely careful to avoid notice, and use all their fine powers of intelligent contrivance. The nest is placed upon some high rock, or in the crevice of a bank, often mid-way of some lofty precipice; sometimes, where no such places can be found, they build in the tops of high trees, though in a flat country, where there are no trees, they sometimes build lower, in the midst of large swamps among grass and reeds, the object seeming to be secure from notice.

There is in the Delaware River an island called the Pea Patch, which is the gathering place of the clans; the birds resort there by

thousands to roost, and on one occasion a severe storm beat so violently upon the shallow retreat, that immense numbers of them were drowned and swept by the tide against the Jersey shores, but no diminution was perceived in their numbers the following season.

The nest is built of twigs and mortared well with mud or clay, a strong and serviceable dwelling, rather than a delicate or luxurious one. They all build very early in the season, the young birds being strong and hardy, to sustain the cold blasts of the early spring of our harsh climate, for as their nests are generally placed near the banks of streams or some body of water, they are greatly exposed to their severity.

There is no doubt that the shy and wary habits of these birds are the result of the harsh treatment they have received at the hands of men, for in exceptional instances where they have been domesticated and treated as pets, they have become extremely tame, and very sociable, not to say saucy.

On the whole I think that a summing up of their good qualities will make a very fair showing. Certainly none can deny that they possess talent and pluck, and that in a fair encounter of wits, the crow often gets the better of his human persecutors. He certainly understands the nature and appearance of a gun as well as the best sportsman, displays the greatest prudence, forethought, and executive ability in the management of all his affairs, causing "the best laid schemes of mice and men, to gang alee," capturing the one without mercy, and circumventing the other in nine cases out of ten. He is a cosmopolitan and something of a bohemian, but a pretty good fellow after all.

These birds have a fancy for being caressed and soothed like cats. A gentleman who had taken one of the English coughts, a first cousin of the crows, as a household pet, declares that it would sit up on his knee some-

times for hours, while he fondled and caressed it, but immediately resented the least opposition to its will with beak and claw.

It is probable that they take pleasure in a damp atmosphere and are certainly not much afraid of cold, being found in very high latitudes.

Virgil says the croaking of the crow foreboded rain,

*"Tam corvix plena pluviam vocat improba voce,"*

and this habit is generally indicative of pleasure in other creatures, as in the tree-frog, which is never so happy as in announcing an approaching storm by its sonorous croak.

The ancient belief in the appearance of the crow being an evil omen has assumed various forms. The Romans thought it so, when seen on the left hand, and in Scandinavian countries, it is believed to forebode death if it enters the house, a superstition of which Poe availed himself in his celebrated poem. I have spoken of the raven and the crow almost without distinction here, for they so closely resemble each other, that there is really no very important difference, and popular superstition regards them in the same light. The raven is, however, the most easily tamed, can be taught to speak and imitate various sounds. They will bark like a dog, and mew like a cat, mock the notes of the jackdaw and other birds. We are all familiar with the exhortation of that astute and philosophic bird belonging to Barnaby Rudge, "never say die, never say die," interspersed between the drawing of innumerable corks which he seems to have considered as a sound encouraging in its nature and highly conducive to the carrying out of his plucky principles.

In the fables of Æsop, the crow is always represented as exhibiting great sagacity, as in the device of raising the water in the pitcher, which was too low for him to reach, by dropping pebbles into it until the water came near the top. Many such stories are related of him and of his congeners, among which are found, I am sorry to say, those arrant thieves, the magpies, whose dexterous abstraction of glittering things has so often given rise to serious trouble. A tinner once leaving his work-bench to go to his shop to serve a customer, found on his return that a part of the cup upon which he was working was gone. His seat was just in front of a window, which was wide open indeed, but too high from ground for any one to reach it from the outside, and he knew no one had entered through the shop. The matter puzzled him extremely; for though the loss was nothing, the thing had an "uncanny" look, as the Scotch say; nor was the mystery explained until a large tree near the house was cut down and the handle of the tin cup found fixed upon the edge of the nest.

Though it is now a well-known fact to all naturalists that many



THE CROW ON THE DELAWARE.

birds enjoy collecting bright twigs to adorn their nests, such knowledge has only a comparatively recent date, and for a long time the corvidæ enjoyed this reputation alone. A common crow was once seen flying over the deck of a sloop with something shining in his bill; an expert marksman brought him down, and the shining thing was found to be a new iron hinge which had probably been picked up where some new building was going up.

The whole race have a turn for mischief, and apparently a sense of humor which gives them a particularly keen appreciation for it. The magpie is not only a thief, but he is a loud, insolent, and vulgar bird, possessed with the love of mischief, and apparently having as much pleasure in it as a monkey, often alighting upon the backs of sheep or cattle, and resenting their attempts to rid themselves of him with a degree of temper which is really ludicrous in its cool impudence.

The carrion crow is a distinct species, and his bad character should not be allowed to prejudice other members of the family, for though generally omnivorous in their habits, they do not willingly associate with unclean birds, but find their own living by persevering industry and most intelligent devices.

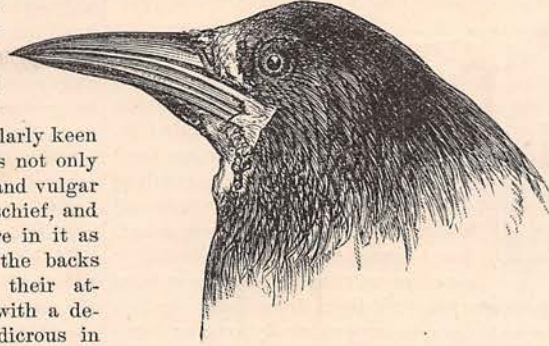
The fish crow subsists mostly by crabbing, and is most fond of such dainty food, but as his beak is not stout enough to break the shell, he resorts to the witty expedient of seizing the crab, rising high in the air, over some rock or stony place, and when at a sufficient height, dropping it, that it may be broken by the fall, when he can descend and eat it at his pleasure. If there are no crabs he resorts to a still more singular method, not quite so legitimate. He will watch some other bird at his fishing, and when he has swallowed a good supply, pounce upon him and force him to disgorge the fish which he has taken, in order to save master crow the trouble of capturing his own game.

I have said that the crow places its nest in secluded places, which it selects with wonderful acuteness, choosing such as seem inaccessible, this matter appearing to be decided by the perception and intelligence of the individual, not only by general instinct, as in many instances the fact that it is inaccessible can be learned only by observation and experience. They are exemplary parents, both sexes taking a share in the labor of incubation, and the care which they take in going to and from the nest, the stratagems which they resort to, to mislead the observer, are truly wonderful. A naturalist records having watched for many hours for the return of the bird to her nest, without success, though quite sure that she would not have left her nestlings so long without food; but so wary had been her motions, so acute her observation, that she had actually eluded his close watch, and returned without being seen.

The magpie protects her nest from invasion by a covering or dome of thorns, which is reared as a screen from other birds who would devour the eggs or the young. "Set a thief to catch a thief," says the proverb, and the consciousness that the eggs of her neighbors

are not quite safe from herself, may quicken her ingenuity. Indeed nearly all the crows will eat eggs of other birds when they have an opportunity.

You may think that my candor has not left the crow a very fair character, but I beg my readers to remember that I began by saying that on the whole they did about as much good



"CAW, CAW, CAW."

as harm, and I leave it to their judgment to decide whether that is not more than can be said for most human beings, and whether after the whole truth has been told crows do not compare very well with men?

## A Moving Story.

BY HOPE LEDYARD.



It was the first of May and we were moving; do you need to be told more to imagine the confusion? I was the eldest of six, and though mother had the name of attending to things, as she was not strong, I was the one who worked.

I don't think one ever feels tired on moving day; it is not while you are packing and planning, and contriving—hurrying from the old to the new house and back again, getting up pic-nic meals, which in spite of the dirt and disorder are very jolly—it is not while all this is going on that you feel tired. One's spirits seem to rise with the demand made upon them. It is only when having improvised a crib out of a big bureau drawer, and delighted the little five-year-old by letting him sleep in mamma's room, you make up your bed hastily and lie down on it, that the "tired" comes out.

But the year I am telling about was my first experience at moving, and I did not know what a false exhilaration the day was to exert upon me. I had been up at dawn, packing and contriving, for we were by no means rich, and papa had said if I saved him extra expenses in moving, I might have the new parlor curtains I had been so long sighing for. It was two o'clock in the afternoon: I had left my little brother to watch the front hall, and was seated on the top of a step-ladder sorting over a lot of rubbish and magazines, when to my horror, I heard Jack say: "Sister's right

back there, you'll see her if you look up." Who could it be that was so foolish as to come to see me in this confusion? I heard a man's footsteps, but could not look round without standing up, and that I would not do—there was not time to descend.

"Oh, Miss Hurst! Excuse my coming in—I had no idea you were moving." There stood Mr. Driscoll, the one of all others in whose eyes I wished to appear well. He was, I had heard, most fastidious as to young ladies! I murmured, with no thought of punning, something about it being "a very sudden move," and tried to apologize for my appearance.

"Indeed, I see no need for apology," said Mr. Driscoll kindly. "I am sure you are a very good daughter to be lightening your mother's responsibility so much. I ran in because I have most unexpectedly received an invitation to meet Mr. and Mrs. —," mentioning a lady and gentleman very well known in literary circles, "and as I find, at the last moment, that I may bring a lady, I could think of no one who would enjoy it so much as yourself. It is such very short notice that I fear you will think me somewhat rude in asking you, but, if you can possibly manage it, I should be delighted to introduce you at Mrs. C—'s."

The very name was tempting bait to me. I had heard of this lady's literary receptions, and dreamed of the honor, at some far future time, of being invited to one of them.

"To-night, did you say?"

"Yes; it is awfully short notice!"

I'll be no use at home after eight o'clock, I thought, and I know just where my best things are—I can dress quickly. "Yes," I said aloud, "I'm only too glad to go, Mr. Driscoll. But I shall not do you great honor, for I cannot make any preparation."

"Oh, that makes no difference. I sincerely thought it would give you more pleasure than anybody I knew. Now, I will not hinder you, but call at nine o'clock."

Any girl of eighteen knows how much harder I worked after that. I felt peculiarly pleasant toward the boys and tenderly solicitous of mother's headache. My dress gave me little anxiety, simply because I had but one best suit, which, carefully locked in a little old-fashioned trunk, had been sent to the new house on the first load. My brother George and I each had a small hair-covered trunk, studded with brass nails, which from the time of our babyhood had held our treasures. At first these consisted of doll's rags and tea-sets in the one, and kites, marbles, and tops in the other; but the girl had matured earlier than the boy, so that, though *his* still held what I called trash, *mine* was the receptacle of my very best suit and a few keepsakes.

The last load was unpacked, tea had been eaten, the excited young ones put to bed, with promises of unlimited treats on the morrow if they would do without the usual story that night, and at last, at eight o'clock, I ran up to my room where, amid rolls of carpet, and scattered furniture, with the aid of a broken glass, I was to make my toilet. There in the middle of the room, was the little trunk; how glad I was I had basted ruffles in my suit, and that all lay in readiness; I turned the key in the lock and lifted the lid—what a sight met my