

BITS ABOUT RATS.

THE following anecdotes illustrative of the marvellous sagacity and strategic powers of rats were told me by a gentleman who, during a long life, had been much given to studying the habits and natures of animals; he assured me there was not the least exaggeration in his account. Should any doubt arise as to its veracity, I have no objection to giving my informant's name.

As far as I can remember I will repeat them in his own words—

"I used to keep in a cupboard, in my studio, a stone jar partially filled with oil. When I left home for a few days, I dipped all my oil-painting brushes in this jar to keep them soft, not, of course, leaving them there. Naturally they absorbed but a small quantity, yet I invariably found on my return my stock of oil considerably diminished. I had strictly forbidden the servants interfering with any of my painting materials, and they assured me they had never done so. One day I took the key of my cupboard away with me, so you may imagine how surprised I felt when, on my return, I found my stock of oil had disappeared at a greater rate than ever.

"One day I found some clue to the mystery. I had mounted a ladder outside my window to nail up a clematis which grew round it; as I looked into the room I saw a rat come out of the cupboard, look cautiously round in every direction, then rush across the room; his flight was followed by that of four others, and they all disappeared under the skirting board.

"I went indoors at once, visited my oil jar, and found, as I expected, it was emptier than when I last saw it; but what thoroughly puzzled me was, by what means these little thieves obtained the luxury they were so fond of.

"After various conjectures on my part, I could come to no conclusion on the subject. I therefore determined to watch them at work. The next day I left the oil jar in the middle of the room, and again mounted the ladder outside.

In a very few moments a large rat, evidently the leader of the troupe—the one who had first come out of the cupboard the day before, to see if the coast was clear for their escape—ran across the floor towards the cupboard, but stopped short as he passed the jar, attracted by the odour of his favourite beverage.

"He walked round it, stood on his hind legs, leaning against it, and then rushed back to the hole in the wall. He instantly re-appeared, followed by his companions; there was evidently a consultation as to whether an attempt would be safe; they ran round it, looked in every direction, and finally decided the chance was too good to be lost.

"You may imagine how excited and interested I was, and if you did not know me well enough to be sure I would not tell a falsehood for your amusement, you could hardly believe what I there saw. One rat stood on his hind legs, leaning against the jar, his face towards it; a second climbed up his back, and stood in the same position; a

third mounted on the shoulders of the second. Clever as this certainly was they could not reach the oil by this means, and I was all excitement to see how that feat was to be achieved. A fourth rat climbed up the others, and, turning round carefully on the shoulders of number three, sat on the edge of the jar, his face turned my way, his long tail hanging within the jar. In a moment or two he turned round again; the secret was discovered. The aforesaid long tail had been thoroughly soaked in the oil, and the head rat, the captain of these brigands, standing upright, with evident relish licked the oil off the instrument his friend had kindly lent for the purpose.

"When his appetite was satisfied he changed places with the top rat, and performed for him the same service; the other rats then took it in turns to feed, and he fed them. After they

flight of stairs without breaking it. The cupboard I spoke of before faced my door. I made in it a small hole through which to watch the operations; I then left the room door wide open, and placed an egg on the landing outside my mother's door. I did this two or three days after treading on the egg in my room, expressly to give them time to recover the fright I had caused them before. My cupboard was a very large one, and I was enabled to sit down and wait patiently for the entertainment I expected.

"Before long a rat crossed the room and went out at the door, came back directly, and, I suppose, told his family of the grand find he had made, for they all followed him up the stairs, walked round the egg, smelt and touched it, then coolly rolled it to the top of the stairs, one going in front, I suppose, to break its fall. Now comes the marvellous part of the affair. When within five or six inches of the top stair, the rat in front turned over on his back, with his four feet in the air; then turned on his side towards the egg, and the other rats arranged it for him between his four legs, with which he tightly grasped it. His friends then raised him till he was on his back again, the egg safely resting on his chest; two took him by the head, two by the feet, and lifted him to the very edge of the stair; then two went to the next step to receive him, and he was absolutely lifted down by the two left above, the other two breaking his fall. The other steps were descended in the same manner, and when they reached level ground they rolled the egg along, preserving the same precautions as adopted before starting their clever descent.

"I am sure I need not tell you I allowed them to carry it safely home, before I came out of my hiding place."

M. R. L.



had washed their faces with their paws, just as cats would have done, they returned to their hole in the wall."

"My next experience in the intelligent ways of these animals was even more wonderful, and showed an amount of determination, patience, and hard work that would be creditable to any of us. One day, entering my studio suddenly, I heard a great rush across the floor, and trod on something just inside the door, which I found to be an egg. Surely, I thought, the rats cannot be answerable for this; but, after making inquiries from everyone in the house, I received no explanation, and my mother told me she had missed an egg from her bedroom, where she had taken it the previous night, having been ordered a raw egg before breakfast. This bedroom was separated from the studio by five or six stairs only. After what I had seen the rats perform, I thought it very likely they might be the thieves in this case, and lay in wait to watch their method of performing so wonderful a feat as taking an egg down a

pride seems to flourish everywhere, it will do us all good to commit to memory:—

"Humble we must be if to Heaven we go;
High is the roof there, but the gate is low:
Where'er thou speakest, look with lowly eye,
Grace is increased by humility."

NUMERICAL CHARADE.

My whole is a battle fought in the reign of Henry V. My 2, 3, 4 is a spirit. My 1, 8, 9 is part of the verb "to be." My 6, 7, 9 is not at home. My 5, 1, 9 is a domestic animal.

ANSWER TO DIAMOND PUZZLE (p. 412).

E
A N D
F I G H T
E N G L A N D
R O A C H
E N D
D

ANSWERS TO BURIED NAMES (p. 412).—
1. Clement. 2. Eva. 3. Fred. 4. Ada.
5. Beatrice. 6. William.

VARIETIES

THE LOWLY PILGRIM.—Here is a verse from an old poet, which in these days, when