

Sagacity of the Rook.

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THE following note, illustrating the sagacity of the Rook, may interest some members of the Derbyshire Archæological and Natural History Society.

Every winter, when the hard weather sets in, I establish a tits' larder in my garden. This, as most people know, is merely a bone with portions of meat or fat left adhering, or a piece of skinny fat, or any meat trimmings that you can beg or steal from the cook, tied to a string and suspended in the air. If the tits' larder be a lump of fat, it is best to twist a piece of wire round it; and it must be hung up high enough to be out of the reach of cats. The lower bough of a tree makes a good place; or, if no tree is available, a pole may be stuck aslant in the ground.

During the long frost of last winter, I had a tits' larder hung on the lower branch of a cherry tree, a few yards from the house, and right in front of my window, whence I could watch the pretty little tits taking their meals.

The rooks soon found it out, and also found out a way to make the tits' dinner their own. Standing on the snow-covered ground nearly underneath the swinging piece of fat, a rook would fly up at it, seize it as you take a pawn at chess, *en passant*, and making a sudden turn in the air, alight upon the branch with the fat in his mouth, and then proceed to eat it.

As this cold collation was intended for the special benefit of the tits, and other refreshment was provided for the rooks, I tried

to put a stop to these rapacious proceedings by shortening the string, so that a rook could not turn round in the air to alight upon the bough. But I did not know the extent of a rook's ingenuity and fertility of resource. He now flew on to the branch where the string was tied, and bending downwards seized the string with his beak some inches below the branch, and drew it up with a regular "Hillee haulee, hillee ho" air, and then, putting his foot upon the string to hold it fast, reached down again and pulled up another length of string, which he again secured with his foot, and so on until he brought up the piece of fat within reach.

I watched the rooks go through this clever performance several times, and noticed that occasionally a bird would fail to secure the string with his foot, and let it slip, when of course he had to begin his hauling up again *de novo*. But I failed to recognize any corvine sound or gesture suggestive of that monosyllabic expletive with which an ordinary Englishman would have relieved his feelings under similar circumstances. As far as I could judge from his action, all that my friend on the cherry branch thought or said was, "Try again. Better luck next time!" I was obliged to substitute a stiffish wire for the string; and, so far, this arrangement has baffled the sable marauders; but I feel far from sure that my poor human expedients to protect the tits' larder will not be neutralized after all by some new device of that quaint, useful, and interesting friend of man—the rook.