

AN AMBUSCADE.

OUR frontispiece, this week, depicts an incident in one of England's little wars, those wars that are often over and done before we have a clear notion in what corner of the Empire they are taking place, or the dangers our fellow Englishmen are encountering in far off lands. All readers of the GRAPHIC, and more especially those who may have shouldered a musket in the old days of the Maori war, will not look at the lonely sentry, standing unconscious of the foe, without a fervent prayer that a cherub, kindred to that which watches over poor Jack on the stormy sea, will give warning to Tommy Atkins before it is too late.

THIEVISH ANIMALS.

BIRDS AND BEASTS THAT STEAL FROM EACH OTHER.



HIEVERY in nature is widely extended. Whole classes of animals prey on other classes for food; whole families are parasitic, and gradually weaken and destroy those on which they feed, writes Alexander H. Japp in *Cassell's Magazine*.

Huber relates an anecdote of some hive bees paying a visit to a nest of humble bees, placed in a box not far from their hive, in order to steal or beg the honey, which places in a strong light the good temper of the latter. This happened in a time of scarcity. The hive bees, after pillaging, had taken almost entire possession of the nest. Some humble bees, who remained in spite of this disaster, went out to collect provisions, and bringing home the surplus after they had supplied their own immediate necessities, the hive bees followed them, and did not quit them until they had obtained the fruit of their labours.

They licked them, presented to them their proboscis, surrounded them, and thus at last persuaded them to part with the contents of their 'honey-bar.' The humble bees did them no harm, and never once showed their stings, so that it seems to have been persuasion rather than force that produced this singular instance of self-denial. This remarkable manoeuvre was practised for more than three weeks, when the wasps, being attracted by the same cause, the humble bees entirely forsook the nest.

Birds, notwithstanding their attractiveness in plumage and sweetness in song, are many of them great thieves. When nest-building they will steal the feathers out of the nests of other birds, and are often much inclined to drive off other birds from a feeding ground, even when there is abundance. This is especially true of one of our greatest favourites, the robin redbreast, who will peck and run after and drive away birds much larger than himself.

Very different as the robin and the sparrow are in other things, they resemble each other in this. On an early spring morning, when a little touch of frost still made the surface of the earth hard, I have seen a blackbird on a lawn at last after great efforts extract a worm, and this was the signal for a crowd of sparrows, who, by dint of numbers, managed to drive away the blackbird and carry off the worm, to feed their own young ones, no doubt.

But the stealing of nest-building material, or of worms, is not nearly so surprising as the stealing of nests themselves. In a sense, of course, the cuckoo steals the use of the nest of another bird, when she deposits in it her own eggs, and steals or procures under false pretences the services of a foster-mother for an intruder; but that is not what we now mean. It is a more common thing for the sparrows, when there is a prospect of a mild autumn, to save themselves time and trouble in the building of a nest for a late brood, and to drive other birds from the nest they have built and still inhabit. Sometimes even the swallow is a sufferer in this way.

A very striking scene of war and theft was brought under our own observation two years ago. We were sitting in an arbor in a country garden, when our eye was caught by a

gathering of birds flying about the branches of a lofty sycamore tree which almost swept over the top of the chimney of a disused back kitchen. In that chimney we knew that swallows had built. The noise of fluttering about the branch told of unwonted excitement and caused us to watch closely.

At length, as it were, on a given signal, the sparrows made an assault on the swallows in their nests; two of the luckless birds were thrown right down the chimney, where, on speedily going in, I found them caught, took them in my hand, to hear that peculiar kind of thick hissing sound which they make when frightened. After observing them a little I let them off, when they disappeared out of view and did not return. The nests were utilized by the sparrows, who successfully reared a third brood in the chimney where the swallows had been.

Readers of Frank Buckland's most delightful books will remember that nothing pleased him more than to observe the different and delightful ways in which his pets would steal. He would sometimes even tempt them to steal just to see how clever they could be in doing it. He tells one delicious story about his favourite Jemmy, the emu, and another about a pet rat which he had, and which not unfrequently terrified his visitors at breakfast.

He had made a house for the pet rat just by the side of the mantelpiece, and this was approached by a kind of ladder, up which the rat had to climb when he had ventured down to the floor. Some kinds of fish the rat particularly liked, and was sure to come out if the savour was strong. One day Mr Buckland turned his back to give the rat a chance of seizing the coveted morsel, which he was not long in doing, and in snipping up the ladder with it; but he had fixed it by the middle of the back, and the door of the entrance was too narrow to admit of its being drawn in thus.

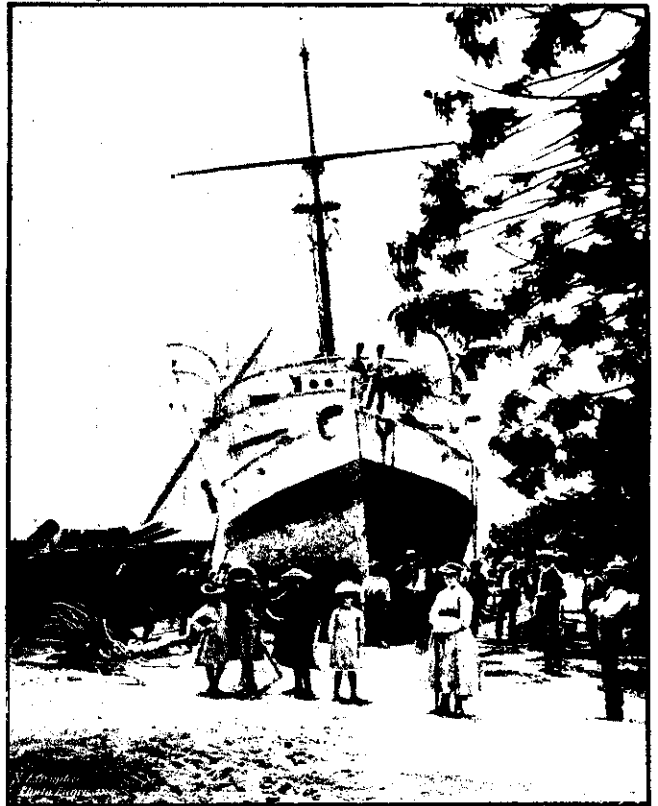
But Mr Rat was equal to the emergency. In a moment he bethought himself, laid the fish on the small platform before the door, and then, entering his house, he put out his mouth, took the fish by the nose, and thus pulled it in and made a meal of it. Never after this did he attempt to drag in such a morsel carried long ways, though Mr Buckland often tried him.

One of the most remarkable instances of carrying on a career of theft came under our own observation. A friend in northeast Essex had a very fine Aberdeenshire terrier, a female, and a very affectionate relationship sprang up between this dog and a tomcat.

The cat followed the dog with the utmost fondness, purring and running against it, and would come and call at the door for the dog to come out. Attention was first drawn to the pair by this circumstance.

One evening we were visiting our friend and heard the cat about the door calling, and someone said to our friend that the cat was noisy. 'He wants little Dell,' said he—that being the dog's name; 'we looked incredulous. 'Well, you shall see,' said he, and, opening the door, he let it out.

At once the cat bounded toward her, fawned round her and then, followed by the dog, ran about the lawn. But a change came. Some kittens were brought to the house, and the terrier got very much attached to them, and they to her. The tomcat became neglected and soon appeared to feel it. By-and-bye, to the surprise of everyone, the tom



THE GUNBOAT 'PALUMA' IN THE BOTANICAL GARDENS, BRISBANE.

somehow managed to get and to establish in the hedge of the garden two kittens—fiery, spitting little things—and carried on no end of depredations on their account. Chickens went; the fur and remains of little rabbits, for which he perseveringly hunted, were often found round the nest, and pieces of meat disappeared from kitchen and larder.

Our friend could not find it in his heart to shoot the tom, and this went on for some time, when suddenly the cat disappeared—had been shot in a wood near by a gamekeeper when hunting to provide for these wild little things, which were allowed to live in the hedge, as they kept down the mice in the garden; but first one was shot and then another, following their foster parent's taste for hunting and killing rabbits and game in the wood.

This was a case of animal thieving for a loftier purpose than generally obtains—mere demand for food and other necessity.

HE UNDERSTOOD.

'MISS GRACIE,' he said with an engaging smile, 'did you ever try your hand at one of these progressive conundrums?'

'What is a progressive conundrum, Mr Spoonamore?' inquired the young lady.

'Haven't you heard of them? Here is one: Why is a ball of yarn like the letter "t"? Because a ball of yarn is circular, a circular is a sheet, a sheet is flat, a flat is £10 a month, £10 a month is dear, a deer is swift, a swift is a swallow, a swallow is a taste, a taste is an inclination, an inclination is an angle, an angle is a point, a point is an object aimed at, an object aimed at is a target, a target is a mark, a mark is an impression, an impression is a stamp, a stamp is a thing stuck on, a thing stuck on is a young man in love, and a young man in love is like the letter "t" because it stands before "u," Miss Gracie.'

'I don't think you have the answer quite right,' said the young lady. 'A ball of yarn is round, a round is a steak, a steak is a wooden thing, a wooden thing is a young man in love, and a young man in love is like the letter "t" because, Mr Spoonamore!—and she spoke distinctly—' because he is often crossed.'

The young man understood. He took his hat and his progressive conundrums and vanished from Miss Gracie Garlinghouse's alphabet for ever.

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THE FLOOD IN QUEEN STREET, BRISBANE.