

*Anecdotes of an American Crow*

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IT IS a difficult task to give a history of our Crow. And I hesitate not to aver, that it would require the pen of a very able biographer to do justice to his talents.

Before I enter on this subject minutely, it may be necessary to remark, that we do not here speak of the crow, collectively, as giving an account of the whole race (since I am convinced, that these birds differ as widely as men do from each other, in point of talents and acquirements), but of a particular bird of that species, which I reared from the nest.

He was, for a long time, comparatively a helpless, dependent creature, having a very small degree of activity or vivacity, every sense seeming to be asleep, or in embryo, until he had nearly attained his finished dimensions, and figure, and the use of all his members. Then, we were surprised, and daily amused with the progressive developement of his senses, expanding and maturing as the wings of the youthful phalæna, when disengaged from its nympha-shell.

These senses, however, seemed, as in man, to be only the organs or instruments of his intellectual powers, and of their effects, as directed towards the accomplishment of various designs, and the gratification of the passions.

This was a bird of a happy temper, and good disposition. He was tractable and benevolent, docile and humble, whilst his genius demonstrated extraordinary acuteness, and lively sensations. All these good qualities were greatly in his favour, for they procured him friends and patrons, even among *men*, whose society and regard contributed to illustrate the powers of his understanding. But what appeared most extraordinary, he seemed to have the wit to select and treasure up in his mind, and the sagacity to practise, that kind of knowledge which procured him the most advantage and profit.

He had great talents, and a strong propensity to imitation. When I was engaged in weeding in the garden, he would often fly to me, and, after very attentively observing me in pulling up the small weeds and grass, he would fall to work, and with his strong beak, pluck up the grass; and the more

so, when I complimented him with encouraging expressions. He enjoyed great pleasure and amusement in seeing me write, and would attempt to take the pen out of my hand, and my spectacles from my nose. The latter article he was so pleased with, that I found it necessary to put them out of his reach, when I had done using them. But, one time, in particular, having left them a moment, the crow being then out of my sight, recollecting the bird's mischievous tricks, I returned quickly, and found him upon the table, rifling my inkstand, books, and paper. When he saw me coming, he took up my spectacles, and flew off with them. I found it vain to pretend to overtake him; but standing to observe his operations with my spectacles, I saw him settle down at the root of an apple-tree, where, after amusing himself, for awhile, I observed, that he was hiding them in the grass, and covering them with chips and sticks, often looking round about, to see whether I was watching him. When he thought he had sufficiently secreted them, he turned about, advancing towards me, at my call. When he had come near me, I ran towards the tree, to regain my property. But he, judging of my intentions, by my actions, flew, and arriving there before me, picked them up again, and flew off with them, into another apple-tree. I now almost despaired of ever getting them again. However, I returned back to a house, a little distance off, and there secreting myself, I had a full view of him, and waited to see the event. After some time had elapsed, during which I heard a great noise and talk from him, of which I understood not a word, he left the tree, with my spectacles dangling in his mouth, and alighted, with them, on the ground. After some time, and a great deal of caution and contrivance in choosing and rejecting different places, he hid them again, as he thought very effectually, in the grass, carrying and placing over them chips, dry leaves, &c., and often pushing them down with his bill. After he had finished this work, he flew up into a tree, hard by, and there continued a long time, talking to himself, and making much noise; bragging, as I supposed, of his achievements. At last, he returned to the house, where not finding me, he betook himself to other amusements. Having noted the place, where he had hid my spectacles, I hastened thither, and after some time recovered them.

This bird had an excellent memory. He soon learned the name which we had given him, which was Tom; and would commonly come when he was called, unless engaged in some favourite amusement, or soon after correction: for when he had run to great lengths in mischief, I was under the necessity of whipping him; which I did with a little switch. He would, in general, bear correction with wonderful patience and humility, supplicating with piteous and penitent cries and actions. But sometimes, when chastisement became intolerable, he would suddenly start off, and take refuge in the next tree. Here he would console himself with chattering, and adjusting his feathers, if he was not lucky enough to carry off with him some of my property, such as a pen-knife, or a piece of paper; in this case, he would boast and brag very loudly. At other times, he would soon return, and with every token of penitence and submission, approach me for forgiveness and reconciliation. On these occasions, he would sometimes return, and settle on the ground, near my feet, and diffidently advance, with soft-soothing expressions, and a sort of circumlocution; and sit silently by me, for a considerable time. At other times, he would confidently come and settle upon my shoulder, and there solicit my favour and pardon, with soothing expressions, and caressing gesticulations; not omitting to tickle me about the neck, ears, &c.

Tom appeared to be influenced by a lively sense of domination (an attribute prevalent in the animal creation): but, nevertheless, his ambition, in this respect, seemed to be moderated by a degree of reason, or reflection. He was, certainly, by no means tyrannical, or cruel. It must be confessed, however, that he aimed to be master of every animal around him, in order to secure his independence and his self-preservation, and for the acquisition and defence of his natural rights. Yet, in general, he was peaceable and social with all the animals about him.

He was the most troublesome and teasing to a large dog, whom he could never conquer. This old dog, from natural fidelity, and a particular attachment, commonly lay down near me, when I was at rest, reading or writing under the shade of a pear-tree, in the garden, near the house. Tom (I believe from a passion of jealousy) would approach me, with his usual

caresses, and flattery, and after securing my notice and regard, he would address the dog in some degree of complaisance, and by words and actions; and, if he could obtain access to him, would tickle him with his bill, jump upon him, and compose himself, for a little while. It was evident, however, that this seeming sociability was mere artifice to gain an opportunity to practise some mischievous trick; for no sooner did he observe the old dog to be dozing, than he would be sure to pinch his lips, and pluck his beard. At length, however, these bold and hazardous achievements had nearly cost him his life: for, one time, the dog being highly provoked, he made so sudden and fierce a snap, that the crow narrowly escaped with his head. After this, Tom was wary, and used every caution and deliberation in his approaches, examining the dog's eyes and movements, to be sure that he was really asleep, and at last would not venture nearer than his tail, and then by slow, silent, and wary steps, in a sideways, or oblique manner, spreading his legs, and reaching forward. In this position, he would pluck the long hairs of the dog's tail. But he would always take care to place his feet in such a manner as to be ready to start off, when the dog was roused and snapped at him.

It would be endless (observes my ingenious friend, in the conclusion of his entertaining account of the crow) to recount instances of this bird's understanding, cunning, and operations, which, certainly, exhibited incontestible demonstrations of a regular combination of ideas, premeditation, reflection, and contrivance, which influenced his operations.