

THE WEEKLY MIRROR.

No. 45. VOL. 1]

HALIFAX, NOVEMBER 20, 1835.

[ONE DOLLAR PER ANNUM.]

NATURAL HISTORY.

REASONING FACULTIES OF ANIMALS.

That animals possess the faculty of reasoning, and are not solely guided by instinct, is the opinion of many British, and foreign naturalists, numerous facts corroborative of this doctrine may be found scattered throughout their works;—doubtless a more enlarged acquaintance with and a stricter attention to, their habits would still further strengthen and confirm this hypothesis.

The sagacity of the beaver, the cunning of the fox, the polity of the bee, the industry of the ant, &c. &c. are so obvious to the most superficial observer as to have become proverbial; and amongst the volatile tribes, instances of foresight and reasoning are often displayed, wholly unaccountable on the principle of mere blind instinct. To this purpose, an American naturalist (Dr. Steel) mentions the sagacity of the swallows frequenting the banks of the Saratoga, [?] which often alter the construction of their nests according to circumstances, in order to secure their young from the depredation of their natural enemies; and an instance of equal, if not greater, sagacity in this tribe of volatiles, I myself witnessed in the south of Scotland several years ago. The spring had been uncommon mild, and the congregation of swallows in the vicinity of the Cheviot was greater than had ever been observed by the oldest inhabitant of this border district. Numerous flocks of them might be seen constructing their nests underneath the straw-thatched roofs of the barns and farmsteads on the Kale and the Beaumont. The ancient straggling mansion of Thirstane seemed in particular to be one of their favourite resorts; the walls were thickly studded with their nests, and two were even attached to the upper corners of one of the bed-room windows. An unusual commotion amongst this feathered community one morning attracted the notice of the family while seated at breakfast, and led to the discovery, that the two nests within the reach of the house-maids broom had been swept away.

Throughout the early part of the day the birds congregated in great numbers on a dilapidated shed in the rear of the house and by their incessant chattering and agitation seemed to be engaged in deep consultation. Towards noon, however, the noisy couclave broke up, when the bereaved pairs immediately recommenced their labours at an angle of the roof furthest from the insecure site they had before chosen. The necessity for despatch was doubtless urgent, as the breeding season, was near at hand; and in this emergency they were not to be unaided by their companions, since, sometimes

eight, were seen flying backwards and forwards, and poising themselves on the edge of the overhanging roof, loaded with materials, while as many as could find room assisted in the building operations.

Without entering on the disputed point whether the lower order of animals, even admitting them to be endowed with a certain portion of reason, are, or are not, capable of transmitting thier individual acquisitions to their species, it seems at least sufficiently evident in the above instance, that the swallows not only communicated a knowledge of their wants and feelings to each other, but profited by the united experience and assistance of their kind.

But, however this may be, I have widely deviated from my purpose, which was merely to recount what appeared to me a striking instance of reasoning in the common sparrow.

The day of the opening of the London Bridge was a day of jubilee to the flocks of those little familiars in the outskirts of the metropolis, owing to the almost total desertion of the streets and squares by people of every rank and degree who had hurried to witness that splendid spectacle.

A few of them from the adjoining garden, that usually pick up in haste and on the wing the crumbs that I am in the daily habit of throwing to them from the breakfast-table, emboldened by the absence of all bustle, alighted fearlessly on the pavement, and soon devoured their allowance, except a hard crust about the size of a walnut, which resisted their united efforts to reduce it to fragments.

As I stood watching their proceedings, they one by one flew off, with the exception of a single bird, which continued its efforts for some time longer. After a while, however, even its patience failed, & it hopped to the edge of the curb-stone, apparently about to take flight after its companions, when suddenly, as if actuated by some new idea, it returned, took up the hard-hearted crust in its bill, and flying towards the kennel immersed it in a little puddle of stagnant water. Thus softened, the sagacious little creature brought it back to the pavement, and readily succeeded in picking it to pieces.

FIRST ADVENTURE OF A SAILOR.

(Concluded)

“ I have that evening as fresh in my memory as if it were but yesterday. The sun was just setting, and our own river Tyne looked broader, clearer, fresher, and brighter in that sunset, than ever it looked before. I stood gazing up the river towards Newcastle, and then down upon the water, beautifully wrinkled by the fresh breeze that played over it. I thought of my mother,

and stood still and strained my eyes towards the place where she was, and did not even dare to wink, for fear of losing for an instant the dream and the wusset glory. I felt that my eyes were filling with tears; and though I was not going to cry, like a lubberly landsman, yet I let them fill; that I might see the pretty colours of the rainbow through them. And then, the landscape grew dim and dimmer, and glanced and danced about, and the Tyne looked so dazzling, and rays of light seemed to shoot from every thing, as the setting sun gleamed on the mast heads round about, which had all been clean washed by a shower of rain.

“ How long I stood in this way, I know not. The sun was set and the sky had faded, when I was roused from my reverie by hearing two or three voices shouting very loud. I started,—I thought my shipmates were coming back already—and in great terror I looked towards the shore. The shore, to my astonishment, was quickly receding from my view! the shout I heard, was from some keelmen rowing up the river, and the good fellows were wishing success to our fishing, and a safe return to the Old Ravensworth.

“ To make the matter short, the Old Ravensworth had broken from her moorings, and with wind and tide in her favour, was going fast out to sea.

“ I afterwards found, that though many saw her sail out of the harbour, yet no one was aware that all hands were not on board. Every man was concerned about his own affairs; every one knew that she was ready for sea; and though it excited a little surprise that she should try to cross the Bar when the tide was so low, instead of waiting for the next morning's tide, no one troubled his head about her. Some people collected on the top of the hill, where the light-house now stands, to see her cross the Bar; there was not light enough for them to see, but all prophesied that she could not do it that night. The next morning, the truth was known to every body. The Captain had come back,—had found his crew drunk, and his ship gone,—and all the lamentation in the world would not bring her back again.”

“ Did she pass the Bar safely?” asked Charley.

“ Yes. One would have thought the old whaler knew her way, she went so cannily over; and the next morning saw her making her way across the German Ocean, as merrily as ever.”

“ Oh!” said little William, “and you were alone upon the great roaring sea! What did you do, grandpapa?”

“ What would you have done, Willy?”
“ I should surely have sat down and cried.”