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VOL 37

CHARLOTTETOWN, P. E. ISLAND; WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 6, 1897.

NO 233

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MANY KINDS THAT ARE USED FOR FOOD IN DIFFERENT LANDS.

English Gulleries and Holland's Egglard. Egg Thieves Among the Feathered Tribes—How the Jackdaws Robbed Their Friend the Bantam.

Custom, which rules in matters of eating more than in any other department of life, has set very narrow limits to the English idea of what are and what are not edible eggs. This must be mainly due to fancy, for the taste of the eggs of most birds is almost the same, though that of a very few, such as the plover and the guinea fowl, is distinctly superior. Much has been written as to the sale of other birds' eggs, gulls', guillemots' and redshanks' for plovers' eggs. They are good enough of their kind, but the difference can be recognized when the shell is stripped off. Not even those of the redshank approach the plover's in flavor. The gull's eggs are so unlike those of the plover that the persistence of the tradition that they are sold as plovers' eggs is puzzling.

The explanation is somewhat curious. The belief had its origin in a confusion of names, which is illustrated by a note of Sir Thomas Browne. The old Norfolk name for the black headed gull was "puet," and these puets' eggs were formerly much more commonly used for food than plovers' eggs. Sir Thomas speaks of the "puets, in such plenty about Horsey, that they sometimes bring them in carts to Norwich, and sell them at small rates, and the country people make use of their eggs in puddings and otherwise." The black headed gull was and to some extent is still the principal wild contributor to our egg supply, except the rock fowl of the coast. At the celebrated gullery in Scoulton Mere, in Norfolk, the first eggs are generally laid in the middle of March, and none is taken after a certain time, fixed yearly, according as the season is early or late. As late as 1890, according to Mr. Thomas Southwell, from 8,000 to 9,000 eggs were taken annually from this one colony. Several of the ancient gulleries of Norfolk are now extinct. That near Wangford was destroyed, according to the evidence of a warrener who remembered the "cuddy muddies," as he called them, "by taking their eggs too close." On the other hand, fresh colonies have been established elsewhere.

In the markets in Holland all kinds of large birds' eggs appear for sale, and are presumably intended to be eaten. Redshanks', greenshanks', and godwits' are the commonest in the market stalls of South Holland, but one sees also the bright blue eggs of the heron and those of wild ducks. Formerly a very large trade was done in wild fowl eggs with the shepherds of the Isle of Texel. The north part of the "Taxel" (as it is pronounced by the Dutch) is still called "eyer land"—"egg land"—and it was from this district that the supply was mainly drawn. In Friesland, the Dutch Norfolk, where meres, broads, heaths and wild fowl abound, the shel-drakes' eggs are one of the minor sources of pocket money to the villagers. Shel-drakes like to nest in a burrow, in which they would normally lay one setting of eggs and then hatch them off. The Frieslanders provide ready made burrows, from which a dozen nesting chambers radiate. These artificial nests are made in a grass covered sand hill, a loose turf being laid over each nesting chamber, which is removed when the egg is taken, and then replaced. The strangest part of this arrangement is the tameness of the birds. Several females use the same entrance and will allow themselves to be handled. They go on laying regularly, like hens, until

the middle of June, when they are allowed to sit. The late Mr. H. Durnford, the first English naturalist who described the wild life of the Friesian Islands, noted that each villager generally owned one of these shel-drake lodging houses, and that they were scrupulously honest in not taking each others' eggs.

This is greatly to the credit of the Friesians, because egg stealing is not only an almost universal frailty among rustics, of whatever nation, but is the only form of crime which is generally recognized and labeled as larceny in the animal community. Every bird knows that the other bird's eggs are that bird's property. It is not like a young one, but a chaffed, and there is a distinct criminal class among birds which knowingly steal eggs, just as there is a respectable class, the great majority, who know that they have to guard against this. Botwix and between there is a doubtful stratum, represented in this country by rooks, starlings (which take larks' eggs), and gulls, who are not habitual criminals, but are liable to stray when temptation comes. The professional egg stealers among our birds are the carrion crow, the magpie, the jay, and the jackdaw. They have no misgivings whatever as to the edible properties of all eggs, though we never knew an instance of them stealing from each other. They are perfectly aware that they are stealing, and their whole air and demeanor when so employed is different to that which they wear when hunting for legitimate food.

The following cases may be cited: In April, 1896, a wild duck was disturbed from her nest in a copse in the Isle of Wight. An hour later a pair of crows found the nest. It held 11 eggs, rather too many for two crows' breakfasts. They invited a few friends, ate all the eggs and then began such a chorus of croaks and shouts that the crime was suspected. Every egg was gone before a single crow uttered a sound. In Holland two magpies found a pheasant sitting. They waited until early next morning and then set to work at daybreak, when their proceedings were watched. One went behind the pheasant and pecked its tail till the bird turned round and rushed at the magpie. The other magpie at once spiked an egg and flew off. Two jackdaws which had a nest in a hollow tree near a house in Suffolk showed a touching affection for a bantam hen. They hopped about the yard in her company, ate out of the plate of food set down for the bantam and were much commended. The bantam had a nest in the garden known to the household. As no eggs were visible for some days a watch was kept. The two jackdaws were seen sitting by their friend, who was on the nest. When the egg was laid, the bantam flew off clucking, and as soon as she was gone one of the daws flew off with the egg.—London Spectator.

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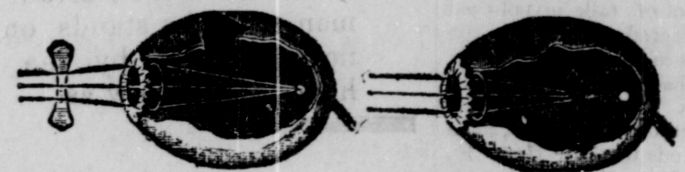
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