



A ROOKERY.

terwards in the procession, resplendent as Jeanne d'Arc, Hope, and a Fairy. We all seemed to catch the excitement of unrest and long before it was time for the procession to pass we were assembled in front of the Hotel Joos, which had the appearance of a battery so numerous were the cameras ranged along the pavement. It was a day of intense and sultry heat, with ominous black clouds, and mingled with the vesper bells there was a growl of distant thunder. At last the church bells rang out cheerily, and a few minutes afterwards the procession came in sight. The master of ceremonies, with his gold-laced cocked hat, knee breeches, and gold-laced coat, marched with a step that could only have been rivalled by a Highland piper. Following him were the acolytes in their scarlet gowns and white surplices, then a troop of tiny little girls dressed as fairies, and taken care of by a sweet-faced sister, and hastening after them little boys, dressed as soldiers, zouaves and cuirassiers predominating, and mixed indiscriminately amongst the soldiers were tiny white-trousered sailors and brown robed friars. They skipped along gaily to the strains of a meagre brass band, and then came the banner of Our Lady, carried by six girls dressed in white and wearing white wreaths; these were followed by the young girls and boys who had lately been confirmed. There was a hum of excitement behind us, and looking round we found our host and his wife and the servants of Hotel Joos eagerly watching the next part of the procession, in which were the young Jooses amidst a band of girls, whose "fancy" dresses were very well carried out. One dressed as Faith struck me particularly, her robe of white serge, her long black hair, her arms clasped round a cross, and her eyes raised ecstatically made an effective picture. Now came a body of young fishermen, dressed in their fete dresses, which consist of black dresses, with rich black silk, satin or brocaded aprons,

large white caps, long gold ear-rings, from three to four inches long, and either white or coloured silk shawls richly embroidered. They carried a figure of Our Lady under a blue and gold canopy. Following them came bands of fishermen, each representing the crew of a boat, and each band carrying a banner, some of them beautifully worked, dedicated to their patron saint, and presented at some time or other to the church. Just as the first part of the procession was passing out of the "place" there was a heavy clap of thunder, and then, with a swish, the rain poured down. There were wild shrieks and cries from the little ones, and a perfect stampede. Everyone rushed into shelter, carrying in their arms children or banners or saints. However, the storm soon cleared off, the band assembled in the "place," the procession reformed, and continued its way through the narrow streets and along the quay, where the band was dismissed, and the people marched to the sweeter music of their own voices raised in hymns of praise.

It is not Etaples alone that is picturesque. There are lovely country lanes, quiet and shady, and comfortable-looking farms embedded in green trees, yellow sunlit corn fields, where brown-faced men and women work. And then there is the river flowing gently to the sea. It is a contented minded river, and does not want to dry up in summer and flood in winter, as so many of our New Zealand rivers do. In the evening when it is cool and the trees throw their long shadows like bridges across the stream, the cows come down to drink, and the farmer's boy brings his team of horses to have a swim and wash the dust of a hard day's work off their glossy sides. It is then we turn our bicycles homewards, after an afternoon's sketching, and think with joy of the morrow, which will bring us to "fresh woods and pastures new."

ROOKS AND THEIR TREE-TOP VILLAGES.

(By DINORNIS.)

The many-wintered crow that leads
The clanging rookery home.

Rooks, large, dark-plumaged birds of the *corvus*, or crow genus, so far as I know, have no relatives in New Zealand. There may be birds allied to the family in the Land of the Moa and the Maori, but I have never heard there of any bird that resembles the British rook. That this remarkable bird has been discussed by Colonial acclimatisation societies I feel quite certain, without, however, positively knowing that such has been the case. The rook is altogether a too important bird to be ignored by those at least directly connected with the cultivation of land and the production of crops—and profits—therefrom. Left to its own devices and allowed liberty of unrestricted increase, the rook tribe might soon become a serious hindrance to successful tillage, not because of their grain-eating, which does not amount to much, but from the havoc they would work amongst sprouting corn, etc., whilst digging for chafer grubs, wireworms, and so on, things the most noxious the farmer has to reckon with, and for whose destruction in vast numbers he has to thank the rooks—or at least he ought to feel thankful, but usually doesn't. Their propensity to too rapid increase kept in check, rooks are thus really valuable accessories to a farm, doing much to assist the farmer in getting clean and full crops from his acres. About this aspect of rook-existence I will have something to say later on; at present my concern is more with individual rooks and their home-life than with any question of their economic value or otherwise.

The illustration accompanying this paper shows part of a rookery in London Road Gardens, Edinburgh. Although it looks a somewhat solitary location it is thus far enough from the solitude of woods and fields. This rookery has not only been built in a public place where visitors are by no means infrequently seen, but is situated, also, close to a large public school, and to streets along which constant streams of tram and motor car and other vehicular as well as foot-passenger traffic are flowing all day long. The birds pay no heed to all the rattle and clatter of the streets, nor to the folk, large and small, beneath the trees, experience having taught them that they need fear little from all that. Yet, even here, they are suspicious and watchful of uncommon things. Anything, indeed, that looks obviously out of the way, excites in them immediate distrust. When I arrived beneath the trees one fine Sunday morning lately, armed with a camera with which to take their portraits, they seemed to pay little attention at first. When, however, the instrument was set up, and they had taken a look at it, it was diverting, though irritating, to see them one by one steal away from the nests and disappear. Not knowing that the camera was incapable of anything worse than a snapshot, they took it, probably, for some new-fangled kind of gun, and moved out of range accordingly.

The nests shown in the picture are a few among some fifty here congregated; large structures composed of twigs and branches, and made roughly comfortable inside with a lining of grass roots, withered grass, etc. This is quite a small rookery compared with others I have known, having hundreds of nests; but to sit or stroll under the trees here, watching the endless movements, and listening to the varied and perpetual caw-cawing of the sable-plumaged villagers, is quite an object lesson in bird-life and bird-vocalisation also. Doing so during many an idle lunch hour has convinced me that rooks have a great deal to say to one another, that they have, indeed, a great deal of intelligence and a wide range of emotions, with corresponding power of expression. I do not mean to say that mere caw-cawing in an energetic strain is any evidence of mental power, but that the tones of these admittedly harsh bird voices are so varied, their modulation so diverse, and the accompanying actions so striking, that only those who are bat-blind could believe other than that rooks are capable of much feeling and perception. Merely to view the arrival of mates at the nests, and witness the effusive capers with which the meeting is embellished, reminds one irresistibly of the behaviour of human "turtle-doves" in like circumstances. The excited flutterings, the softened, tremulous, bill-to-bill endearments, their trick of amorously jostling each other along the boughs, all show that the birds are fully awake to the realities of life. At any rate these excited wing-happings, caw-caws, and kissing matches very closely resemble the sweetest human brand of the same kind of thing.

As already mentioned, unlike most other quite undomesticated birds, rooks do not shun the company of man, though at stated times they forsake it for lengthened periods. When first I saw the nucleus of what is now this lively bird-village on the tall tree-tops here, there were no birds present, they not having returned from their winter sojourn in the country. As is usual here, the spring was wet, cold, and backward, and when, early in February, the birds did begin to arrive, they merely perched among the branches near the old nests and in a very melancholy-like manner assiduously did nothing save to make disparaging remarks about the weather. In a few hours they were off again to their distant feeding places, and were no more to be seen for a few days. Then a few straggling pairs would return and sit discussing the situation, welcoming new-comers as they kept dropping in from the sky. This sort of thing was kept up, off and on, for a few weeks, until, I suppose, premonitions of coming eggs forced them to the conclusion that something practical had to be done. Pairing had fairly taken place, even



MR. ROBERT HENRY (Henry's Dramatic Company).

though not for weeks would a green leaf be seen upon the trees. Rooks are very clannish at all times; but upon pairing they become positively fond. To see the heartiness with which the male bird seeks for and brings food to his mate while she is sitting there dreaming of the coming youngsters might form a rebuke and a lesson to many a one of our own kind. The tit-bits of food are carried somewhere in the gullet of the male bird, and disgorged on arrival at the nest. I have seen three quite large lumps of food thus passed from the bill of one bird to that of another, and gobbled by the recipient with amazing celerity. The sitting bird hopped out of the nest, expectant excitement in its every movement. Both caw-cawed vociferously, but in a tone of evident affection. No doubt she was asking, "Have you really got something nice?" While he as certainly answered, "Haven't I just!" Bills meet in what

like to fall to pieces as we sometimes do. There may also be a bit of jerry building done in rook villages now and then, but the first gale shows the folly of that. Judging by what happened afterwards the first question that was discussed by the birds was as to which nests were good enough to stand, and which were not. At anyrate, one morning they set to work and pulled quite a number of nests to pieces, leaving only about a dozen well-set-up ones intact. The ground was strewn with their building material; but, of course, the new supplies were at hand, and cheap, costing nothing in fact save "labour only." When this clearance had been effected building operations were soon in full swing. In nest-building, while one bird brings the raw material the other does the constructive work—and the watching. This last is an important function, for rooks have an undeniable propensity to pilfer their neigh-

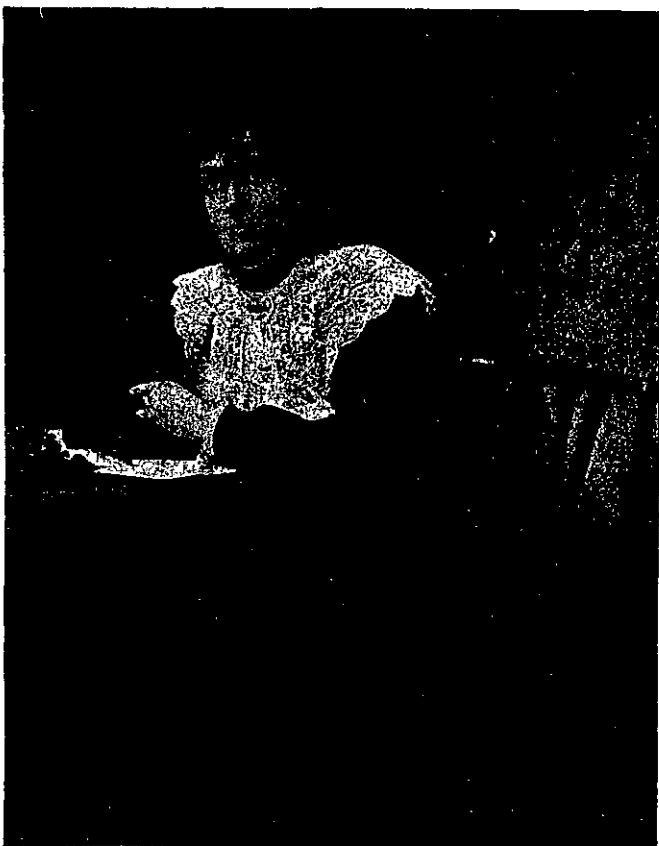
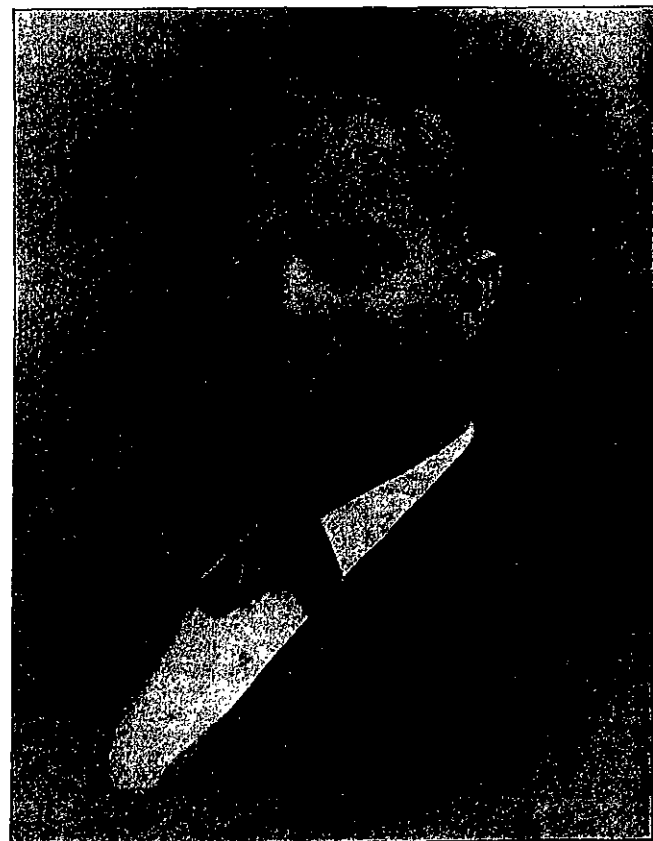
MR. SID DOODY AND MISS EDIE WRIGHT
(Fuller's Vaudeville Company).

looks very like a downright kissing match, the tucker is received with demonstrations of ecstatic appreciation, and quietness soon again reigns in the domicile.

When my rooks had finally made up their minds that something had to be done they did not waste much time before setting to the doing of it. Rooks use their old nests over and over again, but they know better than to occupy their dwellings till they are

bours' beams and rafters. Should a nest be left unguarded for a few minutes even, its owners will be likely to find a strange shrinkage in the dimensions of their eyrie upon their return. Rooks procure their building material in more ways than one. The more usual way is to break away the outer twigs and branches of elm, etc., in which labour their strong bills are of great

[CONTINUED ELSEWHERE.]

MRS. ROBERT HENRY (MISS BILLIE HOWARD).
(Henry's Dramatic Company).

MR. W. J. COULTER (Stage Manager Henry's Dramatic Company)