Troubles of Bird Housekeeping

If the average small boy knew what a hard time birds have to rear their families under the best conditions he would hesitate to disturb their nests, even if there was no law to threaten him with punishment if he did so.

There was a patient pair of robins, for instance, who built their first nest more than six weeks ago in a low apple tree in the orchard. Presently there were two blue eggs in the nest. Then came the first catastrophe. Next morning the nest was empty. On the ground under the tree lay one of the eggs with two holes picked in its shell. That was the work of a big, sneaking bluejay, if one may judge by the fact that the same afternoon the robins were seen chasing a scolding jay about the orchard and that the picture of the jay has long been in the birds' rogue gallry.

Immediately after the destruction of their eggs the robins set about building a second nest on another limb of the same tree. They got so far as to have three blue eggs in this prospective cradle when a red squirrel came down one afternoon from the oaks adjoining the orchard and made a robins' egg omelet of what he found there.

Then a third nest was built and on that the old mother bird has now been sitting for two weeks. Perhaps she will succeed this time in rearing an in-

THE ROBINS.

teresting family, but there is an old white cat with three kittens under the hay mow stairs, who spends hours standing motionless, all but the tip of her tail, in the tall orchard glass and who thinks that a dinner of young robins would do her own children much good.

There is a little yellow warbler who built down in the pasture wood lot and who had equally hard luck in a different and really peculiar way.

The yellow warbler's nest was in itself an exquisite thing. It was built near the top of some thick bushes, about five feet from the ground. It was lined with soft, silky gray mosses and threads of vegetable tissue and it looked like the inside of a spun silver cup. It was built so artfully that leaves and branches hid it on all sides, and it took hard work and good luck to find it even after one knew it was there. It was found the day it had been completed, when the mother bird was just ready to begin laying her eggs.

But there was another bird out that day, sneaking through the bushes like a pickpocket, looking for a chance to leave one of its eggs in a newly built nest. The sneak was a cowbird, which never builds a nest of its own and dismisses the whole subject of maternal responsibility from its mind when it has left an egg in some other bird's nest. One of these big brown and black cowbirds found the yellow warbler's dainty little nest and laid one of its big spotted eggs there. Then it flew back to the pasture again, and got down on the ground among the cattle, with others of its sneaking kind.

Sometimes when a yellow warbler finds a cowbird's egg in its nest it will build a false bottom over the egg and proceed to make its nest above it on the second floor. But this poor warbler got no such opportunity. This has been a cold, late spring, and the warblers and other similar birds have been slow in building. Also there were many cowbirds about, looking for a chance to saddle off the hatching and rearing of their young on their betters, and before the yellow warbler mother could get a chance to lay one of her own eggs in the nest she had built it was actually filled almost to overflowing with four big cowbird eggs. This is believed to be the record in the way of cowbird greediness. Often two cowbird eggs are found in the same nest, but rarely if ever have four been found.

The greed of the cowbird in thus completely occupying the warbler's nest brought its own punishment with it. The warbler, disgusted, abandoned

COWBIRDS STOLE THE WHOLE NEST.

the nest completely. A day or two later something—boy or beast—had discovered the deserted nest and stolen all four of the eggs.

If the yellow warbler builds another nest and succeeds in raising its brood where the cowbirds cannot find it the first catastrophe may be all for the best. Even when only one cowbird's egg is laid in a nest and is hatched out with three or four young warblers the latter are likely to get far the worst of it. The young cowbird from the moment it breaks the shell is bigger and greedier than its foster brothers and sisters. It will crowd them to the side and insists on eating much more than its share of the food which the yellow warblers bring for their young.

Across the barbed wire and rail fence from the warbler's nest is a big woods pasture. Close to the fence grow thick clumps of hazel brush and wild crab and plum trees. In some places the thicket is so dense that a man has hard work in forcing his way through it. High up in these tangles, six or eight feet from the ground, two pairs of catbirds have built their nests. They are apparently safe from all but other bird enemies, for the long, sharp thorns and the interlacing branches protect them from attack from the ground. This is evi-

MOURNING DOVE BROODS ON THE GROUND.

dently a favorite nesting place of theirs, for in the branches there are the ruins of nests evidently two or three years old.

Close to the catbird's tangle and lying on the ground in a poor apology for a nest were found a recently hatched mourning dove and a white egg from which the little bird had not yet picked its way. This nest was close to the stalks of some close growing bushes and would never have been discovered if the old mother bird had not gotten up and flown away in a terrible fright when the nestseeker was four or five feet away.

With the instinct of most of the ground building kind the old bird went off with an apparently broken wing and did her best to decoy danger away from her helpless little ones. It is a wonder how these little doves escape the prowling cats which hunt in the meadows and woods all about, but so far they have done finely, and on Saturday last the elder of the two was already able to use his wings in a flight of three or four feet.

Out in an old telephone pole which stands at the corner of two country roads is a regular birds' flat building. About fifteen feet up from the ground, just high enough up to be the despair of small boys, is a small hole leading down to a circular chamber. Here a bluebird family has its home. Five feet up is another and larger hole. This is the front door to the residence of a redheaded woodpecker. At present the young woodpeckers are just getting ready to try their wings and at almost any time one of the youngsters may be seen looking out of the hole at what must seem a strange world. Still higher up, in the third story of the flat building, is another opening evidently made by a flicker, who changed his mind and left before he completed the work. There is likely to be an English sparrow's nest in that cavity before the summer is over, for the "avian rats" are going out into the country for the summer in great numbers and bid fair as soon to be as big a nuisance there as they are now in the city and nearby suburbs.

There seem to be other birds beside the bluejay which sometimes eat or at least destroy the eggs of their fellows. Thus the other day a horrible suspicion was aroused in regard to that symbol of innocence and gentleness, the robin redbreast. The robin flew from a tree down into the grass of a swamp meadow. There he disappeared for a moment. When he came into sight again he was flying for dear life with a red-winged blackbird close behind it, shrieking "stop thief" at the top of its voice. Of course the robin's

IN THE BIRD'S FLAT BUILDING.

intentions may have been perfectly honorable, but why should the redwing be roused to such a sudden pitch of fury at the sight of him asks a writer in the Chicago Tribune.

Russia's White City.

For three months in the winter Archangel, now to become the great western port of Russia, scarcely sees the sun, and for three months in the summer seldom loses sight of it. Yet there is no city in the whole of Europe which lies for so many months—for the greater part of the year, in fact—under a mantle of snow; and because of this the Russian fondly calls it "the White City."

White, too, it is in other ways. All the chief buildings glare with white paint and blink with white blinds. The churches—and in a Russian city they are but few—are also of pure white; only the cupolas are green, and the crosses on their summits gold. And white are the private houses of the better sort—except where Norwegians and Germans live, for buff and blue and red then streak and diaper the pine walls and edge the gable ends. But street-posts, gates, pillars, walls, fences—these are all white. And in the summer, for every official you see in a blue or gray tunic, you see ten in white caps and white uniforms. Bright color alone is left to the women and children; pink blouses, green skirts, scarlet petticoats, orange aprons, and blue kerchiefs are common enough; while a group of children will always look like a cluster of old English flowers. But otherwise, in summer as in winter, this old city of Archangel, now destined to be the capital of a new Russia in the near west, is a White City, indeed.

Her Legal Privileges.

The following allegation in a bill for divorce against a wife was held by the Supreme court at Washington not to state any legal ground for divorce: "She was quarrelsome, vicious in disposition, murderous in threats against the plaintiff and his parents, hysterical and ungovernable in temper, crazy in her actions, and by her causeless and unprovoked boisterousness, screaming, hallooing, and other wild conduct, by day and night, an intolerable nuisance to all her neighbors."

Oldest Church in the Country.

The oldest Protestant church in the United States is St. Luke's, at Smithfield, Va., writes William E. Curtis in the Chicago Record-Herald. St. Luke's was erected in 1632, and was restored in 1894 as nearly as possible to its original condition and appearance. It is a beautiful old structure of early English gothic, with mullioned windows and a stately tower, and has been used for public worship almost continuously for two centuries and a half. The original church erected on Jamestown island by the first English colonists in North America under Captain John Smith—the church in which Pocahontas was baptized and married—has all disappeared, except a picturesque, ivy-clad tower of brick, surrounded by a grove of trees.

Holland Keeps Old Ocean at Bay.

There are at present about 1,000 miles of sea dikes in the Netherlands. The total length of dikes is difficult to estimate, and even if it could be estimated would mean but little, for it must be remembered that the dikes have for the most part in the course of time been destroyed and rebuilt repeatedly. It has not been so much a question of building them as it has been of maintaining them and keeping them where they were. Besides protecting the country from the invasions of both fresh and salt waters, the dikes have served to reclaim no less than 210,000 acres, nearly all of which are good, fertile land.—National Geographic Magazine.

The man who has never written a foolish love letter has not yet taken all the degrees.

Map of the Soils

To Teach Farmer What He Ought to Plant.

Washington correspondence of the Boston Herald: Uncle Sam is going to have a soil map that will be a wonder. It will be something of a kind entirely new, and will enable the farmer, wherever he is located, to determine just what crops will bring him the largest returns in money. Printed in colors, it will convey information in the clearest and most easily comprehended manner imaginable. The map is to cover the whole of the United States, and will be on such a scale that every ten-acre patch will be represented by one-eighth of an inch square. But each farmer will be able to procure a chart of his own neighborhood on a larger scale, so that he can arrange his planting in accordance with the suggestions which it conveys. The work is done by townships to start with, and these are put together to make counties, which are finally assembled to form complete maps of states. Hitherto the business of farming has been to some extent guess work; the agriculturist formed a surmise as to what crops were best for him to try, and did this planting accordingly. Henceforth he will study the government map, and from it will obtain advice, based on the highest scientific knowledge, as to what will be best for him to try to grow. Then he will go ahead with a reasonable certainty of satisfactory results.

In the first place, the soil map will show what kind of agricultural industry any given locality is best adapted for—whether fruit raising, vegetable growing, dairying or general farming. It will make clear to the farmer in North Carolina, for instance, that he has the same soil that is used advantageously for certain purposes in Georgia, and that, if climatic conditions are not unfavorable, the same crops may be expected. A wonderful strip of light sandy soil, not over four or five miles wide, extends along the Atlantic coast from Massachusetts to Florida, with occasional interruptions, bordering the ocean and its embayments—i. e., the rivers and bays. It is a natural truck patch, adapted for the production of early vegetables, which ripen much sooner in that ribbon of land than anywhere else in corresponding latitudes, owing to the nearness of the sea. The nearer the water, the earlier the planting may be done. Along that strip in spring the climate moves north at an average rate of 13 miles a day. The crops of vegetables which it produces comes to market at a corresponding rate. But backward weather in the South and forward weather in the North will disarrange things sometimes, causing a ripening of the same kinds of produce at the same period in different latitudes of the strip, and thus bringing about a glut disastrous to growers. Under ordinary conditions, however, the potatoes, tomatoes, peas and other garden stuff, arrive first from Florida, then from Georgia, next from the Carolinas and so one. This interesting strip is conspicuously shown on the soil map, owing to its great commercial importance. It has so lengthened the season for fresh vegetables that now it may be said that there is no longer any season; such products are obtainable all the year round. In southern Florida there is a limited area below reach of frost where vegetables can be grown all winter, and the yield of this region tides over the cold months, until the spring season begins its march up the coast. It is the strip next to the beach, a mile wide, that is best for trucking purposes, and these sandy lands, when near to cities and with good transportation available, are worth from $50 to $500 an acre, though only a few years ago they were valued at $1 an acre. As shown by the map, even along the strip the soils vary, so as to be adapted to different kinds of truck, the lightest and sandiest being best for early peas, the medium suitable for tomatoes and the heaviest just right for growing cabbage. The map will call attention to certain troubles of soils, which have been investigated through chemical analyses. One of these is acidity, which has an important influence upon farming over large areas; another is excess or deficiency of certain elements of plant growth, which can be supplied by fertilizers, and yet another is alkali. As for alkali, science has ascertained both the source and the remedy. It comes usually from wash from the mountains from salts carried onto the land by irrigation, or from deposits laid down at a period when the land was sea bottom. The remedy is to underdrain the land and wash out the alkali, and to prevent accumulation of seepage water in the subsoil.

Giant Mexican Spiders.

A New York professor has just returned home after spending the winter in exploring the mountains near Buena Vista and investigating the habits of a species of monster spiders found in the middle Cottonwood pass. Little definite is known of these spiders, but around them has been gathered a mass of Indian legend and prospectors' yarns that rival those of Munchausen.

Many years ago these spiders lived in a cave easily reached by tourists. It was in a valley two miles northeast from Harvard City, then a thriving mining camp eight miles west of Buena Vista. In 1880 a man named Shultz cut his way into the spiders' den. He did not return, and a week later a searching party found his body partly buried in the spiders' cave under a mass of fallen rock. As it would have required timbering at an expense of several hundred dollars to recover the body, and as the man had no known relatives it was left undisturbed. The spiders have found another home farther back in the mountains. Some of the tales told about these spiders are given in an old letter which has just been found in Buena Vista. It says:

"A short distance out of Buena Vista there is a cave swarming with spiders of immense size, some of them having legs four inches in length and bodies as large as that of a canary bird. The cave was discovered in 1868, and was often visited by pioneers on their way to California, who obtained their webs for use in the place of thread. Early and late the cave resounds with a buzzing sound emitted by the spiders as they weave their webs. The webs were tested in '71 and found to be composed of silk of the finest quality. The skins of the spiders make good gloves, as they are pliable and require no tanning.

"A number were captured and tamed, and manifested great affection for all members of the family. They were far superior to a cat for exterminating rats and mice, following their prey into the holes in the walls and ceilings. One spider, kept as a pet by a Buena Vista lady, used to stay all night at the head of her bed, acting as sentinel."

Baking Powder Biscuit.

Measure a quart of sifted flour into a mixing bowl, add to this four level teaspoonfuls of baking powder and a teaspoonful of salt. Sift again; add to flour two tablespoonfuls of butter, and rub in thoroughly with a spoon or flexible knife; do not use the hands. Moisten the flour with enough milk to make a soft dough. Do not handle much, but roll the dough out about an inch thick; cut into small round biscuits, placed in greased biscuit tins and bake in a quick oven for fifteen or twenty minutes.

English Champion Tea Drinkers.

The British people consume nearly six pounds of tea per head of the population, or an increase of one pound per capita in sixteen years. There is no other country which, in any way, approaches this. Holland is the only country in Europe where the consumption of tea exceeds one pound per head. In Russia and in the United States, which are the other two large tea consumers, the consumption amounts to under one pound per head.

GETTYSBURG'S HEROINE.

A monument to the memory of Jennie Wade, the brave Pennsylvania girl who was killed at the battle of Gettysburg, July 3, 1863, will soon be dedicated, the fund for the same having been raised by the Woman's Relief Corps of Iowa. Jennie Wade was one of the heroines of the civil war, as well known in her humble way and as loved as Barbara Frietchie. She it was who was killed by a stray minie ball of the Confederates while making bread for the Union soldiers, right in the stormiest and most dangerous part of the three days' battleground.

Jennie Wade was then only a young girl, but her sacrifice will always be remembered and perpetuated in the history of that sublime struggle. The first day of the battle she drew and carried water from the windlass well, and filled the canteens of the Union soldiers, amid the shrieking of shells and the awful din of the battle. She never swerved from her willing task by giving the cup of cold water to those brave men.

Early, even before it was light, on the third day, she was astir, getting in wood to heat the brick oven to bake bread for the soldiers, wearied with the two days of Titanic struggles. Very soon there was a call at the door for something to eat, and she turned to her mother, saying:

"I will make biscuits if you prepare fire in the stove," and turned to go about her new work with a will, but before she had done this a ball from an enemy's gun crashed through the door and killed the brave girl in her sister's home, on the morning of July 3. She was buried the evening of July 4 by soldier hands, in a coffin prepared for a Confederate colonel who had fallen in that battle.

Long Lightning Rod.

The largest lightning conductor in the world is in Bavaria. The top of it is some yards above the meteorological station on the Zugspitze, the highest point of land in the German empire. It runs down the side of the mountain to a body of running water. The length of the rod is three and a half miles.

BOY TOOK 10,000 VOLTS.

Resuscitated and in a Fair Way to Get Well.

Walter Budds, 9 years old, had a current from an electric cable carrying 10,000 volts of electricity pass through his body recently. That he was not killed is considered miraculous, but the physicians at the Hartford hospital, where the boy is now suffering from the effects of the shock say that he will recover, says the Hartford Courant. Young Budds started out with Johnnie Farrell and Willie Cosgrove, young chums of his, to see the circus parade. They went to Main street near the tunnel and after waiting for some time without the parade's coming in sight, they got uneasy. On Albany avenue, just above the Main street junction, the Hartford Electric Light company has a terminal tub through which the cables that bring the electric current in from the Farmington river pass into the underground system of the company. One of the boys suggested that they climb upon the roof of the terminal tub to see if the parade was coming down Albany avenue. They made a run for the tub. A ladder stood in the rear of the tub, and the tub is built several feet above the surface of the ground. Young Budds was in advance of the others. He was the first to mount the ladder and as he climbed up the rounds he turned to the other boys and said that he could get to the top first. The parade was not in sight and that he might have a better view of the surroundings he reached from the top of the tub to one of the cables with the heavy voltage for the purpose of pulling himself onto the pole which carried the cables down through the tub. In taking hold of the cable he instantly connected himself with the electric current. His feet were jerked from beneath him, his body became rigid and blue flames shot out from the cables underneath the boy's hands. What appeared to the big crowd to have been a dead boy was brought back to life, and then the little fellow was taken to the Hartford hospital in an unconscious condition. He was very weak on being received at the institution, but during the afternoon he gained more strength and had a long sleep. Both his hands were badly burned and the index finger of his left hand was burned off.

TO FOIL CHECK RAISER.

New Scheme for Preventing Any Alterations in Checks.

More than 20,000,000,000 of checks are used annually in the United States, and of this amount something like 18,000 are "raised," the loss falling on the drawer, for the drawer of a check is chargeable with the amount paid on it, provided his signature is genuine, no matter for what amount he has previously filled it in. Many devices have been planned for foiling the check-raiser, but the security check is the most perfect protection the ingenuity of man has yet unfolded. The check has been briefly described as follows: "On the left of the check is printed the safe-guarding schedule. The words directing the payment of money are qualified by the following printed into the body of the paper: 'Provided amount does not exceed that expressed in words and figures at end of schedule.' After the drawer has written in the amount of money to be paid he adjusts a small paper cutter to that line of the upper half of the schedule which bounds the maximum amount to be paid in dollars, tens, hundreds, or thousands, and tears off the check down as far as the small ring in the center of the schedule. Then he revolves his ruler, adjusting it to that line of the lower half of the schedule which bounds the number of dollars, tens of dollars, hundreds or thousands, to be paid, and then completes tearing the check from the stub along that line. This leaves in the hands of the drawer the check absolutely safeguarded from alteration, for the left hand margin expresses in words and figures the amount not exceeding which it has been drawn."

The device is used by scores of banks and by hundreds of prominent firms, although it has been before the public but a short time. It is used not only on checks but also notes, receipts, drafts, bills of lading, and other papers, and is suited for use of money orders and tickets.

Portugal's Plethora of Money.

Portugal is suffering from a plethora of money just now. Not gold, of course; nor silver; but copper. So vast is the supply of this inferior metal that ordinary people are exceedingly chary of changing such few gold coins as they may come into possession of. The copper coinage is big and cumbersome, and it is also depreciated, so that, in order to avoid being burdened with it, it has become the custom, in the larger cities at all events, to use street car tickets as currency. In the provinces postage stamps are made to serve a similar purpose. Meanwhile the government at Lisbon goes on serenely minting the obnoxious coins—which nobody will use—at the rate of some 80 tons a month.

America's Clyde the Delaware.

The Delaware is the river of great ocean shipbuilding in the United States. From Philadelphia to Wilmington there are seven great concerns and several smaller ones. Within the past few months these yards have had under construction more than seventy vessels, representing a tonnage of over two hundred thousand and a combined cost of something like $30,000,000. The Cramps had considerably more than one-half of this, but there were enough millions left to keep the other concerns busy and prosperous.—Saturday Evening Post.