

NATURAL SCIENCE.

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THE following true anecdotes will interest all lovers of Natural History :

A quaint, old-fashioned, rambling garden, with its buttercups, lilies, larkspurs, spineas, rosebushes, and spikes of monkshood, here and there overgrown with tall rank grass ; beds of beets, turnips, cauliflower and cabbage ; again, untrained, straggling raspberry, currant and gooseberry bushes ; apple, cherry and plum trees, the homes of successive generations of robins and thistle birds ; an equally old-fashioned, rambling log-house, partly clap-boarded and partly roughcast, under whose sheltering eaves many a "pee-wee" and swallow has been born and has thriven.

It is curious in this old garden to note how not only has each bird its ancestral home intact, but how each bird keeps its own tree or bush for itself, and woe betide the intruder, whether it be beast, bird or reptile, who thinks himself at liberty to share in this privilege. Even other individuals of the same species are unceremoniously driven off, although but one little nook of the tree had been required annually. Thus one apple tree has for many years been the undisputed homestead of a certain pair of robins, or rather was till the season of 1883, when, arriving from some unknown cause much later than usual, another—a strange pair—were found safely domiciled there. After a sharp but short contest the invaders retired, and were apparently lost sight of. Weeks passed on, and before the eggs were hatched a violent yet most welcome rain filled cistern and barrel, and quickened the growing wheat and corn. Then it was noticed by the inhabitants of the quaint old house that although the rain poured off the eaves, yet the cistern remained dry. Investigation showed the cause to be the nest of the expelled pair of robins, which had chosen the eave-trough for a home, and had taken the precaution to lay a floor of almost impervious blue clay with walls six inches thick, and had then nearly hooded the entire nest with the same

material, the whole forming a mass over sixteen inches in diameter and nearly eight inches in height. Then it was remembered that after the above-mentioned contest, both first and second pair had been seen carrying mud, apparently to the roof, as much as to say, "Although you (the intruders) may not stay with us, we will at least help you to build a home for yourselves." To the best of the writer's knowledge there is no other instance recorded of a robin building in such an exposed situation as an eave-trough, fence-corners, bushes and trees being preferred. The reader will not fail to note the intelligence of the birds in providing a roof for their dwelling, a precaution made necessary by the unprotected situation, unnecessary in ordinary circumstances.

Under the eaves of this same house, on one fine spring day, while a pair of "white-bellied" swallows were engaged in completing their nearly-built nest, they were unceremoniously interrupted in their labours by the arrival of a strange bird, perhaps the cow-bird (*Molothrus*), perhaps a tyrant fly-catcher—for the writer's informant was not a naturalist, and knew little beyond the fact that the intruder was not a swallow. The stranger at once possessed itself of the nest, nor could the efforts of the pair effect a removal. They then flew off a short distance, and returned reinforced by some sixty or seventy comrades, of whom some hovered round the bird keeping guard, while the others, each conveying a small quantity of mud in its beak, proceeded to wall up the stranger in a living tomb. In a few minutes, on the principle that "many hands make light work," this was so satisfactorily accomplished, that several persons who were very shortly called to see the nest refused to believe the story ; nor would they believe till the crust of now dried mud had been broken and the unfortunate, half-dead captive set at liberty. It is needless to add that it did not revisit the spot either then or during succeeding seasons.

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INFORMATION was received by the last British mail that Sir William Dawson has