

BOYS AND GIRLS

The English Sparrow.

The parasitic finch, properly called the house-sparrow, but known throughout the United States as the English sparrow, was brought to this country first in 1850 from England. Other sparrow importations followed, and the bird multiplying prodigiously, had spread, by 1887, over the settled parts of nearly all the states from Maine to Alabama, and thence north-westerly to Missouri and Wisconsin.

He had also colonized here and there in other states and certain territories. To-day he is found in the cities and settled towns of nearly the entire country. Up to February, 1896, he had not reached the northern parts of Wyoming and Montana, the Staked Plains of Texas and New Mexico, or the larger portion of what is known as the Great Basin.

The sparrow was introduced into our country by individuals—and in one instance by a city government—in the belief that he would preserve the trees of towns and cities by destroying harmful insects.

At first he was fostered and coddled as no

more to these other sources of supply, and to the eggs and young of American birds, which he now frequently destroys. The sparrow at times feeds his young upon injurious insects, but

4. He is a persecutor and supplanter of numerous highly useful and delightful American birds—many of them sweet songsters—which, if let alone, would destroy far more injurious insects than the sparrow ever molests. From this fact probably arises the alarming increase here of the devastating 'vapor' moth.

Quite to the point is this fresh story, just told me by a prominent American ornithologist.

'Last summer,' says this observer, 'I noticed up in a pear tree of my suburban garden, a pair of "least flycatchers"—true native insect destroyers, hardly as large as undersized canaries—defending their pretty, compact nest against a dozen English sparrows. The sparrows, in concert, moved about the nest in a gradually narrowing circle, keeping up a sort of death-dance like

ly, as a rule, to the outnumbering interloper.

From street, park and garden in and about our cities and larger towns the pest-sparrow has nearly or totally expelled almost every native bird once haunting there. Less than twenty years ago my home on a busy street of a city, was graced by the long stay of the white-bellied and barn-swallow, the song and chipping sparrow, the robin and the Baltimore oriole,—all of whom bred about it—and by the seasonal appearance and generous remaining of the chickadee, cedar-bird, downy woodpecker, yellow warbler, red-eyed vireo, bluebird, snowbird, fox-colored sparrow, thistle finch, brown creeper, white-bellied nuthatch, and other gentle native birds.

DEPARTURE OF NATIVE BIRDS.

Excepting a few reluctant robins, they long ago gave place to the intruder. About the Massachusetts State-House barn swallows bred not long ago. They, too, have fled before the sparrow.

Boston Common is nearly desolate now, from year's end to year's end, of every bird but the wrong one. Walking over it recently before leafing-out time, I could not find—except one robin's nest—a trace of the nest of any American bird.

In the lofty elms, where formerly hung nest after nest, woven purse-fashion by our master-workman, the Baltimore oriole, I could discover in the way of bird-homes only unsightly heaps of trash thrown together for nurseries by the parasite.

Such, in substance, is the state of affairs all over our country, wherever the English sparrow has obtained full lodgment. I firmly believe this departure of American birds to be due not to mere cowardice, but rather to a highly honorable wish to bring up their children apart from unclean, prying, loud-mouthed—I had almost said profane—and quarrel-picking sparrow neighbors!

Has the English sparrow actually destroyed our birds in quantity, or only driven them to a distance? We cannot certainly say. There is ground for fearing that he has in many districts killed off the house-wren.

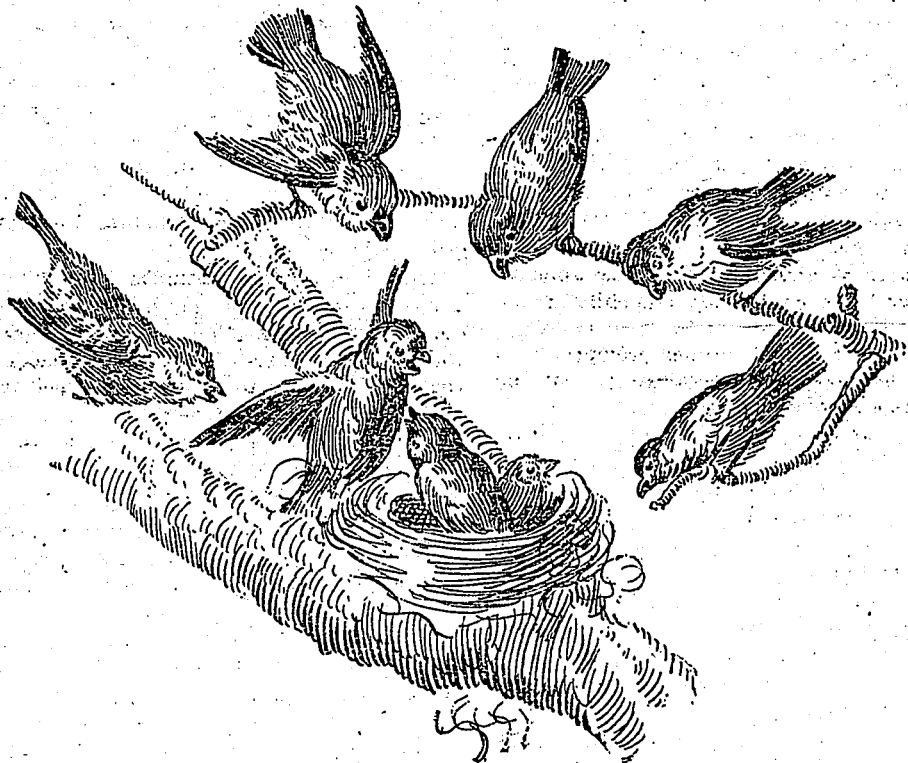
Most of our other urban birds have retreated to country districts or the wilderness where, alas! the pest is following them—and it is possible, though hardly probable, that their ranks are still unthinned.

Other evil deeds of these interlopers are the choking of street-lamps, and roof-drains with nest-rubbish, the defiling of cistern water, the endangering of founderies by their readily-ignited nests, the ruining—at the South—of thatched roofs, the destruction of useful insects, and the harboring of the eggs or pupae of devastating insects like the gipsy-moth, in and under their nests.

To offset his proved harm the English sparrow can truly plead no practical or sentimental good whatever, discernible to most unprejudiced persons. He is probably less entitled to protection than the common rat, and like the rat, is probably destined to abide with us. Can we, then, lessen the harm of the sparrows by diminishing his numbers?

In the Eastern United States, though he still swarms there, he seems to be lessening slightly; perhaps because his natural eastern enemies, the little saw-whet owl and mottled owl, have followed him to populous centres, and are even beginning to breed in city spires. The sharp-shinned hawk, another Eastern enemy, has also followed him to town, as has the Northern shrike.

Despite the sparrow's obtrusive familiarity, he is perhaps the most wary bird upon



DEFENDING THE NEST.

American bird had ever been. As he multiplied his popularity waned rapidly.

To-day, by nearly every observant resident of the United States, and emphatically by naturalists, he is pronounced a pest, who adds to the serious injury he does us not a few annoyances well classed as insults. Common observation fully proves against him the following charges, with many others which cannot be here specified:

1. He is unclean. Outdoor statuary is defiled, and cemeteries, residences, and public buildings, are kept foul externally by this bird, and his colonizings rapidly force the destruction of ornamental vines trained upon houses and churches.

2. His habitual note is a noisy, joyless 'clink,' which to invalids and most other persons is offensive.

3. He is a most injurious robber and destroyer. When the sparrow can find enough of such matter, he mostly lives upon partly digested grain from street droppings; when he cannot, he rapaciously spoils orchards, vineyards, gardens and grainfields, or pilfers poultry food. As the horse disappears from our streets, the sparrow will turn more and

the capers of cannibals about a stake-bound victim.

'The plucky little nest-proprietors flung themselves furiously upon the evil army, occasionally knocking a sparrow fairly over; but the circle slowly narrowed, and at last both flycatchers fell rather than flew, completely beaten out, to the lower limbs of the tree. There, with outspread wings, they lay panting. The sparrows now closed in on the nest and began to pick it to pieces, tossing mouthfuls of it, in mere malice as it seemed, to right and left.

'Soon an evil-looking sparrow sprang to its rim, and peered down in the notorious manner of the feathered egg-thief. But at that instant one of the flycatchers, restored, flashed into sight, and drove the intruder helter-skelter. Then the mate came, and the noble little pair, darting desperately upon the robber gang, triumphantly routed it!'

'Those sparrows never came back. The flycatchers raised their brood in "peace with honor."'

This is refreshing testimony. Unfortunately, however, the native bird yields speed-