

THE FARMERS ADVOCATE AND HOME MAGAZINE

THE LEADING AGRICULTURAL JOURNAL
IN THE DOMINION.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY
THE WILLIAM WELD COMPANY (LIMITED).

JOHN WELD, MANAGER.

Agents for "The Farmer's Advocate and Home Journal,"
Winnipeg, Man.

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LONDON, CANADA.

Nature's Diary.

By A. B. Klugh, M. A.

The Snowbirds have come down from the North. Veritable spirits of the storm are these hardy little birds. Swirling over the fields they go uttering their musical trilling note. Down to earth they come in a weedy field, and run hither and thither from one weed-stem to another.

These birds breed in the far North in Greenland, Labrador, around Hudson Bay and in Alaska. In the summer their plumage is pure white, with back wings and tail marked with black. In winter much of the white is clouded with chestnut brown.

They build their nests out on the open Arctic tundra, making them of grass and moss and lining them with feathers.

While with us, the snowbirds feed almost exclusively on weed-seed, their main fare apparently being ragweed and pigweed, though in the vicinity of Guelph I have seen them feeding on the seeds of blueweed.

The snowbirds are usually found in larger flocks than most of our winter birds, the flock often containing a thousand or more birds. When a large flock is feeding, they appear to roll like a wave across the field, this appearance being due to the hindmost birds continually rising and flying over the rest to the front of the flock.

The winter is a good time for observing the location of birds' nests. When the trees are bare, these cradles, so well concealed in the summer, stand revealed to us. On the drooping boughs of the elm we see the dainty pocket-like basket of the oriole. In the forks of small branches, usually of maple, we find the compact nest of the American goldfinch, composed of various materials firmly felted together and lined with plant-down. On thorn trees we notice the rather bulky nest of the white-rumped shrike, of which the exterior is built of twigs interwoven with strips of bark and rootlets, and the lining of fine grass. In the woods, hung by the rim in a horizontal fork, we may find the little pendulous nest of the red-eyed vireo, composed of strips of bark, pine needles, pieces of wasps' nest and fine grass, all felted together into a thin, light but strong structure. High up in a fork of a tall tree we see a bulky mass of sticks, with here and there the brown lining of dead evergreen leaves or bark

showing through—this the nest of one of the hawks or owls.

In a low bush we may discover the nest of the yellow warbler, a compact structure of moss, hair, wool, bark-fibre and plant-down matted together. Perhaps we may find one of these nests built two-stories high, for in some cases, if a cowbird deposits an egg in a yellow warbler's nest, the warbler will build the sides of the nest a little higher and construct a second bottom, thus leaving the cowbird's egg in the basement, while it hatches out its own eggs in the next story. One nest of the yellow warbler is on record which was three stories high, with a cowbird's egg in each of the lower compartments. The cowbird with us plays the same role that is played by the cuckoo in Europe—that is, it builds no nest of its own, but drops its eggs into the nests of smaller birds.

The young cowbird on hatching hoists the young of the rightful owner of the nest out over the edge of the nest, and then receives all the food brought by the parents of the murdered nestlings. After leaving the nest, the young cowbird follows its foster-parents about always, with drooping wings and wide open mouth, begging for food, and it is ridiculous to see the little warbler or sparrow foster-parents cramming food into the capacious maw of this young parasite, which is by now twice their size.

The destruction of the young of small birds caused in a year by a single female cowbird is undoubtedly great, for each female apparently lays from four to six eggs, each one in a different nest. Each egg hatched means the death of from four to six nestlings, and, furthermore, prevents birds which would breed twice in a season from doing so, because of the length of time the young cowbird takes to become sufficiently mature to feed itself.

The female cowbird is of a uniform, dusky, grayish-brown color, with a "sparrow-like" black bill, and is about seven and a half inches in length. The male is iridescent black, with a chocolate-brown head and neck, and is about eight inches long. The name cowbird comes from the habit these birds have of feeding among the cattle in the pasture and eating the insects disturbed by the cattle as they move about. Thus the cowbird does good by destroying injurious insects and also by eating a large amount of weed-seed, but it is extremely doubtful if the benefits thus conferred offset the loss of the nestlings of other beneficial birds which the rearing of each cowbird occasions.

During our recent late November fall of wet snow, which coated the trees, the number of branches broken down from the deciduous trees (the maples, elms, etc.) by the weight of the snow was very noticeable. But how many were broken down from the evergreen trees? Very, very few! Why was this? Because the branches of the deciduous trees are set at a rather sharp angle, while those of the evergreens are horizontal or nearly so; thus the former frequently break off at this junction with the trunk, while the latter merely bend and allow the snow to slide off. This horizontal branching can be regarded as one of the adaptations of evergreens to a Northern climate.

Farm Lessons from the Far East.

"Farmers of Forty Centuries," or Permanent Agriculture in China, Korea and Japan, is the attractive title of a unique book of travel by the late Prof. F. H. King, D. Sc. To any student of farming it is a rare treat to lay hands on a book like this. As a record of observation in distant lands, coming nearer us every day, it is more fascinating than most novels, and made doubly so by the use of nearly 250 photogravures. Prof. King knew before what objects to snap the camera as well as what to write. Your average globe-trotter has no eyes to see the agricultural conditions and problems that he flits by, and so he brings us back little or nothing about how the world's greatest industry is carried on among peoples like the yellow men, who can teach us many things out of an accumulating experience of four thousand years in tillage, irrigation, fertilizing, small economies, making much out of little; in fact, one will be apt to conclude, after a few hours' reading of this book, that we in America are just about at the A B C of farming. Agriculture in Canada and the United States owes a debt of gratitude that Prof. King has left behind this volume, in addition to others, widely and deservedly known, such as "Physics of Agriculture," "The Soil," "Irrigation and Drainage," and his valuable treatise on the ventilation of farm buildings. Prof. King was a trained observer, both from the practical and the scientific view-point, and he tells us about the practice of the great Asiatic realms in all the things that a reading farmer would want to know. With our wasteful skimming processes, it should give us halt to learn how a little Jap can realize \$100 a year on less than one-tenth of an acre, or how

in China, Korea and Japan waste refuse is so scrupulously husbanded that house-flies are few and far between, and the people save millions that we spend on screens and fly poison. It was not uncommon to find a man on 2½ acres of land maintaining a family of twelve, a cow, a donkey and a couple of pigs; and to see flocks of sheep so well trained that they would pick away at the scant herbage of the pathway, never turning even to nibble at the unfenced wheat and barley alongside them. When will men have so highly developed a moral sense? Little Japan has some 40 perpetual experiment stations. People have to know something to pay over \$23 per acre rental for land on which to grow one common crop like rice in a season! An appreciative foreword to the book is written by Dr. L. H. Bailey, and his commendation is entirely deserved. Copies of this volume may be obtained at \$2.50, postage paid, from Mrs. F. H. King, Madison, Wis.

Reciprocal Demurrage Wanted.

Editor "The Farmer's Advocate":

"Upon the hearing of the application at the sittings of the Board, held in the city of Ottawa on the 27th November, 1912, counsel and representatives appearing for the Applicant Railway Companies, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, the Montreal and Toronto Boards of Trade, the Montreal Corn Exchange, the Dominion Millers' Association, the Canadian Lumbermen's Association, and others:—

It is ordered that, on the publication and filing of tariffs therefor, and for the period commencing the fifteenth day of December, 1912, and terminating the thirty-first day of March, 1913, both inclusive, the said Applicant Companies be, and they are hereby, permitted to increase the car service or Demurrage toll prescribed by the order of the Board No. 906, dated the 25th day of January, 1906, from one dollar a day to two dollars a day for the first twenty-four hours, or any part thereof, and to three dollars a day for each succeeding twenty-four hours, or any part thereof, for delay beyond the free time allowed by the said order for loading or unloading cars: provided that this order shall not apply to cars held in transit at stop-over points under published tariffs filed with the Board,

(Sgd.) D'ARCY SCOTT,

Assistant Chief Commissioner,

Board of Railway Commissioners for Canada."

The above ruling given by Assistant Chief Commissioner, D'Arcy Scott, practically gives the railways what they demanded in regard to increasing their demurrage charges from one dollar per day to two dollars per day for the first demurrage day, and three dollars for the second and each succeeding day, which, of course, includes both the loading and unloading of freight cars.

At the hearing of the railways' application before Commissioners D'Arcy Scott, James Mills and A. S. Goodeve, Mr. Duval for the railways cited that the increase of demurrage charges in the State of California worked advantageously both for the railroads and for the shippers, but he intentionally, or otherwise, omitted to state that the California shippers enjoyed reciprocal demurrage, with the results that shippers were able to get cars when, and as needed, and reciprocal demurrage should certainly have accompanied such a drastic advance in the demurrage charges.

By reciprocal demurrage is meant: first, freight cars must be placed for the shipper within a reasonable fixed time after he has ordered the car, and for any delay on the part of the railways shipper to be paid the according demurrage rates. Second, the railway companies to deliver the cars at destination within a reasonable stated time, and for any delay the shipper to be paid according to the demurrage rates. Thirdly, for any delay after their arrival in placing the cars on the proper sidings so they can be unloaded, the shipper to be paid as above.

According to the Canadian Car Service Bureau's report of May 31st, 1912, there was collected in demurrage for the previous fiscal year east of Fort William, caused to a great extent by the railroads lurching cars and not placing them promptly for both loading or unloading, the sum of \$324,731.60. As this amount was collected on the basis of one dollar per day demurrage, what will this revenue amount to at two and three dollars per day?

A fair average cost of a freight car is nine hundred dollars which, under the demurrage rate of one dollar per day would return over three hundred dollars per year allowing for Sundays and holidays. Owning freight cars to be held under demurrage at the one dollar rate, which the railroads claim is too low, would be an exceedingly profitable business, but under the new ruling of two and three dollars per day, one year's demurrage on one freight car would yield over nine hundred dollars, a profit large enough to purchase another freight car.

Another fact that ought to be mentioned is that the Canadian roads are using a great

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