WHERE OUR BIRDS WINTER

LOUISIANA'S FORESTS NOW SWARMING WITH FEATHERED STRANGERS.

Nearly Every Form of Eastern Bird Life to Be Found in the Colony That Makes the State a Most Attractive Field for the Naturalist and the Taxidermist.

BENTON, La., March 14.—Just at this season the woods of Louisiana are most populous with birds. Not only the natives are here, but visitors from every Northern State and not any of them have set their wings for the homeward flight. The naturalist who makes a sojourn in this section through the winter months has opportunity to study pretty nearly every form of feathered life the eastern part of North America can show, and to study them at close range. The woods are so thick and the fields so quiet that the air voyagers may be approached within a few yards and, as no one ever disturbs these species of them which are not "game," they become singularly tame. Representatives of water and wading birds are as numerous as those which stick to dry land and trees. Every lagoon is inhabited by Northern cranes, herons and fishers of other kinds and not less than a dozen differing varieties of bitterns make the day and night clamorous. Birds of prey come, too, in almost endless variety. In summer northern Louisiana can show perhaps a half dozen kinds of hawks and three kinds of owls, but in that time, which is the snow time further north, about twenty differing species of hawks are here and a dozen kinds of owls. The opportunity afforded to the naturalist and the taxidermist as well are understood by some men who live above the Mason and Dixon line and they are regular journeyers to Louisiana when the cold comes. These men use, almost without exception, a double-barrelled gun of only .44 caliber, which chambers a cartridge the size and appearance of the Winchester cartridge, but is loaded with dust shot instead of ball. They are fatal little weapons at a distance of thirty feet and there is rarely any necessity to shoot at targets further away.

In March the pirates, twitterers and songsters betray signs of preparation for mating. The green is getting up in the trees and the mysterious law of nature which makes all things bloom and reproduce their kind in the spring is at work upon them. Contrary to popular impression, much of the preparatory work of bird mating is done in their winter home before the beginning of the journey back to the North. This is true not only of the wood and field varieties, but of wild fowl as well. There is, of course, no nest building done, but the observer will see a disposition on the part of the birds to pair. Males and females will be found in company here and there and always separated from other members of their tribe by a hundred yards or so. They show a rare modesty in this matter, or it may be that they are afraid of being teased by those others in whose small bodies the leaven of spring has not yet begun to work. It sometimes happens that the selection of mates is made here, but most often the courtship is completed on the way north, which occupies a space of time of all the way from two weeks to six weeks, according to the latitude in which the bird is accustomed to spend its summers, its speed and its industry of flight. Most birds go north as the spring goes, in little flights of a hundred miles or so. For this reason residents near the Canadian line find the returned wanderers with them so soon as the spring is fairly under way. There are some species which remain in the South until the weather gets too warm for their comfort. They then start north in long and determined journeys, which cover hundreds of miles at a flight, stopping only for nightfall and twice a day to feed a little while. As these varieties begin their nest building as soon as they reach their destination, it is reasonable to suppose that their courtship was completed before they started. Certainly, they have little time for love making during their far and strenuous journeying. It is noticed by men curious about such things that birds begin erecting their homes almost as soon as they reach the point at which they purpose to spend the breeding season. Their rapidity of selection would not be possible if it had not been begun during the warm days which found them in the South and carried them in their travels homeward.

Another evidence that the process of mating is begun here is found in the springtime pugnacity of the males. It is difficult to walk into the woods in March without having the ear assailed by a succession of angry cries, or chirps, betraying two battling males of any one of fifty of species. Courage in birds is by no mean regulated by size. Some of the largest of them, notably the crow, are the most cowardly. Conversely, a little hop o' my thumb, sometimes not longer nor taller than an inch, will attack a flyer that in proportion to itself is as a house to a man. The bee martin or "kingbird," so called because it whips everything it can get at, will not weigh more than two ounces, but it has a thousand pounds of temper and a ton of nerve. That charming writer upon birds, John Burroughs, says that the bee-martin is cowardly, but he must have encountered some degenerate individual, outlawed from his kinsmen as a dastard. The average martin of this family is not afraid of anything that flies. It is a frequent sight on Louisiana spring mornings to see a huge gray hawk hurtling through the air, emitting now and then a distressed squawk, much like its usual scream of savagery, while in its rear flies one, or at most two, "kingbirds," smiting it venomously between the shoulders and most elated when a small feather floating downward shows that a blow has gone home. This chase will last for a half mile or more and when it ceases the hawk will scurry onward with undiminished speed until out of sight. Meanwhile the two minute black knight errants will fly back to their starting point. At this season it will be often found that they are male and female, interrupted in their courting near the top of some huge tree by the questing scream of the approaching robber.

The mockingbirds, too, wondrous minstrels in gray, are as valiant as gifted and many of them are slain by invading shrikes because they do not know that discretion is the better part of valor. Occasionally the victory rests with the mocker, thoughnot often. Such is the fame of their valor, however, and so well is it understood by other birds that interference with one of them means fight to the death, that the shrike will attack only when there is absolute dearth of other prey. The contestants are nearly equal in size and the shrike which dines upon the singer earns his meal. The cardinal grosbeak, called universally throughout the South "redbird," has so little sense of the fitness of things that it will attack a man under certain circumstances and, when winged by a single pellet of shot or trapped, will fight to the last. Many a small farmer boy has dropped his prey and trotted to the house with a bleeding forefinger from having caught one of these desperadoes and incautiously handled it. Both the mocker and the redbird remain here all the year through, but they seem to get on excellently with their northern visitors and there is no discernible friction between them at any time.

Louisiana woods now furnish the greatest number of bird varieties because it is at the fag end of the season, when all which are coming south have arrived and there has been no start to the north. Three weeks hence there will be a decrease of more than 50 per cent in the number of feathered things to be found in an hour's stroll and near to the end of April only the natives will be left. Just now, however, the inhabitants of the woods and fields are at their prettiest and on their prettiest behavior from the viewpoint of man. It is true that the northerners are mostly of sober coat. Drabs and grays predominate among them and their dull outing uniforms will not be exchanged for flashing russets and greens until they get back home. The birds which belong here, however, show plenty of coloration. A half dozen cardinal grosbeaks alone are sufficient to liven up the landscape. Then there is the bluebird, whose azure black and wings and ruddy breast do not change at any time; the robin, the black and yellow oriole, the red-winged blackbird, the purple grakle in his burnished armor, the white and black vireo, the "French mockingbird" in white and gray, the yellow and green wissertanl and a lot of others. In March the robin, indeed, has a slightly rumpled and draggled look. He is quiet, not at all perky, and seems anxious to escape observation. The reason of this is that he is recovering from a prolonged debauch and his conscience hurts.

On every Louisiana plantation and in most Louisiana yards are china trees which bear a round, hard berry, twice the size of a buckshot. These berries are green and acrid in summer, but when the frost has fallen turn to a bright yellow. Of them Robin is fond. They contain a strong exhilarative principle which later turns into a soporific. A half dozen of them set the bird to dancing about in joyous fashion, then it gets dizzy and makes a few objectless turns as if it were trying to waltz, then it topples over and goes to sleep. Its stupor will last a half hour. When it wakes it goes back to the tree and repeats the performance. Little negro boys catch many robins in stupefied or semi-stupefied condition. A curious effect of the poison is that it deprives the bird of a sense of danger. Those under its influence suffer themselves to be picked up and their necks wrung without an effort at escape. After three months of this sort of life it is no wonder that Robin redbreast wants to go off somewhere by himself and sit down and think. His sobriety in March is due wholly to the fact that the china berries are all gone. No morality, lately awakened, restrains him. If the berries lasted all of the year he would be drunk all of the year and would never go north at all.

If it were possible to catch and keep in captivity full grown mocking-birds, those captured now would be the most valuable because their repertories now are the fullest. All winter long they have been associating with hundreds of emigrants from New York, Pennsylvania and contiguous States and they have picked up a vast assortment of melodies. They have so many, in fact, that their songs sound like a whole aviary turned loose into vocalization one after another. They will forget all of this by the middle of summer and their imitations then will be only of native birds, because the mockers have a notably poor memory, but they begin again in the fall as soon as the first arrivals from the North have caught their breaths and begun to whistle, chirp, or twitter, and by the time the cold months are over they will be once more at their best. One singular result of the memorative faculty or instinct of the mocker is the duets, or sound-duels, which often occur between it and the hermit thrush, the sweetest minstrel of the North. The hermit thrush when it reaches the South maintains its secretive habits. It lives in the deepest and darkest parts of the forests. It is only rarely seen upon the edge of a field and then flits back into the thickness as if it dreaded the light. Its solitude and the difficulty with which it is approached, however, have no effect upon the sweetness of its voice or the liquid variety of its music. Its piplings are often heard in woods which are quiet and the mocking-bird, when it hears them, instantly ceases its own song and bends all its attention in the effort to memorize. The song of a hermit thrush is not easy of acquirement, both on account of its purity of tone and its range of notes. It is a rare thing, however, that the male mocking bird is unable to master it. When this occurs the failure is due to the fact that there is some fault in the individual mocker. The mockers differ in ability to acquire. Of the strain of the hermit thrush Burroughs says: "Through the general chorus of wrens and warblers, I detect this sound rising, pure and serene, as if a spirit from some remote height were slowly chanting a divine accompaniment. This song appeals to the sentiment of the beautiful and suggests a serene religious beatitude as no other sound in nature does. It is not a proud gorgeous strain like the tanager's or the grosbeak's, suggests no passion or emotion, but seems to be the voice of that calm, sweet solemnity one attains in his best moments. It realizes a peace and a deep solemn joy that only the finest souls may know. A few nights ago I ascended a mountain to see the world by moonlight, and when near the summit the hermit commenced his evening hymn. Listening to this strain on the lone mountain, with the full moon just rounded from the horizon, the pomp of your cities and the pride of your civilization seemed trivial and cheap. I have seldom known two of these birds to be singing at the same time in the same locality."

The desire of the hermit thrush to be alone is as strong in Louisiana as in its Northern home, but when the mocking-bird is engaged in mastering its song it is not permitted to be alone. It must either sing while another singer is outpouring its soul or it must remain silent altogether. The result of this is that the listener is often furnished with a double hermit song, one by the hermit and one by its imitator, but there is no ear so fine that it can detect the difference if it happen that the mocker has progressed to the last stage of his memorization. In fact, the wood thrush, the cat bird, the wood veery and the wood sparrow often find themselves merrily answering a supposed brother hidden, whereas they are affording material to the mocker.

The man who starts for a stroll through a Louisiana forest in these days will leave his waistcoat at home, for the weather is warm to one in motion, though to him who lies upon the dead grass and stares up at the blue sky it has a lingering tang of chill in it. He will meet in a walk of a mile with fifty different varieties of birds, and of these not less than half will be of Northern origin. The woods are now open enough to afford more unobstructed view and still enough leafless to give the requisite shelter to their inhabitants. The shades are well designed to set off the bird colors, there being less of the vivid greens of summer. The evergreens are of a darkness that is almost black, and bits of brilliant hue are as strongly outlined against them as if they were white. Across the snake-like path, made by cattle in searching for water, the grosbeak will dart like a flash of flame. As it passes upon some naked branch, with a huge gray clump of Spanish moss behind it, it seems to light up the surrounding dusk like a stab of fire. From the thick green branches of a cedar or arbor vitæ, leaps a bluebird, to be followed in succession by a green-backed flycatcher, a vireo all in brown, and a scissor tail of white, black and slate blue. The cause of their exit will be a dwarf shrike, of drabilike gray, with a bill as sharp as a needle, as strong as a chisel and as long as itself. It may carry upon this bill a tiny wren. If so, it will leave the corpse for a lesson to other starlings all bare of leaves in an open space to itself, and upon one of the long thorns of the locust it will impale the dead wren, hanging it as scientifically as could any butcher in trousers, after which it will fly away with an ironic chirp of satisfaction. The chances are a hundred to one that it will not return to the wren and that the corpse will hang until it decays and falls, or is blown away piecemeal by the ants. It is the nature of the shrike that its memory is as short as its sword is long, and it is doomed to go on killing and hanging up its prey and forgetting all about it so long as its life lasts.

If the man in the woods will walk until he comes to some large pond, its edges carpeted with lilies and ferns, he will see much of the feathered water life. As yet not a duck of them all, except the canvasback and redhead, has gone north. In the centre of the sheet maybe a drake mallard will be preening himself, each sleek oiled feather gleaming in the sun and his dark green head blazing like an emerald. His swimmings, semi-divings, low clucks and preenings will be all for the charming of a brown hen which sits demurely on the pond six paces distant and pretends to be not at all impressed. If he draws nearer in his wooing, she will retreat, and if he pursues she will take wing coyly but swiftly. As the drake in his courtings makes widening circles in the water it will be eyed disapprovingly by a flamingo which in tender pink stands by the pond's edges placidly waiting for its dinner to swim by. Near it will be the small, light blue "shy poke," one of the ungainliest birds in the world, and there may come from the far side of the little bay in the deep resonant boom of the great bittern as it takes flight and rises heavily above the trees. The smaller birds will be in no wise disturbed by the presence of the larger flyers. They know instinctively a bird of prey from one that is harmless. They will fly down to the water's edge singly or in troops, dip in their bills for a drop or two and then vanish. In Southern middays of summer there is little woods music. The fierce sun beats down too relentlessly for exertion of any kind, but in March there is just enough of warmth in the air to suggest that spring is at hand and the long dim aisles of trees are resonant with a thousand notes. In certain of the thickest places there is a riot of color and a riot of song. Love making seems to call for much motion and much noise.

TROUBLES OF ONE MONAGHAN.

Barber Chair Broke Under Him and Damages Were Demanded.

A very excited little man with a week's growth of beard on his chin forced his way up to Magistrate Cornell in the Jefferson Market police court.

"Of'm an Orishman, yer Honor," he began, wiping his forehead with a red handkerchief.

"So I hear," remarked the Magistrate with a smile.

"My name's Monaghan, yer Honor, Pathrick Monaghan," resumed the little man, not noticing the smile.

"Is that so?" said the Magistrate in his most polite tone. "Very glad to meet you, Mr. Monahan."

"Monag-ghan, if ut plase yer Honor. An' Oi shtreedaddled into a Dago barber shop this afternoon——"

"You what?" asked the Magistrate.

"Oi shtreedaddled into a Dago shop to gitt me beard cut off, if it plase yer Honor, an' blamed sorry Oi am for 't now. They sat me in a chair and thin drew the back from unther me an' Oi fell with the glorious r-result that ther whole think bruk down an' Oi was fer sittin' an the flure in the midsht av the ruins."

"Well, well, well," said the Magistrate sympathetically.

"The worrst is yet to come, if it plaze yer Honor," the little man resumed. "The Dago shuk his fisht in me face and yelled: 'Yer bruk it.' 'You did it yerself,' Oi sez, still sittin' in ther ruins, and yer did it a purpose.' 'You pay a dollar fer damages,' sez the Dago an' Oi repleied that Oi would be an oyster the day Oi did it. Thin he was afther takin' me overcoat which was hangin' on the wall. Oi rose from ther ruins, av coorse, to defind me roights as a citizen, but they were four Dagos in ther shop, if it plase yer Honor, an' Oi'm here."

"He had no rights to take your overcoat," said the Magistrate. "I shall give you a summons for him."

"An' what about the pain an' the injury an' ther tremenjous difficulty av sittin' down which Oi be afther havin' just now?" inquired the complainant.

"Oh, a summons will do," said the Magistrate, and one was made out. Monaghan hurried toward the door with it, but at the last moment he turned back.

"Yer Honor," he said, "if ut plase yer Honor, if it be that the Dago returns the coat—need Oi come back?"

"Certainly not," said the Magistrate, and Monaghan went away happy. The summons was returnable yesterday and all day the court officers looked eagerly for the barber and his injured customer but neither appeared. So it was decided that Monaghan must have recovered his coat. Some of the policemen suggested that in view of the four Italian assistants in the shop he probably took friends along when he served the summons to help the barber to make up his mind.

IRELAND'S LACK OF SNAKES

TIM MORIARITY'S INVESTIGATIONS INTO A WEIGHTY SUBJECT.

Narrow Escape From Violence When He Tried to Convince His Father That St. Patrick Didn't Drive Them Out—Tim's Excursion to Columbia College.

One short year ago young Tim Moriarity, over in Brooklyn, astonished his pa and his ma and his sister Mary Ellen and a few of the neighbors with the announcement that it was silly and foolish to believe that St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, had driven snakes out of that land. Old Mr. Moriarity, who was in training for a proper celebration of St. Patrick's Day, strongly resented such heretical teaching of his son, and it needed all of the wisdom and diplomacy and shrewd gentleness of Mrs. Moriarity to keep Mr. Moriarity from checking daylight out of Tim.

"There never was a heretic in our family, I'll have you know, young man," old Tim cried.

It was supposed that the Moriarityes had heard the last of the disputation of St. Patrick and the snakes. But they hadn't. It was not long until Mrs. Moriarity noticed that young Tim seemed absorbed and struggling with some weighty matter. A few weeks of observation forced her to ask him what it was that was on his mind.

"Shure, it is not Mary Catherine your thinkin' of axin' to have yo' and money scarce as it is now," Mrs. Moriarity bashfully remarked, her face a rosy crimson.

"Oh, hang Mary Catherine," young Tim replied, his face all ablaze with fury. "It's that snake story about St. Patrick that I am trying to solve. Say, mam, if I only had the collateral I'd go over to Ireland and settle that once for all. I'd grow snakes in Ireland or die in the struggle."

"Well, don't let your father hear you say anything as to them snakes," Mrs. Moriarity cautioned her son. "It would just work him up into a rage, and you know he is not as young as he was once and can't stand excitement now like he used to. My advice to you is to let the matter rest. Drive it out of yer head. Think of something else."

"It's dead easy for ye, mam, to say 'drop it,' but I can't. I've got to bust that old yarn wide open or I'll never again rest easy in my mind. Such a lot of nonsense never was perpetrated on a decent, simple-minded people such as the Irish are. No snakes in Ireland because St. Patrick banished them. Well, mam, the Irish have got credit of putting blame on people for making game o' them, but I never heard any o' them that kicked over this snake story, and yet it's the worst libel that could be perpetrated on decent, self-respecting, law abiding, yet simple people. The man that is responsible for that story is no friend of St. Patrick or the Irish. Why, mam, he'd blacken the memory of his old father wherever he is, if he ever had one. It's such a silly nonsensical lie, too. Shure, St. Patrick would not banish anything out of Ireland let alone snakes. He did not want to, either."

"I've hearn tell my father, God rest his soul, say that St. Patrick was the greatest man in all the world," put in Mrs. Moriarity, "and everybody that I hear talk about St. Patrick, the priests and the wise men, and the books make him out a very smart man, and one that was a very pious one. Why, I read once in a life of St. Patrick that he made the blind to see, the dead to walk, and performed a whole lot of other miracles more wonderful that had any other man. And sure, Tim, if it was not so the books would not say so. Now, Tim, do be easy, and take my advice, and don't bother about St. Patrick and the snakes. Shure, what matters it to you, avick, whether he did or did not banish the snakes out of Ireland Divil a haporth you'll won get out of it. There aren't any there, are there?"

Tim turned a simple look of pity upon his simple-minded honest mother, and walked away, musing.

"Oh, if I had the collateral, I'd just go right over and settle once for all that hoary-headed lie. I'd pull the whiskers off, you may bet. Wonder why such a foolish thing was gotten up, anyway. Snakes in Ireland! Why if snakes don't grow there, and live there, it must be for some other cause than that St. Patrick drove them out. That old Jocelin, the Cistercian monk, is responsible for it all. If he didn't think to make out St. Patrick the most wonderful man of all the ages, why St. Patrick and snakes would never be coupled in the way they are. And yet I know Jocelin, who really had the most wonderful respect, at times amounting to awe for St. Patrick, says nothing about snakes. It's demons he talks of. It's his story, however, that is built upon and bandied back and forth until even old Jocelin himself wouldn't know it. There is the Bishop of Ossary, David Rothe, who takes a crack at it; and notwithstanding the plain statement of old Jocelin he will make it out that snakes were driven out by St. Patrick, and refers the inquiring mind to the Ninetieth Psalm for proof of his statement. I'm on to the curves of all such as the reverend person, however, and I search the Ninetieth Psalm high and low, top and bottom, and nary a mention anywhere do I find as to snakes. I'm going over and consult the black letter tomes some more and see if some sort of light wont be let in upon the subject."

And so to the library, which has been a resort of his lately, goes young Tim. He astonishes the attendants by his earnestness and his zeal in studying over the black letter tomes. Hour after hour passes and yet young Tim keeps hard at it. The attendants cluster around him curiously yet not daring to disturb him.

"Say," Tim says one afternoon, "you people may have got on to me. I am trying to find out all about that old yarn as to St. Patrick and the snakes. Here, this 172d miracle in old Jocelin makes it out that it was demons he was writing about, but you see commentators make it out that it was snakes. See, here it says:

"'The national annals record and the Latin writers declare in this do foreign and natives concur, and in this do also the modern confirm the ancient, together with the Greek writers. Theodorus and Euthymus all say) that the Ninetieth Psalm treats of the actual subjection of serpents and wild beasts which therein is promised unto the saints confiding in the Lord.

"'Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder, the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under thy feet.'

"Now I turn to the Ninetieth Psalm and find it says no such a thing. Look for yourselves. As for the freak writers, Theodorus and Euthymus, there is not a word to be found anywhere of reference of the Ninetieth Psalm, or snakes. Can you tell me what sort of a con game this is, at all? And just listen to this:

"'If has been delivered to us by our ancestors that St. Patrick possessed the power of expelling serpents. This was the universal opinion not only of the people but of the wisest and most discreet men of our nation, that by the virtue and the power of God our island was freed from all venomous creatures. This do the Hymns, the Antiphones and the office sufficiently prove.'

"Did ye ever see anything like o' that? St. Patrick banished snakes out of Ireland. Proof is apparently given, but investigation shows that the man who gives the proof does not know what he is talking about. 'Tis misleading. A lot of rubbish, to be sure. And yet it is upon such foundation that poor St. Patrick has been all the ages been accused of keeping snakes out of Ireland. To my mind it ought not keep out a flea let alone a snake. I'm sure a grave wrong has been done St. Patrick who, all in all, was a great man and about the only man in all the world that knew how to get along with the Irish."

"My friend," interjected the middle aged librarian with glasses, "you seem to be much absorbed in this very great subject. Why don't you consult the geologists. Perhaps they could let in a flood of light. I'm sure they'll be glad to discuss the matter with you in earnest, as you seem to be."

"That's an excellent idea, indeed," said Tim, rapturously. "The geologists ought to be able to explain why it is that there are no snakes in Ireland, since there are none. And I guess it is pretty well settled that they are not there, or that heavy, moss-backed, gray-whiskered old lie would not be bandied about the world all these years. If I can't nail the lie one way I can another. I'll satisfy myself as to why snakes cannot and do not live in Ireland."

Several days later Mrs. Moriarity noticed the change in Tim and remarked, quite gingerly,

"Well, I suppose it's all settled about the snakes and St. Patrick, ain't it?"

"Yes, mam, it's settled, and I know that snakes do not reside in Ireland because snakes do not live on islands, as a rule, and Ireland is an island. England is an island together with Scotland and Wales. There are a few snakes there, but not many. It's not exactly settled as to why snakes don't take up residence upon an island, but philosophers say they don't, and that ought to settle it."

"And you would not believe that St. Patrick had not a hand in driving 'em out, because some pious men say so?" ejaculated Tim's mother, warmly. "I'm afraid, Tim, that it's a great deal of trouble you are making for yourself in this world and the next. It's too much of this world's larnin' you have, and not enough of the world to come. Mind your soul's salvation. It's worth everything to you. What does the good Book say: 'What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' Mind yourself, Tim. There is such a thing as being too smart. Pay more heed to the talk of the priests than you do. And less to men of the world."

"That's all right, mam," Tim bandied back at her. "We wont quarrel; never fear as to that."

Some few nights afterward, when there was company at the home of the Moriartys and old Tim was away making preparations for a proper celebration of the coming St. Patrick's Day, Mary Ellen simperingly remarked:

"Mam says you've fixed up that snake story about St Patrick. St. Patrick never banished snakes because they never were snakes in Ireland to banish. Is that so?"

"For sure, Mary Ellen," Tim replied.

"I'm glad of that. It lifts a load off your mind. Won't you tell us what the professor told you? Do now, Tim, avick. Sure, now, I do like to know things as well as the men."

"Now you know what they say happened to two women in olden times, through curiosity. Devil tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, and the world was thereby doomed. Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt because she was so fresh as turn to look back when Sodom was burning," said Tim.

"Well, I don't care," pouted Mary Ellen, simperingly. "I think you're real mean. You ought to let us know."

Tim was just as anxious to tell it all as Mary Ellen and the other auditors were to be told. He wished only, however, that they be keyed up to the proper tension. People in their circle when things are fired at them, pay little heed, even forgetting what is being talked about, let alone the details. Tim wanted everybody on tenterhooks.

"If you must really be told, that is you wont rest easy until you are told it was up to Columbia College, Mary Ellen, that I went to learn about the snakes and St. Patrick," young Tim began. "It's a fine place they have up there. Nothing half so grand anywhere else on earth I believe. Looks as if they had money to burn.

"What about the snakes?" put in Mary Ellen's beau, who though very sweet on a sample of Irish woman, wont stand for the Irish style of story telling.

"Will you rest a while, sir?" Tim persisted. "I wont have things upset, even by you. They had marble floors, as clane and brighter than mam's kitchen floors, with young ones sitting or lying down on 'em, smokin' cigarettes.

"Could any of ye young gentlemen tell me where the professor of geology is to be found? I want to see him," I said.

"Go around this corridor till yo' find the office of the Burson," a youth replied. 'He'll fix you out all right.'

"I did just as the young fellow said," Tim went on. "And what do you think? They sent a servant man along wid ye to introduce me to the professor of geology.

"Oh, rats!" cried out Mary Ellen's beau. "Servant man to introduce you to the professor of geology. You're talkin' thro, yer old cabbeen. Well, go ahead wid your story."

"Say misther, yo tried to rush things, and they won't be rushed," Tim explained. "Who's telling this narrative, you or me. I'd like to know?"

"You are, of course," Mary Ellen's beau replied, "but you're mighty slow at it. Go ahead."

"Well, it was into the office of one of the professors of geology, Arthur Hallock, that I was ushered," said Tim. "A fine looking young man of 32 or 33, in shirt sleeves, working at his desk, he was. I said: 'Professor, I hope you'll be easy wid me, but I want to ax a few questions o' you', and I hope you wont be thinkin' ridiculous. Is there any reason in the world why snakes should not live in Ireland?'

"'Nary a reason,' the professor ups and tells me. 'All the climatic situations and geological data, so far as I am aware favor the growing of snakes in Ireland. Any one who wants to see for himself will be surprised at the success of their propagation.'

"'But you know they are no snakes there?' I tells the professor.

"'Not my own knowledge, but I've heard say they were no snakes in Ireland because St. Patrick banished them out,' the professor replies. 'There ought to be snakes there, though, for as I said the surroundings are favorable. You know snakes, it has been found, do live wherever man can live. But they are parts of our country where a snake shows itself only to be annihilated. Hogs are dead down on snakes. I never saw a hog and a snake together. But it is the snake that always suffers. In Ireland they raise a great many cattle, and why not hogs? They'd wipe out all the snakes that came along.'

"'They do raise hogs plenty o' 'em, more than three million a year,' I tells the professor. 'Don't you remember stories told of the pig that is sold to pay the poor man's rent. Don't you remember the picture papers printin' his photograph and his introduction. Sure, man that is to pay the rent.' And so that's the fellow that's responsible for driving out the snakes that the good people having been putting on St. Patrick all the ages. Wonderful!'

"'I'd hate to be understood as saying as much as that,' Prof. Hallock went on to explain. 'I never made a special study of the subject, and therefore could not be expected to give a satisfactory opinion. In fact, I know of no professional man who has ever made a study of the subject. I do not know why. There are no doubt causes that would interfere, perhaps to prevent snakes living in a place, but hogs are the only one that occurs to me just now.'

"'Are any o' yer feller professors apt to have any different minds o' the subject than your own,' I axed the professor.

"'I think not,' he replied. 'It's a simple matter, and there can be no two opinions. Trouble is, there has been no special study of the subject at all. It's interesting, though. No, I don't know why it has not been studied.'

"I thanked Prof Hallock for his information and down to the Museum of Natural History I went, yes myself. I went to see the Professor of Geology. I said to the man in uniform, gold and red braid on guard in the corridor: 'It's a long way you'll have to go to see him, sir.' he makes reply. 'He's in Bermuda.' 'There are others here, the words are full o' 'em, to be sure,' I says, kind o' smart like.

"'Who do you want?' the man all in gold lace and maroon axed me.

"'That you have not the Professor in Geology, could you not name over some of the others. That'll do. Where's the Professor in Entomology? Prof. J. A. Allen is he you call him? Right this way to the elevator, I'll show,' said the guide. Up there I found a middle aged man at work, over a cardboard on which were bats with wings and without wings. He was busy.

"'Can you tell me,' I asks 'why it is there are no snakes in Ireland?'

"I forgot to say that this man was a very silent appearing and seemed all absorbed with his bats which he appeared to be studying intently.

"'I don't know why there are no snakes in Ireland,' he said.

"'But professor,' I persisted, 'the surroundings are such as not to bar out snakes, aren't they?'

"'As to that I cannot talk intelligently. I've made no special study of the subject. I'd hardly expect to find snakes on an island. Yes, to be sure there are some in England, Scotland and Wales, not many species, however. As I never made a study of the subject I cannot be expected to talk with as much wisdom as if I had.' From what I have heard I should not expect to find snakes in Ireland.'

"'Why, there is everything there that there is in other places on this wide world, even trouble and you know snakes are great for creatin' that, we've been told,' I urged.

"'We don't expect to find snakes on land, particularly an island, such as the Emerald Isle is. That's all the reason I know,' the professor explained. 'No, it's not because of the soil, or the air or water. At present all I can say is that snakes are not to be found in Ireland because it is an island, or no island are snakes found. Special study will give were specific reasons.'

"So I thanked the man of science for his information and came away. Are you satisfied with the explanations, Mary Ellen? That beau of yours ain't one can see. It needs to be driven into his head with a hatchet, or an axe, or the like o' that."

AMMUNITION WRISTLETS.

The War Department to Experiment With a New Device.

From the Baltimore Sun.

WASHINGTON, March 13.—The Army ordnance officers are greatly interested in a new device for carrying cartridges. The Board of Ordnance and Fortifications has recommended that the Chief of Ordnance be authorized to accept 5,000 ammunition wristlets, invented by Thomas C. Orndorff of Worcester, Mass. The Department agrees to use this number at once in packing 100,000 cartridges for immediate shipment to such points as will bring them into actual use. Mr. Orndorff's offer is made without expense to the Government for the purpose of experimental trial.

The ammunition wristlet is a fabric to encircle the forearm and holds twenty cartridges. It weighs of itself less than one-half an ounce. If the ammunition is issued in the wristlets, two could be placed on the arm without inconvenience, and, if it were necessary to take more, they will fold and make a small package that could be stowed in the pocket without irritation. If the soldier is ordered to advance or retreat, his ammunition goes along the same as though it were in his belt, and, if there is a lull in the engagement, the cartridges can be transferred to the belt and the wristlet thrown away. It costs but a few cents—not as much a some clips that hold five cartridges.

The value of the wristlet, however, is not ended when it is empty. While every precaution is taken to furnish the soldier with material for cleaning his rifle, he is often without it in the field. By tearing the band apart it can be used for this purpose. It is strong enough to use as a temporary bandage in case of a slight wound, or even as a tourniquet in case of a serious wound.

Eloped With the Burglar.

From the Philadelphia Record.

CHATTANOOGA, March 10.—Holmes Mason entered the house of the Widow Glenn, at New Decatur, Ala., and, it is alleged, stole money and valuable jewels. As he was escaping he was discovered by Miss Bessie Winsett, who made her home with the widow. She was about to make an outcry when he seized her and whispered his name in her ear. She knew him. He proposed to elope with her, and she consented. Officers pursued and caught the pair.

SCIENCE AND SERPENTS.

LATEST ADDITIONS TO KNOWLEDGE OF THE SNAKE TRIBES.

The Two Principal Groups of Venomous Reptiles—Different Ways of the Viper and the Elapine Families in Making the Deadly Stroke—The Pawer to Charm.

From the Washington Times.

"It may be stated as a general rule," said Prof. Leonhard Styneger, of the Smithsonian Institution, "that our poisonous snakes are decreasing rapidly in numbers, and that consequently the danger from their bites is constantly diminishing. In many localities where rattlesnakes were formerly numerous they have now become entirely exterminated, while in others they are extremely rare. The causes that have led to this are various, but the commonest cause is undoubtedly the increasing cultivation of the country. In other places the decrease in the number of the snakes can be traced directly to its being killed off by the hog, an animal certainly not proof against the venom if it enters its circulation, but usually well protected by its fat, which is, in most cases, sufficiently thick to prevent the fangs of the serpent from penetrating the underlying tissues. On the other hand, there are localities in which certain species of poisonous snakes have actually increased."

It is occasionally suggested that a premium per head, or rattle, be paid by the Government for the extermination of the dangerous snakes, but it has been shown that there are but few localities in the United States in which the really dangerous species are numerous enough to render even an experiment with bounty desirable. It has been tried and is still in vogue in India, where large sums are paid annually to snake destroyers, but without sensibly diminishing the fearful mortality resulting from snake bites in that country. Even in the little island of Martinique it appears to have had little effect in decreasing the number of the deadly fer de lance, probably the most dangerous of all serpents, while it undoubtedly led to an increase in the death roll of the population. The inhabitants of Martinique have tried various means of rending themselves of the presence of the deadly reptile. They tried the hog, so redoubtable in the case of the rattlesnake, with the result of great mortality among the hogs. Their last experiment was the importation of a number of that little ferret-like animal from the East Indies, called the mongoose, which successfully combats the deadly cobra, but, as a traveller observes, "the attack of the cobra is one thing, and that of the fer de lance—which wastes no time feeling about on end, but lets out at once—quite another, and so the mongoose has taken no active steps toward the extermination of the fer de lance."

A description of the general characteristics of this serpent may be taken as typical of the entire viper family, in which are included all the American snakes, except the coral.

The fangs of the vipers are attached to the forend of what may be termed the jawbone or maxillary, in the hollow of which is contained the poison sac, the contents of which are emitted through a hollow or groove in the fangs. At right angles to the maxillary, and attached to the plates by means of certain muscles, is a bone or rod called the transpalatine. The fangs lie normally flat, back against the palate, but when the snake strikes a contraction of the muscles of the transpalatine pushes the latter against the maxillary, which, being movable, revolves through about a quarter of a circle, carrying the fangs with it until they are erected perpendicularly to the roof of the mouth. It has been recently shown that the erection of the fangs is a necessary consequence of the opening of the mouth, although the most authorities who have hitherto written upon the subject have so stated. In the case of the fer de lance, the reptile lies in coil, using its tail as a "point d'appui," and with the forepart of its body bent back upon itself in several coils, thus resembling the rattlesnake. Suddenly it shoots forward its head with the rapidity of lightning, throwing open its jaws at an angle of 180 degrees, and thus it is seen that the fangs, which are erected simultaneously, are at right angles to the jaw, and point straight at the object of attack, and that if this object lies anywhere in the line between the commencement and completion of the thrust, it is bound to be struck fairly by the points, especially as the venom-injecting snap is not made until the victim is struck or the thrust completed.

The only American snake which belongs to the elapine family, the other great group of poisonous serpents, is the coral, a denizen of the Gulf States. One of the main distinctions between this group and the vipers lies in the fact that the maxillary is practically immovable, and the fangs in consequence permanently erect, so that the snake strikes in a more or less pronounced curve, and snaps at the object of attack. Unless this snap is made precisely at the right moment, the points of the fangs will not meet, and no poison will be injected. The snapping of the jaws is necessary for the injection of the venom with both the vipers and elapines, and so frequently is the act sometimes performed that the snake's fang has been found broken off in the wound, in the reptile's attempt to extricate its jaws from the flesh.

The elapine's mode of attack is less direct than that of the viper's, and depends in a great measure upon the reptile's aim, which is not always accurate. It was probably the extreme clumsiness of the coral snake in striking its intended prey that led until very recently to the belief that it was perfectly harmless. It was only after a remarkably successful achievement in this line in which the snake's victim died within an hour that the coral snake came under close scientific scrutiny, and it was found that its poison is scientifically with that of the Indian cobra. This poison is the main constituent of the venom of all the elapines, always mixed, however, with a certain amount of colorous venom. The venom of the vipers is mainly composed of a colorous venom, with more or less admixture of the cobra constituent. The cobra and rattlesnake are selected as typical specimens of the elapine and the viper families in regard to their poison, as the cobra contains least admixture of the viper or colorous venom, and vice versa. The effect of these two poisons is distinctly different, the cobra venom affecting the nervous system, reaching the nerves of motor centres with extreme rapidity, and leaving only a slight scar mark to the wound, while the viper poison acts chiefly by causing mortification of the part bitten, which may spread with more or less rapidity over the entire body, or may only result in a local affection.

Snake venom, in its most virulent form, is only modified saliva, doubtless converted by nature into a specific poison as much for the purpose of enabling the animal to procure food as for a weapon of defence. The fact that the blood of the reptile is impregnated with an antidote which enables it to safely devour its poisoned prey seems to render this supposition probable. Another remarkable gift which nature seems to have bestowed upon certain varieties of snakes is the power of fascinating or mesmerizing their victims. Although this may appear a rather fanciful notion, some very distinguished scientists of the present day are inclined to admit that there is some truth in it, and there are cases upon record which can scarcely be explained in any other way.

A remarkable feature of the greater part of poisonous snakes in this country by means of which they are readily distinguished from the non-poisonous varieties is a deep pit or hole found in the rattlesnakes and their nearest relations on the side of the face, between the nostril and eye. This feature has led to the sub-classification of the rattlesnakes, moccasins, copperheads, &c., into "pit vipers." The "pit," or cavity, sinks deep into the maxillary bone, and represents a "blind" sac lined with epidermis, which, not being connected with any of the other cavities or organs in the head by any inside opening or canal, for