

Birds that Kill Snakes for Livelihood



Burrowing Owl

"Of what use are snakes?" is a question often asked by the students of a lecture. They do not gratify the aesthetic sense, as other useless creatures do; and are loathsome and often pernicious.

Every other created thing views them with horror—men and monkeys, beasts of prey and birds. Indeed, many species of birds—crows, ravens and others—have a bitter animosity to the snake race, and kill the wriggling reptiles wherever found, even though they may not always devour the mangled remains.

There are birds that gain their livelihood by assiduously seeking and slaying poisonous serpents.

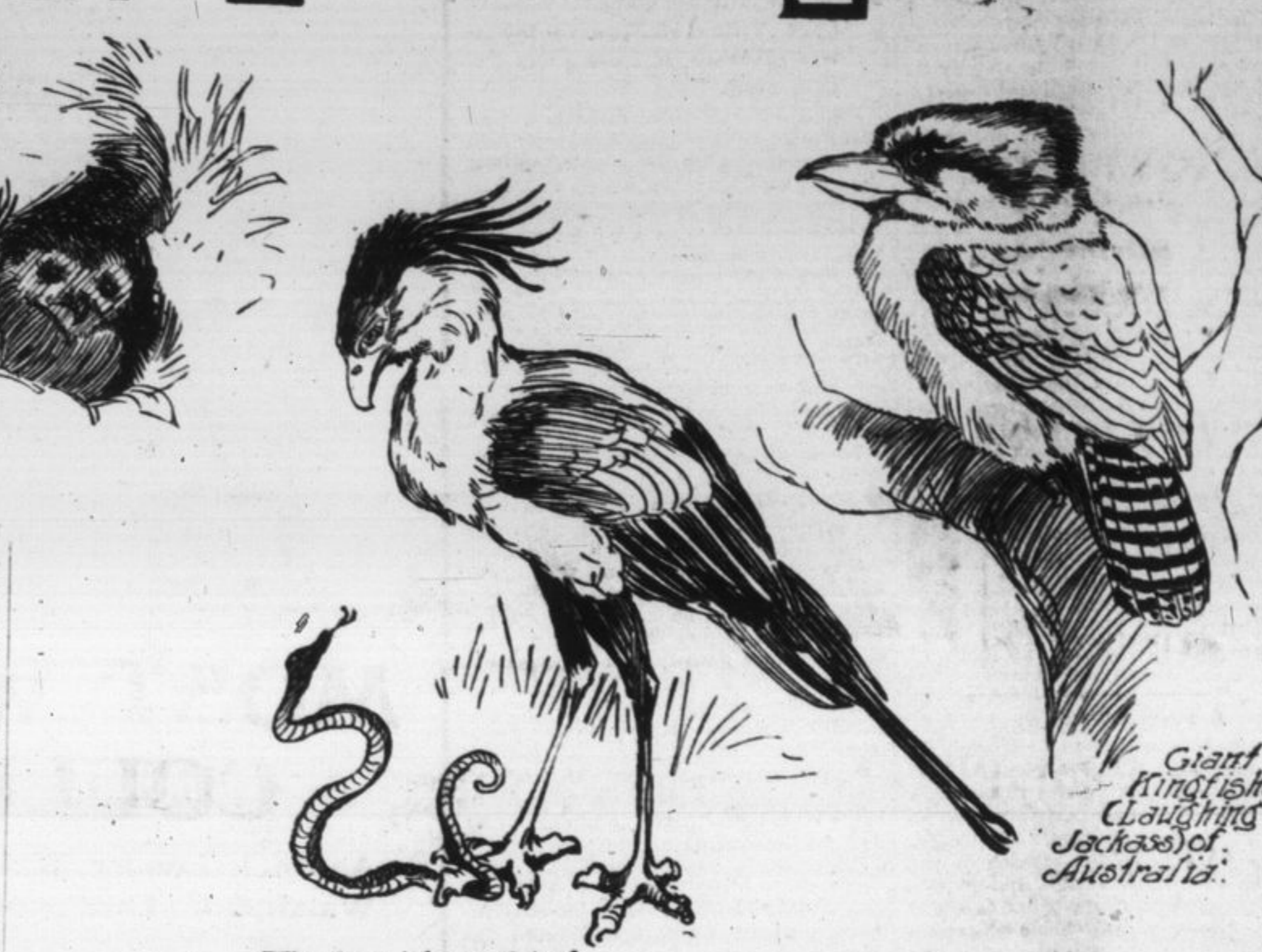
Ask the Australian colonist, which of the many queer birds that adorn his primitive forests he holds in most respect, and he will instantly name the laughing jackass, or the giant kingfisher. Its note resembles a donkey's bray.

The kingfisher lives almost entirely on poisonous reptiles, in which the island continent is inconceivably rich. It is especially venomous ones; frogs, toads, cicadas and tree lizards. He never catches fish after the manner of his American or European kindred.

It was a hot day in the Blue mountains of New South Wales. A traveller had been tramping through almost shadeless brush for some hours. At last, finding a fallen tree trunk—the mimosa is almost the only one of the Australian trees that does not turn the edge of its leaves to the sun—a fact that accounts for the curious shadiness of the Australian bush.

Suddenly he beheld a big kingfisher in the act of catching a snake in its beak. He started at the observer with an abrupt dash to the ground not far away, and a few seconds later flew back to his perch with something wriggling in his big, fierce-looking bill. It was a carpet snake that had been hanging in the sunshine just beyond the shelter of the mimosa clump.

The bird had seized the reptile by the neck and held it in a vice-like grip, de-



Great Kingfisher Laughing Snake eating

The Secretary Bird

He, too, first kills his prey, throws it into the air with a series of trump, and then disposes of it at leisure.

The "native companion," as the Australian crane is called, is no mean antagonist of the snake race, of which it destroys hundreds of thousands. Its method of killing is peculiar, for it stamps on the reptile with the full force of its leg, drawn up to the body, and then propelled forward like a piston rod with all the bird's strength.

To make assurance doubly sure, the crane strikes a quick succession of blows that crushes the last vestige of life out of the mangled reptile, which is then swallowed with no more ado.

Another snake eater is the secretary bird of South Africa. More than once travellers have seen this curious creature, half vulture and half falcon, with a suggestion of the crane, tacking a big snake just as the native companion of Australia does; that is to say, never touching it with beak or wing, but always stamping on the squirming folds with its powerful legs, disabling the reptile at the first blow and finally dislodging all the vertebrae in one stroke.

Should the snake show fight, the secretary bird seems to tighten all its feathers about it, hopping briskly here and there, with all the "footwork" of the veteran pugilist, so as to avoid the snake's strike.

Such contests can end only one way, and the crushed serpent is soon reposing harmlessly in its living tomb.

Another Australian bird, known as

Jardine's harrier, is a serpent killer of great ability, specially endowed by nature with legs of great length, mailed with strong, yellow scales, impervious to snake teeth, and also bills and cats frogs, lizards and other reptiles.

The harrier besides the pied crow and the laughing jackass is of great value to Australia, which contains so many varieties of deadly snakes.

It seeks for snakes on the wing, hovering at no great distance from the ground over the hot and stony places frequented by them. With sudden sweep, the reptile is grasped by the neck with one powerful foot, and then the harrier soars high into the air and kills its reptile prey by dropping it on rocks or hard, sun-baked earth from a great height.

The Indian adjutant and crane of all kinds, Mancharian and Dutch, are also snake hunters. Indeed, in India the adjutant is treated with as much consideration as the sacred monkeys of Haumati. Woe betide the inexperienced tourist or visitor who tries to shoot one of these curious birds.

Then there is the burrowing owl of the South American pampas, which searches for rattlesnakes, following the creature into their own holes. These birds also are respected, and with cause.

There is no greater foe to all warm-blooded mammals than the poisonous snake, and any bird with cleverness and courage enough to kill one and dine off it afterward well deserves man's gratitude and protection.

SENSE OF SIGHT IN ANTS.

Experiments Show They Don't Depend on Smell.

The old theory that ants could not see and were guided entirely by sense of smell has been demolished by a series of experiments reported in the Revue Scientifique. A little platform of cardboard was set up near one of their nests with inclined plane leading conveniently down to the entrance. Then a number of the insects and a quantity of their eggs were placed upon the platform.

For a few minutes the ants seemed greatly perturbed, but they very soon found the inclined plane and at once started carrying the eggs down to the nest.

A second inclined plane was located on the opposite side of the platform, but they took no notice of it. The experimenters then twisted the platform around so that the second plane pointed to the nest entrance.

Without hesitating the ants ceased using the old plane and took to the new one, showing conclusively, it is argued, that they were not following a trail by scent but were getting their bearings by some other sense than smell.

They all seemed to know all the entrances and to have a sense of their direction. They struck out new paths for themselves and always reached their destination without fail. This was regarded as establishing some form of vision.

Finally, an electric light bulb was set up near one entrance to the nest. It seemed to have an immediate attraction for the ants, as they unanimously used the entrance on that side coming to and going from the nest. Then it was changed over to the other side, causing great excitement apparently among the insects, which ended in their changing over to the newly illuminated way.

Changes in the brilliancy of the light seemed to have no perceptible effect on the ants, but they never failed to detect the change of direction. All possible precautions were taken to prevent the heat from the lamp from reaching them, so that it is regarded as certain that they perceived the light.

Natures Provisions.

There are qualities in which Mrs. Hobbs prides herself, but good temper was not one of them. "I'm no saint," she often stated, and even her most loyal friend was not prepared to disagree with her. On one occasion a lecturer on "How to Grow Old Gracefully," spoke before the Cranston Woman's Club, and was entertained at dinner by Mrs. Hobbs.

"It's strange and sad to think that every time we give you to anger it adds a new line or deepens one already in the face," said the lecturer, thoughtfully at the close of an excellent meal.

"Mrs. Hobbs eyed her sharply, but was unable to detect any ulterior designs on the part of her guest.

"I don't know as it's so very strange, or sad either," she remarked, after the cause for inspection. "I think, perhaps, it's just one of Nature's wise provisions for folk who see what a woman who isn't given to much talk outside has to contend with in her own family."

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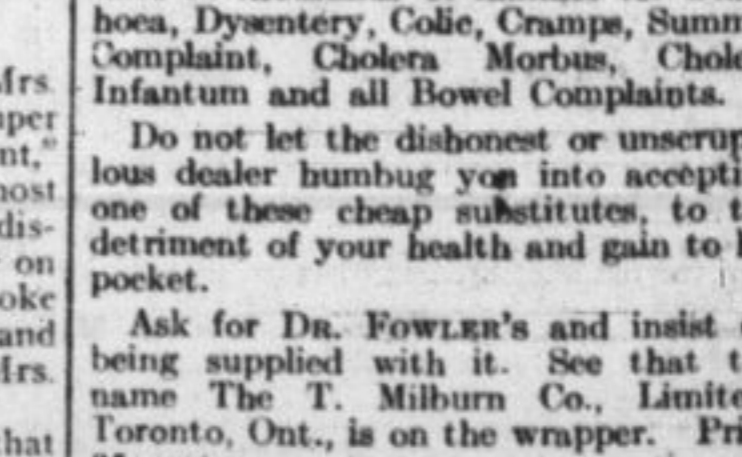
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LIQUOR LAWS IN NORWAY.

Private Profit Eliminated—Consumption Decreased.
New Norwegian liquor laws are successful. The Sondag system gives power to municipalities to grant all the retail spirit licenses which they deem necessary to a company which would bind itself to carry on the traffic in the interests of the community, with a fixed annual return of not more than 5 per cent on its paid up capital.

In establishing the system the question of compensation does not appear to have presented much difficulty. The allotments of the profits are as follows: To the state, 65 per cent; to the licensee, 15 per cent; to the municipalities, 15 per cent, and to the public utility operating as consumer attractions to the public houses in towns, 10 per cent, and in the surrounding districts, 5 per cent.

The profits of the trade under these restrictions have contributed \$7,000,000 for objects of public interest since the beginning of the system. During the last eight years the proportion accruing to the state has been increased and set apart till 1910 to form the nucleus of an old age pension fund, which amounts to \$2,300,000. This is a remarkable fact in the history of Norway, which is that the consumption of alcohol per inhabitant has decreased about 45 per cent. In the last five years the total crop has been marked since the establishment of the Sondag system.

The aims and principles of the Sondag system are these: The elimination of private profit and the creation of a monopoly for the public; insuring highest quality of liquors sold; the reduction of the number of licenses; the easy enforcement of the law; the destruction of the power of the spirit trade; and the furtherance of all progressive measures of reform.

DIET OF CONSUMPTIVES.

Overfeeding Recommended—Proper Digestion Assured.
Herbert C. Clapp, of Boston, says that diet is a most important factor in the treatment of tuberculosis. A consumptive is much more likely to eat too much than too little. Systematic overfeeding with proper digestion of the food is the accepted remedy. The food must be palatable and well served and its circumstances. The outdoor air will enable him to assimilate larger amounts.

Milk and eggs are the best foods to produce fats, which are most necessary to the patient. The author advocates three solid meals a day, with lunches between milk and six eggs a day being given. Fresh meats are especially necessary for these patients, but a mixed diet is undoubtedly the best borne. Meat juice is valuable, fried foods and cabbage should be left alone. Alcohol is not advisable, but coffee and chocolate may be taken moderately.

Dubiety in Atmosphere.

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An Alabama man tells of an odd character in a town of that state for whom the local creek had more attractions than the hot and grassy cottonfield. Not long ago "Tobe," as the dork is called, took a day off in pursuit of his favorite amusement. Tobe baited his hook and patiently sat upon the bank of the creek vainly waiting for a bite. At last, under the combined influence of the warmth of the day and the sluggish movement of the creek, Tobe fell asleep.

"Good Lord! Good Lord!" exclaimed Tobe, with a gurgle, as he awoke, "is dis nigger a-fishin', or is dis fish a-niggerin'?"

Why He Didn't.

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Recently two gentlemen were driving along a country road in a wagonette when a spark falling from one of their cigars set fire to the straw in the bottom of their vehicle. Soon the flames drove them from their seats, and while they were busily engaged in extinguishing the fire a countryman, overtaking them on horseback, stopped to assist them. "I've horsebacked the smoke for some time," said the countryman, "but why didn't you stop out to us? on earth didn't you shoot out to us? Why didn't you stop out to us?"

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THE FIRST LIGHTHOUSE.

The first lighthouse ever erected for the benefit of the mariners was that built by the famous architect, Sostratus, by command of Ptolemy Philadelphus, king of Egypt, between 285-247 B.C. It was built near Alexandria on an island called Pharos, and there was expended upon it about 800 talents, or over a million dollars.

Ptolemy has been much commended by some ancient writers for his liberality in allowing the architect to inscribe his name instead of his own. The inscription reads, "Sostratus, son of Dexiphanes, to the protecting deities for the use of seafaring people." This tower was declared one of the seven wonders of the world and was thought of sufficient grandeur to immortalize the builder.

It appears from Lucian, however, that Ptolemy does not deserve any praise for his liberality on this score or Sostratus any great praise for his honesty, as it is stated that the latter, to engrave in after times the glory of the structure, caused the inscription with his own name put in the marble, which he afterward covered with lime and thereon put the king's name.

In process of time the lime decayed, and the inscription on the marble alga remained.

IMPROVEMENTS IN INDIA.

Improvements in India.
Nine Million Pounds to Be Spent on Railways.
In the coming fiscal year \$9,041,000 is to be spent on railways in India out of capital, not less than £3,787,300 of it on new rolling stock, for which there is an urgent necessity. It was thought of to be provided for-out-of-revenue and not by permanent additions to the capital account.

Nearly 45,000 acres of land are to be laid out on open lines for other purposes, so that £7,500,000 will be poured into Indian railways already opened for traffic, and only £2,245,000 of the allotted total will remain to be devoted to new construction.

Irrigation works are to have £83,300 spent on them and £66,400 represents discharge of debt under various heads, which naturally means borrowing unless we regard the anticipated surplus revenue of £775,000 as being devoted to this particular object.

Already a loan of £2,000,000 or three scores of rupees has been issued in India, and the borrowing in England by the secretary of state and the railway companies are put at £6,957,000. In reality, therefore, about £9,000,000 will be raised in England to keep India steady on the path of progress by usury, since it is from Great Britain and not from India itself that even the rupee loans are chiefly provided.

The net deposits of the savings banks are expected to increase by £85,000 during the year, and the whole of that likewise will be absorbed in the projected capital expenditure, as well as £134,000 provided by deposits, remittances, etc.

Great Land Owner.

Great Land Owner.
The Duke of Northumberland is the largest land owner in England. His estate stretches almost from sea to sea, and he can ride one hundred miles and not once leave his own domain. In his appearance he is tall and thin, with reddish hair and flowing whiskers. He is old-fashioned in manner and shows many of the attributes of a grand seigneur. And he has all the pride of the Percy and keeps up to the full of their Olympian traditions. He was once bound to say: "You will have to go a long way back in time to find a duke like me. In religion he is an Irvingite, his father, and he has converted the duchess to his own belief."

A Fighter Anyway.

A Fighter Anyway.
Champ Clark, the somewhat erratic Missouri congressman, has two ungratified ambitions. As a boy he yearned to be either a college professor, or a prize fighter, but instead developed into a clever politician. "I don't mind admitting," he said the other day, "that I would have been a success in the prize ring if anyone looking at his giant frame, deep chest and square chin, will have no difficulty in agreeing with me. I was a fighter, but I'm not."

A Modern Heart.

A Modern Heart.
"Do you see that lady over there? She brought my cousin's heart!"
"Was she so cruel?"
"No; but the day before he broke off my engagement she let her infernal 200,000 marks."

ONLY ONE SERVICE A YEAR.

Only One Service a Year.
Story of Little Church on English Hilltop.
There stands upon a hill in the village of Uphill, in the county of Somerset, a small and very old church, which is surrounded by caves in which the bones of all kinds of animals have been discovered. The historic place of worship, which looks down upon Uphill castle and the village itself, was at one time the only place of worship for miles around.

For several years no Sunday services have been held within its walls, and the only time that the public is allowed to worship there is on the year-day on Christmas Eve when the vicar of Uphill or some other clergyman officiates.

There is a footpath leading up the hill to the church, but as the hill is a very steep one and the distance great, very few people visit the church. It is by order of the ecclesiastical commissioners that it is opened to the public once a year.

Curious stories are told regarding this interesting edifice, one of which is to the effect that the church was purposely built on the top of the hill so that the preacher could feel convinced of the sincerity of the faith of those who accomplished the task of climbing to it. The church has been visited by people from all parts of the world. It is the only building in England—probably in the world—in which divine service is conducted only once a year.—Tit-Bits.

Accommodating.

Accommodating.
"Oh, what a pity!" he said to her brother. "I've been eating onions." The brother reported to the girl. She shrugged her plump shoulders and gathered up her skirts, and sauntered out into the kitchen garden.

They met under that lovely new moon we have. It is in the spring-weather and it is the loveliest new moon I ever saw. It hangs in the purple sky like a jewel in an Ethiopian's ear.

"Pardon me," he said, "I did not think I would have the happiness of meeting you this evening, and I ate onions for tea."

She blushed prettily, and picked a rose to pieces.

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