

Science Siftings

BY VOLT

Apples Breathe.

That apples breathe is the startling discovery made by Professor F. W. Morse, the director of a scientific experiment station in New Hampshire. He finds that when in storage they give out carbonic acid gas and moisture as animals do, and that it is because of this respiration that they become softer and lose weight. It appears that the colder the place in which the apples are stored the slighter are the chemical changes produced by their breathing. The practical moral for the fruit-grower is, therefore, that they should be put in 'cold storage' as soon as possible after they are picked. According to Professor Morse, exposure to a high temperature for even a few days will greatly lessen their 'keeping' power.

A Voracious Spider.

Far up in the mountains of Ceylon there is a spider that spins a web like bright yellowish silk, the central net of which is 5ft. in diameter, while the supporting lines, or guys, as they are called, measure sometimes 10ft or 12ft. The spider seldom bites or stings, but should anyone try to catch him, bite he will, and, though not venomous, his jaws are as powerful as a bird's beak. The bodies of these spiders are very handsomely decorated, being bright gold or scarlet underneath, while the upper part is covered with the most delicate slate-colored fur. So strong are the webs that birds the size of larks are frequently caught therein, and even the small but powerful sculp lizard falls a victim. A writer says that he has often sat and watched the yellow monster—measuring, when waiting for his prey, with his legs stretched out, fully 6in—striding across the middle of the net, and noted the rapid manner in which he winds his stout threads round the unfortunate captives. He usually throws the coils about the head until the wretched victim is first blinded and then choked. In many unrequented dark nooks of the jungle you come across skeletons of small birds caught in those terrible snares.

Eyes of the Savage.

The scientists are always delving into the mysteries of nature, many times on lines that the average man never thinks of. Here, for example, is that question of the keen eyesight of the savage. We have all heard how much keener his eyes are than those of civilised men, and we have accepted the statement as a fact without stopping to think how and why it is true. But a party of scientists from Cambridge, England, who have been on an anthropological expedition to the Torres Strait, tell us as a result of their investigations that the keen sight of the native is due to his knowing what to look for. They found that members of their party could see and distinguish objects as far as the natives could after they had become familiar with the surroundings. A queer illustration of this principle is given in the western Indian's power to distinguish the sex of a deer at a distance so great that the antlers cannot be seen. It is not only sight that gives the Indian that power, but his knowledge of the peculiar gait of the male deer.

The Habits of Sea Birds.

A visit to the well-known sea birds' island of Lawrence Rocks is described by Mr. Mattingley in the *Victorian Naturalist*, and the article contains a number of very careful and valuable observations about the habits of the dove-like prion (which is usually called the whale-bird because as soon as a whale appeared the prion appears by the thousand out of the blue in order to be present at the banquet); the fairy penguin; the mutton bird or short-tailed petrel; and the gannet. The gannets' nests are mound-shaped, with a dished hollow in the middle to receive the one egg which the bird lays. The nest needs to be dished so as to give a purchase to the bird's feet, and it also needs to be firmly fixed to its rocky foundation since it is built on the most exposed part of the cliffs in a region swept by the fiercest gales of the Southern Ocean. The birds deal with the gale by sitting face to wind so as to offer as little resistance as possible to it, with their webbed feet flattened on the outside slope of their nest, while their strong, stiff tail feathers are propped against the inside ridge of their saucer-shaped nest. Thus an excellent leverage is obtained, and apparently the bird holds the nest and the nest holds the bird against the wind's assault. Mr. Mattingley says that most of the brooding birds' tails were very much worn by using them in this manner, as they hold on and protect their young with the bent feathers.

Intercolonial

The Rev. Father M. Hogan, who has been in charge of the Lithgow parish for nine years, has been granted leave of absence. He will leave Sydney on February 24 for a twelve-months' trip to the United Kingdom.

His Lordship Dr. Reville, of Sandhurst, has signified his intention of providing two scholarships, tenable at the Bendigo Conservatorium of Music, for the benefit of the members of the Cathedral choir and the Catholic young people in general.

The Rev. Fathers P. L. Coonan, P.P. (Forest Lodge), T. Phelan, P.P. (Lewisham), and Michael Sheerin (St. Mary's Cathedral) are expected to arrive in Sydney on February 11, after twelve months' leave of absence spent in the Home Countries.

The Sacred Heart Church at Darlinghurst is to be pulled down and rebuilt (says the *Freeman's Journal*). Tenders are now called to carry out this work. The plans have been prepared for a very fine building. The present building, a stone edifice, was erected over 70 years ago, and for many years, during the lifetime of the late Archbishop Polding, it was one of the head centres of Catholicism in this city.

On January 23, at the Dominican Convent, West Maitland, there passed to her reward Sister Mary Aloysius Lynch, in her 69th year. The deceased Sister was born in King's County, Ireland, and came to New South Wales in 1871. Until within three weeks of her death she was able to fulfil her duties. During her illness she received all the consolations of Holy Church, and on the day of her death she was visited by his Lordship Dr. Murray, the venerable Bishop of Maitland. She passed peacefully away, surrounded by the members of her community.

Advices to hand by last week's mail show (says the *Catholic Press*) that Miss Amy Castles is doing well in England. She is engaged for the best concerts in London and the provinces and on the Continent. The Royal Amateur Orchestral Society, a very select body, of which his Majesty the King is president and the Prince of Wales vice-president, gave recently a grand orchestral concert in the Queen's Hall, and Miss Castles was the sole vocalist. The hall was packed, and the artist got a most enthusiastic reception. The Chief Justice of England presented Miss Castles with a magnificent floral tribute.

Writing of the late Mr. John Leahy, Speaker of the Queensland Legislative Assembly, whose death was recorded in a recent issue, the *Brisbane Daily Mail* says:—'Queensland has suffered an almost irreparable loss in the death of Mr. Leahy. . . . On questions of order Mr. Leahy was armed at all points, and ever in command of the House. His impartiality was unchallenged, his decisions unimpeachable. . . . He was equipped for legislation on Queensland affairs in a manner scarcely equalled by any of his peers in Parliament. . . . We have, unfortunately, very few strong men in our State Legislature, and Queensland can ill-spare a strenuous statesman with the gifts, the brains, and the personality of John Leahy.' More than 20,000 spectators lined the route from New Farm to Toowong Cemetery, along which the State funeral that followed the remains of Mr. Leahy passed. For half an hour business and traffic were at a standstill, almost every shop and office building in the streets through which the cortege moved being closed for the time, while flags were lowered half-mast, and solemn funeral bells tolled. The cortege was one of the longest ever seen in Brisbane, being a mile and a quarter long, and containing 250 vehicles. Every section of the community was represented. The Premier and members of the Ministry attended, also many members of the State Assembly and the Legislative Council, the Lieutenant-Governor, a representative of the State Governor, the State Military Commandant and officers, the Naval Commandant, the officers of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly, the Mayor of Brisbane and civic representatives, representatives of the Supreme and District Courts, the under-secretaries and officials of the different Government departments, some of the foreign consuls, representatives of the Queensland Irish Association, St. Patrick's Day Committee, and the Hibernian Society—men representing every phase of commercial and professional life.

Messrs. A. and T. Inglis, the Cash Emporium, George street, Dunedin, announce that they are now showing in all departments their latest shipments of goods for the autumn season. These have been purchased for cash in the best markets of the world, and the firm is therefore in a position to offer all goods at a remarkably low rate....

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