

The Chit-Chat Club

Points from Papers Put "Over the Air."

(Set Down by "Telanother")

"Birds," said the oldest member fiercely, in answer to a query from Blinks, "are a cursed nuisance. I remember the day when farmers could grow decent crops in New Zealand, but the infernal sparrows won't let them do it now. Shoot them—that's what you want to do with them."

The "wireless bugs" of the X Club were comfortably ensconced in the big easy chairs before the fire, and Har-gost, known to his intimates as "Blinks," had asked the oldest member what he thought of our bird life.

"If it wasn't for the birds, you probably wouldn't be here," said Harrison, "and," he added reflectively, "what a terrible loss!"

"Rubbish," said the oldest member, who was never quite sure when Harrison was taking a rise out of him. "What difference do the birds make I'd like to know?"

"They save us from the insect menace," said Harrison. "Without them, the world would rapidly be overrun by insects, and gradually we'd go under before the onrush of the victorious insect."

"That's a new and rather startling viewpoint," said Drexler, known to his cronies as "Silent George," because of his few contributions to the general conversation.

"It may be," said Harrison, "but it's not far wide of the mark. I remember reading a while ago where a chap in the 'Scientific American' said that in another few thousand years, mankind would have gone down before the insects which are rapidly growing in numbers and variety. Something similar was stated by Mr. W. R. B. Oliver, of the staff of the Dominion Museum in a wireless address last week, except that he says that the birds will save us."

"That's exactly what set me thinking about the subject," said Blinks. "I heard the address, and it struck me that our present policy is suicidal."

"Nonsense," said the oldest member, who was always ready to take a definite stand on any subject, whether or no he knew much about it. "All the birds do is to eat our crops and our fruit. Do the Nelson fruit-growers love the birds?"

"Yes, many of them do," said Harrison, "and with good reason. For a few weeks each year they give trouble through eating our fruit, but most of their attacks are on insects. Picture for yourself the creeping, crawling onrush of the insect world, and the gradual but steady overcome of man."

"There are thousands upon thousands of varieties of insects scattered over the world, and in his lecture, Mr. Oliver pointed out that there is an incessant war between man and the insects. Insects harass us wherever we turn, and the reason for their consistent growth lies in our own action of destroying their natural enemies."

"They multiply so beastly rapidly, too," interposed Blinks.

"Yes, that was another point he made. One pair of potato beetles would multiply to 80,000,000 in a single season if all grew to maturity. Think of it," he added, turning to the oldest member, "millions of potato beetles advancing in a solid phalanx."

"We'd spray them," said the oldest member, who did not like to admit he was on weak ground.

"A fat lot of good that would do," said Blinks. "You couldn't kill them all."

"No," agreed Harrison. "It's the birds that help us out of our difficulties. There are three groups of insects, and any of them might get the better of us if it weren't for the birds. First of all there are the disease carriers, taking round germs such as the bubonic plague...."

"It makes me feel sick," said the oldest member apprehensively, looking around to make sure there were no insects in the vicinity.

"It would make you feel a jolly sight more sick if you killed off the birds as you want to," said Harrison.

"Another group of insects are the

crop eaters, while the third group directly attack us for food."

"The crop eaters must get through some grain in a year," said Winton Thribs thoughtfully.

"Yes," replied Harrison. "Mr. Oliver said that it was estimated that at least ten per cent. of all crops grown in the United States were destroyed by insects. Fortunately we're not as badly off as that in New Zealand, but we've got to take more care of our native birds if we don't want to go gradually back. All three groups are to be found in New Zealand, and we've all had experience of group three, in the mosquito family."

"You can kill them off with crude oil," said Thribs, determined to air a little bit of knowledge gleaned from a popular science paper.

"No fear you can't," said Harrison. "You can prevent some of them breeding, but that's as far as you can get. It would be impossible to destroy all their eggs or breeding places, even if we knew where they were. Mr. Oliver said that the main factor in the increase in insect life in other countries was the decrease in their birds."

"That's all very well," said the oldest member, determined not to give way, "but conditions have never been bad in New Zealand—and never will be."

"You're wrong there," said Harrison. "Mr. Oliver said that in Canterbury in the '60's grass grubs invaded certain districts and ate everything in front of them. All that the farmers could do was to dig trenches and stem the advance. It was the birds that came to the rescue."

"Well, it's birds like the sparrow we want to shoot," said the oldest member.

"We don't want to shoot any," said Harrison. "The sparrow eats a bit of wheat once a year, but he's eating insects all the rest of the time don't forget. The blight bird eats fruit once a year, and all the fruitgrowers want to get after him, but they forget that for about eleven months of the year he is keeping their orchard clean."

"I've read that if all birds were to disappear, man could live on the earth only nine years," said Drexler. "It's about right too," concluded Harrison. "Kill all the birds, and we'd be forced to live in a world of creeping, crawling things. Just imagine it. A battalion of slugs advancing in front, mosquitoes by the millions hovering all around you, tens of thousands of great hairy spiders guarding the rear, and you hedged in and unable to move...."

"Hell," roared the oldest member. "What's this," and rising hurriedly he swiped frantically at the back of his chair, looking all the time as if he were about to go off into a fit. A moment later, a tiny spider had been dislodged and hurriedly dispatched, and the oldest member sat down, feeling that he had made rather a fool of himself. "For God's sake don't paint your vivid pictures while I'm here," he said to Harrison, "I thought a battalion of them were after me."

"The chickens, or rather the spiders, coming home to roost," said Blinks sententiously. "I don't think I'd take a gun after those birds after all."

"No," said Harrison, "I'm all for protection, too. The birds are evidently our allies, and we don't want to go back on them."

"Talking of birds," said Larton.... "We've finished talking of them and of spiders too," said the oldest member hurriedly.

"It just reminded me of some of the queer birds there were in olden times. Human birds, I mean," he added, giving the oldest member a sideways glance.

"I heard an address on publicity, given by Carlson E. Holmes, of the Gordon and Gotch people, and it showed how publicity came down through the ages."

"Don't want any blessed advertisements over the wireless," growled Thribs, who held a few shares in a newspaper, and was always liable



What Do You Know

(1--)

"THE INSECT MENACE."
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"MUNICIPAL MATTERS BY WIRELESS."



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to keen feelings where his pockets were concerned.

"This wasn't advertising," said Larton, "so it won't affect old granny in which you've got those shares my boy. You will probably be surprised to learn that long before your great grandfather started taking down the little Niggers with dud advertisements, and founding the family fortunes, advertising was a powerful medium."

"We've always paid twenty shillings in the pound," said Winton virtuously.

"And given your clients about nine shillings worth of value for the pound, too," said Larton. "Anyhow the art of advertising is just about as old as the hills, and although your great grandad may have taken people down a bit with advertising, he wasn't half as bad as many who went before."

"From what Mr. Holmes said, it seems that, apart from the hen which has always been both an advertiser and a wireless announcer, the Greeks were the first to indulge in a little publicity. You'd think from the stately plays that the old boys performed, that they didn't have much of a sense of humour, but from their ideas of advertising, they must have had a little."

"How on earth did they advertise," queried Blinks?

"They used to inscribe fearful curses on their enemies, and attach these to statues of their pet Gods. But one thing at least they did do, and that was to punish severely any of their town crier johnnies who misplaced the Emperor's Greek. No dropping of the H's there, or off would come your head."

"It's a pity we can't try a similar treatment with some of the birds who erect street hoardings these days," said Thribs, who naturally considered the newspaper the only medium for advertisement.

"That's an old trick too," said Larton. "The ancient Romans apparently were the first to start the hoarding business, and used it to announce the big attractions of the gladiatorial contests. Can't you see the flappers o' those days reading all about the deeds of derring do of their George or Percy as the case might be."

"Advertising for many centuries seems to have been confined to the lackening of the characters of your enemies, at from 150v downwards, the English used it in various ways to denounce those who had aroused their wrath for one reason or another."

"Advertising in the style which we know it is of comparatively recent times, and 100 years ago the advertisements consisted mainly of quack medicines and bogus adventures. What a contrast to to-day, when advertisers recognise that it's not worth advertising, unless their goods will command repeated sales through their worth. A hundred years ago, advertisements were lures for fools, but to-day they are the medium through which wise buyers make their best bargains."

MAYOR AND RATEPAYERS

"One of the most novel experiences

I've had for a long time," said Brenton, who, having worked late, had but just joined the little circle, "was that of listening to the Mayor, Mr. Troup, describing to ratepayers, how the Council proposed to spend the loan money they interred to raise. Fancy sitting back in comfort in a big chair, and hearing the whole story. Doesn't it make you want to get a wireless set?" he inquired of the oldest member.

"No, it doesn't. I wouldn't have one of the infernal things on my mind," retorted the oldest member. "Can't even get in a quiet evening apparently, without being disturbed by someone wanting to raise the rates. It ought to be prohibited."

"It opens a wonderful field," said Larton. "We in New Zealand find it hard to think nationally but wireless will help us. Its quite unique to have a Mayor explain over the wireless what loan proposals mean, and so it is to get those excellent talks on the Singapore base. Wireless is going to weld the Empire still more firmly together—and it's my belief that our labour agitators see that coming, and are annoyed because too much light can now quite easily be thrown on Bolshevism and like subjects. Many a man won't bother to study the question closely from his paper, but he will listen-in to a talk from someone who knows. Mayor Troup has led the municipal field with his talk over the wireless and has shown us what wonderful possibilities are possessed by this twentieth century marvel. Distance is annihilated and...."

"So will you be, if you aren't home for dinner within the next ten minutes," interposed Blinks, cutting short what looked like becoming a lengthy dissertation.

"By Jove, you're right," agreed Brenton. "It's well after six o'clock, I'm off, and suiting the action to the word, he picked up his hat and made for his suburban home, a lead which was shortly after followed by the others."

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