

CURIOSITIES OF NATURE.

The Jumping Gall, the Aerobic Bean, and Seeds that Explode.

"Here is a curiosity," said a botanist. It was a little ball of wood or fiber that when held in the palm seemed endowed with life, rolling over and over and flying into the air.

"I've had people come to me with these," continued the speaker, "and say they were bewitched. One man believed he had discovered spontaneous generation; another wrote an exhaustive paper which he tried to read at all the learned societies, showing that here was the beginning of both animal and plant life. In fact, the little gall, for that is what it is, has attracted a good deal of attention."

"So it is only a plant," said a reporter.

"Not exactly a plant, but the unnatural growth of vegetable matter on trees, bushes, or shrubs, caused by the secretion in the bark of an insect egg that hatches and causes the growth. In this case, you see, the gall is little larger than a mustard seed."

"The gall is produced in this way: The eggs of a very small dark-colored insect, known as cynips, are deposited in the leaf, and, from some secretion introduced into the wound, the vegetable matter entombs the insect in a ball of fiber separate from the leaf, from which it finally drops. The larva's movements in restraint create the curious activity."

"There are many kinds of galls, and though they are injurious to trees they are invaluable to man, and are staple commodities. The ordinary oak galls of commerce are made by a cynips. When they are green, blue, or black, the insect is in them, but when white it has escaped. England is the center of the trade, and receives galls from Germany, Turkey, Egypt, China, and Bombay. The galls are used for a variety of purposes. One sort of blasting powder is made of powdered galls and chlorate, but the most valuable product is ink. This is made from them almost entirely."

"Seeds often jump about in the same mysterious way. In Mexico strangers see a curious seed known as devil's bean, or jumping seed. In appearance it is a small triangular body. The first time I saw these seeds I was sure that they were arranged with mechanical springs, as they not only rolled about, but jumped several inches in the air. But upon one of the seeds and the mystery is explained. The shell is hollowed out, containing nothing but a white larva, that has eaten out nearly all the interior and lined it with silk. Its motions occasion the strange movements."

"Some seeds move by an entirely different process—that of exploding. A friend of mine got some seeds in India once, and placed them on his cabin table. All at once came an explosion like that of a revolver, and he received a blow on the forehead that drew blood, while a looking glass opposite was shattered. The seeds had become heated, and all at once the covering exploded, scattering the seeds in all directions. That is their manner of dispersal, and a large number of plants have a similar method of scattering their seed."—*New York Sun*.

Odd Antics of Birds.

A relative of mine had a large marsh upon his estate, and here the great cranes made their summer home, building their curious nests there and rearing their young, says Prof. Holder in the San Francisco *Call*. The marsh was surrounded by high grass, and it was his practice to creep through and watch the birds unobserved. The antics they went through it would be impossible to describe—now they would caper along in pairs, stepping daintily with the mincing gait of the ideal exquisite, lifting their feathers or wings, taking short steps, and gradually working themselves up to a bird frenzy of excitement, when they would leap into the air and over each other's backs, taking short runs this way and that, all for the edification of the females standing by, and finally, after a series of these exhibitions, the different birds selected their mates. Among the birds of the western hemisphere the cock of the rock ranks next to the crane in the strangeness of its evolutions. The bird is confined to South America, and is, about the size of a small pigeon, has a bright orange web in the male, with a plume-like arrangement upon the head. It is a proud bird, principally building its nest in rocky places not visited by man. At the commencement of the breeding season, a party of birds numbering from ten to twenty, assemble, and selecting a clear space among the rocks, form a ring or circle, facing inward. Now a small bird takes its place in the center, and begins to hop about, toss its head, lift its wings, and go through all the strange movements possible, that appear to be watched with great interest by all the rest. When the performer is thoroughly exhausted he retires to the circle and another bird enters the ring, and so on, until all have been put through their paces, when the pairs probably make their selection. Often the birds are so exhausted after the dances that they can hardly fly, lying panting on the rocks.

Near the borders of Southern California is found a bird, called the sunate, that has a strange courtship. It is about the size of a magpie. During the mating season four or five birds collect together and seem to vie with each other in the extravagance of their posturing—wooming now in rows, now single, in a regular dance, and, by way of music, uttering loud, discordant squawks. Their long tails are lifted high in the air during this performance, and their entire behavior is remarkable in the extreme.

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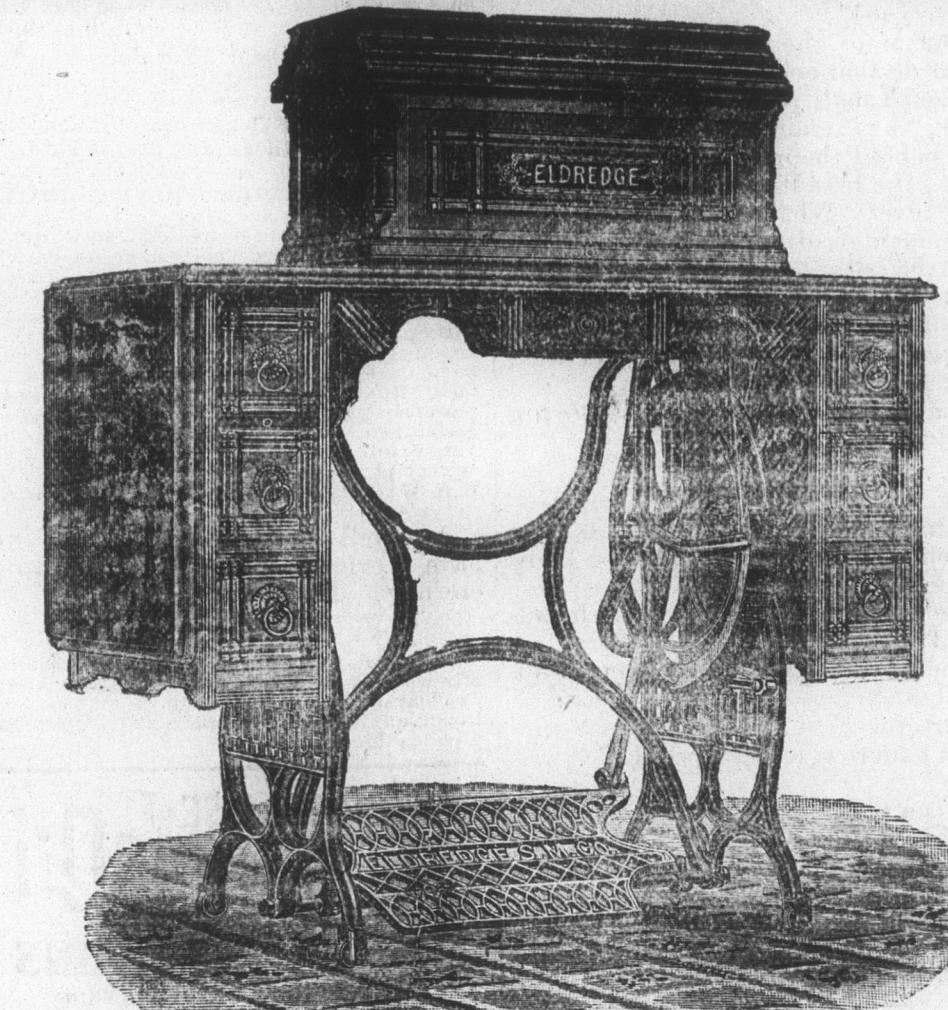
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