

SMALL PET DEPARTMENT

THE MUSIC LESSON.

(Translated from the German by W. G. Todd.)

No doubt if singing birds could all relate in what way they came into their cages, and by what process they learned to accommodate their natural powers of song to the melodies of man, they would oftentimes draw sad portrayals of their experiences.

The unions for the protection of animals have made such a vigorous use of this theme that people now can hardly see an imprisoned bird without feeling at once a degree of sympathy for him and a sort of indignation towards his jailors.*

So much the more delighted are we to receive from the artist the interesting picture of a thistle-finch in its school days. The master, a fat, chubby-cheeked, merry-faced youngster in pointed cap, short leather breeches, stockings and unstrapped buckle shoes,



has planted himself against the wall with extended feet, and seems to be in a very agreeable position. His right hand is thrust into his breeches pocket, while on the left sits the bird that he is endeavoring to instruct in a popular village air.

With updrawn eyebrows he observes his pupil—while the fresh lips round themselves for the task. Now goes the whistle. At first the bird sits there stupidly and cannot comprehend the situation; but when the melody has been often enough repeated he

* Somewhat ironical. The unions for the protection of birds in Germany, aim to suppress the robbing of the native birds' nests in general, but do not disapprove of properly confining song birds. Probably no land contains more caged song birds than Germany.

turns his head coyly to the right or left, blinks at his master with his little bright eye, and hesitatingly lets off a few broken notes of the tune. The tones are soft and shy, as naturally would be expected of the first attempt; but the music-master observes that they indicate success, and over his whole face there spreads a beam of joy, as he unweariedly continues his instruction. Gradually the bird strings together note after note; he grows more confident, and finally, as if proud to show his intelligence, straightens himself up with full breast, and dashes off the whole melody. Now is it time for the master to show the brilliant results of his methods to his comrades, and the good opinion which they express only serves to add to the self-satisfaction of the master. For a time he is permitted to enjoy the results of his persevering labor, and the bird hangs in its more substantial than ornamental cage, by the cottage window. But one day the father needs money to pay a tax or something of the sort, and the little pupil takes a journey to the larger chamber of some boy in the city, where, surrounded by beautiful curtains and fine furniture, he sends forth his songs from a gilded cage.

WHITE AND FANCY MICE.

The mouse, in its wild state, is naturally the enemy of all, if so feeble a creature can be termed an enemy, and as a natural consequence the enemies of the mouse are in strong force. It is not, however, the wild mouse that we have to deal with at present, but the pretty, if not more useful, fancy mouse, the pet of our boyhood. In years gone by, we kept mice both for pleasure and profit, and so good had we got the different strains or families, that making allowance for the tendency to revert, or throw back, we could obtain almost any peculiarity for which the strain was selected. Thus we had black with white head and ears, white with black feet and head, and a strain that was colored much like a silver gray rabbit. The whole secret of our success was selection and perseverance.

In breeding mice, as with dogs, or horses, or any animal, selection is one of the greatest essentials, and after selection comes perseverance. But we are straying from the point of our present chapter: the fancy mouse is both elegant and graceful, and fully repays for any pains bestowed on it, and the smell is nearly, if not quite, destroyed by keeping the cages properly clean.

As a rule, fancy mice are gentle and somewhat timid, but with encouragement their timidity soon wears off, and they will then allow themselves to be handled, or placed in the pockets, hat, glove, &c., without attempting to escape. They will also run all over the person of their regular attendant, but it is very rarely they will have dealings with a stranger. Unlike many domestic pets, they are easily kept, take up little room, and do not require expensive food; and as they are very prolific, the whole cost can be easily defrayed by selling the surplus stock. In our opinion there are no small animals possessed of more beauty and grace than mice, and if to this be added their agility and graceful movements, few pets will be found more interesting, either to young or old, but neither fear nor harshness must be evinced towards them.

For ordinary purposes, the common box-cage is best. This can be purchased at any "fanciers' store." For a single pair, the dimensions should be about 8 in. by 6 in., by 3 in. high; nest-place 2½ in. wide, and the width of the box. A round hole 1½ in. in diameter, so the docs should not injure themselves when heavy with young should lead into the nest. A lid should cover the nest to enable it to be cleaned readily.

A movable door should be added to each box to give access for the removal of dirt and debris. A tin receptacle to be purchased at a bird store should be kept to contain the food. If more than two mice are kept, two inches additional space should be added for each mouse, else they will pine away and die. From one to a dozen extra

cages should be kept according to the stock. For traveling boxes 6 in. by 6 in. by 4 in., half covered with perforated zinc are best. In making these boxes, use dark wood for the light varieties and light wood for the darker sorts.

Besides the foregoing, wheel cages like the ordinary squirrel cages are sometimes used, but we object to their use, as the mice soon have sore feet. Fancy cages can be made of any form, but these are not so suitable for the inhabitants as the preceding. Mechanical cages, too, are or were, in great request, but they, generally being worked by a wheel, are open to the same objection as the wheel cages.

Wire cages, both square and dome-shaped, are objectionable, as they are in the first place too cold, and in the second place too light, as mice do best in a state of semi darkness. Besides, to our fancy, they look too much like a prison. Neither do the animals appear to such advantage as in the one described above. The form of the cage is, however, a matter of individual fancy; but we would remind fanciers that it is the mice, and not the cage, that should be looked at. In no case do poor, miserable specimens look well in fine cages, quite the reverse.

Food and Feeding.—The food of the mouse, when at liberty, consists of what it can obtain. Grain, roots, grass, and seeds; also bread, meat, cheese, candles, &c., all come alike, and it is often the case that this indiscriminate use of food leads to death, and disease. The field mouse forms a granary, and in it stores up a vast accumulation of food: nuts, acorns, wheat, beans, and various other seeds, generally form the staple, but occasionally pieces of bread, cheese, suet, &c., are found stored away. We particularly remember two cases where this foresight, or instinct, was shown, although it is common to the field mouse. In Kent we were employed near a nut plantation, watching some men ploughing, in fact there was a wager as to the best ploughman, and when near the hedge-row near the plantation, a large number of "mouse nests," as the ploughmen called them, were turned over, and altogether about two bushels of cob-nuts were picked up. In one of these stores we counted seven hundred and ten nuts, one hundred and twenty acorns, forty-five beans, about a pint of wheat and barley, and seven peas, besides other seeds. Thus the pair of mice must have made over a thousand journeys to collect these together. No peas had been grown within a quarter of a mile of the spot, so we supposed those in the store had been dropped by the birds. The nuts were fully thirty yards off, so that an immense lot of work had to be gone through to collect so large a store. In the other case we were planting larch near a large plantation of spruce and Scotch fir, and we opened several nests, and got over thirty pounds of seed (not cones), and from one nest alone we obtained over seven pounds of fir seeds, three pounds of acorns, and over six and a quarter pounds of grain and other seeds. The whole of the contents of this store we weighed and found it contained just eighteen pounds, but whether there were only one pair, or whether there were several mice we could not ascertain, but the fir seeds the mice had collected, fetched us 10s. 6d. from that one nest; and altogether we made 45s. of the seeds we got altogether in about five days; not a bad sum to reap from the labor of such small animals as mice. It is a curious and noteworthy fact that mice, when storing away food for winter use, always select that which is soundest and fairly ripe, so that a store of seeds are of value, if the seeds are of any useful kind. It is also very noticeable how clean the little animals are when in a wild state, eating only clean food, and that free from all obnoxious properties.

The house mouse is not, however, so particular as regards food, and so far as we have been able to ascertain they make no stores of food against a rainy day. This is probably due to their partial domestication, and to there generally being a stock of food for them to gain access to; matters that would probably change the habits of any animal. The food of fancy mice should be clean,

and consist of substances that are inodorous, so as to lessen the chance of unpleasant smells. If well kept on proper food, and cleanliness is scrupulously attended to no unpleasant smells will be perceptible, with the exception of a slight odor that is given off from the animal itself, and this is so slight that the scent of the sawdust will completely conceal it, unless, as we said before, coarse substances, such as cheese, bacon, or strong vegetables, as onions or garlic, are given them. We have ere now known such cases, and the result has been as might have been expected, an intolerable stench.

The staple of fancy mice should be stale bread soaked in milk, and oats and bran, with an occasional change to canary seed and millet, and other seeds that are poor in oil. Wheat should not be given, neither should hemp, linseed, rape, mustard, &c., as they are too oily. In preparing the bread and milk, stale bread (at least three days old) should be crumbled into a cup or basin, and scalding hot milk should be poured over it in just sufficient quantity to soak the bread well without being sloppy. Feed regularly once a day with this, and when the mice cease eating remove the tin, and throw in some oats or canary seed. This the mice will eat at leisure, and each time the cages are cleaned out some bran should be thrown in along with the sawdust, partly for them to eat, and partly to assist in absorbing moistures. During the winter a small portion of suet chopped fine, or lean meat well boiled and chopped up, should be given once or twice a week with canary or millet seeds instead of oats. Water is not, as a rule, necessary, the moisture in the bread and milk being sufficient; but if dry food is alone used, then a little milk should be given from time to time. During spring and summer a few blades of flowering grass will be relished, and at all times a small piece or two of carrot occasionally will be taken with apparent relish. On no account should salt food be given, as it disagrees with the little animals, and sugar should only be used sparingly, as it tends to make the mice too fat, and gives them a rough appearance. The tins in which the bread and milk is put should be scalded out at least three times a week, and they should be kept clean in all parts, especially if the backs are of brass, as they sometimes are. In fact, great cleanliness should be used in every part of the feeding arrangements.—*Bazaar.*

CATS.

BY LADY CUST.

(Continued from page 100.)

Kittens are fifty-six days before they are born, at which time they are, like puppies, blind and deaf, the eyelids and ears being firmly closed; and the former, if opened, showing the power of sight immatured. In about nine days, sometimes sooner, sometimes later, they commence their functions.

The untamed mother hides her kittens, but the domesticated cat always forces them upon the notice of her own protectors, bringing them and anxiously recommending them to their care, and expressing evident signs of pleasure on seeing them caressed. It is curious to watch the mother fetch her kittens one by one to remove them to some place she has fixed upon for them. How gently she carries her little treasure in her mouth! looking carefully around to be sure that no enemy is in sight, and then placing it down and smoothing its coat. If the distance is great she rests, as the little burden is generally fat and heavy.

The mother nurses her progeny for a few weeks, scarcely ever leaving them, and after that time she catches and brings them small game, such as young mice and birds, instructing them how to kill them. No maternal love can exceed that of feline mothers for their offspring; they will brave any danger in their defence, and fight for them to the last breath, fretting with lamentable cries for many days if deprived of them; and frequently not