



Pussy Willow

► WHAT THE first robin is in the animal world, pussy willows are in the world of plants—the universally recognized early heralds of spring.

There are other animals and plants that sound the very first notes—although not much earlier than these, at that—but robin and pussy willow recollections date back to childhood, and are known by everyone. They will, therefore, hold their primacy so long as our race has any traditions.

There are many kinds of pussies borne by as many kinds of willow; for the name of the willow tribe is legion, ranging from the humble, foot-high prairie willow with its tiny, glistening catkins, to the great gnarled and spreading trees of the black willow, or the weeping willow, imported from Europe, which we see in cemeteries and on lawns.

The largest and finest pussy willows, which now have a considerable sale at florists' shops, are those of the goat willow, a native of Europe and Asia.

These harmless, charming, furry wild kittens, so beloved of children everywhere, are in reality the flower clusters of the willow. Unlike most trees, willows and their relatives are bisexual, that is, male and female flowers are borne on separate individuals. The necessity for transferring pollen for some distance, plus the fact that wind has to be depended on in the absence

of any reliable insects at this time of year, accounts for the enormous numbers of flower clusters on every tree—for each catkin consists of from 20 to 100 separate, primitive flowers.

It is the business of the females to catch the pollen that is shed into the air in invisible clouds by the yellow male catkins on other trees. After fertilization is thus brought about, the seeds of the willows are launched on little cottony parachutes, much like those of the cottonwood, but less woolly and hence less troublesome.

If you have a vase of pussy willows, either from the florist's or obtained in the old-fashioned natural way, you can easily establish a willow bush of your own, and thus be sure of an abundant supply of catkins every year. Just let them stand in water until they throw out roots, and then plant them in your back yard, or, if the ground is still frozen, in a pot of sand until the soil outdoors thaws out. Willows are the toughest of plants, and will grow even in the shadow of a railroad yard or a blast furnace.

Do this and in a couple of years you will have a thrifty willow bush that will bear a crop of gray velvet fairy kittens every spring.

Science News Letter, March 12, 1955

GENERAL SCIENCE

Chemist Would Certify U. S. Population "C.P."

► THE U. S. is C.P.—communist pure—if the rigorous standards of the chemist for purity are applied.

Dr. Harold C. Urey, University of Chicago Nobel prize winner in chemistry, analyzed the communist situation and found that the contamination is only "a couple hundredths percent of the population," a percentage that would allow any chemical to be labeled C.P., meaning chemically pure.

Admitting that 25,000 members of the Communist party may appear to be a large number, Dr. Urey, in the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (Feb.), said that there are about ten times as many people in this country who are sufficiently insane to be confined in institutions and the number of ambulatory cases is unknown.

Dr. Urey's comments were made in an attack on present personnel security regulations, triggered by the sudden suspension of the security clearance of Dr. Edward U. Condon by Secretary of the Navy Charles Thomas last Oct. 21. Dr. Condon subsequently retired as director of research for Corning Glass Works and is now a consulting physicist in Berkeley, Calif., for Corning and other companies.

At the time of his resignation, Dr. Condon stated that he was unwilling "to continue a potentially indefinite series of reviews and re-reviews," and had withdrawn his clearance application. The former director of the National Bureau of Standards had been cleared four times since the end of World War II.

"Denial of clearance to Edward Condon," Dr. Urey charged, "causes me to have a

complete and utter lack of confidence in the clearance procedures and in the competence, good sense and good intentions of the people who have been instrumental in the repeated withdrawal of clearance to which Condon has been subjected during the last seven years.

"This includes some high officials of the United States, including the present vice-president of the United States and the Secretary of the Navy."

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STATISTICS

More Widows in U. S. But Proportion Smaller

► THE UNITED States now has almost twice as many widows as in 1920 but the proportion of women in the population who are widows has been decreasing at every period of life.

Compared with the present figure of more than 7,400,000, there were 5,700,000 widows in 1940 and less than 4,000,000 in 1920. This is an increase of almost 90%, while during the same period the number of adult females in the population showed a 63% increase, statisticians of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Co. point out.

The fact that the proportion of widows in the population has been decreasing while the number has been increasing is explained by the marked decline in mortality.

Science News Letter, March 12, 1955

PHYSICS

History of H-bomb Told by Dr. Teller

► A LITTLE more historical light on the H-bomb, but no new information as to what makes it explode, is contained in an article by Dr. Edward Teller, University of California physicist, published in *Science* (Feb. 25).

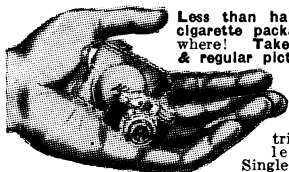
Dr. Teller, Hungarian-born scientist who is credited with the idea that made the H-bomb practical, names a large number of scientists as participating in the development of the thermonuclear bomb. He particularly gives Frederic de Hoffmann praise for "a fine calculation" and observes that his name also should have been signed to a report which presumably was the one that showed that "even before the Greenhouse tests in 1951 it became evident to a small group of people in Los Alamos that a thermonuclear bomb might be constructed in a comparatively easy manner."

The H-bomb is credited by Dr. Teller to Los Alamos, and not to the Livermore laboratory to which Dr. Teller went in 1951.

The idea that seismographs can be used to detect atomic bomb explosions receives confirmation in Dr. Teller's recital that he watched the Nov. 1, 1952, H-bomb explosion jolt an earthquake recording machine at the University of California.

Science News Letter, March 12, 1955

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