



The Crow

THE AMBITIOUS gardener who wants an early crop of sweet corn has to contend with many troubles, not least among which is the crow. No sooner do the first tiny sprouts appear above the soil than this bold black thief goes hopping along the row, pulling up plant after plant, and swallowing the seed kernel still clinging to the roots. The crow is a choicy rascal. He does not want hard, dry corn—won't touch it if there are bushels of it lying about. What he wants is the soft, sweet grain, with its starch turned to sugar by the digestive processes going on during the sprouting. For the same reasons he may later raid the corn patch while the ears are soft and green but lets it alone when they begin to get ripe and hard.

Yet for all his thievish habits, that must make him seem the very embodiment of Satan to the enraged gardener, the crow has redeeming traits. Corn is about the only crop he troubles, and it is not the major portion of his diet. Like all other birds, he feeds mainly on insects. June bugs and cutworms in the early summer and grasshoppers in August are his staples, though many another enemy of the garden goes into his ample interior. To discourage him from stealing corn, and at the same time compel him to return to his normal insect diet, a well-known ornithologist has recommended tarring the seed.

In addition to two or three smaller forms of the true crow found in this country, a quite distinct species, the fish crow, is abundant along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts. He is a smaller bird than the common crow, weaker in flight and in voice, and in general he is not so cheerfully noisy a ruffian as the more familiar cornfield nuisance.

Science News Letter, April 16, 1932

PHYSIOLOGY

Epilepsy May be Caused By Permeable Brain Cells

FAULTY structure of the brain cells, which appears to let some of the important mineral, potassium, leak out or other substances to enter when much water is drunk, may be the cause of epilepsy, Dr. Irvine McQuarrie, professor of pediatrics at the University of Minnesota School of Medicine informed members of the American College of Physicians.

When epileptic patients are kept from drinking much water, many of them do not have convulsions, Dr. McQuarrie found, and they excrete much more sodium and chlorine than potassium. When under certain conditions these patients are allowed to drink large amounts of water, so that some of it is stored in the body cells, the reverse is true. The patients have epileptic convulsions, and at least 24 hours before these start, the amount of potassium in the urine may be found to be very much increased. This, Dr. McQuarrie thinks, indicates a "leak" of potassium from somewhere in the body, probably from the brain cells.

The convulsions, which occur when water is stored in the epileptic's body, without storage at the same time of a certain amount of mineral matter, are due to dilution of the body fluids surrounding the cells, Dr. McQuarrie suggested. When just enough common salt (sodium chloride) is added to the

diet to keep the extra water from diluting the body fluids, the convulsion tends to be prevented. From these and other observations, Dr. McQuarrie concluded that epilepsy is due to some obscure disturbance in the physiology of brain cells, such as this tendency to let some of their contents leak out into the surroundings.

Science News Letter, April 16, 1932

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The Science Service radio address next week will be on the subject of

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE AMERICAN CRIMINAL

Dr. E. A. Hooton

professor of physical anthropology at Harvard University, will deliver the address, speaking directly from the historic hall of the American Philosophical Society, which will be meeting in Philadelphia.

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