

THE WAY THINGS WERE

An extract from BIRD ROOM AND AVIARY, by the Rev. C.D. Farrar

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This extract is taken from the chapter headed "*VERMIN, DISEASE AND DOCTORING*"

" The danger to the successful breeder is *mice*. Like the poor, they are always with us. You can't hope to eliminate them: only keep them down.

In breeding, my ladder has again and again broken down, and I have found myself like Alnaschar, waking up from my dreams to find all my hopes shattered by a mouse. The best way to stop mice is to fasten a strip of zinc half-way up the walls and to nail the nest boxes on to plates of zinc. It is well worth it. Nothing is more annoying than to see a fat mouse drop out of a nest.

The best trap is the one made in Germany, and sold by most ironmongers at about 4s (40 cents Ed.). The mice run up a sort of tunnel and drop into a receptacle of water, and in the morning you go and gather them up. I have caught as many as twenty at a time, and have escaped the guilt of murder. The verdict was death by "Misadventure".

Cats in the aviary are very trying. It spoils your breeding chances, as the birds are so frightened. I find the best course is to have as few cats as possible, and to make them fewer you want a little air-gun. They are silent and sure. You should always have a ready-dug grave in some quiet spot and, as in the celebrated poem of Sir John Moore, bury the corpse "darkly at dead of night". If anyone asks about an old favourite, you are conveniently deaf, like some doctors.

Rats are too terrible to think about. The only safe way is to net the bottom of the aviary, a costly job and by no means a sure one, for these brutes can dig anywhere and climb anywhere, and eat anything eatable.

If you want aviculture to bless you, you must wrestle with it as Jacob wrestled with the Angel, and rats can give you all the wrestling you want.

In setting traps, put them where the mice can get—the birds cannot. A difficult matter. I have many a time caught a poor little baby quail by mistake, and then it was too late to be sorry.

Don't leave poison about. You will probably get the mice alright, but the birds drag the poison bread also, and it rolls a way and gets lost, and some day an inquisitive parrot finds it, and eats it, and, as Bret Harte once said of someone who was stabbed, 'The subsequent proceedings interested him no more'."