

the female love of ornament. Take up any daily or fashion paper, and one can see such items as the following, clipped from the New York *Sun* of Dec. 13 and 20, 1885: "Miss Brady looked extremely well in white, with a whole nest of sparkling, scintillating birds in her hair, which it would have puzzled an ornithologist to classify," and "Mrs. Stanton Whitney had her gown of unrelieved black looped up with blackbirds; and a winged creature, so dusky that it could have been intended for nothing but a crow, reposed among the curls and braids of her hair." It is said, 'Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise.' Perhaps, if the lady in question could have seen the crow during its lifetime perched upon and feeding on the decaying carcass of a horse, she might have objected to the association.

On the other hand we quote from the London *Truth* an item showing the humanity of England's queen: "I am glad to hear that the queen contemplates issuing a ukase censuring the barbarous fashion which so many women have lately adopted, of wearing the bodies of birds, or parts of their bodies, in bonnets and hats and on dresses. Her majesty strongly disapproves of this practice, which of late has greatly increased, which is daily increasing, and which most assuredly ought to be abolished."

As long as the ladies continue to demand bird-skins for ornamental purposes, so long will the gunners and taxidermists undertake to supply the market, therefore the initiative in the movement for the protection of birds must be with the 'wives, sweethearts, and mothers,' and not alone with the laws and lawmakers.

WILLIAM DUTCHER.

#### DESTRUCTION OF THE EGGS OF BIRDS FOR FOOD.

FEW persons living at a distance from the seashore have any idea of the immense destruction of bird-life by residents of the coast, who make the systematic and wholesale robbery of water-birds of their eggs a yearly pastime. A thoughtless and relentless warfare has been waged, until extermination of all bird-life on our shores stares us in the face. This destruction has been carried to such an extent, that many of our water-birds, such as gulls, terns, herons, and shore-birds, have become scarce where formerly numberless thousands added life and beauty to our harbors and beaches. The shooting of these beautiful and graceful ornaments of our water-ways for millinery purposes is undeniably one cause of their decrease; but, great as is this cause, it is in no degree comparable to the destruction made by the

so-called 'egggers,' in their annual forays in the name of food-hunting.

My scientific explorations during the last ten years have taken me to many of the breeding-places of various species of water-birds; and some facts which have come under my observation, illustrating how the few birds still to be found along our extensive coast-lines are gradually succumbing to the slaughter, may prove of interest. There is probably not a port, pass, or bay on the entire coast of Texas, whose inhabitants do not regularly devote several days each year to what they term 'egging.' As soon as the 'scouts' or fishermen report the birds established, and laying their eggs on the islands and secluded beaches, all work is suspended, every craft is pressed into service, and everybody is off to assist in the ghastly sport at the breeding-grounds. Arrived at the desired locality, the first day's work is that of thoroughly destroying every egg already laid; and this ruthless sacrifice of thousands of eggs is made before any are secured by the robbers, that they may avoid carrying away any partially incubated ones. Returning to their boats after this work of destruction, the perpetrators remain in hiding, or quietly sail about the lagoons, until the next day, by which time the distracted birds that had not laid their full complement of eggs when frightened away by the intruders, and who had meantime been hard pressed to deposit their treasures, will have laid many thousands of eggs in the very face of destruction. Two or three days are now devoted to gathering the freshly-laid eggs, and to stowing them away in barrels and tubs in the boats. All eggs, from an inch in diameter upwards, are taken, excepting, perhaps, those of the pelican, whose eggs are too fishy for any stomach. I have known of boats which came a distance of over a hundred miles to gather these eggs, cruising from reef to reef until they had secured a good load. For days after the return from these expeditions, the shops along the coast expose quantities of bird's eggs for sale, which are disposed of cheaply, according to size. As these eggs of wild birds are much more fragile than those of domestic fowls, a very large proportion of them are broken by the rough handling they receive before they reach the markets. No doubt more eggs are thus wasted than are eaten; and, unless one is familiar with the breeding-places of these birds, no idea can be formed of the appalling extent of this yearly destruction. I examined, before the egggers had reached it, one of a group of grassy islands or flats, about the size of a city block, on which were breeding not less than ten thousand birds, consisting chiefly of gulls, terns, and herons;

and, as each pair lays three or four eggs, here were at least fifteen or twenty thousand eggs on one small island. Now, when one remembers that there are hundreds and probably thousands of such resorts, where the birds are annually robbed, what must be the havoc, the cruelty, and the unwarrantable sacrifice of these harmless birds! Is it any wonder that the birds are shy, and hate the very sight of man? Is it not about time that the bird's side of the question was not only defended, but strenuously championed? The effect of this heartless and cold-blooded trampling upon the domestic instincts of birds is not calculated to encourage amicable and social relations between them and man, but quite the contrary, as the following observation will show.

I have seen laughing gulls, and royal and Caspian terns, upon being driven from their nests, deliberately dash at, and destroy with their bills, every egg exposed in the vicinity of their nests, not excepting those of their own species. Their very nature seems changed by this heartless persecution; or, recognizing the purpose of man's invasion, they intelligently and deliberately attempt to thwart his purposes by destroying the prize he covets. Such is the influence man exerts over these intelligent and persecuted birds, instead of making friendly advances to them, and by kindness encouraging in them their naturally docile and amiable propensities. How strongly in contrast is this with the pleasant sight at Geneva, Switzerland, where happy crowds of visitors delight in giving crumbs to the friendly gulls that flock about the bridges, feeding almost from the very hands of the people! There is no reason why the gulls, terns, herons, and other water-birds should not constitute one of the chief attractions at our seaside resorts, enlivening them with their grace and beauty.

In regard to the profits of the 'egging business,' I doubt if even the most successful 'egger' can make as much money as he would have done had he stuck to his regular and much more praiseworthy occupation. The quality of wild bird's eggs is inferior to that of the eggs of the domestic fowl, and consequently their price is low, and frequently barrels of them are thrown away as unsalable. This destruction, therefore, has no excuse in necessity as a source of food-supply.

If a tithe of the truth were known throughout the country at large, concerning the sacrifice of bird-life in the names of 'business,' 'enterprise,' 'food,' 'sport,' and what not, from Maine to Mexico, and from California to Alaska, there would be such a cry of remonstrance as would make the bird-destroyers hang their heads for shame.

Another fact not generally known beyond the

scene of its occurrence, relating, however, to the destruction of young birds, rather than to eggs, may be here stated, which for devilish 'enterprise' exceeds any thing that has ever come under my notice. In 1877, and also in 1878, while studying the birds about Corpus Christi Bay, Texas, I examined a low grass-flat called Pelican Island, so named on account of the numbers of brown pelicans that had for years taken it for their breeding-place, to the exclusion of all other species. Here many thousands of these great birds were tending their eggs and young, breeding in such numbers that one could step or jump from nest to nest, over nearly, if not quite, every square yard of the island. Four years later I cruised over the same course, and noticed that the pelicans had deserted this grassy island entirely, and were scattered, in diminished numbers, on other islands which were not occupied by them when I made my former trips. On inquiring into the cause of this change, I learned from prominent citizens, that two or three enterprising (?) men had conceived the idea of making their fortunes from pelican-oil, and had erected 'trying-out' shanties on the mainland. They went to the island in question in large boats, and carried off cargoes of young pelicans in all stages of growth, and boiled them up for their oil. The only satisfaction I could get from the history of this experiment was, that the men could not sell the oil, and had nothing but their nefarious labor for their pains. Think of the enormous sacrifice of life for a foolish experiment! This heartless slaughter is hardly equalled in cruelty by the so-called sport of the union troops during the war against secession, who, while idly lying in transports off the passes along the coast, amused themselves by fastening a fish to a plank which was so weighted as to be quite submerged: they would then watch the pelicans dive for the fish, while bets were freely interchanged as to the probability of the bird getting a broken neck, with the odds decidedly in favor of the death of the pelican. Instances without number might be given to show that man, unchecked by law, will ruthlessly destroy the very things most useful to him if preserved and protected.

The question may be asked, What are pelicans, cormorants, gulls, terns, and herons good for? It may be answered, If for nothing else, they are good to look at and to give life and beauty to the shores and bays. They most assuredly do no harm: on the contrary, they are the scavengers of the shoal waters of our shores, as the buzzards are of the land; and if it were not that the water-birds keep in check the superabundance of almost valueless fishes and other animals that multiply in

prodigious numbers in the shallow waters, especially in warm climates, such a stench would arise from the excess which would necessarily be washed up on the shores, that all human existence about the bays would be out of the question. Nature admirably provides a check to an over-supply, as well as a protection to those weak in numbers, and, if mankind interferes too much with the harmony, retribution will surely follow. Many of our birds are fast going the way of the bison, never to return. If men were not held in check by public opinion and the necessary laws, our land would soon be as barren of all animal life as are the plains of bison. In our greed, destructiveness, and lack of thought for our future comfort and happiness, we are not so very far in advance of the South-Sea islander, who plants his cocoanut, and has not the patience to let it grow, and yield a thousand-fold, but soon digs it up and eats it, fearing lest he lose it altogether, and then wonders why other islands are more favored than his own. GEO. B. SENNETT.

#### THE RELATION OF BIRDS TO AGRICULTURE.

THE utility of the so-called insectivorous birds — by which are commonly meant species which feed almost exclusively upon insects, like wood-peckers, fly-catchers, swallows, vireos, warblers, and, in less degree, the thrushes — has never been seriously questioned. The extent, however, to which other species subsist upon an insect-diet is not generally known or even suspected. Recent investigations respecting the food-habits of many of our birds show some surprising results, highly favorable to the species investigated. It has been found, for example, that all birds are to a large degree insectivorous, including hawks and owls, and even plovers and sandpipers. Professor Aughey, in his report on the food of the birds of Nebraska, published in one of the reports of the U. S. entomological commission, calls special attention to the importance of not only these birds, but the different species of the grouse family, as a check upon the grasshopper-scurge.

The great importance of the smaller birds in general, including the song-birds, as a check upon the undue increase of insect-life, and consequently the desirability of their strenuous protection, being well-nigh universally conceded, attention will be briefly called to certain species hitherto more or less generally under ban as injurious to agriculture, and whose destruction is considered praiseworthy. Foremost in this category are hawks, owls, crows, and jays. The robin, the brown-thrasher, the catbird, the chewink, and the various

kinds of blackbirds, are also excluded from protection under the bird-laws of most of the states. Crows are accused, with some justice, of depredations upon the young corn, and of now and then robbing a stray hen's nest, or of gobbling up a young chicken. These last enumerated misdemeanors are exceptional, too rare even to require formal notice. The depredations upon the young corn are easily guarded against, as a small quantity of grain thrown upon the ground is greatly preferred by the crows to the few kernels they can acquire by pulling that which has been planted. Many farmers, indeed, consider it much more to their interest to feed the crows for a few days than to destroy them, recognizing the fact that at all other times they are among their best allies; their food consisting largely of grasshoppers, cut-worms, and other noxious insects. Why the jays have been tabooed is hard to explain, their pilferings being at most of a trivial character, while, as destroyers of noxious insects, no birds, it may be safely said, are more important. The other species named above (aside from the hawks and owls) are well known to levy tribute on the small fruits of the garden, the robin particularly, to a somewhat serious extent; while the catbird, brown-thrasher, and chewink not unfrequently pull the corn planted near the thickets they inhabit. Otherwise these species are among the most useful of our birds, whose services are to such an extent recognized, that opinion is divided — even among those who suffer most from their depredations — on the subject of whether or not they are, during the short period of the fruit-season, to be treated as outlaws. In certain portions of the country, particularly in the south, the depredations of the blackbirds upon the grain and rice-fields are of serious character; but throughout at least three-fourths of the states there is certainly no good reason for destroying these otherwise useful birds.

Hawks and owls, from time immemorial, have been treated as foes, and legitimate targets for the rifle or shot-gun on all occasions; their destruction having been not unfrequently encouraged by the offer of bounties from the public treasury for their heads. Of late, frequent protests have been raised against this indiscriminate slaughter. These protests come mainly from ornithologists who have studied their food-habits, and become convinced that their destruction is not only unnecessary, but unwise. A number of published protests might be here cited, did space permit, based on actual knowledge of the facts in the case, and giving statistics of the contents of stomachs of many examples of different species of birds of prey. Only a few of the statistics at hand can