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— Mr. E. T. Dumble, writing in the *Geological Bulletin* of Texas, brings out a very interesting fact, and one which may shed some light upon the question of who were the builders of the shell mounds of the coast regions of Texas. During the great storm of 1886, which so nearly destroyed Sabine Pass, one of these shell mounds, which was near a certain house on the river-bank, and the locality of which was exactly known, was destroyed or carried away by the violence of the waves, and rebuilt nearly half a mile farther up stream than it formerly stood. It is therefore possible that these so-called Indian shell mounds, which are composed almost entirely of shells, with fragments of pottery, and sometimes a crumbling bone or two, were not built, as has been supposed, by Indian tribes who lived on shell-fish, but are entirely due to the action of the water; and the presence of the Indian relics may be easily accounted for by remembering that these mounds are usually found in low ground, and, being high and dry, would naturally be selected as camping-places by the Indians in their hunting and fishing expeditions.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

Our Native Birds.

IN *Science* for Aug. 3 there is an editorial on the re-appearance, in "woods and the meadows in the country," of large numbers of native birds, and it is queried why ornithologists have not offered some explanation of the fact. It is a difficult matter to remember about the number of birds seen from year to year, the exact time of their appearance, and the weather; and, unless some sort of a record is kept, mere unaided memory is often misleading.

I do not know how it is in other places, but on Staten Island there have been no more birds this past spring than in former years, though the cold weather delayed them somewhat in their progress northward, as it so often does. On the 22d of April I saw two swallows, yet on the 25th water froze. On the 2d and 3d of May the warblers came in numbers, and the usual annual ogling with a glass was gone through with.

This summer, also, apparently no more birds have built on the island than there did last; and the number of nests belonging to robins, cat-birds, and chippies in the garden and vicinity has not been added to.

We really suspect that the careful observer has not seconded the popular account of the great bird-visitation, for the reason that he has recorded many others just like it, and believes, as Carlyle says in 'The Sower's Song,' that "this year will be as the years that are past have been."

WM. T. DAVIS.

Tompkinsville, N.Y., Aug. 10.

YOUR interesting statement in *Science* of Aug. 3, regarding the return of birds to their deserted haunts in the North and West, prompts me to say that I have noticed this year in this vicinity a remarkable decrease in the number of such migratory birds as nest here.

Orioles, red-birds, and cat-birds are generally quite numerous in this region, and last year impressed themselves upon the memories of the people who cultivate grapes and other small-fruits. This year they are noticeably scarce, and have done very little harm. Robins generally pass here in large numbers, moving South for a few days in the fall, and tarrying a month or more on their northward journey in early spring. During the latter period they are game to the small boy and negro pot-hunter. Last spring they were remarkably scarce.

On the other hand, the English sparrow is here. I noticed the

first pair seen in this vicinity eight years ago. The house-marten, which once occupied the eaves of houses in the neighboring city of Oxford, has left in disgust, and the sparrows now monopolize all such desirable locations. This pest, I think, has invaded most of the larger towns in Mississippi, and other Southern States.

Can it be that native birds have concluded that they might just as well meet the invader in their old haunts, as try in vain to escape him by remaining South during the summer? R. B. FULTON.

University, Miss., Aug. 10.

I NOTICED a week or so ago in *Science* that part of the evidence of increased abundance of our native birds consisted of reports from Illinois. Perhaps I can cast some light on that point. I was in northern Illinois till the first of July. Up to that time there had been no signs of an unusual number of birds, except during one week. Then the fields, woods, and even the towns, literally swarmed with small birds for a few days. That was easily explained. It was just at the migrating season of the warblers, and they were bewildered and driven out of their way by a cold storm. Thousands of them died, apparently from cold and exhaustion. They could be picked up in the streets. For several days the papers were full of reports of the "thousands of *strange* birds." Every one said they were birds which had never been seen there before; but any one who has searched the woods knows how many of our birds are unknown to people in general. A considerable proportion of these birds were redstarts. I identified six species, I think, of warblers, but, not having my note-books by me, cannot be positive as to the number. Certainly all, or nearly all, were warblers, and none of them unknown visitants, though all uncommon in the thickly settled places. I believe it was from this occurrence that the report of an unusual abundance of native birds in Illinois originated.

L. N. JOHNSON.

Bridgeport, Conn., Aug. 14.

Queries.

34. ARE BATS DIURNAL? — Are bats ever known to be diurnal in their habits? While out fishing a few days ago in this vicinity, about two o'clock in the afternoon of a bright sunny day, I noticed over a pool in the river, perhaps a hundred feet in diameter, a bat as busy and happy, and apparently as successful in his pursuit of insects, as I have ever seen one at twilight. He snapped once or twice at my fly, giving me hopes of landing him. His color was brown, and to all appearance he was of the common species.

J. W. CHICKERING, Jr.

Dennysville, Me., Aug. 14.

35. MILK-SICKNESS. — During a summer visit to the North Carolina mountains, the writer heard much about the 'milk-sickness,' or 'milk-sick' as the natives call it. They seemed to apply the term indifferently to some peculiar disease there prevalent, and to a plant which is believed to be the cause of it. They believe that the cattle eat this plant, and that the disease is transmitted to human beings through the milk. We were repeatedly warned to be careful in our use of milk, especially when we were about to visit the Nantehala Mountains, for there the milk-sick was said to be especially troublesome. We went through those mountains, and heard of it often; but it was always somewhere else, never near at hand. There was one noteworthy exception. A lady with whom we took dinner assured us that there was plenty of it down on the creek, but that her cattle were kept in pasture, so there was no danger. There are said to be two doctors in the Nantehalas who understand the disease; and if either one of them can be reached in time, there is little danger, otherwise it is frequently fatal. The only remedy we heard suggested was apple-brandy and honey. We were unable to learn definitely what the symptoms of the complaint were, nor did we find out what the plant is which is believed to be so dangerous. Is there a well-defined and recognized disease due to this cause, or is it merely some form of fever to which the people are specially subject from their mode of life and surroundings? It almost seems as if there must be something in it, the belief in it is so general; yet, if I mistake not, I have seen the existence of any such disease denied by those who ought to know.

L. N. JOHNSON.

Bridgeport, Conn., Aug. 17.