

The trade wants them in thousands, and would not seek a bird so rare that it was available only in hundreds.

I think there is no evidence of any bird being made extinct by acts of the plumage dealers, whose interest lies in birds being abundant, but the Bill allows the scientific collector to bring in the rarest plumage. In this connection some persons emphasise the destruction of insectivorous birds as being a pity; but an insectivorous bird may itself destroy beneficial insects—say, dragon-flies, which themselves feed on mosquitoes.

Mr. C. W. Mason and I have published a very careful analysis of the food of birds in India, and we decided that herons were injurious (see *Memoirs of the Agricultural Department of India*, vol. iii., 1911). I have before me three such memoirs, all by entomologists, relating to England, Australia, and India; and it is necessary to distinguish very clearly what the value of a bird is. Apart from this, no one interested in Nature could desire the extinction of any species of bird or other life at all, and we need not restrict our precautions solely to beneficial birds.

The third point is whether the proposed Bill will protect the birds. It will not, because it simply prohibits importation into England of all plumage except ostrich and eider down, unless it is worn or is personal property. The plumage goes just the same to Paris, and no bird is protected at all. The same amount of plumage will come to England, only it will be all made up in Paris.

The fourth point is: What can be offered in its place? I suggest the Bill should prohibit the import of scheduled birds, and that if evidence is brought of cruelty or of approaching extinction, the importation of the bird from that locality should be prohibited by simply adding it and its locality to the schedule. There might well be a Standing Committee attached to the Board of Trade to hear representations and to vary the schedule.

The egret is greatly mentioned. It is said to be destroyed for its plumes while the young birds are still helpless in the nest; but I have photographs of an egret farm in Sind, and there are hundreds of such farms. The egrets' plumes are taken without cruelty, and the birds are not killed. Why, then, indiscriminately forbid egret plumes and destroy an industry in India? Why not exclude Chinese egret, and represent the matter to the Chinese Government? Why bar also the possibilities of farming emu, rhea, marabout, lyre-birds, pheasants, etc.?

The Committee for the Economic Preservation of Birds up to August, 1914, endeavoured to put this matter right. It is a fact that this Committee had secured the co-operation of the plumage trade of Paris, Vienna, Berlin, and London, and that the whole trade voluntarily stopped the import and use of the plumage of a number of birds which were thought to be in danger of extinction or to be beneficial. This was the only effort to secure the real remedy, international co-operation; and the present Bill completely wipes out that possibility.

Perhaps the present discussion will produce the solid evidence (apart from opinion) on which the supporters of the Bill rest; up to the present there has been little other than sentiment.

One last point that has a scientific bearing is that the Bill allows the importation of plumage for scientific purposes and for museums. The scientific collector specialises on rarities which the museums need, and it is exactly this type of collector who needs to be stopped; but the Plumage Bill is backed precisely by the ornithologists who want rare skins, and so can get them.

I think the Bill needs a great deal of reconsideration, that a reasonable Bill can be drafted which will protect birds, and that the present one allows for the collection of the nearly extinct birds and does nothing to protect the cases where there is cruelty.

H. M. LEFROY.

If I were still in Parliament I should give as cordial support to the Importation of Plumage (Prohibition) Bill as I would have done to the late Lord Avebury's Bill had I been in the House of Lords when he introduced it. But I recognise that if the measure is to receive support from men of science, it must be based mainly on scientific rather than on humanitarian or sentimental grounds.

I notice that Prof. H. M. Lefroy, in a recent letter to the *Times*, seems to assume that the advocates of prohibition are actuated by sentiment only. He asks whether they consider it less cruel to kill spring chickens for their flesh than pretty birds for their plumage. If this is meant for argument, it seems particularly feeble, unless the whole question of the ethics of consuming animal food is to be raised. If it were as easy to rear egrets, birds of paradise, rifle-birds, etc., for the sake of their plumage as it is to rear cattle, sheep, and domestic fowls for their flesh, probably none but extreme humanitarians would raise serious objections, even if the birds had to be killed, which is not necessary in ostrich-farming. From a scientific point of view, the matter seems to resolve itself into the question whether the extinction or drastic reduction of the most beautifully clad birds can be viewed with indifference. I cannot speak at first hand about the extent to which reduction has been carried, but the evidence on this subject has proved sufficient to convince the Legislature of the United States that restriction of the plumage trade was necessary if some of the choicest species were to be saved from extinction.

I cannot but hold the conviction that the true functions of naturalists are not limited to the mere work of collecting, recording, and classifying, and that it is incumbent upon them to aid in resistance to the extermination of such existing species as do not interfere with the welfare of human beings. But, after all, I can claim no higher standing than that of a field-naturalist, setting more store on a bird in the bush than two in a glass case or on a lady's hat!

HERBERT MAXWELL.

Monreith.

THE subject of the Importation of Plumage (Prohibition) Bill now before Parliament is one in which all zoologists, and, indeed, all lovers of Nature, should take a lively interest. It seems almost certain that much cruelty is involved in the operations of plume-hunters, and it is difficult to see how it could be otherwise, especially when the plumes are collected during the breeding season. This question, however, I leave to others who have the necessary evidence at hand, together with the important problem of the part played by the birds in the destruction of noxious insects.

The point I wish to emphasise is the irreparable loss, not only to science, but also to mankind in general, which will result from the extermination of many of the most interesting and beautiful creatures that exist. Unfortunately, there appears to be no limit to the lust of personal gain. Were it possible to pluck a star from the heavens and sell it for the decoration of a lady's headdress, star-hunters would doubtless be as active as plume-hunters in destroying man's rich inheritance.

It is clearly our duty to preserve for future generations, as well as for our own enjoyment and edifica-