

JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

1780—1851.

John James Audubon, one of the world's eminent ornithologists, was born near New Orleans, Louisiana, more than a century and a quarter ago; that is to say, on May 4th, 1780. His magnificent work, "The Birds of America," in ten volumes, was completed nearly four score years ago. That work has been an inspiration to those who, in these later years, have seen the birds Audubon knew and loved so well, disappearing not only as to number, but as to species. It has made his name a rally-cry for bird-lovers under the auspices of a society that has done good work in the past and that promises to do a better work in the future for the protection and preservation of native and migratory birds the world over.

Less than twenty-five years ago the Audubon movement was regarded by the thoughtless and careless majority as a sentimental fad. As it grew it was antagonized by every selfish interest affected, or likely to be affected, by the restrictions for which it stood and pleaded. The hunter was no less bitter in his opposition to it than the trader in plumage. Sympathies of those who should have been with it were set against it. The worst enemy it had to contend with was public indifference; next to this was public contempt. There was a time, strange to say, when to be a pronounced friend of the bird was to incur ridicule and the abuse of people who thought such a cause beneath the dignity of manliness and womanliness.

A great awakening was necessary in order that the mass of the people might see the practical side of the question. And it came. It came with the rapid disappearance of forest birds, prairie birds, field birds, shore birds, sea birds, birds of plumage, native and foreign. Within the seventy-odd years since Audubon's volumes were given to the world, not only have myriads of birds been ruthlessly destroyed, but numerous species have been annihilated.

There is no cause for discouragement, however. The fact that the question of bird protection has at length forced its way into the legislative halls is not to be underrated. It carries with it the weighty assurance that the country is becoming aroused to a realization of the situation. It also carries with it the satisfying assurance that the question is now touching the business interests of those who have been proof through all these years against moral argument. Doubtless the movement had to take this course, and doubtless, that it has taken it, the steps at which the law-making power have long hesitated will soon be taken.