

THE ENGLISH SPARROW IN CANADA.

HOWEVER little attention may be given to the subject, one cannot fail to recognize the economic value of our Canadian birds. It will be obvious also, to even the most casual observer that changes have taken place among the feathered tribes in the last few years. Perhaps the farmer wonders why it is, that he hears so few early morning songsters this year, or why the bluebird never nests in the hollow gatepost any more, or maybe he wonders why the chimney swallow does not build her peculiar nest on the inside boards of the barn as he has remembered her to do ever since he was a boy.

It is a very evident and also lamentable fact, that our insectivorous birds are becoming scarcer every year. In answer to questions sent out by the Bureau of Industries in '95 re bluebirds, reports have come in from all parts of the Province that few have nested in any locality. In reply as to the cause of this state of affairs, authorities on the subject are unanimous in the opinion that the bluebird has been driven out by the English sparrow. This spring I saw sparrows forcibly evicting barn swallows and pewees which had built their nests under eaves. Nor are any of our small birds exempt from their attacks. Prof. A. J. Cook in his admirable work on "The Birds of Michigan," asserts that even "The kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) is one of the victims of the English sparrow."

The English or European sparrow (*passer domesticus*) was introduced into New York in 1850 and since that time they have increased so rapidly that now probably not a single village or town could be found in the whole of North America that has not its hundreds and

even thousands of them. The sparrow does not raise one or two broods a year as do our native species, but breed continuously throughout the season, and either eggs or young birds may be found in the nest any time from May till September. Some American ornithologists affirm that they have known one pair to raise as many as 30 young in a season. The food of the sparrow consists almost entirely of grain, which in cities is picked from the droppings of horses. Of late years, however, they have pushed into the country where they have made themselves notorious by nipping off the early fruit buds.

To ornithologists the sparrow is a peculiar enigma. In England the Rev. F. O. Morris, one of the best authorities on birds in Europe, classes him as a useful bird, and English farmers protect him for his insectivorous habits. Nor is he pugnacious there, for the little English robin an even smaller bird will put him to flight. It was in consideration of these useful qualities that the sparrow was introduced into America. But here his habits have proved to be just the reverse of useful, and American ornithologists are unanimous in condemning him for driving out native birds. No one seems to be able to offer any explanation of this change of habits in sparrows. The only thing approximating an explanation is that given by Mr. Darwin in his "Origin of Species," where he gives several analogous cases of imported species supplanting native ones.

However, the fact remains, that our native birds are becoming scarce, and that the English sparrow is the cause of the scarcity. What are our farmers and fruit growers going to do about it? In many of the States of the Union a