

INTRODUCTION

BIRD life is disappearing from the United States and Canada at so alarming a rate I sometimes feel it is wrong, at this day and age of the world, to encourage the hunting and shooting of birds of any kind. Mr. W. T. Hornaday, the Director of the New York Zoölogical Society, has recently collected and compiled statistics from more than thirty states, showing that the decrease of birds within the past fifteen years has averaged over forty per cent. At this rate another twenty years would witness the total extermination of many birds in this country. Several species have already become extinct, and others are rapidly approaching the danger line. Conspicuous among these are the wild turkey and the pinnated grouse, two of the noblest birds on the continent. Several species of water-fowl are also growing scarce.

Not only are game birds pursued and killed, in season and out of season, under the name of sport and for market, but the song birds, plumage birds, water-fowl, and many innocent birds of prey are hunted, from the Everglades to the Arctic Circle, for the barbaric purpose of decorating women's hats. The extent of this traffic is simply appalling. Some of the plumes of tropical and semi-tropical birds sell at as high a price as fifteen dollars an ounce. No wonder the cupidity of ignorant and heartless market hunters is tempted by such prices to pursue and kill the last one of these birds. It seems incredible that any woman in this enlightened and refined age, when sentiment against cruelty to animals is strong in human nature, could be induced to wear an ornament that has cost the life of so beautiful a creature as an egret, a scarlet tanager, or a Baltimore oriole. What beauty can there be in so clumsy a head decoration as an owl or a gull? Yet we see women whose nature would revolt at the thought or the sight of cruelty to a horse or a dog, wearing the wings, plumes, and heads, if not the entire carcasses of these birds. Not only is the life of the bird sacrificed, whose plumage is to be thus worn, but in thousands of instances the victim is the mother bird, and a brood of young is left to starve to death in consequence of her cruel taking off. Is it not time to check this ruthless destruction of bird life by the enactment and enforcement of proper laws?