

The Rockwood Review.

FRIENDLY, VERSUS UNFRIENDLY HABITS OF BLACKBIRDS.

Among our resident farmers a difference of opinion exists in regard to the influence of the Grackle genus of birds on farm crops and the economics of land tillage, probably a large majority of the cultivators of the soil regard the presence of the blackbird tribe as unquestionably inimical to corn growing, as well as pestiferous to orchard products, such as cherries, strawberries and raspberries. Those hostile to the dusky feathered visitors, by the use of the gun, traps or poison, try to drive them from their fields or roosting places in the groves; while a few land managers seem more benevolently disposed towards the ornithic part of created things, and tolerate and even encourage the visits of almost every species of bird, except the owl and falcon tribe. One farmer that one could name averred that it would be impossible to grow corn profitably were the grackle family annihilated! This man was regarded as an eccentric or cranky individual by many of his neighbours, and another of the same disposition as to bird patronage, and who has a fine and extensive grove of conifers on his farm, which grove is from year to year a perfect "rookery" or breeding place for the blackbird tribe, and for quite a number of other species of our feathered summer visitants; and the proprietor of the evergreens and of the surrounding fertile acres, maintains that he suffers no appreciable loss in his harvests, and that as far as he is aware his coniferous grove, judging from the song and babel-like utterances of his bird tenants, the "locale" may be and probably is almost an ornithic elysium!

Although the Redwing Grackle's usual habit is to choose a site for its nesting purposes near the roots of willows, or on a tussock of reeds in some secluded bog, the bird occasionally adopts a different way of proceeding. We have many times known them to breed in

societies of ten or more pairs of birds amid the close matted branches of the Lombardy poplar tree, near to the farm house. These families in time of danger from the visits of hawks, crows or other intruders, seem to form a clan and to co-operate in mobbing the common enemy.

One can however testify that however beneficial grackles may sometimes be in larvae grub, and insect destruction, they occasionally give way to a most mischievous penchant for pulling up and feasting on recently sown and sprouting corn; and also at unexpected times they show a caprice to assemble in large flocks of young fledged birds and their elders, and strip a whole orchard in a few hours of its luscious cherries.

Several years ago, the writer of this suffered a serious damage to his corn crop in the month of June, from the pertinacious visits of a multitude of hungry redwings. The original or first seasonal planting had been mainly a failure, and about two-thirds of the four acre field had to be resown, and the second planting was just in the sprouted stage that is most sweet and delicious to the corvine palate. The state of matters in the field was discovered by some grackle scout or other, and the hint promptly acted upon; myriads of the clamorous grackles got to work uprooting and devouring the kernels, and despite the gunning and shouting and belligerency of the planter and his auxiliaries, all the growing corn except what remained of the first planting, and which had attained too advanced a condition of growth to prove nourishing, was dug up and devoured, and was only the bird work of part of two days. The feathered host then moved on "to pastures new" and repeated the same nefarious proceedings, and but little philanthropy has been felt to the crimson wings since that impudent piece of larceny.

The birds must have been an aggregate of assembled family groups from a great extent of