

THE PRACTICAL VALUE OF BIRDS.

Michelet long ago said:—

“If it were not for the birds no human being could live upon the earth, for the insects upon which birds live would destroy all vegetation.”

Very much later a writer in *“Forest and Stream”* said:—

“If the birds were all destroyed, agriculture in the United States would instantly cease.”

Still later Forbush, one of our foremost writers on the subject, said:—

“An acquaintance with useful birds of the farm is as important to the farmer as is a knowledge of the insect pests which attack his crops. . . . Were the natural enemies of forest insects annihilated, every tree in our woods would be threatened with destruction, and man would be powerless to prevent it.”

These startling assertions are not the vain vapourings of dreamers and sentimentalists. They are the conclusions of trained scientists, based upon a great accumulation of information acquired only by the most painstaking and tedious investigation. Most of the very extensive literature upon this subject in America is written by investigators connected with the United States Department of Agriculture and various State Agricultural and Horticultural Departments and Societies, largely appearing as public documents, but a great deal of it, partly written by independent experts, scattered through scientific periodicals.

In some instances there has been a tendency to exaggerate the facts and to make assertions too extravagant concerning the value of birds. It may even be that if all birds were destroyed, other enemies of insects would be able to take care of the situation before desolation would become complete, but that no one can know. We do very definitely know that birds destroy a vast number of injurious insects, rodents and weed seeds every year, and are to be considered one of the most important factors in checking the increase of such pests, which, if unchecked by any means, would quickly prove very disastrous to the human race because of their wholesale and widespread destruction of vegetation. It is quite definitely known that ruthless slaughter of insectivorous birds has been followed locally by immediate increase in the numbers of insects, to the great injury of forest and agricultural crops; that wholesale destruction of birds of prey has been followed by “plagues” of mice and other mammal pests.