

THE CONSERVATION OF WILD LIFE

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

FORTY years ago John Ruskin gave a series of lectures on "Greek and English Birds," which he later gathered into a volume under the title of "Love's Meinie"—a title showing affectation of course, for Ruskin was as affected as Carlyle; and no small part of the contents of the volume exhibits affectation carried to the verge of mental unsoundness. But it is beautifully written—else would it not be Ruskin's. It shows the delight in nature which can never be felt save by the man whose pulses throb with sheer delight in the spring scents of budding things, in the music of birds, the rustling of trees, the running of brooks, and in the wind-flaws on glassy lakes; a delight which can never be interpreted to others unless by one who is also master of the great art of putting fine thoughts into simple, clear, and noble words.

It also contains a characteristically amusing, and by no means wholly unjust, attack on modern science. In comparing it with the crass ignorance of the average upper-class Englishman he says: "It is vulgar in a far worse way by its arrogance and materialism. In general the scientific natural history of a bird consists of four articles—first, the name and estate of the gentleman whose game-keeper shot the last that was seen in England; secondly, two or three stories of doubtful origin, printed in every book on the subject of birds for the last fifty years; thirdly, an account of the feathers, from the comb to the rump, with enumerations of the colors which are never more to be seen on the living bird of English eyes; and, lastly, a discussion of the reasons why none of the twelve names which former naturalists have given to the bird are of any further use, and why the present author has given it a thirteenth, which is to be universally, and to the end of time, accepted."

With the stricture on modern scientific terminology contained in the last clause I

cordially agree. But of far greater practical importance is the lesson to be inferred from the first and third "articles." It is deeply discreditable to the people of any country calling itself civilized that as regards many of the grandest or most beautiful or most interesting forms of wild life once to be found in the land we should now be limited to describing, usually in the driest of dry books, the physical characteristics which when living they possessed, and the melancholy date at which they ceased to live.

Ever since man in recognizably human shape made his appearance on this planet he has been an appreciable factor in the destruction of other forms of animal life, and he has been a potent factor ever since he developed the weapons known to the savages of the last few tens of thousands of years. But modern weapons have given a tremendous impetus to this destruction. Never before were such enormous quantities of big beasts and large birds slain as in the nineteenth century. Never before was there such extensive and wasteful slaughter of strange and beautiful forms of wild life as in the century which saw the greatest advance in material civilization and the most rapid spread of the civilized peoples throughout all the world.

Towards the end of that century a few civilized nations wakened to a sense of shame at what was going on. Enlightened men and women here and there began to take efficient action to restrain this senseless destruction of that which, once destroyed, could never be replaced. Gradually they roused a more general sentiment, and now there is a considerable body of public opinion in favor of keeping for our children's children, as a priceless heritage, all the delicate beauty of the lesser and all the burly majesty of the mightier forms of wild life. We are fast learning that trees must not be cut down more rapidly than they are replaced; we

have taken forward steps in learning that wild beasts and birds are by right not the property merely of the people alive to-day, but the property of the unborn generations, whose belongings we have no right to squander; and there are even faint signs of our growing to understand that wild flowers should be enjoyed unplucked where they grow, and that it is barbarism to ravage the woods and fields, rooting out the mayflower and breaking branches of dogwood as ornaments for automobiles filled with jovial but ignorant picnickers from cities.

In the present century the new movement gathered head. Men began to appreciate the need of preserving wild life, not only because it was useful, but also because it was beautiful. Song birds, shore birds, water-fowl, birds of all kinds, add by voice and action to the joy of living of most men and women to whom the phrase "joy of living" has any real meaning. Such stately or lovely wild creatures as moose, wapiti, deer, hartebeeste, zebra, gazelle, when protected, give ample commercial returns, and, moreover, add to the landscape just as waterfalls and lofty pine trees and towering crags add to the landscape. Fertile plains, every foot of them tilled, are of the first necessity; but great natural playgrounds of mountain, forest, cliff-walled lake, and brawling brook are also necessary to the full and many-sided development of a fine race. In just the same way the homely birds of farm and lawn and the wild creatures of the waste should all be kept. It is utterly untrue to say, as demagogues and selfish materialists sometimes unite in saying, that "the game belongs to the people"—meaning the loafers and market gunners who wish to kill it, and the wealthy and lazy gourmands who wish to eat it, without regard to the future. It is true that the game belongs to the people; but this rightly means the people who are to be born a hundred years hence just as much as the people who are alive to-day. In the same way, persons who own land, and, above all, persons who merely visit or pass through land, have no more right wantonly or carelessly to destroy birds or deface scenery than they have to pollute waters or burn down forests or let floods through levees. The sooner we appreciate these facts, the sooner we shall become a really civilized people.

Laws to protect small and harmless wild life, especially birds, are indispensable. Such laws cannot be enacted or enforced until

public opinion is back of them; and associations like the Audubon Societies do work of incalculable good in stirring, rousing, and giving effect to this opinion; and men like Mr. Hornaday render all of us their debtors by the way they efficiently labor for this end, as well as for what comes only next in importance, the creation of sanctuaries for the complete protection of the larger, shyer, and more persecuted forms of wild life. This country led the way in establishing the Yellowstone Park as such a sanctuary; the British and German Empires followed, and in many ways have surpassed us. There are now many such sanctuaries and refuges in North America, middle and South Africa, and even Asia, and the results have been astounding. Many of the finer forms of animal life, which seemed on the point of vanishing, are now far more numerous than fifteen years ago, having by their rapid increase given proof of the abounding vigor of nature's fertility where nature is unmarred by man. But very much remains to be done, and there is need of the most active warfare against the forces of greed, carelessness, and sheer brutality, which, if left unchecked, would speedily undo all that has been accomplished, and would inflict literally irreparable damage.

The books before me¹ are powerful weapons in this warfare for light against darkness. Mr. Hornaday's volume, in which he has been assisted by Mr. Walcott, consists chiefly of lectures delivered before the admirable Forest School of Yale University. It is really a full technical treatise which should be owned and constantly used by every man and woman who is alive to our needs in this matter. He shows how much has been accomplished in creating the right type of popular opinion. He is able to tell what we have accomplished in the creation of great National playgrounds, the National parks, which are National game preserves. The Yellowstone, Glacier, Mount Olympus, Grand Canyon, Sequoia, and other parks represent one of the best bits of National achievement which our people have to their credit of recent years. The National forests should also be made game reserves. No sale of game or market hunting should be allowed anywhere; fortunately, the infamous traffic

¹ Wild Life Conservation. By William T. Hornaday. With a Chapter on Private Game Preserves by Frederic C. Walcott. Yale University Press.

Alaskan Bird Life. Edited by Ernest Ingersoll. Published by the National Association of Audubon Societies. Menschen und Tiere in Deutsch-Südwest. By Adolf Fischer. Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart und Berlin.

in millinery feathers has now been forbidden. The Federal migratory bird law is a capital piece of legislation. Mr. Hornaday shows the imperative need of protecting our shore birds; he shows the economic value of birds to the farmer; he deals with what must, alas! be called just severity with the attitude of the average "sportsman" toward wild life.

One of the most interesting and pleasant phases of the movement of which Mr. Hornaday is one of the leaders is that which deals with the rapidity with which animals accustom themselves to protection and multiply when given the chance to do so. In New York and New England white-tail deer have enormously increased in numbers during the last thirty years. In Vermont the deer were absolutely exterminated forty years ago. Then a dozen were introduced from the Adirondacks. These have thriven and multiplied literally over a thousandfold. In forty years the original twelve individuals have increased to such an extraordinary degree that at present hunting under proper restriction is permitted, and five or six thousand deer are killed annually, without diminution of the stock. Mr. Hornaday is an entirely sane and rational man; he heartily approves of hunting, of sport carried on in legitimate fashion, as it can be, without any diminution of the amount of game. He shows that in the case of the Yellowstone elk it is urgently desirable that there should be a great increase in the killing, especially of cows; for in the absence of a sufficient number of natural foes they have increased until they now die by thousands each winter of starvation. (By the way, I venture to point out that when the cougars in the Yellowstone dwell away from the deer, antelope and sheep, and prey only on elk, they do no damage.) Our prime duty, at present, as regards the immense majority of large or beautiful or useful mammals and birds, is to protect them from excessive killing, or, indeed, from all killing. But when genuinely protected, birds and mammals increase so rapidly that it becomes imperative to kill them. If, under such circumstances, their numbers are not kept down by legitimate hunting—and some foolish creatures protest even against legitimate hunting—it would be necessary to have them completely exterminated by paid butchers. But the foolish sentimentalists who do not see this are not as yet the really efficient foes of wild life

and of sensible movements for its preservation. The game hog, the man who commercializes the destruction of game, and the wealthy epicure—all of these, backed by the selfish ignorance which declines to learn, are the real foes with whom we must contend. True lovers of the chase, true sportsmen, true believers in hunting as a manly and vigorous pastime, recognize these men as their worst foes; and the great array of men and women who do not hunt, but who love wild creatures, who love all nature, must discriminate sharply between the two classes.

The Audubon Societies, which have done so much good work, have rarely done a better piece of work than in publishing the charming little book on "Alaskan Bird Life" which has been edited by Ernest Ingersoll. It has been prepared for free distribution among the people of Alaska. Surely, societies that do such work are entitled to the heartiest support from all good citizens. But something ought to be charged for the book. Let school-teachers have it free by all means; give it as a prize to exceptional pupils; but let the average man or woman pay something for such a first-class little volume. It is a book of really exceptional merit; no bird lover in the United States or Canada—not to speak of Alaska—can afford not to have it in his or her library. It is all excellent; but best of all are the portions contributed by Mr. E. W. Nelson. Mr. Nelson is one of our best field ornithologists, and also one of our best closet scientific systematists; and to extraordinary powers of observation, and intense love of the wilderness and of wild creatures, he adds the ability to write with singular power and charm. Nothing better of its kind has ever been done than his account in this little volume of the bird life, at all seasons of the year, in the Yukon Valley and on the islands and along the seacoast. His ear is as good as his eye. He is the first writer to do justice to the musical notes, especially the love notes, of the "sou-sou-southerly" duck, which in winter we know so well on Long Island Sound. He tells of the Lapland longspur, singing on the wing like a bobolink; and of the noisy cock ptarmigan crowing his challenge as he springs a few yards in the air when he is still the dominant figure on the snowy spring plains, before the hosts of water-fowl arrive. Mr. Nelson is the first observer graphically and fully to portray the life history of the strange emperor goose.

He is almost the first observer to describe the songs—for they are songs—of the shore birds; and particularly attractive is his description of the aerial love dance and love song of the tiny and gentle semi-palmated sandpiper. I cannot forbear quoting his account of the bird chorus that greets the oncoming of one of the spring storms:

"The evening before the onset of one of these spring storms was commonly heralded on the tundra, even in the clearest weather, by wonderful outbursts of cries from the larger water-fowl, and these would continue for half an hour before the birds settled down for the night. Thousands of birds took part in producing the tremendous chorus. It was made up of the notes of numberless loons in small ponds joined with the rolling cries of cranes, the bugling of flocks of swans on the large ponds, the clanging of innumerable geese, the hoarse calls of various ducks, and the screams of gulls and terns, all in a state of great excitement, apparently trying to outdo one another in strength of voice. The result was a volume of wildly harmonious music, so impressive that these concerts still remain among my most vivid memories of the north."

These ornithological sketches by Mr. Nelson are masterpieces of vivid and truthful portrayal of wild nature. They are as well done, from the standpoint of the nature lover and the man of letters, as Hudson's delightful "Naturalist in La Plata" and "Idle Days in Patagonia." These two volumes of Hudson's are literature, just as White's "Selborne" and Burroughs's writings are literature. Nelson writes with as strong charm as Hudson; he has the same love and understanding of wild life, and in addition he is a trained scientific man of the first class and an adventurous wanderer in the wilderness. A man who combines such qualities is very rare, and it is a pity not to utilize him to the utmost. Some first-class publishing firm, like Scribners, should insist upon Mr. Nelson's writing an American ornithology which would take rank as both a literary and a scientific classic.

The third volume is Mr. Fischer's sketch of men and beasts in German southwestern Africa. He describes the fell destruction, the almost complete annihilation, of the won-

derful big game fauna of these southwestern African wastes by the white hunters and the black and yellow men whom they armed in the nineteenth century. It was a butchery so appallingly wasteful that it is melancholy to read of it. He also describes the steps taken by the German Government during the last decade to undo this wrong, especially by the establishment of carefully guarded game reserves. As in our country, as soon as the effort was seriously made it was entirely successful; eland, kudu, wildebeests, zebras, and many other wild creatures have once again begun to grow plentiful, and on these reserves are gradually losing their fear of man. Mr. Fischer's account of the desert and its dwellers shows keen sympathy and understanding. The mighty wilderness creatures of Africa surpass those of all the other continents in size, beauty, strangeness, number, and variety; and to allow this magnificent fauna to be needlessly butchered to satisfy the ignoble greed of hide and trophy hunters is a crime against our children's children. There are vast tracts of country that are useless for agriculture and of most use as game preserves managed in the interest of all people, both those existing and the unborn. England and Germany have done a fine work in the interest of civilization by their preservation of the African fauna in sanctuaries and by good game laws well enforced.

This is one of the many, many reasons why the present dreadful war fills me with sadness. The men, many of whom I have known—Germans, Englishmen, Frenchmen, Belgians—who have been opening the Dark Continent to civilization, and who on the whole and of recent years have done their work so wisely, are now destroying one another and ruining the work that has been done. I knew many of the men, Englishmen and Germans, who have done most for the creation and success of these game preserves—Schilling, Hamilton, Jackson, Götzen, Harry Johnson, Buxton. In all essentials they resembled one another. The admirable work they did was of the same character, alike in the British and in the German possessions. It is cruel to think that their splendid purposes and energies should now be twisted into the paths of destruction.