

up and left his parrot in the water. I fished it out nearly dead, not by drowning, for the hawk had killed it by sticking his claws through it in many places. Therefore he only put it in the water to stop its noise, which was a very necessary thing to do, because if a trio of magpies had been near at the time they would have given him a job to defend himself while holding his parrot. Those parrots were very plentiful, generally in little flocks feeding on the ground, and magpies were also plentiful, so that it was a good idea for the hawk to come sweeping along, pick up a parrot and drop in the water with it.

No doubt that was a prosperous hawk, but I never saw the trick before, nor have I ever heard of it since, though it is now nearly thirty years ago. Other people may have seen the same thing, but, like myself, have thought it a little "too tall" a story to write down. Those hawks were not at all uncommon there, and, so far as I can remember, were the same as the New Zealanders, but, like all the Australians, were comparatively wild and shy.

It may be bad policy to kill the hawks, as Professor Newton thinks, but he should remember that we have killed and wounded a great many birds all over New Zealand, and that the wounded ones generally went to feed the hawks and tended to their undue increase, while the number of birds are less and the natural balance destroyed. Supposing that every hundred whales had had ten enemies before the whalers came; after the whalers killed fifty whales the others would have had too many enemies, which might be disastrous in itself, but if all the sunken and wounded whales went to feed up more enemies the case would have been harder still. This is the case with the swamp-hawks, and thousands of them might be shot now with great advantage, to all sorts of ducks at least. In fact, the ducks will never recover unless the swamp-hawks are greatly reduced; but it is different with the bush-hawks, and I will not kill any more of them.

Professor Newton has the same idea about the Faroe Islanders killing the predaceous gulls to save the other birds' eggs and young ones. He points out that "for untold ages those birds managed to get along very well together," but he misses the point that the islanders had already taken too many eggs, and that the services of the great black-backed gulls were no longer required in that direction. Therefore, the islanders are quite right in trying to reduce their numbers and keep any surplus eggs for themselves.

NATURAL ENEMIES.

Professor Newton, of Magdalene College, England, writes to New Zealand in a kindly way about her bird reserves, and warns her against killing the hawks, which he rightly says "would be the best safeguard against one of the evils to be expected from over-population—that is, the outbreak of disease, which might carry off a large proportion of the birds which it is desired to encourage." The above is all very true, and very applicable not only to our dealings with native birds, but also to our dealings with rabbits; and it is a pity that the naturalists at Home did not tell us in time that the best way to keep our rabbits healthy and flourishing was to import their natural enemies. We had to find that out for ourselves, and now, fourteen years afterwards, we get it out from Home.

As it has turned out, it is a blessing that we did bring the natural enemies of the rabbits, but we deserve no credit for doing so. It was exactly like one of young Scoresby's blunders, every one of which, according to Mark Twain, brought him honours and promotion until he became Lord Scoresby, Y.C. If we had not brought the natural enemies our rabbits might not be so good, nor their export trade so flourishing as it is now; but instead we might have been losing nearly as much grass by a worthless horde of rabbits.

And now, before we bring the sparrows' natural enemies we should consider what chance we have of exporting them at a profit.

There were evidently two sorts of natural enemies instituted as checks—one for ordinary creatures and the other for the diplomats. The hunter that chases his prey takes only the weakest and worst, which is a benefit to the creatures he hunts, and he may be called "the honest check," such as the dog and the hawk; while the enemy that lies in wait may often take the ablest and best, and thus injure the race it lives upon. This may be called "the fraudulent check," such as the cat and all the night prowlers that live upon day birds. This is the only sort that should be tried against such diplomats as sparrows.

Counterparts of the two sorts of checks exist notably among fish, and among many other creatures—they existed even among men before they thought fit to ignore natural law altogether. There used to be marauding hunters in England and over the border; in Syria and New Zealand; also highwaymen with swords, all of which came within the honest category: but they are all dead now, and we have the other sort instead, such as Jabez B. and Co., the defaulters.

I think it was in September that I first noticed a few sparrows this season (1900), but their numbers appeared to be constantly increasing until about the 7th or 8th of January, when they all left in a day, for I noticed the silence out in the big pines. I saw lots of them carrying straws for their nests, and thought that they were going to stay here; but I heard a long-tailed cuckoo out there, and he would soon spoil their nesting. Then they bethought themselves of the farmers' crops where there were no cuckoos, and left at once. I love cuckoos now, and will never shoot another of them. I used to shoot them for the sake of the other birds, because I saw one of them drop something one day, and found it to be a naked young bird with its head crushed.

The nest-building sparrows certainly met with something that they did not bargain for, because there was a fine lot of grass-seed just ready for them when they left. They are cunning and clever beyond belief.

The kakas also went away early in January with a good many of the tuis and mokies, but I know why they left: they did not want grass-seed, and went up the mountains after the rata-blossoms, which are later higher up, but there were plenty on Pigeon Island when the sparrows left.