In old school books there used to be a story of a boy who first ate the cake his mother had sent him, and then cried because it was all gone. We eat our cake, and our posterity of a few centuries hence will have to cry because we have left none for them.

There are several different ways of looking at the present state of what may be called national economy. This is noticeable on all hands, and in some instances the crime—force needlessly extravagant is a crime—saves the Government an outlay of one-third of our precious life-giving goals, for example, is wasted in smoke; and in consequence, during at least one-third of the past year the world of London, to say nothing of much of our kingdom, has been threatened by a health-destroying fog and gloom, which might almost be called the very shadow of death itself, so fearfully does it increase our annual bills of mortality. Who society is a remedy for this state of matters, and that this remedy will be applied as soon as—the Irish Question is settled. Even the dark and bistrosome streets and lanes of the East-end will catch glimpses of glorious sunshine then, and light and heat will help to banish sin and disease.

In lesser matters we are also madly, and, in a more general way, extravagantly. The destruction of our song birds, notably larks, to form table tit-bits for the upper ten and the middle million, is so great that already it is rare indeed to hear the charming birds anywhere near a large town. Again, the very finest of our woman-kind are still nothing more nor less than beautiful and lovely, but the women of the lower classes, in that they are so full of skin, of a large proportion of which, it is well they should know, are captured under circumstances of the greatest cruelty, turn from their nests in springtime, when their outs or plumage are most lovely; when they are dressed, one might say, in bridal garments. Small mercy receive they at the brute hands of their captors; they are strangled on the spot, in sight of the despairing male birds, whose songs of joy are blushed for a season, and whose young are left in the nest to open their yellow beaks, to grasp in vain for the food that never comes, and so perish miserably of cold and starvation.

The same wanton and thoughtless extravagance goes on in the forest, and in that ivory and wild beasts' skins. Already the very noblest of our larger animals that dwell afar in forest or jungle are becoming woefully scarce; sacrificed all they will be mere at the shrine of fashion and fancy.

It will surely be a poor sort of a world to live in when neither buffalo nor bisons roam in the wilderness or prairie; when the roar of the king of beasts is replaced by echoes of African hills; when the elephant, the seal, and the bear can only be met with stuffed in museums; when the doves, the native hens, and now, the field mouse and the nightingale and the nightingale and the nightingale are swallowed down or preserved by the phonograph. It certainly will be a poor sort of world, and we creatures of the present age will be the sufferers.

Perhaps many think it is but poor policy to look so far ahead. Let us consider, however, what we owe to birds and beasts in this good year of 1896. A few minutes spent in such consideration will not be time wasted, if it shall lead us to treat with greater care and kindness the dumb beasts whose pleading, woe-stricken eyes are always upon us, look where we will.

Let us take the birds first. Directly or indirectly, we depend upon the feathered race for the large portion of our food, in eggs and in flesh. As regards game and poultry, we have very little to complain of; the former are more carefully and judiciously preserved, and the latter have become an institution in the country, the breeding of fowls has almost reached the rank of an exact science.

Yet, to see the laws of economy as rigorously applied to the waters that surround our islands as to our moors and hills themselves, so that the living wealth that creeps and floats about our shores may have a chance of increasing for the national week.

Indirectly we owe a very large debt indeed to the wild birds of the fields and gardens, although they are trapped and shot in the most heartless manner, and interposed even the hips and haws and holly-berries that help them to tide over the severity of the winter season. The ignorance of gardeners especially causes them to look upon birds as their enemies. That they do a little harm at times and eat a little fruit, there is no gainsaying, but we would have neither fruit nor vegetables were it not for the wild birds. Insect life, particularly in the larval state, would become a plague, and good gardening a penance, if not an impossibility, were it not for the birds.

The roe of nothing of an insect-eating or song-bird is to make the wild birds that remain with us all the winter the destroyers of the crusts of thousands of to stinging insects that would be a dead loss to the garden.

In mentioning gardeners' assistants it would be unfair to forget the hedgehogs, the toads, and our good friends the frogs.

But it is to the insect-eating or soft-billed birds in particular that we have to be grateful for keeping down the truly terrible aphides or plant lice—these are ordinarily known by the name of green flies—on roses, etc., and black flies on beans and cherries. They increase during the summer months with enormous rapidity; the eggs are laid in autumn, hatch in the spring sunshine, then begin to multiply virulently till autumn again; but it is in the early season that the birds assist us so well. Birds also keep down wasps and earwigs, that are so great a plague or curse to the fruit-grower. They devour also wireworms, and many other injurious parasites, "crawlin' fellies." I have already mentioned owls as useful in keeping down mice. These latter are at times most troublesome garden pests, especially in the winter season, when, having devoured their stores of winter food, they come forth to eat the roots of everything palatable.

The effect of the sort of plague these creatures may become as well as the folly exhibited by ignorant keepers in shooting down every bird of prey wherever seen, was afforded a few years ago in the south of Scotland. A raid
had been made, and war à entrance declared against hawks and owls; this was carried out to the bitter end, but the field-mice increased to such an extent that whole fields of grass were utterly destroyed, the little creatures being actually in millions. So true is it that there is a balance of nature that cannot be interfered with and impunity. By this law no one species of animal is allowed to pander to the destruction of others, nor can any natural family be wantonly removed without others suffering in some way or another. Birds, especially in the far north, are trapped and shot for the sake of their feathers and down. It is well known now, even outside the medical profession, that feather beds are not so healthy as mattresses; still feather beds will always be utilised for making pillows, and as for down, it will be a valuable article of commerce for centuries yet to come.

The song-birds of this country have a value which it would be difficult indeed to compute. Consider them first as they are in their native woods and wilds, when in the sweet springtime every tree harbours a musician, every bush shelter a songster; when in thicket and copse every leaf even seems to have found a voice, while far above us the fleshy clouds themselves are ringing with the gladsome melody of birds. One does not need to be a poet, nor a naturalist either, to enjoy such a concert as this; to the weary, to the tired brain-worker, to the toiler in towns, who has escaped from drudgery for a day, and come down to the cool green country, it means life and health itself. The soul seems to borrow from the birds a portion of their ecstatic joy, the mind becomes calm, the nerves are soothed by their songs, cares and worries are for a time forgotten, and the thoughts carried far away "to better lands than this!"

Very early on a summer's morning in the wooded midlands we are awakened by the sweet soft singing of a blackbird on the lawn. No occasion to get up for the sun itself has not yet cleared the horizon. We sleep again, and the melody mingles with our dreams; hush,-by the robin will fill up the intervals with his pleasant lilt, and later on the bold loud notes of the chiffchaff will burst forth in the blossoming orchard, and the many among the trees will make echo ring from tree to tree. All day long, wherever we walk, the birds will be with us; at even tide we may listen to the plaintive song of the linnet on the thorn, the drowsy whirr of the partridge among the corn, or croonle of cuckoo in the spruce thickets. In the silence of the night, and all the livelong night, we have melody that we scarce could distinguish by day—the voices of blackcaps, woodlark, and nightingale.

Their loud delight
Breaks through the stillness of the night,
And music's softest airs fill all the plains.

But consider the value of our song birds, even when confined in cages! To appreciate this thoroughly one would need to be an invalid for a few months; then, indeed, bird-song is something, and bird ways and tricks are matters well calculated to banish ennui, and make the weary time seem shorter.

In this country we perhaps do not owe a great deal to birds as scavengers except on the immediate sea-board; but in the native towns and villages of Her Majesty's Indian dominions, to the vagabond crow (Corvus corone), the adjutant (Leptoptilos crumenifer) and a few other birds, assisted, I may add, by buffaloes and blue-bottle flies, millions owe not only the health they possess, but life itself.

To the homing instinct of pigeons the world is indeed deeply indebted. Especially are these birds useful in time of war, or to a town that has been placed in a state of siege, as Paris was during the Franco-German war, when but for balloons and pigeons the city might have been considered for a time blotted out of existence. The subject is far too extensive to enter into here; but let me briefly remind the reader of a few facts. The utility of the voyageur depends upon the love of home inherent in the bird, and the power it possesses of making its way over tracts of country quite unknown to it at a great speed and unriddling. They are trained to this by being taken at first only short distances on the parent loft on favourable days. After a year of such training a bird will be able to fly over a hundred miles, and two hundred miles in the second year. What is known to the public, as the "fancy" as the carrier pigeon, is not the bird of which is in use for long-distance flying, but a cross-bred pigeon—the Antwerp. Some of these, when fully matured and trained, have been known to do a journey of three or five hundred miles in twelve hours. Something of the enormous speed they attain on wing may be gathered from the following example: an incident: A large round hole was lately found in a shop window of plate glass, cut as clean as if done by a glazier's diamond, while in the shop itself, and opposite the aperture, was the dead body of a Belgian homing, with battered head and broken neck. It had doubtless flown against the glass during the fog and darkness.

Pigeon flying as a pastime is only in its infancy in this country, though in Belgium alone there are 1,200 societies; and while the season is at its height every Saturday from that country over 200,000 birds are despatched by train to far-off parts of France, and even Spain, there to be thrown up.

It is not training alone, however, that accounts for the homing power the pigeons have, for extraordinary but authentic stories are told of even untrained birds making their way back to their lofts from places hundreds of miles away. This proves that pigeons have some curious instinct or even sense which we ourselves cannot understand, and brings to our minds the words of the poet—

"I hear a voice you cannot hear,
Which says I must not stay:
I see a hand you cannot see,
Which beckons me away."

Many sea-birds possess the same instinct, notably gulls and albatrosses; but as yet mankind has not attempted to dominate these birds, though I could easily fancy the albatross, or even some species of gulls, bringing messages between Australia and the Cape of Good Hope, or between Australia and America. The day may come.

Little need be said of the debt we owe to our ordinary domestic animals, such as the horse, the bull, the donkey, dog, and harmless necessary cat. This is all self-evident. That we do not treat them with sufficient care and kindness is a fact that we ought to be hourly ashamed of.

The extraordinary love one cannot help developing for a dog or even cat, that has for many years been a fast friend and faithful favourite, is in itself a proof of the value of such an animal. People are often ridiculed for bestowing affection on a dog, but only by the unthinking. People almost like a good dog; few of us happily require to love the animal. But to thousands in this country the companionship of a faithful dog is an incalculable boon. Home, disposition, or inducement, or force of circumstances, such may be prevented from mingling much in society. It is small wonder, then, that they come to love the dog, who loves them for a minute, whose fond brown eyes watch and read every movement and look—the dog with his ways so winning, his affection so unbounded, his heart so loyal, the same in trouble or sorrow in weal or woe, and who loves his master all the more when low and lonely.

Well, my subject is too large to do justice to, but I must say that on the very day the child has been presented with a living pet, the gates of a new world have been opened wide to him; his mind will be moulded, his heart enlarged, his very soul softened by observing and studying the life and ways of even the littlest of God's lowly creatures.

OTHER DAYS.

By the Rev. William Cowan, M.A.

Oh, would they might come back again,
Those days before my house was bare,
When little voices thrilled my ears,
And little feet were on the stair.

Oh, would they might come back again,
Those days before my house was bare,
When little voices thrilled my ears,
And little feet were on the stair.

Now I am poor, I dwell alone,
And totter on through strangest ways,
Still longing for what never comes—
The life and love of other days.

But how small a thing it is—

To get once more the life I know
And the love I need so well—

To get once more the life I know,
And the love I need so well.