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THE NAVY'S NEEDS.

The condition of the navy is attracting more attention than it has received at any previous time since the close of the war. Naval officers and a few legislators have long known—and the fact is now generally admitted by the press and the people—that we have not had during the last twenty years a single sea-going ship that would have had a hope of victory if pitted against any of the first class warships of other nations launched during that time.

It is unnecessary to go into the controversy as to what measure of success or failure has attended the practical working of these ships, two of which are in commission, while the other two are nearly ready for their crews; assuming, even, that they will accomplish, in the matter of speed and seaworthiness, all that their specifications call for, they are still unsatisfactory specimens of naval architecture, and are costly but inefficient additions to the service.

The United States navy ought not to be intended for large offensive operations against land fortifications and heavy ironclads. So much has been admitted by the navy department in the construction of the last four and in the plans of the next four new ships.

Now, there is no objection to the speed of the two largest of the new cruisers, namely, 18 and 18.9 knots respectively. If that speed could be maintained for ten days, and if they could carry coal enough to last that time, they would be model "cruisers," for they could overhaul anything afloat; but unfortunately that is not intended to be their sustained speed, and it is not likely that even 15 knots could be kept up for any great length of time, or that they could carry sufficient coal for long steaming at great speed.

It is apparent that we must keep up a considerable naval establishment for two reasons: First, as a navy cannot, like an army, be created at short notice, an effective nucleus of trained officers and men must be maintained at all times; second, even in time of peace there are barbarous or semi-civilized nations with whom no arrangement is effective unless the power to enforce our rights is made clearly apparent.

fleet just outside our ports in case of a blockade or bombardment; but it is becoming more and more questionable whether these would be absolutely essential to our defense. In their place, a swarm of torpedo craft, Ericsson's Destroyer, and dynamite-gun carriers could be provided at very moderate expense, and there are few naval officers who do not admit that they would rather fight ironclads than torpedoes.

Finally, the navy wants to forget some things and learn some others. It especially needs to forget that vessels ever were propelled by the wind. If every manufacturer using a steam engine insisted on erecting a windmill over his workshop to assist the steam power below, he would be regarded as a "crank;" yet that is practically what many of the older naval officers insist upon on board ship. Because sails and spars were once necessities, they cannot see that they can be dispensed with now.

The personnel of the United States navy—as universally admitted by foreign officers—has no superior in education, originality, quickness in device, and promptness in execution. If the government will only provide the right kind of ships, there need be no doubt that a good account will be rendered of them.

INCIDENTS IN BIRD LIFE AT THE PARK.

The curious behavior of a sheldrake in the Central Park Zoological Gardens has puzzled Superintendent Conklin and the keepers, and is attracting much attention among visitors. When the two sea lions were brought to the Park recently, this sheldrake was the only one among all the birds in the little inclosure outside the lion house, where the sea lion tank is, that took any interest in the new comers.

The sheldrake comes from Australia, where there are not any sealions, and is, therefore, unacquainted with these monsters. Perhaps to this fact may be attributed the strong interest he took in them; for, ever since they were dumped into the tank, he has seemed to regard himself their special guardian, and spends the hours of each day on or near its edge.

He stands like a sentry, usually on one leg, and at first attacked the other birds, when they approached, with such fierceness that they seem now to have a wholesome dread of him, and at times, when very thirsty, sneak up to the basin, take a hasty sip, and scurry away as though they had come to the belief that the tank and its waters belonged exclusively to the sheldrake. Now, there are in this inclosure many large birds, such as the pelican, stork, and bittern—birds able to defend themselves; but, strange to say, they submit meekly to the assumption of proprietary right by this little wood duck, as if by some unseen, but potent, influence directed. The ponderous, sleek, and slow moving sea lions come up to the surface now and then, watch their little champion drive away intruders, and then, after blinking, sleepy-eyed, for a few moments, fall over lazily into the water and disappear.

The sheldrake is not known among naturalists as an aggressive bird, and hence to see him fly furiously at a great pelican, drive him from the field, and then send a long-legged sand bill crane scampering after in evident alarm, is a curious sight. While the sheldrake will allow no other bird to approach the sea lions by day, he relaxes his vigil after nightfall, when the sea lions and birds repair to the little house near the tank to sleep, and there is a tacit understanding that the other birds may then approach.

This sheldrake is of the sub-family Anatinæ and of the genera Tadorna (Leach) and Casarca (Bonap.). The species are to be seen on the sea shore as well as on the lakes, feeding on marine plants, crustaceans, and mollusks. The note is a shrill whistle.

Another interesting phase of bird life has been developed in the big cage on the eastern side of the arsenal, where a scarlet ibis (Ibis rubra) has taken a strong dislike to the note of the whooping crane (Grus americana); and, as if in furtherance of Oscar Wilde's suggestion as to an art police which should prevent discordance in music as well as deformity in other branches, this ibis essays forcibly to restrain the whooping crane from uttering his unmusical note. One day last week, the crane got to work in real earnest, and whooped away for nearly half an hour.