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THE NEED OF INSULAR EXPLORATION AS ILLUSTRATED BY BIRDS¹

By ROBERT CUSHMAN MURPHY
AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

I

IF the track of every civilized inquiring traveler could be accurately plotted on a globe, there is little doubt that all but a few small portions would become entirely black, due to the crossing and merging of the countless lines. This would apply to nearly the whole of the ocean as well as to the lesser area of continents and islands. In short, modern man has seen his world and has mapped with extraordinary faithfulness somewhat more than three quarters of it. The "unknown," in the geographic sense, has become exceedingly restricted. On the other hand, the little known still looms amazingly large. The fact that the scope of knowledge

is so vast and human interest so diversified means that only a few centers of ripe culture have been studied in any large proportion of the aspects that man's curiosity makes possible. The great bulk of travelers add much to their own store of information and enjoyment; they may also exert a cumulative influence in the field of international relations. Few of them, however, can be expected to add new accretions to the sum of exact knowledge.

When a well-informed layman begins to acquaint himself with the biological material in a great museum, he is likely to conclude that the fauna of the world has been rather thoroughly collected, preserved, classified and filed, or in other words that the strictly pioneering part of the task of getting acquainted with the earth's inhabitants has been finished. For a few groups be-

¹ An address delivered before the Science Section of the American Association of Museums at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, May 20, 1938.

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