

BIRD DAY IN THE SCHOOLS.

The observance of Arbor Day by the schools has been so successful that it has been suggested that a Bird Day, to be devoted to instructing the children in the value of our native birds and the best means of protecting them, might with propriety be added to the school calendar. The idea of setting apart one day in the year for the planting of trees was first suggested nearly twenty-five years ago by J. Sterling Morton, ex-secretary of agriculture. More than a million trees were planted on the first Arbor Day, and the importance of the day has gradually increased until it has come to be observed in nearly every state and territory in the Union. One of the greatest benefits of Arbor Day is the sentiment and interest aroused in the subject of trees and in the broader study of nature. It is believed that the observance of a Bird Day would appeal to our people—particularly our youth—even more strongly.

Bird Day is more than a suggestion. It has been already adopted in at least two cities with marked success, but as yet it is still an experiment. Apparently the idea originated with Prof. C. A. Babcock, superintendent of schools in Oil City, Pa., who wrote to the department of agriculture in 1894 urging the establishment of such a day, and stating that May 4 would be observed as Bird Day in Oil City. In reply, the secretary of agriculture sent the following letter:

WASHINGTON, D. C. April 23, 1894.

MR. C. A. BABCOCK,

Supt. of Schools, Oil City, Pa.

DEAR SIR: Your proposition to establish a "Bird Day" on the same general plan as "Arbor Day" has my cordial approval.

Such a movement can hardly fail to promote the development of a healthy public sentiment toward our native birds, favoring their preservation and increase. If directed toward this end, and not to the encouragement of the importation of foreign species, it is sure to meet the approval of the American people.

It is a melancholy fact that among the enemies of our birds two of the most destructive and relentless are our women and our boys. The love of feather ornamentation so heartlessly persisted in by thousands of women, and the mania for collecting eggs and killing birds so deeply rooted in our boys, are legacies of barbarism inherited from our savage ancestry. The number of beautiful and useful birds annually slaughtered for bonnet trimmings runs up into the hundreds of thousands, and threatens, if it has not already accomplished, the extermination of some of the rarer species. The insidious egg-hunting and pea-

shooting proclivities of the small boy are hardly less widespread and destructive. It matters little which of the two agencies is the more fatal since neither is productive of any good. One looks to the gratification of a shallow vanity, the other to the gratification of a cruel instinct and an expenditure of boyish energy that might be profitably diverted into other channels. The evil is one against which legislation can be only palliative and of local efficiency. Public sentiment, on the other hand, if properly fostered in the schools, would gain force with the growth and development of our boys and girls, and would become a hundredfold more potent than any law enacted by the state or congress. I believe such a sentiment can be developed, so strong and so universal, that a respectable woman will be ashamed to be seen with the wing of a wild bird on her bonnet, and an honest boy will be ashamed to own that he ever robbed a nest or wantonly took the life of a bird.

Birds are of inestimable value to mankind. Without their unremitting services our gardens and fields would be laid waste by insect pests. But we owe them a greater debt even than this, for the study of birds tends to develop some of the best attributes and impulses of our natures. Among them we find examples of generosity, unselfish devotion, of the love of mother for offspring and other estimable qualities. Their industry, patience, and ingenuity excite our admiration; their songs inspire us with a love of music and poetry; their beautiful plumages and graceful manners appeal to our esthetic sense; their long migrations to distant lands stimulate our imaginations and tempt us to inquire into the causes of these periodic movements, and finally, the endless modifications of form and habits by which they are enabled to live under most diverse conditions of food and climate—on land and at sea—invite the student of nature into inexhaustible fields of pleasurable research.

The cause of bird protection is one that appeals to the best side of our natures. Let us yield to the appeal. Let us have a Bird Day—a day set apart from all the other days of the year to tell the children about the birds. But we must not stop here. We should strive continually to develop and intensify the sentiment of bird protection, not alone for the sake of preserving the birds, but also for the sake of replacing as far as possible the barbaric impulses inherent in child nature by the nobler impulses and aspirations that should characterize advanced civilization.

Respectfully,

J. STERLING MORTON,

Secretary of Agriculture.

Of the success of this first experiment there can be no question. "The day was observed in the Oil City schools with a degree of enthusiasm which was good to see. The amount of informa-

tion about birds that was collected by the children was simply amazing. Original compositions were read, informal discussions were held, talks by teachers were given, and the birds in literature were not forgotten or overlooked. * * * The idea simply needs to be known to meet with a warm welcome akin to that with which we greet our first robin or song sparrow in the spring.—Journal of Education, May 24, 1894.

Bird Day was observed in 1895 and again on May 8, 1896, with such success that it bids fair to become a regular feature of the schools of Oil City at least. In speaking of the third anniversary, Superintendent Babcock says:

"The exercises this year (1896), as upon previous ones, varied somewhat in the different grades. They consisted of original compositions by the pupils, containing the results of their observations of birds, of talks by pupils and teachers, comparing observations, giving localities of bird haunts, and general exchange of bird lore; of recitations from eminent prose writers on birds, and from the poets; finally many of our schools closed their exercises by a trip to the woods to listen to the vesper concert of our feathered brothers. * * * We begin the study of birds on January 1 and continue till June, studying those that stay all winter and trying to keep account of the new comers as they arrive. We devote two periods, of twenty minutes each, per week, to this study. Bird Day is a summary or focusing of the work of the year. * * * The results of bird study and of Bird Day are interesting. Our children generally know most of our bird residents, they also love them, and feel like protecting them. There has been a complete change in the relations existing between the small boy and the birds."

Other suggestions regarding the study of birds and the observance of the day will be found in two interesting articles on Bird Day, one by Superintendent Babcock, in the Journal of Education for April 4, 1895; the other by A. E. Winship, in the Outlook for April 6, 1895, p. 560.

Last spring (1896), the movement was started in Iowa by Prof. C. H. Morrill, superintendent of schools at Fort Madison, who was apparently unaware of the experiment in Pennsylvania. He set apart May 29, 1896, as Bird Day in the schools under his jurisdiction, and describes the result as follows:

"I never saw children more enthusiastic in preparation or happier in rendering. They brought their pet birds, they decorated the rooms with flowers and green branches, they ornamented the boards with drawings of birds, birds' nests, flowers, etc. * * * The buildings rang with bird music all day, the children were happier than ever before, and visitors came until standing space in many of the rooms was at a premium. * * * It is safe to say that we shall