

BIRD DAY.

The nation has begun to realize that greatest reforms can come through the medium of the public school. From year to year new subjects are added to the school curriculum. Alcohol and tobacco will meet most resistance from the disciples of the public school, and the time is at hand when social and civic reforms must needs seek the same medium.

The designs and purposes of Arbor Day are accomplished by troops of happy and intelligent school children in America. Not a holiday but a *tree-planting day*, is the true spirit. And now the condition and needs of our civilization suggest still another line of culture and a day for concentration upon the subject. *Bird Day*, which was first observed in Oil City, Penn., May 4, 1894, has received encouragement from the generous founder of Arbor Day, and, indeed one who has so deeply realized as he, the necessity of protection of trees would not overlook their feathered habitants.

The public school will find *Bird Day* a nucleus for intensely interesting facts and for the healthiest æsthetic culture. Laying aside all poetic fancies, and meeting man on his own selfishly human grounds, of what use are the birds to man? The insectivorous birds might proudly assert that without them, man could not thrive upon this earth. And the facts of the case would bear them out. We are told by Professor Bruner that three-fourths of the food of birds consist of insects. Supposing that each bird in Nebraska eats 25 insects, it would require more than a million insects for a single day's rations during one of our summer days. All insects seem to have their special feathered enemy that if unrestricted could spare the farmer the arduous task of spraying the trees. Think of a bird like the woodchuck that eats its weight of insects in a single day or the merry little chickadee that devoured 5,550 eggs of the canker-worm moth in a single day.

To the hawks and owls we look for a diminution in field mice and vermin. The migratory birds bring us seeds from other lands.

Audubon, that naturalist whose adventures in this region every child should hear about, says that 415 species and sub-species visit this state, 227 breed here, and more than one hundred are winter residents.

What condition in bird life prevails today? An enormous decrease. A few of the almost self-evident reasons are: Clearing of forests, draining of swampy places, cultivation of land, hat-trimming and egg collecting.

The reasons for Bird Day are clearly stated in the following letter written by Ex-Secretary of Agriculture J. Sterling Morton:

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 hundred-fold 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 æsthetic 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 forms and habits by which they are enabled to live under the most diverse conditions of food and climate—on land and 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.

J. STERLING MORTON,
Secretary of Agriculture.

The following list of books offers some interesting matter on the subject of birds:

1. First Book of Birds.—Miller.
2. In Nesting Time.—Miller.
3. Bird Ways.—Miller.
4. My Saturday Bird Class.—Miller.
5. In Bird Land.—Keyser.
6. Birds in the Bush.—Torrey.
7. Birds Through an Opera Glass.—Merriam.
8. Our Birds in Their Haunts.—Langille.
9. Homes Without Hands.—Wood.
10. New England Bird Life.—Coues.
11. Nests and Eggs of North American Birds.
12. Birds of North America.—Lawrence.

Nearly every boy has his ideal of manliness, and with many, kindness to a bird or dumb creature is a sign of weakness. Stories are needed to illustrate that the "strongest are the tenderest." Emperor Charles of Germany left his tent pitched that a swallow's nest might not be disturbed. Abraham Lincoln, when riding across the country with a party of young lawyers, turned back for a distance of several miles to rescue a bird that had fallen from its nest. General Custer turned aside his entire detachment that the nest of a bird in the arid plains might be spared.

LOUISE W. MEARS.

SHELDON EPIDEMIC. The Sheldon epidemic is spreading. The mayor of Moundsville, West Virginia, says he is going to run the town as Jesus would. It is to be hoped that the contagion will soon strike Kentucky. But there is little prospect for it as the numerous colonels would doubtless have to be told not only what Christ would do but who He was.