

The Latham Foundation Story Service for the Public Schools—By E. M. S. Fite.
Credit is due Mrs. Vira C. Scott for most of the bird data used in this story.

What Tom and Virginia Learned About Birds.

The joy of making
a friend of the birds



Copyright,
The Reilly Lee & Co.

After dinner Mr. Mann had no sooner settled himself comfortably in his big arm-chair than Tom, his alert ten year old son, sat on a stool in front of him and with his usual direct way when he wants information, said, "Daddy what do you know about Sea Gulls? When Mother and I were crossing the Bay today on the ferry, the gulls followed the boat and watched for scraps of food that were thrown to them. They have such a funny cry, and they are so graceful as they swing high and low in the air; sometimes they seem scarcely to move their wings at all when they are flying. What are they good for?"

Tom's little sister Virginia heard the question and she climbed up on Daddy's knee and said "Yes what are they good for? I want to know about sea gulls too, and about other birds." So this is what Daddy Mann told them.

"Sea Gulls are not only useful but all birds are very useful. You must not think that birds are destructive and should be killed because some of them eat fruit and seed; we must be very sure that more harm than good is done before we take the life of these feathered creatures.

"Now Sea Gulls are water scavengers; that means they eat all of the refuse in the waters of our harbors and keep the waters clean. Let me tell you how they helped the people of Utah who went out there years ago to settle the country, to make homes there. The first year they planted their seed and when the grain came up and the people were so happy, thinking of the fine crops they would have, a great swarm of black crickets came and destroyed the grain. But they were not discouraged and so they planted their fields the second year; the crickets came again and just as the settlers were wondering what

they could do to save their crops, a most interesting thing happened. A great flock of Franklin gulls, hundreds and thousands of them, came down into the fields and fed on the crickets until not a cricket was left. The farmers were so grateful that they put up a monument to the sea gulls, and you can see it in Salt Lake City if you ever go there.

"We are told too that the sea gulls landing in the rigging of Columbus' ship acted as pilots and through them Columbus knew that he was near land, and all of the men had their courage renewed just at the time they were thinking they would have to turn about and go back to Spain. Gulls are a great help to ships at sea for they live on the rocks and islands far out at sea and their presence there, and their cries, which you noticed Tom, give warning to the ships when they are too near rocks or islands."

"They don't eat cherries and other fruit, Daddy, but the robins and the thrushes do," said little Virginia. "Yes," answered Daddy, "they eat their share, but they pay the farmer well for the fruit they eat, by keeping his fields and orchards free from injurious insects; it has been found by careful study that two-thirds of the food of robins and thrushes consists of injurious insects which would ruin the fruit if they were not eaten by the birds. So the farmer should be glad to give the birds their small share of the fruit saved for him. The beautiful meadow-lark is another bird that is a good friend to the farmer; all spring and summer he is busy eating cutworms, caterpillars and grasshoppers, and he is so fond of weed seed that he helps to keep the weeds down; that's another way the meadow-lark helps the farmer. The little English sparrow is considered a great nuisance by many persons. They work in great flocks. In Canada one year the farmers decided to kill off all the sparrows because there were so many of them they thought that the sparrows ate too much of their grain: so they killed them all; no sparrows were left. The next year the insects completely ruined their crops and the year after that; so the farmers realized that it had not been the sparrows but the insects that had destroyed some of their grain and they imported some sparrows again so that the birds would eat the insects.

"Swallows feed mostly on flying insects, such as house flies, mosquitoes, and gnats, locusts and wasps. Woodpeckers, warblers, and a lot of small birds feed on injurious insects that are harmful to our trees and shrubs; they protect our forests and orchards. A man who has made a study of these matters claims that if we would take the trouble to give water to the birds during the dry season, by placing pans of water in our orchards and vineyards that the birds would not eat so much of the fruit; they want water and get it by eating juicy fruit. It is also claimed that if wild fruit is planted which bears at the same time as the cultivated fruit the birds will eat it in preference. Russian Mulberry, Juneberry and Shadberry trees planted near orchards and grain fields, are said to be a protection to strawberries, cherries and vegetables. Also the wild black cherry, elder, mountain ash, dogwood, Virginia creeper and many other trees and vines that grow berries of which the birds are fond. Certainly it would be worth trying and these wild things are very attractive in themselves and would add beauty to our road sides.

"Tom, I hope that you never use a bean-shooter; I have seen some boys shoot at crows and even at the beautiful song birds. They are

cruel mostly because they have not been taught to think and have not been told, as I am telling you, that all birds have their part to play in the great scheme of Nature. If they but knew that without the birds, our crops, our orchards and our gardens would be utterly destroyed! Even the crow who often does serious damage to the corn crops, and robs the nests of wild birds of the eggs and young, is valuable as a scavenger and destroys many injurious insects, mice and other rodents.

"Among the birds of prey, very few are harmful; most of them are of benefit and should be protected. For instance the turkey-buzzard is a scavenger; in some of the South American towns the buzzard is the official gutter and street cleaner, and down there it is against the law to kill a buzzard for that reason. The red-tailed hawk, who is sometimes accused of stealing chickens, eats meadow-mice, squirrels, gophers, grasshoppers, beetles, and snakes. Sparrow-hawks eat mostly grasshoppers, crickets, spiders, worms, and meadow-mice. The little screech owl is one of our very best friends; he is abroad at night and catches many injurious small animals that the hawks do not get during the day.

"Now that so many of the birds have been killed off the farmers are begining to regret it for they are realizing that birds are their best friends, and they can hardly afford to begrudge them some of the fruit and grain they help us to cultivate. And that is not all; just think of the joy that they bring to us with their beautiful songs! Would you be willing to give up the bird songs? I wouldn't; why a great part of the happiness of being out of doors would be done away with if we had no song birds."

Tom and Virginia had listened with rapt attention and at the end of the story, Tom drew a long breath and said,—"Gee, Daddy, but it's fine to know all about the birds like that! You can be mighty sure that I shall be a friend to the birds from now on, no more killing for me!" "Me too," said little Virginia as she gave Daddy a hug of thanks before she jumped down from his knee.

SCHOOL NOTES

MURRAY

Under the leadership of Miss Silveira the boys and girls of Murray keep up a splendid record in the work of the KIND DEEDS CLUB. Two boys, intelligent and consistent enough to realize that in heeding their father's order to kill birds they could not enroll in the Club, begged their father to release them and he has consented. All praise to the father. Now the boys are enrolled and the eager interest of all the children is an inspiration to us. Instances abound to prove that the help of the bird in keeping crops clean of insect life is a service of such glowing merit that we should not begrudge them a reasonable share of what they have literally earned.

The children of Murray have started a bank and the fund will be used for relief in time of need,--perhaps to bring comfort to a sick child or relief to a stray or wounded animal. This is a beautiful thought and it has originated entirely with the children. We congratulate Miss Silveira.

A MODEL PLAN

In our next issue we hope to have all the details of the KIND DEEDS CLUB COUNCIL which Mrs. Borneman, Principal of the B Street School, Hayward, has organized. The plan is so far-reaching that it controls seventeen class-rooms and is a signal success and a model for all large schools.

PALOMARES

The boys at Palomares have demonstrated a surprising degree of accurate observation. They heard our talk on the building of bird houses and saw our model. When we returned shortly afterwards to leave the pattern we found they had copied it with precision entirely from memory. Interest in the work is keen. A child in the Receiving Class recited fluently the poem "Be Kind to Living Things." An older sister had drilled him in it last year.

ALAMEDA KIND DEEDS CLUB

An independent Club organized by Mrs. Tebault in Alameda is demonstrating the beautiful things children are capable of thinking of doing for others. Two of the boys have devised the plan of keeping an old lady, sick and infirm supplied with kindling wood. They go to her back yard and chop it for her. They are also taking an interest in rescue work for cats who bear the unmistakable signs of disease or starvation. These animals are borne to the Animal Shelter League 1820 East 12th Street, Oakland, where humane people receive them.

IS HUMANE EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOLS NEEDED?

We have been consulted by the principal of one of the schools as to the punishment which should be imposed upon a boy who has wantonly tortured a horse. This is a case for police intervention. Cruelty to animals is fertile soil to breed criminals. "The lack of humane education" said a great man in the Texas House of Representatives, "is the principle cause of crime."

We can't imagine members of the Kind Deeds Club or Boy Scouts being cowards and that is what cruelty to animals means.

THE LAW GOVERNING STRAY DOGS

It is well to know that the law governing stray dogs referred to in the Monthly Bulletin of the Oakland Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals of Alameda County, which has been distributed among the Alameda County Schools, does not apply to stray dogs in the County; this law is applicable only to the city of Oakland, so we have been informed at the County Clerk's Office.