

“The teacher was right,” said another.

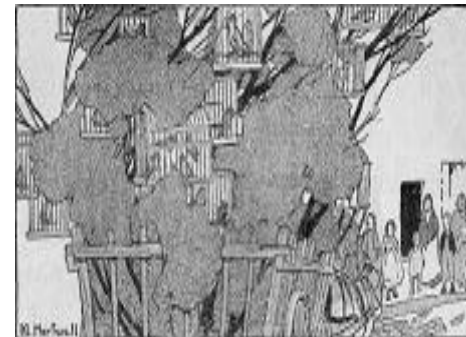
At last, the farmers grew ashamed of having killed the birds. They met and did away with the wicked law, but it was too late.

Harvest time came, but there was no harvest. In many homes there was want and sorrow.

The next spring a strange sight was seen—a sight never seen before or since. Through the streets there went a wagon filled with great branches of trees. Upon them were hung cages of birds that were making sweet music.

From all the country round these birds had been brought by order of the farmers. The cages were opened, and once more the woods and fields were filled with the beautiful birds, who flew about singing their songs of joy. Once again the harvests grew in the fields and filled to overflowing the farmers' barns.

## THE BIRDS OF KILLINGWORTH



Adapted from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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The Birds of Killingworth/Adapted from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

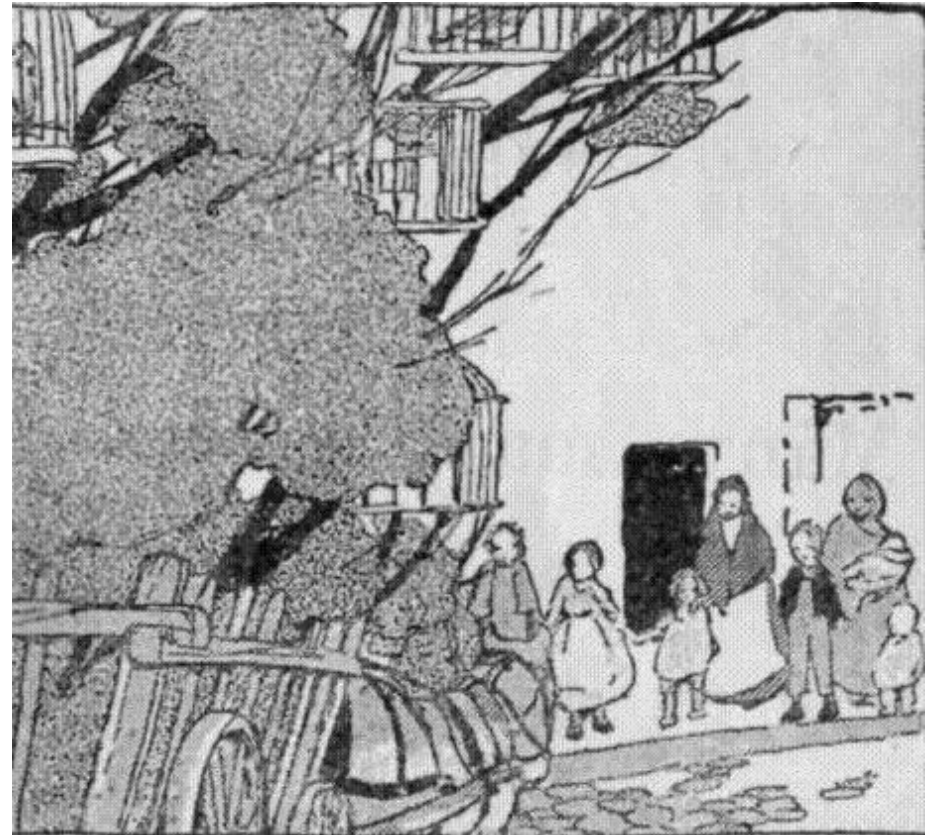
Summary: A tale of what happens when a town decides to kill all of its birds.

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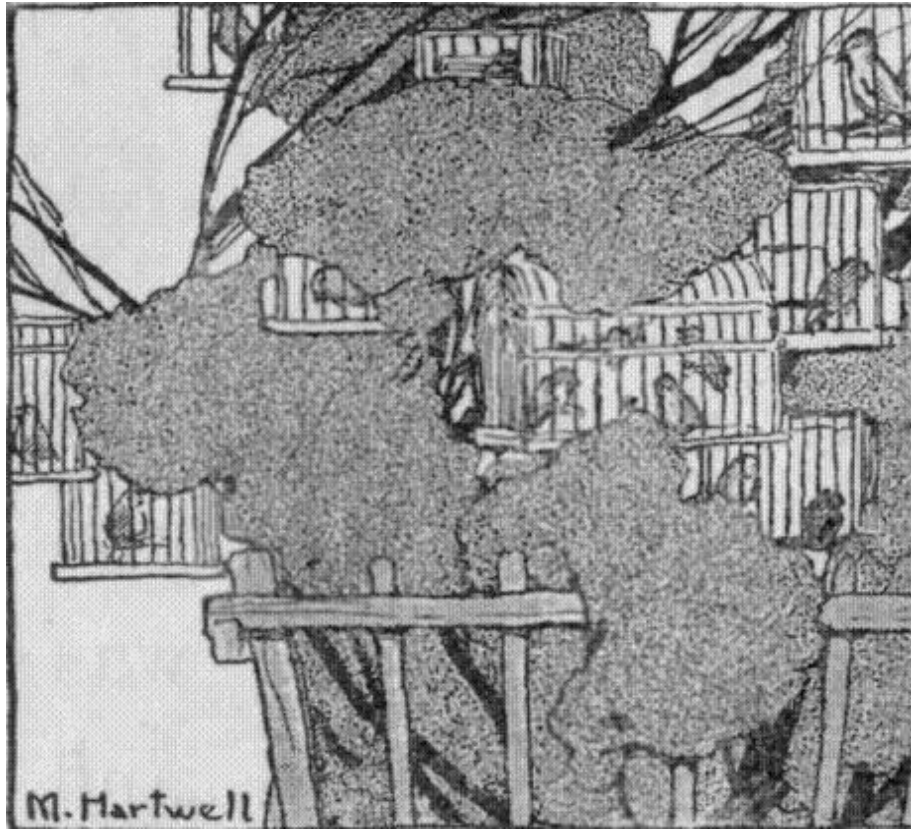
Reading Level: 3.9



gardens hundreds of insects of every kind crawled, finding no foe to eat them. At last the whole land was like a desert.

From the trees caterpillars dropped down upon the women's bonnets, and they screamed and ran. At every door, the women gathered and talked.

“What will become of us?” asked one. “The men were wrong,—something must be done.”



The dreadful war on birds began. They fell down dead, with bloodstains on their breasts. Some fluttered, wounded, away from the sight of man, while the young died of starvation in the nests.

The summer came, and all the birds were dead. The days were like hot coals. In the orchards hundreds of caterpillars fed. In the fields and

## THE BIRDS OF KILLINGWORTH

It was spring. The apple trees and the cherry trees were pink and white with blossoms. They filled the air with fragrance. The maples were red, and on the oak and poplar the buds were swelling. The brooklets were rushing and leaping on toward the sea.

It was spring everywhere. The robin and the bluebird were piping sweetly in the blossoming orchard. The sparrows were chirping, and hungry crows were calling loudly for food. The farmers of Killingworth were plowing the fields, and the broken clods, too, told of spring.

A farmer heard the cawing of the crows and the song of the birds.

He said, “Did you ever see so many birds? Why, when we plant our seeds, these birds will take them all. When the fruit ripens, they will destroy it. I, for one, wish there were no birds, and I say kill them all.”

Another farmer said, “Yes, let us call a meeting of the people of the village and decide what is to be done with the pests.”

The meeting was called, and all came: the squire, the preacher, the teacher, and the farmers from the country round about.

Up rose the farmer who had said he wished there were no birds.

“Friends,” he said, “the crows are about to take my field of corn. I put up scarecrows, but the birds fly by them and seem to laugh at them. The robins are as saucy as they can be. Soon they will eat all the cherries we have. I say kill all birds; they are a pest.”

“So say I,” said another farmer.

“And I,” said another.

“And I,” “And I,” came from voices in every part of the hall.

The teacher arose and timidly said:

“My friends, you know not what you do. You would put to death the birds that make sweet music for us in our dark hours: the thrush, the oriole, the noisy jay, the bluebird, the meadow lark.

“You slay them all, and why? Because they scratch up a little handful of wheat or corn, while searching for worms or weevils.

“Do you never think who made them and who taught them their songs of love? Think of your woods and orchards without birds!

“And, friends, would you rather have insects in the hay? You call the birds thieves, but they guard your farms. They drive the enemy from your cornfields and from your harvests.

“Even the blackest of them, the crow, does good. He crushes the beetle and wages war on the slug and the snail.

“And, what is more, how can I teach your children gentleness and mercy when you contradict the very thing I teach?”

But the farmers only shook their heads and laughed. “What does the teacher know of such things?” they asked. So they passed a law to have the birds killed.