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# PETTENGILL

"The Gentleman from Indiana"

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## A BIRD OF AN IDEA!

Mrs. Roosevelt, ever busy with good deeds, has given us a very valuable and very practical idea. She wants to change the habits of birds. As I see immense possibilities in the suggestion, not only for our feathered friends, but as a cure for unemployment and depression, I quote her exact words: "Ever since I read the account of how exhausted the birds are when they reach their destination after their migration from the North, I have wondered if there is any way in which their habits might be changed."

Ever ready to assist in good works, I began to inquire why birds migrate, the number of said birds, and the number of people who might be employed in changing their habits. For surely, if sea-captains, over hundreds of years have taught parrots to talk politely, we can without doubt, in a few centuries of time, cure the exhaustion suffered by our migratory friends.

Well, here is the problem. It is a big one, but if we all put our hands to the wheel under Mrs. Roosevelt's inspiring leadership, who shall say us "nay"?

It is truly an interesting task. It takes us back to the Pleistocene epoch, of the Quaternary period of the Cenozoic era. That's when the birds began to get their migratory habits. It was, say, 25,000 to 100,000 years ago. This was the period known as the Ice Age. During thousands of years this old earth of ours

would grow warmer around its middle, the warmth slowly moving north and melting the ice farther and farther toward the North Pole. The birds followed the retreating ice. Then, the pendulum started back toward the Equator. Huge glaciers 1,000 miles long pushed south to the Ohio River and my home in South Bend, Indiana, was

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Sheet 2 - P-February-14

under a mile of ice. Well, naturally, as the ice cap followed on the heels of the retreating warmth, the birds were forced slowly south for worms, gnats and bugs.

This huge and ponderous march of ice, first north, then south, was repeated four or five times over thousands of years, and so the birds got the bright idea of winging it south when it got cold, and flying north when it got warm.

In those good old days there were other things at work forming bad bird habits. First, more land where the insect-loving birds could live, then more water where they must die. In that far-off morning of the world "when you were a tadpole and I was a fish," the British Islands were not islands at all. They were connected by a land bridge to the European continent stretching to Iceland and points west. Australia and South America were all one and these early birds in search of worms could hop merrily along with dry feet from one continent to another.

It was quite an education the birds got. The Arctic tern, for example, flies back and forth every year from Patagonia to Alaska, some 10,000 miles each way. The vast size of the job of re-educating him and his friends is apparent.

However, only 225 of the 1,000 species of North American birds fly as far south as the Gulf of Mexico. This reduces the size of the task to which Mrs. Roosevelt so nobly summons us.

With our task of changing bad bird habits limited to its true size, we can begin to measure the job that confronts us. Just how many migratory birds — robins, wrens, ducks, geese, crows, etc. — there are, no one knows. There has never been a complete bird census! This is something our bureaucrats have neglected. However, after consulting our scientific experts, I believe that in the Western Hemisphere alone there are at least 5,689,762,876 birds. This is about 40 for each of the 135,000,000 of us.

Now we come to the practical part. I propose that every unemployed person be assigned 40 or more migratory birds on a Federal Good Habit Bird Forming Project, No. XQ-719-Z. He might start with a dozen of the Arctic tern as they fly the farthest, and get the most exhausted. It will be his job to change the habits of these birds. The project must of course wait until Mrs. Roosevelt is through straightening out all the bad habits of mankind. But when that is done to her complete satisfaction, I propose that she be made Secretary of Birds with full Cabinet rank and unlimited funds.

SAMUEL B. PETTENGILL

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are when they reach their destination after their migration  
from the north, I have wondered if there is any way in which  
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Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt

*hr*  
This delicately humorous remark  
Which Lady Eleanor has put in print  
Some idling statesman with a purblind squint  
At what his optics leave him in the dark,  
Thinking the owl as ably solemn as the lark,  
Conceives himself a stinter with a stint;  
And claims, bright as a coin just from the mint,  
Wing-weary migrants should take to an ark.

To-day the press gives out two kinds of jokes:  
The witty jokes that call light laughters forth  
and the bright joker to the heart and ears;  
But as to him that perpetrates a hoax  
Too smeared with malice to have any worth,  
He's pitiable to tears and tears and tears.

Israel Jordan

May 4, 1946

Hotel Everett,  
Portland,  
Maine.