

## JOHN F. LACEY.

By WILLIAM T. HORNADAY.

It was the free wild birds of the Iowa prairies that once inspired a strong man to champion their cause in the council chamber of our nation. To know our birds of song is to love all birds. Fortunate indeed were the birds who sang to John F. Lacey during his boyhood and his young manhood. It was the meadow lark, the white-throated sparrow, the brown thrasher, the catbird and the whippoorwill that filled his great heart with love for all birds, and nerved his strong right arm to strike in their defense.

Out of all the achievements of Major Lacey for the better preservation of our bird allies, one fact looms up prominently and dwarfs all others. He was the first American Congressman to become an avowed champion of wild life. It is true that even before he entered the lists of the persistent, uncompromising and permanent defenders of wild creatures in need of defense, other members of Congress had manifested the spirit which later on developed the pronounced game protectionists. But Major Lacey, we repeat, was the first man in the Congress of the United States to take up the new white man's burden and make it peculiarly his own.

The date of this new departure may be given approximately as 1900. At that time few large men in public life took the woes of wild life seriously. Slaughter was the order of the day. The sportsmen who advocated game protection and secured the enactment of protective laws were animated by a desire, not to stop killing, but to preserve today in order to kill more abundantly tomorrow. It is well within the bounds of truth to state that even down to 1890 wild life preservation in America was little more than a pleasing dream, a shadow without substance. Excepting the Yellowstone Park, there were not then in existence any large game preserves in which killing was totally prohibited. Everywhere, without a single

exception, wild game was being killed far faster than it was breeding.

At the date mentioned, the killing of game was everywhere a ruling passion. The protection of our song-birds had only just begun. Every member of Congress was regarded by his constituents as a chore-boy, of whom all kinds of personal services might confidently be demanded. The number of pension-claim burdens that were laid upon Congressmen was very great; and the measures of the nation often waited upon the personal tasks of the constituent.

Acting under what may well be called an inspiration, and in spite of other burdens and other causes, Mr. Lacey deliberately elected to champion the cause of the vanishing birds. We know not just when that call to arms first was heard by him. It is in the silent watches of the night, the still small hours of the new day, when the minds of men are most free from surrounding influences, that our mental vision becomes keenest, and we most accurately measure the things that Were against the things that Are. It is in the early morning watch, when sleep has swept all cobwebs from the brain, that man's mental negatives are most sensitive to great impressions. It is then that the voice of Duty is heard in clear, bell-like tones, calling upon us to arise, put on our armor and sally forth.

I doubt not that the call to John F. Lacey to arise and stand forth as the champion of the birds came to him at a time that he himself never set down and could not name.

But come it did; and while other men were laboring for commercial and industrial causes and striving to pass bills that would appeal strongly to their own constituents, there was one man who constituted himself a Committee of One on Everybody's Business. It was, and ever has been, everybody's business to save our valuable wild life from slaughter and annihilation; but, alas! how often is it treated as nobody's business!

I repeat that Major Lacey was the first member of Congress who made the cause of the wild birds and beasts particularly his own. At first he was treated by some of his colleagues with good-natured raillery, and taken every way but seriously.

But, like the good soldier that he was, in more causes than one, he enlisted in the birds' cause, not for three months' service, nor one year, nor three years, but during the period of the war. From that moment down to his last day in Congress he was never elsewhere than on the firing line.

His victories for the wild life cause were numerous and important; but his first one was the greatest of all. The Lacey Bird Law is enough to render any name illustrious. That act, to prevent all interstate traffic in game illegally killed or shipped, was the first federal act for the better protection of birds, and it placed in the hands of the National Government a weapon more powerful and far-reaching than any cannon ever cast. It has prevented the illegal slaughter, and sale in the markets, of uncountable millions of game birds; and the rogues that it has brought to justice would, if herded together, make a great army.

The long history of Mr. Lacey's labors and achievements in Congress in behalf of wild life will be written elsewhere, in detail.<sup>1</sup> His effective efforts in the founding of national bison herds, with which we are most familiar, were only the latest of his achievements in the field of protection. The enabling act, and the appropriation of \$15,000 by which the first national bison herd was established, in the Yellowstone National Park, was secured through the persistence of Representative Lacey against much opposition. I am inclined to believe that his last work in Congress in his favorite cause was bestowed in securing the legislation by which the National Government joined the New York Zoological Society in the mutual action which created in Oklahoma the Wichita National Bison Range and Herd, now a pronounced success.

The proud State of Iowa may well regard John F. Lacey as one of her most illustrious men. His work has added luster to the State made famous by Allison, Harlan and Kirkwood, and throughout this nation, wherever wild birds are protected, his name is known and honored. To him the people of Iowa, and the bird lovers of America, owe a monument as lofty as his own purposes and as imperishable as his fame.

<sup>1</sup>*John F. Lacey Memorial Volume, Iowa Park and Forestry Association, 1913.*

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