

WILLIAM BREWSTER — AN APPRECIATION.

BY JOHN GEORGE GEHRING.

To appear before this body of Nature Lovers in an attempt to pay loving tribute to the memory of such a man as William Brewster, many of you having had your own relations of intimate friendship with him for years and some from boyhood, might seem like an intrusion under ordinary circumstances; but the circumstances are not ordinary when it is William Brewster of whom I speak! We all knew him to be a man of a wonderfully rich and many-sided character,— and we all know that to merely say how we loved him and shall always revere him, does not lift the weight of an irreparable calamity that has befallen us. Nevertheless it seems imperative as well as a precious privilege that I, at his own request, may be permitted, through your Journal, to give expression to what lies in my own heart.

On the eleventh day of last July William Brewster breathed out his last earthly hour in his tree-embowered chamber in his home in Cambridge. During the last weeks of his final illness it was my great privilege to be many hours by his side, to listen to his words, to return the glances of his friendly and trusting eyes, and to minister to him with such little attentions as one who loves his dearest friend, whom he is about to lose out of his earthly life, eagerly desires to bestow.

Through all those swiftly passing days the voices of his beloved birds came through the open windows of his chamber, and spoke to him through the ever-receptive senses of his bird-loving soul. Almost to the last conscious hour the notes of the robins never failed to elicit a recognition or some sign of pleasure. Indeed, to the sympathetic few who hovered around him, even after he had ceased to be perceptive of the environment of the room and his friends, it seemed that there still remained open the door that led to his love for the birds, for he ever appeared to be conscious of their movements and their notes, and often his countenance would faintly lighten with the recognition of their calls after he had become too feeble to utter words.

Lover of birds and animals and flowers,— and equally lover of his kind,— a rare and singularly beautiful soul was William Brewster, and a priceless privilege it was to be permitted to count him as a friend. A man wonderfully modest for one endowed with so great a store of Nature's lore, and unusually shy and timid in the imparting of the seemingly inexhaustible knowledge he so richly possessed. A man who won all hearts that came under the spell of his voice and presence or upon whom his eyes rested with their message of friendly understanding. "Who is your friend with the kind eyes?" asked of me not infrequently by friends who saw us together, was no unworthy tribute to this man who had the power to make friends by virtue of some subtle innate quality that directly appealed to those fortunate enough to meet him.

William Brewster did not need to commune with his friends in words. His was the rare gift of intuitive communion, and to be in his presence was to those who knew him best the privilege of interpreting a common thought by means of that rarer sense which is far more subtle than anything the clumsy medium of words could convey. What was this potent charm possessed in such marvelous degree by this dead friend of ours? Why were we compelled to love him,— what drew us to him with a feeling of tenderness akin the love of woman,— why did we give our implicit trust as though it were a matter beyond question that we should uncover our hearts to this unassuming man? Was it not that William Brewster was one of those men whose innate honesty and sincerity of soul spoke for itself in every act, in every thought he uttered,— that his relations with his fellow men were of the simplest and most direct,— that he had no guile and no distrust,— but interpreted all others by the light of his own transparent soul and heart and imputed to others only that which was mirrored in his own nature?

His was a character beautifully free from every taint of coarseness. His heart and soul shone through eyes as pure as those of a child. His conversation dealt with things that were beautiful and his soul loved the beauty that is portrayed in Nature with a life-long and all-embracing passion. To be in his companionship was to be at once lifted away from all that had little worth and to dwell upon the beauty and wonder of things that endure. Whoever of his friends had the opportunity of seeing and hearing William Brewster

deal and talk with a woodsman, guide or any of the simpler folk in the humbler walks of life with whom he came in contact during the many years wherein he studied birds in their haunts, but felt the charm with which he made that man feel at ease and upon a level of common manhood. And indeed, this was not manner in the least,— it was but simple sincerity.

From all men did he feel that he could learn, all men did he respect, and with all men did he feel as man to man. It was instantly apparent that he was one who took for granted the common manhood between them and who therefor brought out from them only that which was fine and true. The mere mention that one was a friend of his was to open the way to their hearts, and the claim of his friendship anywhere was a title to respectful recognition. What could we more earnestly desire for ourselves than that our own names might be as touchingly inscribed upon the hearts of our fellows as this of our dead friend, who without knowing it, simply because of inherent human kindness, enveloped himself in an atmosphere of graciousness and good will!

As his old-time physician as well as friend, I had watched with growing solicitude a condition of gradual but increasing disability for a period of over two years. The insidious disease, as yet unconquered by Science, which brought his earthly life to a close, made the outlook increasingly hopeless. As he sought help from various sources he bore with wonderful docility and patience the failure to receive relief. He clung to every alleviation as to a buoy by which his courage might be upheld, until there came a day and an hour which can never be forgotten, when from lips that loved him came the answer to those gravely questioning eyes! He bore the message bravely, though he longed to live. Then to the one for so many years nearest his life, he tenderly spoke of happy years, leaving messages with her for dear and intimate friends, and affectionately thanked the faithful attendant who had ministered to his comfort. It will suffice to say that with a calm and simple resignation, with the dignity of soul that was his when in the midst of strength and the abundance of life, William Brewster accepted the inevitable, and his last days were mercifully veiled by unconsciousness as he drew near to the portal of the Great Unknown.

William Brewster had the Listening Soul! Of all things did he

receive testimony and to all things did he accord a hearing that was fair and just. He hastened to no conclusions and he was ever ready to modify his opinions in the light of farther evidence. His was a nature innately fair and truthful and whilst ever fearlessly uncompromising wherever principle was involved, personally he judged not at all! To be as broadly tolerant as this our loved and honored friend, to be as considerate and fair, as intrinsically friendly towards the opinion of all men, regardless of station, has been an ideal to us all since first we knew him.

O thou lover of all things true and good, upon what far heights today thy soul doth stand, we rest assured that one so fitted to be immortal,— has found his immortality!

Bethel, Me.

WILLIAM BREWSTER.

At a regular meeting of the Nuttall Ornithological Club held November 3, 1919, the following memorial of Mr. William Brewster was adopted by the Club for entrance in the Records, and the Secretary was instructed to communicate it to 'The Auk' for publication. It was prepared by Mr. E. B. White.

William Brewster was one of the founders of the Nuttall Ornithological Club and its President for over forty years, and when not absent from Cambridge, was found faithfully in the Chair at its meetings. His scientific attainments have made their own permanent record, but the Club wishes to record here the sense of the heavy loss it has sustained and of the intimate personal bereavement which the members suffer in the death of one who was held by them in such affectionate regard.

He presided with an easy control, with no trace of self-assertiveness, his poise rendering that unnecessary: perfect balance marked his character; he possessed vigor without asperity and sensibility without softness. Tolerant and just, he infused into the meetings