

ROBERT WESLEY MCBRIDE.

BARNES, OHIO,
JANUARY 25, 1842.

INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA.
MAY 15, 1926.

Robert Wesley McBride, who for nearly 40 years was my friend and neighbor, attained recognition as a soldier, attorney, naturalist, and man of the world. I wish to speak of him principally as a naturalist, as a friend, and as a man.

In public service Judge McBride was a member of the Indiana National Guard from 1879 to 1893, first as a Captain and later with the rank of Colonel. He was always prominent in the G. A. R. and at the time of his death was Judge Advocate General of the National G. A. R. He was one of the surviving members of the personal body-guard of President Lincoln and was author of an interesting book "Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln." He was also active in Masonic circles.



ROBERT WESLEY MCBRIDE
1842-1926

In official life he served as Judge of the 35th Judicial Circuit Court from 1882 to 1890. In 1890 he was appointed judge of the Supreme Court of Indiana, which office he held till 1893 when he retired to resume the private practice of law.

For a number of years after the close of the Civil War Judge McBride was in a seriously crippled condition and could get about only

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with the aid of both a cane and a crutch, but, in spite of this handicap, he had, prior to 1876, done considerable exploring among the earth-works, mounds and fortifications left by the mound builders, in the northeastern counties of Indiana. Anthropology was thus the first line he took up seriously. This soon was followed by Paleontology and Geology, insofar as they bore any relation to the study and evolution of man. He never "dabbled" in anything. When he undertook the study of any particular line, he stuck to it until he could qualify as an expert, but, as all the many forms of natural life are so closely correlated, he readily understood that a profound knowledge of "Natural History" in general was necessary. This knowledge he proceeded to acquire by taking up, successively, Entomology, Ornithology, Mammalogy, Botany and Organic Chemistry. On each subject he spent in time probably more years than are required for a college education. He never really dropped any subject but, when satisfied with his proficiency in that particular branch, would tackle the next one as his "major subject", keeping up the others more as side lines.

He became an accomplished taxidermist and mounted hundreds of native birds. Most of his early collecting and studying was done in the counties of Dekalb, Steuben, LaGrange and Elkhart, with occasional trips to the far West, to Michigan, Arkansas and, of late years, to Florida.

When, in December, 1885, the Indiana Academy of Science was founded, R. W. McBride, then living at Elkhart, became a charter member, and in 1916 was made a fellow. As long as he was physically able he made it a point to attend the meetings of the Academy each year.

In 1886 he and others founded the Indiana Audubon Society, of which he became the first president. The Society holds annual meetings at some point in the State, and these meetings he also attended on every possible occasion.

After his removal to Indianapolis Judge McBride gave more attention to the study and protection of birds and wild flowers than to some of the other branches of natural history. Before the Nature Study Club was founded by Mr. Woollen, he and I took many short outings together, to points adjacent to Indianapolis, in search of insects and shells and to study the wild flowers where they grew and the birds in their chosen haunts. On these outings we were sometimes accompanied by his three grandsons—now men—who then were keen of eye and full of joy and enthusiasm, as are all boys of their age. But their eyes were no keener and their joys no greater than those of their grandsire when an interesting "bug" or shell was brought to light or a rare bird or plant was noted. He would not allow them to pull the wild flowers or harm a snake or other reptile. On these trips and on others he often took a trowel and unearthed and brought home rare plants which he transplanted in the spacious back yard of his Park Avenue home. There he had many wild flowers growing, a number of which, owing to the greed and thoughtlessness of many joy-riders of today, are now almost or wholly extinct within the bounds of the State.

After the founding of the Nature Study Club, and while its members were comparatively few and its outings confined to the vicinity

of Indianapolis, Judge McBride, despite his years and lameness, was often an enthusiastic member of the little band that tramped the fields and woods in search of first-hand knowledge. It was there that his powers of observation and his knowledge of the many forms of life happened upon, were especially notable; there that the title of "naturalist" was of him shown to be apt and worthily bestowed.

What is a naturalist? On whom should that title be rightfully bestowed? That question can most easily be answered by naming some of the naturalists of the past and present. Linnaeus, Darwin, Huxley, Agassiz, Say, Nuttall, Rafinesque, Audubon, Thoreau, Leconte, Baird, Cope and Jordan—they were all great naturalists of the world at large. In a minor degree, but still naturalists withal may be mentioned Evermann, Brayton, Coulter, Scoville, Butler, Cox, Hubbard, Duden, Hessler, Woollen, Wynn and McBride of our own Indiana. They were and are men who knew not fossils alone, not fishes alone, not birds alone, not plants alone, but who had or have a broad knowledge of the varied forms of life, both past and present, which are or have been parasitic on the crust of good old Mother Earth. They knew the close relationship and interdependence existing among all animate and inanimate things. They realized that this world—this universe of ours—is not composed of single isolated objects and forces but that each object, each force is but a necessary part of one grand and perfect whole.

Judge McBride was a man who, knowing these things, could impart in simple and easily understood language, his thoughts and his knowledge unto others. He was a man who could

"Go to the God of the wood
To fetch his word to men."

Judge McBride was ever a busy man. He, as do most naturalists, came in time to realize that our years, our time, is our only true possession here on earth. We bring nothing with us when we arrive. We can take nothing with us when we depart. In the interval between the days of our coming and our going we therefore, if a measure of success is to be ours, both hope and toil—for

"Joy's soul lies in the doing,
And the rapture of pursuing is the prize."

Three great evil spirits are abroad in this land today—not only abroad but in many places have seemingly gained control. These are the spirit of intolerance, the lust for wealth and the desecration of nature's beauty spots, in order to satisfy that lust. Judge McBride was outspoken against all of these. He was a man of tolerance, rightfully believing that the only true measure of a man is to be judged by his moral character, his willingness to at all times abide by the Golden Rule and the laws of his country, and his willingness and ability to do what he can, whenever he can, to advance the moral and material prosperity of mankind. A man's creed—no other man should question—the color of his skin no man can govern. Hence, here in America—the "land of the free"—Jew and Gentile, Catholic and Protestant, Negro and Jap—should stand equal before the law and in the eyes of his fellow men—and all were the friends of R. W. McBride.

The lust for great wealth we see on every hand, and the Judge has often spoken with me against it. No true naturalist was ever an incessant seeker after a fortune. Of a thousand men, one looks up into the sky and wonders why it is there—looks out into space and ponders o'er the porch lights of other sun-ruled systems—treads the earth and thinks of her as a moving sphere—the others look down upon her streets and pathways—seeking gold. Judge McBride was the thousandth man. Because a few of his friends belonging to the other horde became in time plutocrats, he did not regard them as worthy of great deference. He sought not great wealth nor fawned upon those who possessed it. He doffed his hat to no man-made, so-called statesman or ruler, to no millionaire because he was such, to no autocrat whose only claim to greatness was that he was a descendant of some magnate of long ago—but only to the flag of his country, to death in its majesty and to those who by their accomplished deeds had proven that to them belongs rightfully the privilege of receiving the deference of their fellow men.

Against the desecration of Nature, either by the thoughtless who kill birds and reptiles for the mere sport of killing, or destroy the wild flowers to satisfy a moment's desire of possession, Judge McBride was ever outspoken. More so was he against those who, in a larger degree, rape ruthlessly the beauty spots of Nature in order to extend the bounds of our so-called civilization and at the same time satisfy their lust for wealth.

I have thus treated briefly the outstanding traits of Robert W. McBride, as a naturalist, a friend and a man. A genial, upright, kindly, noble man has gone. Long will his memory last among those who, like myself, enjoyed the precious privilege of his friendship.

W. S. BLATCHLEY,
Indianapolis.