**birds of killingworth.**

**by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow .  
Age Rating 8 plus.**

**It was spring, and the little town of Killingworth told of the joy of living again. Every little rivulet had broken from its frozen chain, which had held it fast during the long winter, and was rushing on, rejoicing at its freedom. The purple buds, holding wonderful secrets of things to come, were bursting forth from every tree and bush, while from the topmost boughs the birds called and sang to their mates: "Oh! be happy, be happy, for spring has come!" There were all the messengers of spring--the robin, the oriole, and the bluebird--filling the orchard with their glad melody. The little sparrow chirped in glee for the very joy of living, and the hungry crows, in great crowds, called loudly the tidings of spring. But not long could they stop to sing, for the homes must be made, and soon from every tree and bush could be seen these dainty, downy nests, and in every nest the eggs, and in every egg a wonderful secret about which all the happy birds twittered and sang together.**

**The farmers, as they plowed their fields and made their gardens that spring, heard these tree-top concerts, and saw the multitude playing and working about them, and they shook their heads and said: "Never before have we had so many birds in Killingworth. We must surely do something, or they will eat up half of our crops, and take the grain and fruits that should go to feed our own children." Then it was decided to have a meeting. All in the town were free to come, and here they were to decide what was to be done with the troublesome birds. The meeting was held in the new town hall, and to it came all the great men of the town, and from far and near the farmers gathered. The great hall was crowded. The doors and windows were open, and through them came a beautiful flood of bird music, but the sturdy farmers and great men shook their heads as they heard it. And then they told how the birds were eating the grains and spoiling the fruit, and every one said the birds must go. There seemed to be not a single friend to the singers outside, until one man arose--the teacher in the town, much loved by the children, and himself loving everything that God had made. He looked sadly on the men around him, and then he said: "My friends, can you drive away these birds that God has made and sent to us, for a few handfuls of grain and a little fruit? Will you lose all this music that you hear outside? Think of the woods and orchard without the birds, and of the empty nests you will see. You say the birds are robbing you; but instead they are your greatest helpers. With their bright little eyes they see the little bugs and worms which destroy the fruit. Think who has made them. Who has taught them the songs and the secret of building their nests. You will be sorry when they are gone and will wish them back."**

**But still the farmers shook their heads and said: "The birds must go." So the birds of Killingworth were driven away, until not a single note was heard, and only empty nests were left. The little children of the town were hoping each day to see their friends again, and a strange stillness and loneliness seemed to fill the little town, for the music in the air had ceased. The summer came, and never before had it been so hot. The little insects and worms which the little birds had always driven away covered every tree and bush, eating the leaves until nothing was left but the bare twigs. The streets were hot and shadeless. In the orchard the fruit dropped, scorched and dried by the sun. When the grains were gathered one-half of the crop had been destroyed by the insects. Now the old farmers said among themselves: "We have made a great mistake. We need the birds."**

**One day in the early spring a strange sight was seen in the little town of Killingworth. A great wagon covered with green branches was driven down the main street, and among the branches were huge cages, and the cages were filled with birds. Oh! they were all there--the robin, the bluebird, the lark and the oriole--birds of every color and kind. When the great wagon reached the town hall it stopped. The cages were taken down from the branches of green, and little children, with eager hands and happy eyes, threw open the doors. Out came the birds and away they flew to field and orchard and wood, singing again and again: "Oh! we are glad to be here! We are glad to be here!" The little children sang, too, and the gray-haired farmers said: "The birds must always stay in Killingworth."**

**the end**