

THE AUK:

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF

ORNITHOLOGY.

VOL. XLV.

JANUARY, 1928.

No. 1.

IN MEMORIAM: LOUIS AGASSIZ FUERTES
1874-1927.

BY FRANK M. CHAPMAN.¹

(*Plate I*)

LOUIS FUERTES became an Associate Member of the American Ornithologists' Union in 1891, when he was seventeen years old. He was made a Member in 1901, and his preeminence as a painter of birds was recognized by his election to Fellowship in 1912. He attended his first A. O. U. Congress in 1896 at Cambridge. During the remainder of his life he was absent from these annual reunions on only five occasions; and on four of these his absence was unavoidable. His name did not often appear on the program, but I am certain of your unanimous approval when I say that no other member of the Union contributed so much to the success of its meetings. His remarks on the papers presented by others, sometimes accompanied by rapid blackboard sketches, were original, pertinent and illuminating; his rendering of birds' songs, seemed to bring the birds themselves into the lecture hall. The drawing he usually contributed to our dinner card struck the keynote for an evening of good fellowship; while his after dinner addresses, with their combined humor and sentiment, increased our affection for the speaker and our feeling of comradeship with each other. And at all times, merely by the magic of his presence,

¹ Read before the Forty-fifth Meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union, at Washington, D. C., November 15, 1927.



Louis Aguirre Puertas.

he diffused a sense of joyous well-being and good cheer; a reflection of his own fine, sweet nature.

Louis Agassiz Fuertes, so named because of his father's admiration for Louis Agassiz, was born at Ithaca, N. Y., February 7, 1874. He lost his life in a grade-crossing accident at Potter's Crossing, near Unadilla, N. Y., on August 22, 1927. His father, Estevan Antonio Fuertes, was born in San Juan, Porto Rico, a descendant of a prominent Spanish family. He was connected with Cornell University from 1873 to the day of his death in 1903, at which time he was director and dean of the school of engineering. His mother, Mary Stone Perry Fuertes, was born in Troy, New York, of English and Dutch ancestry. She is still living, together with his two brothers, James H. and Estevan A. Fuertes, and two sisters, Mrs. Sarah Fuertes Hitchcock and Miss Katherine Fuertes.

Fuertes lived all his life in the town of his birth and here, in 1904, he married Margaret F. Sumner, also of Ithaca, by whom, with two children, Louis Sumner and Mary, he is survived.

INHERENT TRAITS.

Love of birds as "the most eloquent expression of nature's beauty, joy and freedom," is the gift of every one who hears the call of the outdoor world. But that instinctive, inexplicable passion for birds which arouses an uncontrollable desire to know them intimately in their haunts and to make them part of our lives, and which overcomes every obstacle until in a measure, at least, this longing is gratified, is the heritage of the elect; and few have been more richly endowed than Louis Fuertes.

No known ancestor possessed those traits which marked him the born ornithologist; no brother or sister has exhibited them; no environmental influence accounts for them. We are certain only that Louis Fuertes showed an interest in birds at too early an age to leave any doubt of its innate spontaneity.

His mother's earliest recollection of her son's especial fondness for birds relates to the period when, as a very little boy, he violently resented the action of his playmates who intentionally annoyed him by making glaringly false associations of the parts of a set of 'sliced birds,' his favorite possession.

Even before he evinced a marked interest in birds he began to use a pencil, drawing at first domestic animals, but at the age of eight or nine inherent taste and talent had combined and his efforts to draw were focussed chiefly on birds. His sister Katherine writes that he was now "pretty expert with a sling-shot and long before he had learned to preserve birds' skins he would carry around birds he had shot until the carcasses or uncured skins had to be consigned to the kitchen stove. First he would cut off their wings and handle them with the utmost loving fingers arranging the webs of every feather in perfection."

James Fuertes recalls receiving a letter from his brother, Louis, about 1884, containing a "pretty good" picture of a Snowy Owl, and states that for two or three years he had then been making drawings of birds which had attracted attention.

Apparently from neither artist nor ornithologist did the boy receive assistance or encouragement. Stimulated only by his inherent desires, guided only by his developing talents, he continued to advance, and a brief, pencilled autobiographical sketch written in 1910 and recently found in his studio shows that at the age of fourteen he had definitely become a painter of birds. It reads: "About 1888, when 14 years old, L. A. F. made his first essay at painting a bird from the flesh in his boyhood's home at Ithaca, N. Y. It was a male Red Crossbill—the first that he had ever seen, and the strange coppery brown of its plumage, its unbelievably queer bill, its sturdy little figure all claimed something that had never before been fully awakened. So, to fasten these peculiar qualities in his mind, where they could be retained, he followed the method that first suggested itself, and which he has followed ever since—he drew and painted it to the best of his power. It was a clumsy thing, crudely painted, awkwardly drawn standing on one foot on a drab branch of impossible anatomy—but—it was a beginning. And certainly it was a wise one, for it resulted in the production of a life's interest for the boy, which could not be diverted."

It is clear, then, that Louis Fuertes was born both a bird-lover and an artist, and it was this rare combination that made him preeminent in his field. But his special qualifications for the study of bird-life did not end here. To a keen eye, which recorded deep

and indelible mental images of things seen, he added a sensitive, discriminating ear which received and retained equally accurate impressions of things heard. To the talent to reproduce birds' forms was added the gift to reproduce their notes, often with such accuracy that the birds themselves were deceived by his rendering of their songs. Fuertes was further endowed with a power and originality of expression which permitted him to describe graphically and eloquently the feelings aroused by the appearance, voice and habits of birds. At birth, therefore, he was potentially an Ornithologist, Artist, Musician and Writer. Was anyone ever more fully equipped to present to mankind the distinctive characteristics of birds?

Their forms, their songs, their rhythmic flight;
Their manners, for the heart's delight.

TRAINING.

When did this rarely endowed boy first come in contact with influences which directed his desires and developed his talents?

There is no record that his school life at Ithaca brought him either teachers or associates who shared his special tastes. Nevertheless both the ornithologist and artist in him continued to grow with his growth. On February 9, 1890, Louis' mother wrote to her eldest son James:

"Louis was sixteen years old day before yesterday and he is tall and well and filling out nicely. His bird drawings are truly beautiful. He shoots rare birds *only*. He never kills them just for fun. About two weeks ago he sent the Smithsonian a rare specimen (the farthest east it has ever been shot) and received a comment in reply requesting further correspondence and information. He feels quite set up about it."

Probably this correspondence, which I have not seen, marked the young bird student's first contact with ornithologists. Prof. Liberty H. Bailey, the distinguished botanist, who joined Cornell's faculty in 1889, recalls the boy's pleasure in the receipt of this letter from Washington. Professor Fuertes had already shown him some of his son's work and, amazed at its excellence, Professor Bailey urged that full opportunity be given for its development.

At this time Louis was also receiving encouragement and assist-

ance from Prof. Burt G. Wilder, Cornell's eminent zoologist, for on June 8, 1891, his mother writes:

"Louis is getting to be quite a celebrity. The Christian Association had his drawings of birds on exhibition the other night. At present he is showing them to Dr. Wilder, who asked him to make some plates of animals for a collection in the museum. Louis feels important."

A quotation from a letter dated July 12, 1891, shows that his paint-box formed part of his outfit on a camping trip with boys who were doubtless out only "for fun" and at the same time Louis' characteristic ability to combine fun with his art. His mother again writes to her son James:

"We did not succeed in bribing Louis to give up his camping project. On the contrary he went in spite of everything and for a day or two I felt very anxious about him. Thursday your father and Dr. Hitchcock went down to Union Springs and spent two or three hours with the boys, and found them doing no particular mischief, but surprised Louis painting the face of a boy who was asleep wholly unconscious of the savage he was becoming under Louis' artistic touch."

The first pronounced change in Fuertes' life came in June, 1892, when he accompanied his parents to Europe. The summer was passed in Paris where he frequently visited the Jardin des Plantes to sketch birds and animals, and he also drew from figures in the museums. In September of that year he was placed in the Institute of Keller, a preparatory school in Zurich, Switzerland, where he remained until the following year.

Numerous drawings of European birds found in his studio at Ithaca show that change of surroundings did not divert him from his favorite pursuit. His technique at this period is so unlike that which he subsequently employed that few would recognize his work. The birds were outlined in pen and ink, colored, and, subsequently, more or less filled in with pen and ink the result resembling a colored line engraving.

His drawings, however, were obviously based on close observation and they show the character and sure, strong draughtsmanship which so distinguished his art. This method of treatment was apparently employed in all his colored drawings from about 1890 until the end of 1894. In a number of instances the attitudes

presented are strongly suggestive of the active, somewhat strained poses so often employed by Audubon.¹

Returning to America in 1893, Fuertes entered Cornell. For the first two years he selected courses designed to fit him for the profession of architecture, but at the end of this time he took subjects in which he was more interested. Like many another naturalist before him, he had no 'head for figures' and his brother James, who was then in Ithaca assisting his father in preparing plans for the great engineering problem of the sanitation of the port of Santos, Brazil, writes that it was a hopeless task to try to coach Louis in algebra and geometry "for mathematics had such a soothing effect on him that he would be asleep after about five minutes of concentration."

There was no course in ornithology in Cornell in those days; no means of developing Fuertes' dominant interests. His body might be in the lecture hall when his mind was with the birds of the campus. It is related that on one occasion, during a lecture, he climbed from the class-room window attracted by a strange note in the trees without. His apology was accepted by a sympathetic professor, whose surprise would have been even greater if he had known that his absent minded student would himself be a professor at Cornell some day with campus birds for his subject.

It was eminently characteristic of Fuertes that his increasing absorption in birds should in no way tend to isolate him from his class-mates. Highly imbued with college spirit, he took an active part in college life. His musical gifts naturally led to membership in the Glee Club, of which for two years he was the leader. Singularly enough it was his affiliation with this organization, more than

¹ Since this was written Prof. Francis H. Herrick writes me that in a letter received by him from Fuertes, dated February 7, 1916, there occurs the following very interesting passage:

"We have here in the town library a magnificent set bound in full morocco of the first great edition [of *The Birds of America*] purchased by Mr. Cornell about 1860 as a nucleus for the town library which he founded long before the University idea crystallized. These wonderful books were my greatest delight as a child, and for very many years were the only works on American birds of which I had any knowledge. It would be hard to estimate their effect upon me, but I am very sure that they were the most potent influence that was ever exerted upon my youthful longings to do justice to the singular beauty of birds."

In view of this statement it is evident that Audubon preceded Coues as Fuertes mentor.

any other college connection, that promoted his development as an ornithological artist.

The mid-year tour of the Glee Club for 1894 included Washington, where, a fellow-member of the club informed Fuertes, he had an uncle named Elliott Coues who was interested in birds. To the question would he like to meet him, Fuertes replied that there was no one in the world whom he would rather meet. Doubtless there was no one in the world who could have been of greater service to him. It would be impossible to overestimate the stimulating effect that Coues' magnetic personality must have had on Fuertes' responsive, appreciative nature. Nor can we value too highly the influence which Coues exerted in developing Fuertes' talents and in shaping his career.

At once Coues realized the young artist's potentialities, and he spared neither advice, instruction, nor material assistance to help him perfect his art and make it a means of earning a livelihood. During the remaining five years of Coues' life master and pupil were closely associated and the memory of this period was Fuertes' most cherished recollection. He never spoke of it without deep feeling.

Continuing his autobiographical memoranda from 1888 when, as quoted above, he described his first drawing from a specimen, Fuertes records his contact with Coues as follows: "For the ten years that came next, the study of birds and nature had to be carried on as opportunity came, along with regular schooling, and the only result was a large series of raw drawings of native birds—occasionally flowers, snakes or squirrels—but (and here is an important thing) every one a study—as good as he could make it, from an actual specimen. It was not until 1894 that any one saw them, when by a lucky chance they came under the notice of Elliot Coues, that greatest of Am. Orn. who never lost a chance to help a youngster who was willing to work. Through him the boy's work was shown to other bird men, and through his warm encouragement F. was urged to attempt the somewhat appalling task of creating a demand for his unknown goods."

A package of letters from Coues, found in Fuertes' studio carefully arranged by dates and tied firmly together, gives silent testimony to the part this correspondence played in his life. Some day

these letters should be published. I have selected for use here only those which relate to the formative period of Fuertes' professional life. The first, dated Dec. 31, 1894, was written soon after Fuertes, on the Glee Club trip, had called on Coues and shown him his paintings. It is addressed to Louis Agassiz Fuertes [sic], and reads:

DEAR MR. FUERTAS:

I will ask you to hand the enclosed letter to your father, whose full name and address I do not know.

Two of Audubon's granddaughters have been spending the afternoon here, and were very much pleased with your paintings.

I shall be glad to look over the rest of them, which you said you would send.

With regards,

Very truly yours,

(Signed) ELLIOTT COUES.

The letter to Fuertes' father is missing, but it is safe to say that it presented his son and his son's future in a new light.

It will be remembered that Coues himself was no mean draughtsman, and that he had had exceptional experience in handling illustrations of birds. He was, therefore, well qualified to criticize Fuertes' work constructively and the result of this criticism was at once markedly apparent in Fuertes' methods. This is referred to in a letter written June 12, 1895, as Fuertes was sailing with the Cornell Glee Club for England. Coues wrote:

DEAR MR. FUERTES:—

The paintings are safely to hand, and much admired. Your improvement in the technique is marked, and I am more than ever hopeful that I may be able to bring you out a little later.

Have a good time abroad, but always keep your eyes open for anything in the way of bird art and artists, and let me hear from you again.

With regards,

Very truly your friend,

(Signed) ELLIOTT COUES.

Evidently on returning from England Fuertes at once resumed his correspondence with Coues, who, on October 14, 1895, wrote him from Sylvan Lake, South Dakota as follows:

DEAR MR. FUERTES:—

I am pleased to hear from you, by your letter of Sept. 25, which has just reached me in this remote place. I leave for home at once.

If your parents are willing and your college duties permit, you had better arrange to attend the coming Congress of the American Ornithologists' Union in Washington, the latter part of next month. I am thinking of bringing your work to the notice of the Union, by exhibiting some of your best paintings, and making some remarks upon them. This can do no harm, and may do some good, and if I carry out my intention, I should like to have your presence, and exhibit *you* at the same time. I am not yet sure that I see my way to publish any of your work, but if you can secure public recognition from the ornithologists, and favorable consideration of what you already have accomplished, it may be made one means to the desired end.

With regards, which please extend to your parents,

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) ELLIOTT COUES.

We can readily imagine the disappointment with which Fuertes denied himself the privilege of a second meeting with Coues, of attending his first A. O. U. Congress, and of observing for himself the reception his drawings were accorded. But his *début* was made by proxy, and in his absence he was introduced to the ornithological world by medium of his works which were exhibited, with comments, by his sponsor Dr. Coues.

Doubtless realizing Fuertes' eagerness to know how his paintings had been received, Coues promptly reported this epoch-making event in the appended letter, dated November 14, 1895, the closing day of the session:

DEAR MR. FUERTES:—

According to my promise I brought your name prominently before the American Ornithologists' Union by exhibiting about fifty of your best paintings and talking about them. You would have felt proud and pleased if you had been present to see how well they were received, and how highly they were praised by many besides myself. I hope you are persevering under competent instruction in certain points of technique, and that in the end the result will be that I can bring out for you a very handsome volume of colored plates, and thus secure for you a permanent reputation.

Sincerely your friend,

(Signed) ELLIOTT COUES.

It must be remembered that Fuertes was still in college and trying to stay there, an occupation that left small time for the pursuit of his bird studies. Inevitably, however, they claimed an ever increasing share of his attention and thought. Dr. Coues

continued to advise and encourage him and, early in the autumn of 1896, his letters became more definitely instructive as he secured for Fuertes his first important commission. On October 16, Coues wrote from Washington:

DEAR MR. FUERTES:—

I suppose you have received your notification of the next Ornithological Congress, at Cambridge, Nov. 9–12. Under existing circumstances this is an event of some importance to your affairs, and you should not fail to present yourself. Let *nothing* interfere with this. Better also bring with you about 50 of the best things you have in your portfolio, to show, and in all ways appear in your new role of an ornithological artist, whose services have been secured by one of the great publishing houses of this country and England.

Personally, I want to see you, and talk over the matter we have in hand. I suppose you will also meet Mrs. Wright there.

Cordially yours,

(Signed) ELLIOTT COUES.

We can well imagine that Coues' command added to his own desire to attend an A. O. U. meeting made the duties of classroom seem comparatively insignificant and in consequence Fuertes answered his first A. O. U. roll-call at Cambridge in November, 1896.

The Secretary's report of this meeting records Fuertes appearance in the following words: "Mr. Louis Agassiz Fuertes exhibited and explained a collection of his own unpublished drawings of birds, made from life."¹

Of perhaps even greater importance than the formal presentation of his work were the occasions when he showed his drawings to individuals and small groups who thereby had not only an opportunity to examine them closely but to meet their author. And surely no one who had this privilege ever forgot the impression made by both.

The abundance and high character of the illustrations in the bird books of today make it difficult for us to realize the sensation created by the advent of Louis Fuertes. Most of the drawings that he brought with him to the Cambridge meeting subsequently appeared in Dr. Coues' and Mrs. Wright's 'Citizen Bird,' and a comparison of the illustrations in this book with those of Mrs.

¹ The Auk, XIV, 1897, p. 84.

Wright's 'Bird-Craft' published only two years earlier, affords convincing proof of what, at a stroke, Fuertes did for ornithological art. At this time Ernest Seton was the only bird artist whose work could be compared with that of Fuertes and his early abandonment of the field left it to the younger man. Coues was also present at this meeting and with complacent, almost parental pride, viewed the triumph of his protégé. Returning to Washington he wrote him on November 21, as follows:

DEAR MR. FUERTES:—

I think you have every reason to be gratified by recent events, and am sure you had a good time in Cambridge and N. Y. Don't let this success turn your head, but just go ahead and work hard, remembering that this is but the beginning of your career, in which final success can only be achieved in the good old fashioned way of hard work, and plenty of it, to the very best of your ability. I suppose no young man ever had a better opening; it remains with yourself to fill it, and prove that I have not said too much about you.

You did not say whether you had seen the article which appeared in the N. Y. Nation of Nov. 12 regarding your work.

As I think I told you in N. Y., I will accept all the pictures you showed us, with the two exceptions of the nuthatch and the hummingbird, which I should like to have you do over again. Put the nuthatch in the most characteristic attitude, head downward on a perpendicular tree trunk, with a full rounded breast, and bill pointing horizontally out to right or left. Take the frame work away from the hummingbirds, set the ♀ better on the nest, and draw the bills thinner.

And in general, *keep your accessories down*. What we want is the *bird*, with least possible scenery, stage setting, framework or background of any description. You will remember that even in the cases of those very fine pictures of the summer warbler and the yellow-rump, the *foliage* about them somewhat interfered with the effect. Be always careful about this.

I have written to Mr. Brett that he may expect to receive from you at once, all but two of the pictures you showed him. Better put them in his hands at once, with the bill for the work, of whatever price has been agreed upon between you.

I handed Mr. Chapman the list of your desiderata, and he promised to send you the specimens without delay.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) ELLIOTT COUES.

The following March Coues published an estimate of Fuertes' art in 'The Osprey' in which he said:

"My examination of a great many of his designs, both in black and white

and in natural colors, makes me think Mr. Fuertes the most promising young artist of birds now living, and one whose work already places him in the very first rank. He is rapidly mastering the technique of his art—in other words, his talent is overtaking his genius—and has already overcome certain crudities which were obvious in his earliest efforts. I say deliberately, with a full sense of my words, that there is now no one who can draw and paint birds so well as Mr. Fuertes, and I do not forget Audubon himself when I add that America has not before produced an ornithological artist of equal possibilities.”

To Fuertes, however, he was giving sound advice combined with praise where it was due and unsparing criticism where it was called for, as it is evident in this letter from Washington, written shortly before the ‘Osprey’ article appeared, dated Feb. 6, 1897:

DEAR MR. FUERTES:—

I have your 16 new drawings. They are beauties indeed. You seem to improve with each new effort. You are now mastering the technique, and getting such a grasp on your art that I think by the time you have done the present lot there may be no one now living, except perhaps Wolf, who will be able to draw birds as well as you do. The gem of this lot, to my eye, is the Night Hawk and moth—a bold conception, artistically executed. The Whippoorwill is very fine, and so are both the hawks.

Don't get your head turned or swelled, go steady now, patiently, laboriously, faithfully, with the most scrupulous care for precision in every minute detail—this is talent; but at the same time give your genius its own scope and free play, in conceiving attitudes, actions, and accessories; yet, keep the accessories wholly subservient to the main figure—the bird.

I heartily approve this lot, with no criticism except in one case. You must do the Turnstone over again. It is good, but not up to your present mark; for you have relapsed into your early crudeness about the belly and legs. I noticed in your early drawings of the water birds that you had not learned to handle these parts. Now you have got the Plover on its legs just right, and you must remodel the Turnstone to make it stand as the Plover does. At present the Turnstone has got its legs pulled out about an inch too far. It would pass muster with ordinary drawings, but is not up to your own mark, and you must either fit it with a new pair of legs, or draw another altogether. You see how solicitous I am that nothing whatever shall appear in these drawings to detract from your highest standard of excellence.

I return the drawings, and have written to Mr. Brett about them.

You may like to see the enclosed, which corroborates your remarkable picture of the Chimney Swift.

Very truly yours,

(Signed) ELLIOTT COUES.

As the time for Fuertes' graduation approached the question of his future became increasingly definite. While proud of his son's gifts Professor Fuertes did not see how they could be made to yield a livelihood and the opening sentence of the following letter, dated March 29, 1897, from Dr. Coues to Louis' mother induces the belief that she had submitted the whole question to him:

MY DEAR MRS. FUERTES:—

I am naturally much pleased to receive your letter. We "understand."

I fully believe Louis is too sensible and honest a character to be spoiled by what has been said, or I would have refrained from giving him in public even his just dues. His letter to me today contains some expressions that I like, regarding his absorbing interest in his work, which he says is the last thing he thinks of at night, etc. That is what I should expect, if he is on the right track, and there seems to be no danger of turning his head while it is so full of what he wants and intends to do. Then there is a naiveté about his apology for not thanking me more properly—he has been too busy, he says, with "a mixture of examinations, laboratory reports, and bird-painting." That is delightful!

I am sure that real genius can never be stayed or thwarted—the most we can do is to guide it a little, in its modes of expression. This I have tried to do in the present case. I saw his *possibilities*, two years ago, when he had not then drawn a single picture quite fit to print, and undertook to discipline him into the necessary technique. The result thus far is fully up to my expectations—yet I regard it as only a beginning.

If the present series of 111 pictures turn out as I expect, I can probably secure him a contract worth several thousand dollars cash. Both fame and fortune seem to be within his grasp, if I can guide him along the way now opened. I have had the handling of a good many boys who wanted to do this or that in science, but had no means, and I have uniformly told them that the *first* thing was to secure means of livelihood, which they could not hope for in science at the outset; and to come to me again, in the matter of ornithology, *when* they had become self-supporting in some "practical" trade, business or other occupation. With Louis it is different. If things turn out as I expect, the thousand dollars or so he will put in his pocket for this work is very little in comparison with what he will be able to earn soon. He should be independent of the world from the start; if his work goes on as it should, he could command more than a *fair* price for the productions of his pencil and brush. I have sometimes fancied his father was not altogether pleased, or even satisfied, and imagined he had other plans for his son's future. But if Louis' gifts be what I believe them, he will never make anything of himself, except along the lines of their exercise and development—never attain to more than "respectable mediocrity" (which for me means dead failure) in any other direction. I weighed my words in the Osprey, in saying that this country has not

before seen Louis' equal in the *possibilities* of zoological art (I did not say actualities, as yet; good as his pictures already are, I regard them as indicative only of what he may attain to, if he keeps on as he has begun).

I hope he is not getting hurried or worried about his present press of work. It is urgent, to be sure, as we are printing the text of the book rapidly, and shall be done before he gets all his pictures made to go with it. But I wish you would see that he does not over work. Far better let the work wait a little, than have a single picture in it that shows signs of haste or carelessness. Every one should be as good as he can possibly make it, and he must take his own time.

As soon as he has finished with this contract, and graduated from college, I hope he will be able to take a long rest, go off in the woods, and get fresh inspiration from contact with nature. Do you know, I can see a difference between the pictures he makes of birds he knows alive, and those he has only dead specimens of to work from? I should like to have him turned loose for the summer, with his field glasses, pencils and sketch book. There is nothing like it, for the ends we have in view.

I should like to hear from you further, and probably also Mr. Fuertes may wish to write, as the probable shaping of a gifted young man's career is of course of the utmost importance.

Mrs. Coues thanks you for your kind message, and joins me in cordial regards.

Very sincerely yours,

(Signed) ELLIOTT COUES.

It is probable that this letter was the deciding vote in favor of Fuertes' becoming a professional painter of birds. We can imagine how, with his ardent enthusiasm raised to fever heat by Coues' praise and the urgent demand for his drawings, he now looked eagerly forward to his graduation and subsequent freedom to devote himself wholly to his calling. We wonder, indeed, how he found time and thought for his college duties or to prepare the thesis on the Coloration of Birds which he presented for his bachelor's degree.

In July, 1897, the month following his graduation, Fuertes placed himself under the guidance of the eminent artist, Abbott H. Thayer, an event second in importance only to his association with Elliott Coues.

Fuertes had first come to Thayer's attention at the Cambridge meeting of the A. O. U. Not, as might be supposed, through his drawings, but through his apt and appreciative comments on the demonstration which Thayer presented there of his recently an-

nounced laws underlying protective coloration in animals. So great, indeed, was Thayer's absorption in his own researches that he did not see any of Fuertes work until the following year, when after meeting him (possibly in Scarborough, New York) he wrote, on a piece of brown wrapping paper the following letter:

My dear Fuertes (Here you begin to experience my characteristic railroad epistles) I am on my way up to Dublin. I omitted to say (what I suppose is, however, obvious) that of course the pleasure of teaching you would be the only form of pay that I could accept.

You will be amazed, at the end of even a few months of pure abstract exercise of your sight-power, to see how much nearer you can come to the delicate charm of a bird. No, it can't be *promised* that a few eye-opening months may not at first simply unnerve you by showing you the rocks under your keel—but this I know, that the young man who did those colored studies from live birds has too fine a gift to have a right to hold back from training. It is just as with a wing-shot. He may be very gifted in shooting without putting the gun to his shoulder, but he can't develop that method to so high a score as the man who aims *may* develop *his*. One must freely turn his back on knacks and let his full powers be brought to bear. In this case the powers are those of sight, and every art student goes on to realize that at first this sense was only general. The best thing for you would be to draw from some beautiful antique marbles—*i. e.* casts, awhile.

I send you this at the risk of scaring you away with so much ardor and talk. I am bird-crazy, and that's the truth.

Yours very sincerely,

(Signed) ABBOTT H. THAYER.

Gerald got a beautiful Mourning Ground Warbler again yesterday.
On the cars—Tuesday P.M. May 11 [1897].

The letters which followed led to Fuertes joining Thayer at his summer home in Dublin, N. H. This providential affiliation is thus recorded in Fuertes' autobiographical sketch:

"As unexpectedly and as providentially as was the aid and advice of Coues in the material and scientific side of the work, came almost simultaneously an invaluable opportunity to study the much harder and even more exacting work of painting. Mr. Abbott H. Thayer, one of America's greatest painters, who is also a most keen and efficient naturalist—the one person in the world best able to help and criticize—volunteered his help, and a year of priceless study with him was the outcome."

EXPEDITIONS.

Fuertes adds that he "now had the help of the two most effective friends he could have found and that it devolved upon him to follow up his matchless advantages. First, it was necessary to enlarge his experience, hitherto limited to the birds of New York State." Second, "it was essential to start a working collection both of skins of birds and of careful notes and studies of such characters as were not easy to preserve."

Ever a welcome member of an expedition Fuertes never lacked for opportunity to extend his field experiences. Eventually they were equalled by those of few ornithologists, and were incomparably wider than those of any other bird artist.

In the spring of 1898, with Abbott Thayer and his son Gerald, he went to Florida. There they made their headquarters at the then famous resort for naturalists, maintained by Mrs. F. E. B. Latham, on the east peninsula of Indian River opposite Micco. Here in a primeval forest of cabbage palms and live oaks bordered by marshy savannas and mangrove islands, with the river on one side the ocean on the other, teacher and pupil found an endless series of novel and exciting experiences. Later they camped at Indian Field on the headwaters of the St. John's River west of Melbourne.

The following year, as a guest of the Harriman Alaska Expedition, Fuertes visited the region between Seattle and Bering Strait where almost every bird seen was new to him. In 1901 as a member of a Biological Survey party he spent five months in the deserts of western Texas and in New Mexico. In 1902, as the artist of an American Museum Expedition to the Bahamas, he further increased his knowledge of birds in nature.

Members of the A. O. U. who crossed the continent in a party to attend the 1903 San Francisco Congress will recall Fuertes' skill with a collecting-pistol and his activity in using it whenever opportunity offered; and sometimes he met opportunity more than half-way.

He joined the group that went to the Farallones and subsequently aided in securing material in the San Joaquin Valley, at Carmel, at Paicines, near Price's Camp in the Tahoe region, and on

Pyramid Lake, Nevada, for American Museum exhibits. His wedding journey to Jamaica in the summer of 1904 gave him his first impressions of Antillean bird-life. Two years later, with an American Museum Expedition, he went to the prairies of Saskatchewan and the Canadian Rockies; and in 1908, under the same auspices, he visited Cuthbert Rookery in southern Florida.

The summer of 1909 found him in the Magdalen Islands and on Bird Rock with Dr. L. C. Sanford, and the following year with an American Museum Expedition in Yucatan and eastern Mexico he had his first experiences in the continental tropics. This experience was greatly widened in 1911 and 1913 when he accompanied American Museum Expeditions to Colombia, in the course of which he crossed that country from the Pacific coast to the Orinoco drainage.

An ever increasing demand for his services now made such heavy demands on Fuertes' time that of necessity he was obliged to curtail his field-work. Beyond short trips, usually with some special object in view, he therefore made no further expedition until 1926 when in September of that year he went with a party from the Field Museum to Abyssinia, returning in May, 1927.

Fuertes was a tireless, effective worker. He utilized every available moment of his time afield to increase his knowledge of the living bird, and to add to his collection of specimens and drawings. His industry combined with his exceptional opportunities placed him in possession of an unequalled amount of original data on which his finished work was based. A very large proportion of his published illustrations embody the results of his own observations and are thus actual contributions to knowledge. This is particularly true of his colored drawings of those birds in which the unfeathered areas change color after death.

PUBLISHED ILLUSTRATIONS.

For nearly a third of a century Louis Fuertes was the leading bird artist of this country. During the latter part of his life he was wholly unable to fill all the requests for his services. When we consider the number of illustrations that he made for publication and attempt to multiply them by the number of times that each one was printed, we gain some idea of the influence he exerted

on bird art and bird study by this widespread diffusion of authentic information concerning the appearance of birds in nature. An estimate of his achievements may be made more definite and impressive by an examination of the appended list of the more important works which he illustrated.

1896. A-Birding on a Bronco. Florence A. Merriam. 22 pen and ink cuts.
- 1897-99. The Osprey. The frontispiece of the American Rough-leg and text-figures of the Long-billed Marsh Wren, Screech Owl and Snowy Owl which appeared in 'The Osprey' for March were his first published wash-drawings. In October, 1898, Coues took over the editorship of 'The Osprey' from Walter Johnson, its Founder, and added Fuertes' name to his staff as Art Editor. Fuertes continued to contribute to it until 1899.
1897. Citizen Bird. Elliott Coues and Mabel Osgood Wright. 111 black and white drawings. This is the first book adequately presenting Fuertes' work. The drawings were made largely under Coues' supervision and reached a standard not before attained in American bird art. In 1907 many of them, reproduced on a larger scale, were published in the revised edition of Mrs. Wright's 'Birdcraft.'
1899. The Auk. The plate of Sennett's and Fisher's Seaside Finches in the January 'Auk' is the first of Fuertes' paintings to be reproduced in color. It was followed by others in each of the four succeeding numbers. Beyond the colored frontispiece of the Oriole (*Icterus fuertesii*) Fuertes discovered near Tampico, Mexico, which appeared in January, 1911, and a black and white plate of the Petrel, *Aestrelata chionophara* in January, 1914, Fuertes made no other illustrations for the pages of 'The Auk.' In January, 1913, however, he contributed a new design for the cover. Two years later he followed it with the one now in use. Let us hope that the present one will never be replaced.
1899. North American Fauna, No. 16. C. Hart Merriam, U. S. Dept. Agriculture. 5 black and white drawings in the text.
1901. The Woodpeckers. Fannie Hardy Eckstorm. Five colored plates; the first to appear in a book.
- 1901-09 Yearbooks U. S. Dept. Agriculture:
1901. Two Vanishing Game Birds—The Woodcock and the Wood Duck. A. K. Fisher. 2 black and white plates.
1903. Economic Value of the Bobwhite. S. D. Judd. 1 colored plate.
1906. Cage Bird Traffic of the United States. Henry Oldys. 1 colored plate (Lady Gould Finch).
1907. Does it Pay the Farmer to Protect Birds. H. W. Henshaw. 4 black and white plates.

1908. The Economic Value of Predaceous Birds and Mammals. A. K. Fisher. 3 colored plates.
1909. Introduction of the Hungarian Partridge. Henry Oldys. 1 colored plate.
1902. Handbook of Birds of the Western United States. Florence Merriam Bailey. 30 full-page plates in black and white and many wash drawings in the text.
1902. The Birds of the Rockies. L. S. Keyser. 8 plates, 4 colored.
1902. Upland Game Birds. Sandys and Van Dyke. 5 black and white plates.
1902. Narrative of Harriman Alaska Expedition. Burroughs, Muir and others. 16 plates, 4 colored.
1903. Key to North American Birds. Elliott Coues. Over 200 wash drawings, chiefly full figures in the text and a colored frontispiece in each volume. Most of the illustrations were made about 1900 or soon after, their earlier publication being prevented by Coues' death in 1899.
1903. Water Fowl. Sanford, Bishop and Van Dyke. 14 black and white plates.
1903. Economic Value of Birds to the State. Frank M. Chapman. 12 quarto colored plates. The success of these plates won for Fuertes the commission to illustrate Eaton's Birds of New York.
- 1904-26. Bird-Lore. Fuertes' work first appeared in 'Bird-Lore' in 1904, and for the succeeding 22 years his colored plates were the leading illustrative feature of the magazine. In 1907 his 12 'Bird-Lore' Warbler plates, together with an equal number by Horsfall, were issued in book form.
1905. The Grouse and Wild Turkeys of the United States and Their Economic Value. S. D. Judd. Biol. Surv. Bull. No. 24. 2 plates, one colored and one black and white.
- 1907-10. Birds of California. F. E. L. Beal. Biol. Surv. Bull. Nos. 30 and 34. Part I, 1907, 4 colored plates, Part II, 1910, 6 colored plates.
1908. Food Habits of the Grosbeaks. W. L. McAtee. Biol. Surv. Bull. No. 32. 3 colored plates.
1910. Distribution and Migration of North American Shorebirds. W. W. Cooke. Biol. Surv. Bull. No. 35. 3 black and white plates.
- 1910-14. Birds of New York. Elon Howard Eaton. The 106 quarto colored plates in the two great volumes of this work figure nearly every species of the state and for the first time gave Fuertes an opportunity to express his wide knowledge of birds in nature. The subsequent issue of these plates in a portfolio at a nominal price greatly increased their circulation and consequent educational value. The originals were purchased by Mrs. Russell Sage and presented to the State Museum at Albany.

1911. Food of the Woodpeckers of the United States. F. E. L. Beal. Biol. Surv. Bull. No. 37. 5 colored plates and 1 black and white plate.
1911. Birds of Arkansas. A. H. Howell. Biol. Surv. Bull. No. 38. 4 black and white plates.
1911. Woodpeckers in Relation to Trees and Wood Products. W. L. McAtee. Biol. Surv. Bull. No. 39. 2 colored plates.
1912. Birds of Eastern North America. Frank M. Chapman. 15 plates, 8 in color.
1913. Fifty Common Birds of Farm and Orchard. H. W. Henshaw. Farmers' Bulletin 513, U. S. Dept. Agriculture. 50 colored figures in the text.
- 1913-16. National Geographic Magazine. H. W. Henshaw. 250 colored illustrations of American birds issued in book form in 1918 as 'The Book of Birds.'
1917. Distribution of Bird Life in Colombia. Frank M. Chapman. 4 colored plates.
- 1918-22. Monograph of the Pheasants. William Beebe. 5 colored plates.
1919. Bird Book for Children. Thornton Burgess. 32 colored plates.
- 1923-26. A Natural History of the Ducks. John C. Phillips. 25 plates, 16 in color.
1925. Birds of Massachusetts. Vol. I. Edward Howe Forbush. 33 quarto plates. A distinct advance over the plates for the 'Birds of New York,' both in detail and general handling. The best of Fuertes' illustrations. Plates for the second volume were completed before he went to Abyssinia. He had begun work on those for the third volume a short time before his death. The originals have been acquired by the Boston Society of Natural History.
1926. The Distribution of Bird Life in Ecuador. Frank M. Chapman. 5 colored plates.
1927. General Ornithology. Laboratory Notebook. Allen, Fuertes and Pirnie. Pen and ink cuts of structural details and entire figures representing leading types.

A list of the illustrations scattered through magazines would materially increase the number here recorded. Fuertes also made an extended series of drawings of mammals for the National Geographic Magazine and also for several books. But mammals did not appeal to him with the force of birds and the result is apparent in his work.

UNPUBLISHED WORKS.

It is not possible to present at this time an even approximately correct number of Fuertes' unpublished paintings. The series of

25 large panels in oil in the home of Mr. Frederick F. Brewster, in New Haven, is the most noteworthy and represents the best work Fuertes ever did of this kind.

The birds, notably Flamingoes, in the backgrounds of the Habitat Groups at the American Museum, and the murals in the Flamingo Hotel at Miami Beach, and in the possession of the New York Zoological Society are possibly next in importance.

There are also numbers of framed pictures belonging to private individuals which are superb studies of bird life. It was to this phase of his art that Fuertes had proposed chiefly to devote himself when he had finished the plates for Forbush's 'Birds of Massachusetts.'

Besides these formal paintings there were in his studio hundreds of field studies including the splendid lot of Abyssinian sketches, incomparably the best he ever made in the field. Fuertes' last work, therefore, both published and unpublished, shows that his genius had not yet found its full expression.

THE TEACHER.

Fuertes was a born teacher. He had the gift and the desire to convey information. To those who came to him for help in their study of birds, and particularly of birds in art, he gave himself unsparingly and with no other reward than to gratify his desire to help.

With characteristic generosity he placed his whole equipment at the disposal of his colleagues. Jealousy and professional rivalry were unknown to him. He loaned his unique field studies or described tricks of technique with equal freedom.

Although so closely identified with Cornell life and interests that he seemed to be a part of the University it was not until 1922 that he became a member of its staff. As a lecturer on birds he then became associated with Dr. Arthur A. Allen, professor of ornithology. How interesting it is to learn that in these lectures he elaborated his graduating thesis on the coloration of birds! Of his work in the classroom Dr. Allen writes:

"Fuertes was not an orator—his manner of speaking and frequent digressions often made it difficult for students to take notes on his lectures—but so vivid was his personality, so original

his vocabulary, so humorous his metaphors, and so warm his human sympathy, that notes were never necessary. Students left the class room inspired. They remembered everything he said and discussed it among themselves as though it had been a baseball game. It was not study to them; it was recreation. Those who have heard Fuertes on the formal lecture platform have occasionally been disappointed, for whenever he felt constrained, he did not indulge in those flights of metaphors that made his informal discourse so delightful. But with students he always felt at home; he was one of them and one with them, and they responded with the best that was in them."

Here, too, should be recorded the fact that in October, 1917, Fuertes came to Washington to demonstrate to the Engineer Corps how the fundamental principles of protective coloration, as they had been discovered by his teacher, Abbott Thayer, might be employed in camouflage.

IN THE FIELD.

Fuertes was more keenly responsive to birds in nature than any man I have ever known. The bird lover, artist and musician in him all combined to arouse an indescribably intense and eager interest in the living bird. The impulse that prompted him to leap from a classroom window to follow a strange bird-note grew with his growth. He was not a collector of birds in the ordinary sense, but when he encountered a species new to him he had an overpowering desire to secure it; and it was indeed an elusive bird that evaded him. He was a persistent, skilful, fearless and resourceful hunter. His exceptional power accurately to reproduce birds' notes was a great asset to him as a collector and brought him many species which would have escaped men without this gift.

His memorable stalk for Flamingoes in the Bahamas twenty-five years ago is recalled by this fragment from a letter written in Abyssinia last January:

"Five hundred flamingos that don't even move away as the caravan skirts the salt incrustated beach doesn't need boosting with you as a bird sight—and the same thing, doubled or trebled, seen farther up the lake from a mile distant camp, swinging up and

around and back and forth with the rising sun on their backs and a still-pink sky beyond the mountains across the lake found me short-winded as I forgot to function for the time being. I was afraid that I'd be a bit jaded on 'fillymingoes,' but there's no danger. I had the same almost unbearable thrill—wide, deep, and full—that my first glimpse gave me, so many years ago, at Grassy Creek. This bird has a different charm—perhaps less wildly beautiful, than ours, but it gets you in the same place.”

Some years ago not long after we had been afield together I wrote:

“Fuertes in possession of a freshly captured specimen of some bird which was before unknown to him is, for the time, wholly beyond the reach of all sensations other than those occasioned by the specimen before him. His concentration annihilates his surroundings. Color, pattern, form, contour, minute details of structure, all are absorbed and assimilated so completely that they become part of himself, and they can be reproduced at any future time with amazing accuracy. Less consciously, but no less thoroughly and effectively, does he store impressions of the bird's appearance in life, its pose, mannerisms, characteristic gestures of wings, tail or crest, its facial expression—all are recorded with surprising fidelity.

“This indeed is the keynote of Fuertes' genius—for genius it is. His mind appears to be a delicately sensitized plate designed especially to catch and fix images of bird life; and of such images he has filed, and has at his finger tips for use, a countless number; for his opportunities for field study have been greater than those of any other painter of birds.”

Having acquired specimens adequately representing a bird's appearance, Fuertes experienced no further desire to collect it. His interest now centered in its actions, habits, and voice and was unending. His keen, discriminating, musical ear made him particularly susceptible to the influences of birds' notes. This cannot be better illustrated than to quote from his description of the call of the Tinamou (*Crypturus*):

“In the tropics, as in more familiar scenes, the bird-songs of the fields are frank, pastoral, and prevalent. With us, the Meadow-lark, Field Sparrow, Vesper and Song Sparrows pipe often and

openly, and, from May to October, their notes are almost constantly in the air. But the forest birds are more reluctant singers, and their rare notes are all mystery, romance, and reclusive shyness. The Field Sparrow will sit on a dock-stalk and sing, looking you in the eyes; the Veery will quietly fade away when your presence is discovered. . . .

“But, enter the forest, and all is of another world. For a long time, perhaps, as you make your way through the heavy hush of its darkened ways, no sound strikes the ear but the drip of water from spongy moss-clumps or broad leaves. You feel yourself to be the only animate thing in your universe. All at once, perhaps far off through the forest, perhaps close behind you, you hear the strangely moving whinny of a Tinamou. I think no sound I have ever heard has more deeply reached into me and taken hold. Whether it is the intensity of feeling that a deep, silent forest always imposes; the velvet smoothness of the wailing call; the dramatic crescendo and diminuendo that exactly parallels its minor cadence up and down a small scale; something, perhaps the combination of all these, makes one feel as if he had been caught with his soul naked in his hands, when, in the midst of his subdued and chastened reverie, this spirit-voice takes the words from his tongue and expresses too perfectly all the mystery, romance, and tragedy that the struggling, parasite-ridden forest diffuses through its damp shade. No vocal expression could more wonderfully convey this intangible, subduing, pervasive quality of silence; a paradox, perhaps, but not out of place with this bird of mystery.”¹

Here indeed is a tribute alike to the bird's call, to the depth of Fuertes' emotion, and to his power of description. Reading this one cannot but regret that his brush did not give his pen more frequent opportunity for expression. Some day, let us hope we may have a volume made from his journals and correspondence.

THE MAN.

We have seen that birds appealed to Louis Fuertes as an ornithologist, artist, musician, and writer, and when we realize the material and emotional responses they evoked in his finely attuned,

¹ From 'Impressions of the Voices of Tropical Birds,' *Bird-Lore*, 1913, pp. 341-344 and 1914, pp 1-4, 96-101, 161-169, 342-349, 421-428.

sensitive nature, and add thereto the evergrowing demands of his profession, we can in a measure, conceive of the part that birds played in his life.

We might readily imagine that he was so absorbed in his studies and in giving form to them that he became a self-centered specialist who found pleasure only in his work and the society of his colleagues. But it was one of the marvels of Fuertes' nature that much as he loved birds, he loved man more. A man who thirty years after graduation was known as the "best beloved alumnus" of a university whose graduates number over 40,000 was obviously possessed of those qualities of head and heart which win universal love and esteem.

A member of college clubs and fraternities and of many civic organizations his contacts with life, wholly outside his profession, were many and varied. His boundless spirit of helpfulness, his wide human sympathies, his eternal youthfulness, combined with the seriousness of maturity, gave him friends, intimate friends, among people of all ages and in every walk of life.

His studio was a center of college and civic life. Here came children from the kindergarten and professors from the university, scientists and artists, boy scouts and rotarians, hunters and game-wardens. With everyone he had something in common. To them all he was ever an inexhaustible source of material helpfulness and spiritual refreshment.

Here came representatives of committees in search of program or poster, or one of the endless forms of assistance he was so well fitted to give; and always he welcomed them, putting aside his work for theirs.

But a man may show only part of his nature under the limited demands of a home environment; while the stress and strain of travel off the beaten trail, and particularly the inconveniences of camp-life in remote places, may reveal traits of character as surprising as they are disappointing.

As the artist of American Museum expeditions Fuertes was my camp-mate in the snows of the Canadian Rockies and the mud of Mexican lagoons; in Bahaman 'swash' and on Andean paramo. For over 60,000 miles we travelled in close, intimate companionship encountering trials, obstacles and disappointments in sufficient

variety to make heavy drafts on one's adaptability, resourcefulness and patience; and each journey increased my admiration for the man and love for the friend. He was never wanting; he never disappointed you. From start to finish he was a stimulating scientific associate, and an enthusiastic, helpful comrade. He multiplied your joys and shared your sorrows. He could handle mules or *jefe politicos* with equal success. He was collector, artist and cook in one. He was never too tired for fresh exertion, never too discouraged to try again. He got the best out of every experience whether it was a new bird, a view, or some minor incident of the day's work. No one could resist his ready wit, his whole-souled genuineness, his sympathetic consideration, his generosity of thought and deed. Everywhere he made new friends and everywhere he found old ones. He never seemed to get beyond the range of Cornell men. They might be class-mates or recent graduates, but to them all he was "Louis" and the glowing warmth of their greeting bespoke the depth of their affection.

These meetings symbolized Louis Fuertes' contact with life. He brought only beauty and happiness into the world. Every memory of him is joyous. Although our grief in his death is immeasurable, we must not let our sorrow cast its shadow on the past or future. For nearly a third of a century Louis Fuertes enriched the world with his talent and his personality. Let us continue to make him a part of our lives. As an artist he has attained immortality through his works; as a man let us so honor and perpetuate his memory that those who come after us will know him not alone for what he did but also for what he was.

*American Museum of Natural History,
New York, N. Y.*