

## SOME LETTERS OF BACHMAN TO AUDUBON.

BY RUTHVEN DEANE.<sup>1</sup>

THE following letters were written the first and second years after Audubon's first visit to Dr. Bachman's home. During that time many letters passed between them, and their mutual interests in studying the fauna and flora of that country, and in gathering information and collecting material to be used in Audubon's forthcoming "Birds of America" cemented an enduring friendship which was never broken.

In reading some sentences in these and other letters, it would at first give the impression that Bachman was accusing his friend of obstinacy and challenging his opinion, but before the letter ends he is apt to write "you have too much good sense to be offended either with my bluntness or my fun." In the letter dated March 27, 1833, the warbler so minutely described, became the type specimen of Bachman's Warbler which later was described and figured by Audubon.

Charleston, July 21st., 1832.

It afforded me very great pleasure to receive two letters recently from my good friend Audubon. They are always welcome whether from the city or the woods, and whether they contain information of birds, beasts, rattle snakes or men. I rejoice particularly that your good lady and sons have joined you in health and that you have been happy in each other's society once more. I hope you will be able to say 6 months hence, that the cholera is all a humbug. I look upon it as a great calamity to any country. There is no use in running unnecessary risks, and if you were not already beyond Boston before this time, I would point out to you a tract of country through which you might pass in safety and pursue your favorite pursuits. But you are, now no doubt, far beyond the reach of danger, indeed I cannot suffer my mind for a moment to dwell on the thought that your life may not be spared till you have reared for yourself and your

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<sup>1</sup> Read before the Forty-sixth Stated Meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union, Charleston, S. C. November, 20, 1928.

country a monument of your taste, industry and talents. Go on and prosper. May your son be a bolder, and therefore a more successful, beggar than you. May the purse strings of the wealthy fly open at his approach and may fame and wealth attend you. I care not so much for the latter but it will be a comfort to you when you grow old, it will save the wife from despondency, and will either be a blessing or a curse to your boys.

We are all, thank God, quite well and wife, children, Maria<sup>1</sup> (our sweet heart), Dr. Wilson,<sup>2</sup> Ward,<sup>3</sup> Plato<sup>4</sup> and all hands beg to be remembered to you. Maria has drawn for you the Franklinia, a very pretty red Hibiscus, is preparing to do another of a white color and has also drawn a splendid Bignonia, the latter, which is very rare here, may be less so in the S. West and probably has already had the benefit of your pencil. She will not forget her instructor and I am sure will ever do you credit. She is making good progress both in ornithology and botany. I looked at a letter of hers to you, in which she makes a long apology in having given Lehman<sup>5</sup> some commissions and is afraid of having given you offence. At all this I laugh, knowing how little reason there was for blame or censure.

Henry Ward is an excellent fellow, modest, temperate, industrious. He comes often to see me and I go to his room every day. He boards at my sister-in-law's, Mrs Stroble's, and is quite at home. The next week he goes to the islands to stay a month. Make your mind easy about him. He has already set up 50 birds and procured a good many skins, We of course go on slowly, weather hot, few birds.

Birds—Now I am at home again. Well!, you find 9 species new to the U. S. I suppose them to be the two forms *Muscicapa*, the *Coccyzus*, the Crane, the 2 *Columbas*, the sparrow and the Vulture. Featherstonaugh says that 3 or 4 of them have never been named. Wilson says somewhere (allow me to quote him) that the boy who brought a handfull of flowers to his mother

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Bachman's eldest daughter, who married John Woodhouse Audubon.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Samuel Wilson.

<sup>3</sup> An Englishman who had come to America to act as taxidermist and collector.

<sup>4</sup> A favorite dog.

<sup>5</sup> A Swiss landscape painter, one of Audubon's assistants whom he found in New York.

said "there are more where these came from" there are also more birds where yours were found.

Has the Spotted Sandpiper a half web on the outer toes of each foot? and does his young look about as much like him, as the young of the Blue Heron looks like his mother? Hence you will see that I am somewhat at a loss for I have no specimen of the above birds except the very fellow now before me. I killed the old male and 3 young of the new sparrow, no difference in color, and they breed here. I have for you the eggs of Wilson's Plover, *Sterna minuta* &c. and if God spares our lives [torn] we will yet add something at least to the habits of birds. I am preparing a piece on the migration of birds to read before the Philosophical Society,<sup>6</sup> which I would say would be at your service were it not too much like taking a minnow to a whale. Thank you a thousand times for the promised bird skins. I shall devour them with my eyes, arsenic and all. We were not the first that conjectured that the Blue Heron was white (to use a bull). I see it mentioned in Bonaparte on the nomenclature of Wilson. I have now the birds in all their changes of plumage. I was much amused at the St. Augustine paper in which the editor swears vengeance against you, calls you ungrateful, bird catcher, and the Lord knows what, for not having declared that Florida was a paradise. I send it to you as a curiosity, we have laughed heartily at it, and if you were here we would drink his health in a glass of claret and vote him an A-s-s. The books are quarantined, all I trust is safe. Have you sent the copy to the State of S. C.? What shall I say more. It is Saturday afternoon and I am preparing for the duties of tomorrow. Oh, how I wish I were with you. Let me hear from you the first gun you fire in Maine. Best respects to Mrs. A. With great respect, but in great haste

Yr. friend, Jn. Bachman.

P. S.

Now write me as long a letter as this.

(Superscribed)

J. J. Audubon Esq.

Care of Dr. Harlan.

Philadelphia.

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<sup>6</sup> Literary and Philosophical Society of Charleston, S. C. March 15th, 1833.

Charleston Decem. 27th 1832.

Dear Audubon

I purpose filling this letter with remarks on Birds & when I have done I will send it to you. It will at least prove that although nullification may for a time dampen, it cannot altogether strangle my zeal for the Science.

I have this moment shot in my Garden, the *Regulus* about which we have so often disputed and although your mind is made up against me, yet you must listen like a reasonable man, we both have a spice of obstinacy. Now hear my reasons for believing it to be a new bird.

I received recently from Gibbs the old & young of the Golden crowned Wren, on comparing these Birds with several specimens I have of the present Bird, I cannot doubt their being different Birds. They are this moment before me. The Bill of the Gold crest, is thick & black, that of the present bird is at least one third less, thin Brown, Nostrils not covered with feathers as the Golden crown and its legs are brown instead of black, its bill partakes more of the Genus *Sylvia* whilst the other partakes of the *Muscicapa*. Make further observations my friend, the above are permanent differences setting aside the difference of colour. It cannot be the young of the ruby crowned wren, it is considerably smaller & differs in all its habits. The present Bird loves thick bushes, I never saw it high from the ground & never on pine trees like the other, its voice differs also very much. I am preparing by the help of Ward skins of each. Let us both resolve that we will not resist the evidence of our senses. I question much whether either the Golden or Ruby crowned wren are found in the Autumn without some colour on the head either red or yellow.

May not the Northern Marsh Hen, be the Bird which we here call the Fresh Water M. Hen & our Ash coloured one that keeps in the Marsh be peculiar to the South? I should like to have this matter ascertained. The greatest mystery in Ornithology to me is the circumstance you mention of the young of Peale's Egrett being when young some brown & others white. My bird is improving. It was white originally, is so still, which I take to be the colour of the old bird, & I hope to preserve it through the winter.

*The new Fringilla* of which you have a drawing has not entirely disappeared. It departs in November & returns in April. I never found a nest, but saw three & 4 young ones with the old. It undoubtedly breeds on, or very near the ground. This bird although not very rare is seldom seen, in consequence of its darting toward the earth as soon as it is approached when it runs along the bushes & in the broom grass of the pine woods & is with difficulty made to fly. It is somewhat strange that it leaves us about the time the other of the numerous sparrow family visit us & it comes to take their place as they retire to the North in the spring. It is the only high land sparrow that breeds in the lower country of South Carolina, the three salt marsh sparrows, the sea side, sharp tailed, & the new sparrow I intend to send you, breed in or near the situations which they most frequent. The present species I suspect breeds but once, of this however I am not quite certain. Next summer I shall be able to say something about the habits of the new Finch that you have not seen, & which I take to be the long lost *F. Caudacuta* of Latham.

The *Ardea Cristata*, your large White Crane's, were in—tolerable but not in the perfect plumage when I had them destroyed. Till then I kept them in my Garden, but they became dangerous, killing a Duck & on another occasion a half grown cat at a single blow & on the day I had them killed they made a pass at a young negro, this was when they were hungry. They became somewhat clamorous at night uttering the usual harsh guttural note of their species. They managed to mount the highest arbours to sleep. Were remarkably expert flycatchers & I frequently remarked at their making a point equal to a setter before they darted on the butter-flies & *Sphynxes*, which they never failed to seize. Indeed this was their amusement every afternoon & evening. I question whether these birds would ever in confinement have attained to the growth of those in their wild state. I tossed a dozen Mulletts of a tolerable size to one in succession one Morning, he seized them before they reached the ground & they disappeared in an instant. In fact they were enormous gormandizers. I think I speak within bounds when I state that one could easily consume a peck of Fish in a day.

I sat down to make a note or two & here is a whole letter. It

may however contain information which you may desire & so I send it. I will keep on making remarks & hope by the first vessel to send you the long promised drawings & Birds. I write that I may not be forgotten. A letter from you, always acceptable is now a cordial. We are all well & all beg to be remembered to you & yours. Our political horizon remains dark & gloomy. The Winter Wren has been sent me from Columbia.

Yr frd

Jno. Bachman.

[Superscribed]

J. J. Audubon Esq.

F. R. S. etc. etc.

Boston.

Charleston, March 27th 1833.

My Dear Friend,

Your letter of two sheets has come to hand this moment, make no apologies for its length, you are never tedious, I hate short letters from you, I pay postage for much brass & copper & shall not object to do so for fine gold.

Now my friend what is the use of writing a whole page of apologies before you mention to tell me that I am in the wrong. I shall take the same liberty with you without an apology, promising at the same time that all your caution is right & I need not add that I am one of the last men that would willfully lead you into an error. But to the point.

1. The *Trochilus* you swear by.

2. The [\* \* \*] *irostra*, ditto, by this time you have the skin.

3. The *Sylvia*. Now take a seat along side of me and deliberately & patiently go with me over the description & history of this beautiful bird. I have a secret to tell you in your ear, softly my friend, I have the male, it is fairly drawn, it is in full plumage. I have the skin well put up & if Maria's drawing does not suit you, you may draw it over, for the Bird was shot by Jostle<sup>1</sup> the third, and it is now the property of old Jostle and if he cannot swear to it I can.

I was coming from Maj. Lees & near Parker's<sup>2</sup> ferry heard a

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Bachman's familiar names for Audubon and his two sons "Old Jostle, Jostle the second and Jostle the third." The origin of the name is unknown.

<sup>2</sup> A location about thirty five miles west of Charleston, S. C.

soft & pleasant note that was new to me. I leapt out of the chair<sup>1</sup> in a crack, to use an elegant expression coined in somebody's brain. I saw the bird on the upper branches of the largest Tupelo Tree, I shot it and it lodged in the Moss. Goodbye says I & went sorrowing to my chair. 3 miles further the same sweet note like music from the spheres came over me, I saw and watched the bird for a quarter of an hour, it was slow in its movements, keeping very high & occasionally hanging under a limb like the yellow throated warbler. This time I was more successful and the bird is safe. Now for your Mourning Warbler, to which it bears about as much resemblance as it does to the Maryland yellow throat. The bird I sent you was an old female I thought I had so stated it. Now listen to me whilst I compare this bird with Wilson's Mourning Warbler which I take to be the Maryland yellow throat, I mean a variety. I hope Nuttall & his friend who have seen this bird will show us the skin, a fig for a bird in the bush if you cannot get it in the hand. Wilson's description & the Male of my new *Sylvia* are now before me, besides the difference in size & bill, the Mourning Warbler of Wilson has a slate coloured head. Mine has a broad band of bright yellow extending to the middle of the head. Wilson's bird has no yellow on the cheeks & sides of the neck mine is yellow as well as the bend of the wings. Wilson's spot on the breast is of black & white, mine is pure black. The Tail of his bird is rounded at the end, mine is deeply forked, his bird has flesh coloured legs, mine has black legs. But the bird & the drawing will be before you I hope before you leave New York. Now my friend draw this male & female, it will be an ornament to your book.

4. I can easily account for your mistake in the *Sylvias*, particularly immature or female birds, but that you should take my beautiful little *Fringilla caudacuta* for the young female of the sea side finch is almost enough to make a man strike his father. I have a dozen specimens of each of these three finches. I sent you two skins, the one was an imperfect specimen of Wilson's *caudacuta* the small and beautiful little finch is the bird I wish to bring to your notice as Latham's, *caudacuta*, I will send you the *F. Maritima*, surely you cannot think the two skins I sent you

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<sup>1</sup> The old fashioned two wheeled chaise.

are of the same species, and as for the *Maritima*, you ought to know that it differs toto coelo. Surely you are joking with your friend. Tell Mrs. A. to stop your Grog & Wine for a month as a punishment for trying to hoax me. I will oblige you by looking for the eggs & nest, but as for farther examination about the Birds I shall not need them. Do you remember my first *Fringilla*.

5. The long legged sandpiper. What is it. Have you seen a skin of this Bird before, do you know the *T. Himantopus*.

6. The short legged sand piper. I sent you the drawing & stuffed bird. Do you know the *Tringa Pectoralis*.

7. The Bird that I sent you the skin of & a drawing is it the young of the spotted sandpiper, give me your candid opinion about these Birds, for you have not said a word about them.

8. The *Regulus*, today I have killed two of these Birds they may be the young of the Ruby crown, but I am greatly at a loss. I have killed many of these Birds in the North in Autumn, but always found what I took to be the young with some red on the head, these birds have none & are invariably  $\frac{1}{2}$  an inch shorter, you know how much the *regulus* family resemble each other. In another letter, in two days I will return to this subject.

9. The Marsh Hen. My opinion first expressed is every day strengthened. Bill, feet, colour all differ, Wait.

Have I not the bump of obstinacy in my head? My friend I acknowledge it, but so have you & it is a helping to us both. You have too much good sense to be offended either with my bluntness or my fun. I love to please you & I esteem & value your friendship above all price.

My views may not always be correct, but they are at least deserving of investigation.

In what way can I repay you and my friend young Jostle for your kind attention in procuring for me specimens of Birds etc. To show you how much I value them let me tell you that I have had two very fine sets of drawers made, one for water & the other for land Birds. I label every specimen & have sent to France for European Birds, your last present was highly valuable. The Blue Grosbeaks in all their states of plumage shall be sent to you & please to inform me of anything you may want. It will afford me great pleasure to oblige you. Before I forget it ought you



not to give the young of the Blue Heron in its white & spotted plumage. In this I can give you skins of every shade. Maria, (our sweet heart) sends her best respects to you & Mrs. Audubon. She is always highly gratified to do anything to please you. I assure you the approbation you expressed of her efforts in drawing birds has doubly repaid her for her exertions, and everything like most in this respect she ascribes to her Instructor. Mrs. Bachman spends a few weeks at Maj. Lee's plantation. The rest of my family are all around me in health & spirits & all hands join in kind remembrance. Tell me how you got the Box of Birds as set up by Ward? Let me hear from you often, very often & I will thank you & work for you. I am much engaged among the Animals & have found something new among the Rats & Shrews. Anything in this way will greatly aid me, there is a Canada Marmot, have you seen it? Shall we ever hear from you when you get among the snows of the North? Now can you write as long a letter as this? God bless you my good friend I am sure you are weary.

Your friend

Jno. Bachman

[Superscribed]

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