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IN MEMORIAM: JONATHAN DWIGHT.

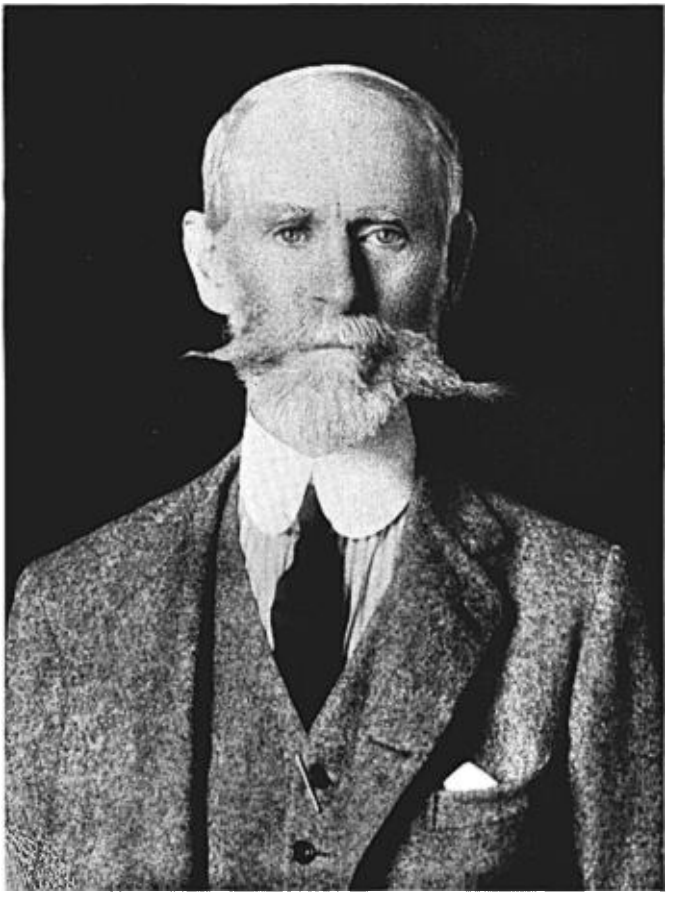
BY J. H. FLEMING.[1]

Plate I.[2]

JONATHAN DWIGHT, M.D., a Fellow and Past President of the American Ornithologists' Union, died in New York City on February 22, 1929, in his seventy-first year. The son of Jonathan and Julia Lawrence (Hasbrouck) Dwight, he was born in New York City on December 8, 1858, at 2 East 34th Street, the residence of his grandmother, Ann Bartlett Dwight. This house was in later years to become his home. His parents lived in Madison, New Jersey, just over the line from Morristown, and here his boyhood was spent. For three years he attended the Madison Classical Institute kept by John Shier. Later in New York he prepared with a private tutor, and entered Harvard University in the autumn of 1876. Of this period his room-mate recalls,—"in college he would often get up at three o'clock in the morning and go after crows' nests. For a man of his rather delicate fibre he astounded me with the tremendous amount of work that he accomplished. He was always a pure-minded, studious boy and man, and I had a great respect for him although his tastes were quite different from mine." A contemporary who was afterwards a close friend says that "Dwight's early life in college was a rather solitary one; he took no pains to cultivate eligible acquaintances, did not go in for

[1] Read before the Forty-seventh Stated Meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union, Philadelphia, Pa., October 22, 1929.

[2] From a group taken November 1924 at American Museum of Natural History.



Sincerely yours
Jonathan Dwight

athletics, and did not trouble himself about dress. His recreation and enthusiasm was collecting birds' eggs." And this same friend writes: "He was an able and very daring climber, and I have shivered on the ground below, as I watched him climbing into outer branches of a tall tree, and of course he did it without any of the safety equipment of the modern climber." Egg collecting continued but with a growing knowledge of the habits of birds. College work was not neglected as two entries in Dwight's diary for 1878 show, "May 11, near Lexington with Batchelder,[1] my mouth has not accommodation for 5 Crow Blackbird's eggs as proved by my tooth (not the only one I have) going through one, while descending a spruce tree by moonlight."—"May 22, went towards Arlington with Townsend[2] at 4 A. M. and got back at 9 A. M. we saw no rarities but heard Virginia Rails. We found a *H. rufus* nest, 5 eggs."

Dwight had attended meetings of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, of Cambridge, the beginning of lasting friendships with a group of men who were to profoundly influence American ornithology. The Cambridge influence is evident from an entry in the diary of September 14, 1878, at Squam Beach, New Jersey, where he had been with his father since July 15, for shore-bird shooting. He lists ninety-seven species of birds seen by himself or reported by others. On New Year's day 1878, he enters in his diary "This is the second year that I have kept systematic notes, last year being the first that I have collected, really knowing what was to be expected from a true collector—a scientific collector. I have collected birds' eggs since about 1872, and only began to collect nests and birds themselves in 1878. I got my first bird July 16, 1878, and now have 110 skins, embracing 65 species. 'Identification comes first' is now my maxim." This first bird is entered in the catalogue of the Dwight collection "No. 1. *Sterna hirundo.* N. J., Ocean County, Squam Beach; July 16, 1878." Measurements and stomach contents are carefully noted, the order of State, County, and place is followed on the labels of all his subsequent bird skins, and greatly facilitated the finding of a skin in a crowded tray. The making of a bird skin came easily to Dwight. His methods were

[1] C. F. Batchelder.
[2] C. W. Townsend, M.D.

those of his friend William Brewster of Cambridge. There were no unnecessary movements, the scalpel and surgical scissors being used in the exact order required. The skin was prepared quickly with that sureness of touch and neatness that was characteristic. The sexing was done with care, and the label clearly written.

Dwight's first ornithological paper was a note on the occurrence of the Stilt Sandpiper in New Jersey. This appeared in the January number of the 'Bulletin of the Nuttall Ornithological Club' for 1879. The summer of 1879 was spent at Tadousac, on the Saguenay River, Quebec, and his diaries record twenty-five species of birds observed or collected there. Tadousac was afterwards to become his regular summer home; though the bird life there was restricted in numbers, the species were of much interest. Returning from Tadousac, the museum of the Literary and Historical Society at Quebec was visited, and notes made in the diary of any birds in immature plumage in the collection.

Graduating with honors in the Harvard class of 1880, Dwight joined his father, a distinguished civil engineer and successful railroad builder, in contract work; but while in Florida in the following spring was taken seriously ill, and only after a prolonged convalescence resumed work in 1883. The time was not lost,—two winters in Florida added greatly to the growing collection, and much on the habits and plumages of Florida birds was noted in the diary.

The foundation meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union took place on September 26, 1883. Dwight was elected an Associate Member, thus beginning a connection that was to last for forty-five years. The next five years were divided between professional work, the study of ornithology, and field excursions in summer to New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Quebec.

In 1889, Dwight enlisted in the 7th Regiment, National Guard of New York, and took up rifle shooting with enthusiasm. Service in the regimental ambulance corps awakened an interest in medicine, and entering the Medical School of Columbia University he graduated in 1893. For some years he was comnected with the New York Hospital, and the Vanderbilt Clinic besides carrying on a private practice, from which he finally retired to give his time wholly to ornithology. During these years the study of the plumage changes in birds went steadily on. Material was lacking in

collections; this Dwight proceeded to get, often under difficult conditions.

The study of this material was preceded by an investigation of feather tracts. A Bobolink was plucked, the feathers counted, their age and relationship ascertained by microscopic examination. With the knowledge thus gained the problem of the sequence of moults was gradually interpreted. When sure of his facts, the publication of papers began. The most important of these early ones 'Sequence of Plumage and Moults of the Passerine Birds of New York,' [1] definitely fixed Dwight's position as a philosophical ornithologist; "It blazed a trail that has become a main travelled road." [2] The old and tenaciously held belief that pigmental change could occur in the mature feather was also vigorously and successfully fought.

The study of sub-species was facilitated by the rapid growth of his collection, soon to crowd all available storage room. Dwight viewed sub-species with a critical eye, each was examined on its merits, and if rejected there were good grounds for doing so. His unrivalled knowledge of plumages together with a vast amount of new material gave weight to his decisions, which he defended with vigor before the Committee on Nomenclature of the A. O. U.

Storage room for part of the collection was provided by the American Museum in 1904, but being insufficient the main collection was removed in 1906 to a building adjoining the residence of his friend Dr. Louis B. Bishop in New Haven, Connecticut; here the material was sorted and stored. With Dr. Bishop's great collection available for comparison the two friends were able to do much systematic work. Progress was made at this time in the construction of storage cases, a subject that later was to be given much attention. With storage cases of a new type, and room for expansion, the collection grew rapidly till the New Haven building became crowded. In 1909 the trustees of the American Museum offered Dwight a room in the Museum that seemed sufficient for future expansion. The aid of the mechanical staff of the Museum was enlisted to further improve the storage cases, and a type was evolved that has since become standard equipment in American Museums.

[1] Ann. N. Y. Acad. Sci. XIII, 1900, pp. 73–360.
[2] Chapman, Natural History XXIX, 1929, p. 327.

The years that followed were ones of increasing usefulness. Workers at the Museum were able to avail themselves of the wealth of material in the collection. Dwight's room became an ornithological centre, where problems were discussed and advice sought by many workers in ornithology. The collection continued to grow and the Museum, freed from the need of increasing its own North American collections, was able to use its resources elsewhere, particularly in South America. Later the Museum's work was hampered by lack of comparative material from parts of Central America, and Dwight becoming interested in distributional problems in that region secured extensive collections from Costa Rica and Guatemala; these, he was, through illness, unable to work up.

At the time of Dwight's death the collection amounted to some sixty-five thousand skins, carefully labelled and catalogued. With the exception of a representative series of North American birds, together with the collection of nests and eggs, left to the Museum at Springfield, Massachusetts, the collection passes to the American Museum.

The literature of American ornithology was a subject in which Dwight was especially interested. Beginning his library at a time when the word 'Americana' was not to be found in dealers' catalogues, and books were obtainable at a moderate price, he secured many of the early printed American books that contained references to birds: local lists, wherever printed, were sought out. A card catalogue of books containing references to American birds was prepared and annotated to facilitate the growth of the library. The collection of minor ornithological journals and pamphlets, was probably the most complete in any American library. Works on general ornithology were represented by many early and rare books, particularly those that had a bearing on nomenclature. The library was representative of the owner, the books being kept in a cheerful room that visitors were made to feel was part of the home.

Dwight's connection with the American Ornithologists' Union was close. He was elected an Associate in 1883, an Active Member (later changed to Fellow) in 1886, and of the forty-six meetings he attended all but the last. Elected to the Council in 1896, he became Treasurer in 1903, resigning in 1920 when he was elected Vice-President. He was President from 1923 to 1926, and member

of the council for thirty-three years. To the Union he gave unsparingly of his time, watching over its membership list and investments with the same care he gave to his own affairs.

Possessing a faculty for languages, Dwight early became interested in the origin of scientific names, and was long a member of the Committee on Classification and Nomenclature, where his influence was always conservative.

He was a member of the Council and Treasurer of the National Association of Audubon Societies, and for long President of the Linnaean Society of New York, whose medal he received shortly before his death.

Though reticent he was always approachable and courteous. His opinions were never given without due consideration, and he was especially considerate of, and helpful to, younger men. His published writings are common property. He cleared the way for future workers in some of the more difficult problems of ornithology. Quality not quantity was his motto. To his friends he was ever a delightful companion, and his hospitality to visiting ornithologists will long be remembered.

Dwight was of Puritan ancestry, being in the ninth generation from John Dwight who founded Debham, Massachusetts, in 1634. On his mother's side he was descended from one of the old Dutch families long settled in Manhattan. He was married twice,—in 1901 to Georgina Gertrude Rundle, who died in 1903;—in 1914 to Ethel Gordon Wishart Adam who survives him.

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