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ROBERT RIDGWAY: A MEMORIAL APPRECIATION.

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Plate V.

IT IS impossible in words to do full justice to any one. So many and so diverse are the elements, known and unknown, that enter into the life of a human being, that to estimate the final result of a life would require more knowledge than is possible to any biographer. A friend unconsciously overestimates the good, just as an enemy depreciates it and emphasizes faults and failings. Accordingly, to appraise the life and services of a man like Robert Ridgway is doubly difficult. Notwithstanding this, we can, at least in recording our own impressions, pay a deserved tribute to his memory.

The facts of Robert Ridgway's life are so well known through the remarkable biography by Mr. Harry Harris published a few years ago[1] that it seems hardly necessary to reproduce these details here, except in small part as a text for the purposes of this writing. Rather is the present tribute a sympathetic attempt to appreciate Robert Ridgway as a scientist, as an artist, as a man, and as a friend.

Robert Ridgway was first and foremost an ornithologist, and it is safe to say that no American, except Spencer F. Baird, equaled him, all things considered, as a systematist in his field. We can scarcely realize the influence that he has exerted on systematic ornithology in America, and as a matter of fact, in the whole world. Just as Baird founded systematic ornithology in the New

[1] The Condor, Vol. XXX, No. 1, January 16, 1928, pp. 1–118.

Very truly yours
Robert Ridgway.

World, just so surely did Ridgway develop and modernize and standardize the technique of the science.

Like most great ornithologists, Robert Ridgway early manifested a love for nature. Fortunately for him and for us, his parents were interested in the out-of-doors and encouraged him in his natural history activities. His boyhood striving after knowledge led to his contact with Spencer F. Baird, whose sympathetic interest at once met a cordial response from the young naturalist; and there rapidly grew up between them a friendship that lasted always. Through Baird, Robert Ridgway in due time obtained the opportunity that was the turning point of his life,—his appointment as zoölogist on the Clarence King expedition for the exploration of the 40th Parallel. On this, his first adventure away from home, he embarked when barely 17 years old, and even at this early age he quickly manifested his ability as a field naturalist. His report on the ornithological results of this expedition is one of the best of its kind, and shows not only his careful observation in the field, but an unusual breadth of treatment for a man of his years, and for the time in which it was written. In fact, it is still a valuable storehouse of information about birds of the western United States.

After his return from this expedition he went to Washington to work permanently under the direction of Professor Baird, and from this time on his progress was rapid. He soon became the head of the division of birds in the Smithsonian Institution, which position he held for more than fifty years. Without doubt his distaste for administrative duties was all that kept him from higher positions.

During this half-century period no important development in the science of ornithology in America was without his participation. To him perhaps more than any other individual is due the adoption of trinomials for scientific names of subspecies. He was influential in the formation of the American Ornithologists' Union, and in the formulation of its early policies, this alone a great service to ornithology. In fact, throughout his whole career his personal influence was felt in the development of ornithology in America.

His writings likewise form a conspicuous part of the ornithological literature of the period. In the three volumes of the 'History

of North American Birds' devoted to land birds, published in 1874, begun by Baird, Robert Ridgway had a conspicuous co-authorship; as well as in the later 'History of North American Water Birds,' appearing in 1884, for which two volumes he wrote a large part of the technical matter. These five volumes, it is almost superfluous to say, constituted for a long time the standard work on North American ornithology. The appearance of Ridgway's 'Nomenclature of North American Birds' in 1881, marked an epoch in the progress of ornithology in North America, for in this work he revised the nomenclature, and to a certain extent the classification, of the birds of this region. His 'Manual of North American Birds,' published in 1887, marked another advance, and this book continued for many years the technical authority on the subject.

The crowning scientific effort of his life was the now well-known 'Birds of North and Middle America,' the first volume of which appeared in 1901, the eighth in 1919, and on the remaining parts of which he was engaged at the time of his death. This great work, one of the finest large contributions to technical ornithological research ever made by a single man, was conceived as the carrying out of Professor Baird's 'Review of American Birds;' and on the synonymy alone Mr. Ridgway spent all of his available time for ten years.

So great and so important is this work that it has, in a measure, obscured his other contributions and accomplishments, for one unconsciously thinks of Robert Ridgway in terms of the 'Birds of North and Middle America.' However, during all the preceding years, and during the course of its preparation, a steady stream of smaller publications flowed from his pen, mostly descriptions of new genera, species, and subspecies, with revisions of generic and higher groups. Some of these, such as his 'New Classification of the North American Falconidae,' are osteological and taxonomic discussions of the nomenclature and status of genera and species. There are also articles on the geographic distribution and life history of species; and some, like his 'Relation Between Color and Geographic Distribution in Birds,' that treat of the principles of ecology. He wrote papers on local faunal ornithology, of which his two volume work on the 'Ornithology of Illinois' and the partly technical report on 'The Birds of the Galapagos Archipelago' are

the most conspicuous examples; and also many lists of species gathered by collectors, to which he added pertinent critical comments. Another sort of publication is his 'Hummingbirds,' published in 1892, which treats all the North American species of this group fully from both technical and life history standpoints, and which, at the time of its appearance, was a model of its kind.

So accustomed are we, however, to regard him as a technical writer that probably few persons today realize his ability in popular literature. One has only to read his 'Song Birds of the West,' which appeared in 'Harper's Magazine' in 1878, to realize his gift for charming description of the out-of-doors. In fact, one of his unfulfilled ambitions was to have leisure to write popular articles on the habits of birds, when ultimately his technical labors should have been completed. It is a far cry indeed from the fragrance of the woods and fields that his description of 'Bird Haven' brings, to the dry atmosphere of a 'New Classification of the North American Falconidae,' but these show the versatility of the man.

Most of Ridgway's publications relate to American birds, North and South, but he had a world-wide interest in ornithology, as is evidenced by such papers as his 'Report on Birds Collected by Dr. W. L. Abbott in Amirantes, Gloriosa, Assumption, Aldabra, and Adjacent Islands,' which appeared in 1896.

Not only was Robert Ridgway accomplished in field and museum ornithological work, but he was an excellent botanist as well. His interest in vegetation, particularly trees, led him early to make observations on the trees and other plants in the magnificent forest that formerly covered the bottomlands of the valley of the Wabash River in southwestern Indiana. The data that he gathered on the height of trees of different species still remain one of the most important sources of information on this subject. He also discovered new species of plants that were described by others.

Robert Ridgway was a bird lover as well as an ornithologist, and the two are, unfortunately, not always synonymous. One of his greatest pleasures, and incidentally of Mrs. Ridgway as well, was the attraction of birds to his home. On his place at Brookland, D. C., and later at Larchmound, his home in Olney, Illinois, he provided bird baths and feeding shelves for his feathered friends, and he delighted in watching their behavior while accepting his hospi-

tality. His love for trees and flowers led him to spend a considerable part of his personal income on the introduction and cultivation of trees and shrubs and other plants; and both his homes became veritable botanic gardens. He was a real conservationist and practiced as well as preached the protection of birds and plants. One of his greatest regrets was the destruction of the great trees in the Wabash Valley, that had so interested him in his early years.

After he had removed to Washington he always yearned for his early home at Mount Carmel, Illinois, and he embraced the first opportunity to return to southern Illinois to live. At such time he found that Mount Carmel was less attractive than Olney, not far away, and there he purchased the place that was his home for the later years of his life. In the hope of establishing a sanctuary for both birds and plants, particularly those of woody growth, he directed his efforts to improving another place near Olney, on which he had temporarily lived, and which he appropriately named 'Bird Haven.' On this plot of 18 acres of woodland and meadow he lavished his care; and it is a matter of satisfaction to bird and plant lovers as well as to Robert Ridgway's host of friends to know that this place, 'Bird Haven,' will be preserved as a permanent sanctuary and as a memorial to him.

Few persons today realize Mr. Ridgway's ability as a color artist, since his best paintings of birds appeared in books that now are only occasionally consulted, such as Nehrling's 'Our Birds of Song and Beauty,' Nelson's 'Contributions to the Natural History of Alaska,' and Turner's volume in the same series. As a matter of fact, his request to have identified a colored drawing of the purple finch was Professor Baird's first knowledge of him. His evident talent at once arrested Baird's attention, and the encouragement that he received from Baird undoubtedly had much to do with the subsequent development of his artistic ability. Robert Ridgway was drawing birds before he was ten years old, making his own colored pigments in his father's drug store.

It is unfortunate that the other activities of a very busy life caused him gradually to cease his painting, since the pictures of birds that he has left us show his unquestionable ability as a bird artist. He enjoyed painting birds, and more than once expressed the wish that he could some day again take up this phase of artistic work.

In one field, however, that of outline drawing of the external parts of birds, for the production of such illustrations as appeared in several of his books, notably the 'Manual of North American Birds,' and 'Birds of North and Middle America,' Ridgway's work has rarely, if ever, in accuracy and beauty been equaled, never excelled.

A student of color and a master of its use, he early realized that there was no satisfactory manual of color and color names suited to naturalists. This lack he endeavored to supply by the publication of his 'Nomenclature of Colors for Naturalists,' published in 1887, in which somewhat less than 200 colors were named. Not satisfied with this, he labored for more than twenty years on the scientific standardization of colors, and on January 16, 1913, he brought out his 'Color Standards and Color Nomenclature,' in which there were actually illustrated more than 1100 colors, with possibilities for the designation of some 6500 altogether. In this treatise, a thoroughly scientific classification of colors is for the first time proposed, which greatly facilitates the use of colors for all naturalists.

Men are judged commonly by two criteria—by what they do and by what they are. In any adequate estimate, it is not sufficient to recount what a man has accomplished, because his personal qualities so greatly influence his activities. No one who knew Robert Ridgway could fail to be impressed by his personality. In scientific work his outstanding traits were his insight, his industry, and his accuracy.

His broad knowledge of birds and his familiarity with their characters, in the gaining of which his drawing of birds greatly aided him, were as remarkable as his judgment, and enabled him to see almost at a glance what others less fortunate must needs discover by study. It was no unusual occurrence, when he was unpacking or examining new collections of birds, as they were received at the United States National Museum, for him to pick up a strange specimen and at once say that it was a new species, or that it was a new subspecies; and he was right in almost every case.

His capacity for work was amazing, and he labored day and night. While he was careful in making decisions in scientific problems, his mind and pen moved rapidly in the subsequent

development of his ideas. His power of concentration enabled him to accomplish much, often under disadvantageous circumstances and surroundings. It is difficult for us today, with our well lighted laboratory rooms and adequate series of specimens, to realize that much of Robert Ridgeway's early work was performed in crowded, poorly lighted quarters, and often with meager material for study. The marvel is, as with Baird, that his output in those days was so good, and that he made so few mistakes. Furthermore, I have seen him carry on a conversation with a visitor and at the same time write a complicated technical description of the plumage colors of a bird that he happened to have in hand, and which he was desirous of completing promptly. The interesting and astonishing features of this performance are the accuracy and almost incredible speed with which it was accomplished.

It is, therefore, hardly surprising that Mr. Ridgway's literary output was so large. While the number of his titles is not great—about 550—so many of his published works are of large size that the total number of his pages approximates 13,000, all written without the aid of typewriter or stenographer!

For one who worked so rapidly, Ridgway was unusually accurate. His work, like that of Spencer F. Baird, well stands the test of time, and his mistakes, considering the amount of his work, were few. In his descriptions of birds, he was of course, greatly aided by his experience and ability as an artist, for to reproduce a bird in picture form requires a much more minute and careful examination of details than does a mere written description.

Mr. Ridgway's interest in birds never flagged, though he appeared in the latter part of his life to tire of the labor involved in the technical work that has made his name a household word among systematic ornithologists.

In his contact with others, Robert Ridgway was always unassuming, gentle, and helpful. He disliked argument, and throughout his writings one finds very little of controversy. While he had his own convictions, never did he press them on others, and if he disagreed, he was content to state his side of the case and let it rest there. He was always open to conviction, and willingly acknowledged his mistakes. His deference to the wishes and opinions of others was one of his most conspicuous characteristics. So

retiring was he that he shrank from public appearance, and seldom spoke at public meetings. In fact, he would allow the American Ornithologists' Union to elect him its president only after he had received assurances that he never would have to preside at a meeting.

For a man of strong character he was unusually gentle, and in his unaffected manner was as considerate of a poor boy as he was of those of wealth or high position. In all my thirty-four years of personal intimacy with this truly remarkable man, I have never known him to speak an angry word or heard him express a really unkind feeling towards anyone. Relatively few persons knew him intimately, largely on account of his retiring disposition and his reluctance to do anything that might appear to be self-advertisement. To his real friends however, his companionship was a continual and inspiring delight: he was an entertaining talker when relating his own experiences or discussing subjects in which he was interested, but in keeping with his modest disposition he ever seemed much more willing to listen than to talk.

No trait of Robert Ridgway's will be longer remembered than his helpfulness. It is doubtful that there has ever been an ornithologist more genuinely and continually helpful to others in ornithological work than was he at all times. Generous to a fault, again and again when he learned that some one was working on a particular problem he would offer his own notes and data, sometimes almost complete, without thought of credit or acknowledgment, and urge the investigator to use them as his own. In fact, he was almost too generous for his own welfare.

This spirit of helpfulness, though valued by all, was especially important to young persons interested in natural history, for such individuals at all times found in him an encouraging and inspiring influence. It was no uncommon occurrence, when some one, even a boy, had come into the National Museum in search of information about birds, for him to stop in the midst of important investigations, sit down, and give his time to explanations and suggestions. He was always ready to help, and he gave without stint from his ample store of knowledge. It is, perhaps, not too much to say that no one interested in birds who ever came into contact with him failed to be helped. Furthermore, many of us are under too

great and lasting a debt to him ever to repay it, except in like manner to others. Notwithstanding the great monument that Robert Ridgway has reared to the science of ornithology, and incidentally to himself, in the thousands of his printed pages, we venture the assertion that his most enduring influence and greatest contribution to the world is the inspiration that he has given to others.

Highly though the world rates the personal impress of a man, even more highly did Robert Ridgway rate the uplift that he himself received from Mrs. Ridgway during the more than fifty happy years of their married life. Evelyn Ridgway was devoted to Robert Ridgway and to birds, and throughout her long companionship with her husband, her devotion to both continued to increase. The beauty of the home life of these two sympathetic persons was known to but a few of their most intimate friends, yet it was a sustaining and inspiring influence in Robert Ridgway's whole life. What he thought of Mrs. Ridgway is to be seen from his own pen in the article written for the 'Illinois Audubon Bulletin,' where his affection breathes through every line.

Notwithstanding his absorption in scientific work, Robert Ridgway had a well-developed sense of humor, and enjoyed a quiet joke. At no time, however, did he carry his fun to the point of unkindness, nor had it ever a sting. He enjoyed a joke on himself as well as one on another.

Were one to consider Robert Ridgway's whole character, one could describe him in a word, and that word—*gentle*man.

No one could have a better friend than Robert Ridgway. Hospitable, unselfish, and loyal, he made fast friends of those who were privileged to know him intimately. While he cared little for society in the commonly accepted sense of this term, in fact visited at the homes of others but seldom, he delighted to entertain his friends, however often they came. He was a charming, an ideal host, and no one ever visited him who did not long to return. To those of his friends who were interested in the out-of-doors, and most of them were, he never tired of showing the flowers and trees of his home grounds, and to explain his efforts to encourage the birds to use his place as a sanctuary. He always had some new and interesting phase of the out-of-doors to call to the attention of visitors, for he was continually making changes and improvements

about his home. It was evident to all that he thoroughly enjoyed entertaining his friends.

His unselfishness, apparent in his contact with everyone, was still more marked in the association with those who were close to him; in fact, nothing could be finer than his complete self-effacement when he could help a friend. His friends will doubtless never fully realize how much he did for them, nor how much they owe to his open-handed and heart-felt generosity.

To his other qualities he added a degree of loyalty that is rare, indeed. He was a man on whom a friend could count in adversity, or in any emergency: once established in his regard, one could be sure of his support and loyalty at all times. Perhaps this quality of his has attracted less attention than it should, because he was in this, as in everything, always quiet and unostentatious. An incident that shows, as well as anything could, his innate spirit of fidelity, occurred not long after he had been brought to Washington by Professor Baird. There came to him from the American Museum of Natural History in New York the offer of a position at a great advance in salary, with promise of further increase, but his loyalty to the man who had given him an opportunity to become an ornithologist impelled him to decline, much as this course seemed to be against his own best interest and future prospects.

The traits of his character were altogether so compelling that the admiration and affection of those who knew him could scarcely fail to be won by these. The esteem in which this quiet mild-mannered man was held by his neighbors is best shown by an occurrence on the day of his funeral at Olney, Illinois. Notwithstanding the fact that this took place on Saturday, the busiest day of the week, practically all business was suspended in town during the time of his funeral. This was a tribute, indeed.

The span of Robert Ridgway's life, from July 2, 1850, to March 25, 1929, covered a period of profound world changes and great advance in science and invention, as well as ever increasing activity in ornithological research. During his long life, his careful, painstaking work and his good judgment have helped to remove some of the stigma of superficiality that has, in some quarters, attached to ornithology,—a service in itself of no small importance.

His friendship with Spencer F. Baird and his loyalty to the man

who in his early life had so greatly inspired him is plainly evident from the account that Mr. Ridgway has himself given us of the circumstances that brought him first into contact with his Washington friend and benefactor. The beautiful and touching recital of these circumstances reveals, possibly more than anything else that Robert Ridgway has written, the intimate relationship between these two great men; and even to read this story is to receive inspiration for one's own efforts.

How much Mr. Ridgway was influenced by his contact with Baird it is difficult to say, but this impression we may surely know was profound. Robert Ridgway possessed the same genial disposition, the same scientific grasp of his subject, the same industry, the same dislike of public controversy, the same helpfulness to others. From Baird, he received his great inspiration, which he, in turn, has passed on to us of the present generation, and which, let us hope, we of today shall pass on to those who later shall take the torch from our hands.

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