

THE AUK:

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ORNITHOLOGY.

VOL. LII.

JULY, 1935.

No. 3.

IN MEMORIAM: CHARLES WENDELL TOWNSEND.

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Plate VIII.

ONE of the many physicians whose interest in natural history has led them to the closer study of birds, was Charles Wendell Townsend, M.D., who was elected to membership in the American Ornithologists' Union in 1901, and was made a Fellow in 1923. Born in Boston, November 10, 1859, the son of Thomas Davis and Frances Barnard (Smith) Townsend, he was of good old New England stock, for the Townsends came to this country from Norfolk, England, in 1637. His interest in birds began in youth, for already in his early years as a student at Harvard College we find him afield, often with his brother William, collecting birds, making an occasional Duck-hunting excursion, excavating shell-heaps on Mt. Desert Island, rowing, swimming, camping out as opportunity offered. At that time bird collecting was more emphasized than observing; nearly every budding ornithologist had his prized collection of eggs or skins, and in this he was no exception, but added to a healthy enjoyment of outdoor sports and shooting, a real interest in the birds he secured. While still a freshman at College, he became in 1877, a member of the Nuttall Ornithological Club of Cambridge, then newly organized, and his first ornithological publication was a brief note in the Club's 'Bulletin' of January 1880, on the capture of a Lark Sparrow by his brother and of a Philadelphia Vireo by himself in Massachusetts. In the following year he had a second note in the 'Bulletin,' on the discovery of Wild Turkey remains in Mt. Desert shell-heaps, followed in 1884 and 1885 by other short notices of interesting finds. In those days, Maynard's 'Naturalist's Guide,' with its list of birds of eastern Massachusetts, was the *vade mecum* of the beginner in the study of birds, for excepting Samuels' work on New England, there were no popular books of reference on the subject; binoculars had not been invented, and the 'bird in the hand' was considered the only safe means of field identification.



Charles W. Townsend

In later years Dr. Townsend often referred fondly to his cherished first edition of the 'Guide' and its association with his early interest in birds. By its aid his skilful fingers had learned to make an excellent 'skin' in a very brief space of time, and the small collection begun as a young man he cherished and added to from time to time through the later years.

Graduating from Harvard College in the class of 1881, he turned naturally to the study of medicine, for not only was his interest already well directed toward biological lines but this profession was traditional on his paternal side, for his grandfather, Solomon Davis Townsend, was a surgeon, and his great-grandfather, David Townsend, was a well-known surgeon during the American Revolution. He therefore entered the Harvard Medical School in the autumn of 1881 and completed the four-years' course, receiving his degree of Doctor of Medicine in 1885. He stood well in scholarship and in 1928 was elected an Honorary Member of the Phi Beta Kappa. In the years following 1885 the exacting nature of his medical duties occupied his full attention. As assistant in obstetrics at the Harvard Medical School (1887-97), physician to the out-patients department of the Children's Hospital (1887-1903), the Boston Lying-in Hospital (1887-98), and Massachusetts General Hospital (1891-1909) as well as in other medical work, he devoted himself unflaggingly to his profession, eventually becoming recognized as one of Boston's most skilful obstetricians and an authority on the nutrition of children. In 1891 he married Gertrude Flint of Brookline and in subsequent years built up a large private practice in Boston where his young family of three daughters and a son grew up. During these busy times of professional occupation, he found little or no opportunity for birds, and even dropped out temporarily from membership in the Nuttall Club.

What may be called the second period of his ornithological career began about 1892, when, attracted by the natural beauty of Ipswich, Massachusetts, he built there a house for summer occupancy, on a ridge overlooking a wide expanse of salt marsh, beyond which lay the white sands and green beach grass of the dunes, with open sea to the eastward. Here with his family he spent summer vacations and week-ends, "commuting" to and from Boston in pursuance of his professional duties. At Ipswich there was always much to do—tramping over the hills, along the beach or through the dunes, boating and swimming in the broad tide creek close at hand, clam-bakes on the beach, or picnics on the nearby hills, always with an eye for the birds, particularly those of sea and shore, in their spring and autumn passages. With increasing enthusiasm he now devoted himself more and more to field observations at every opportunity. His quick eye was keen to detect the characteristic marks and attitudes of the water and shore birds, groups in which he was especially interested. He was wont to contrast the method of earlier days when the gun was an ornithologist's chief companion,

with these later years when binoculars and telescope take its place. He appreciated fully the value of careful notes made on the spot at the time, and always carried a small memorandum book with detachable leaves in which he made his record of birds seen on each excursion or entered on separate pages the observations on single species. These pages were later filed in small envelopes, one for each species, arranged in a card-catalogue box following the order of the Check-List. By this method, in which he took a certain amount of pride, all his important notes on a given bird were available together in compact form. The smallest details interested him, the behavior, posture, song or other notes, characteristic or unusual actions, food habits, and especially traits that might be interpreted from an evolutionary standpoint, such as methods of holding the feet in flight, use of wings in diving, and such. He had not the time nor perhaps the patience for extended and minute studies of bird routine to be made from observation blinds, but combined his own activity with discovering that of the birds, to obtain broader "impressions" of bird life.

The Ipswich region is unique in its combination of varied conditions of land and water with picturesqueness of appearance. The low rounded hills of glacial gravels were long ago turned to pastures, for Ipswich was settled early in the history of white occupation. Generations of cattle and in former days, of sheep have grazed its downs and the ancient forests, once destroyed, have only in recent years been partly replanted. The wide stretches of open and varied surface tend to give an illusion of great spaces. The Ipswich and Essex Rivers transecting the rolling hills, add the charm of fresh water, while the long barrier beach of white sands fronting the sea, protects broad salt marshes with their muddy creeks and abundant growth of marsh grass on the flats. Such an area is never still. The tidal creeks fill twice daily, flooding the expanse of marsh, the wind is ever blowing the shifting sand, and the restless sea pulls down and builds up the shores. In this constant activity of elemental forces Dr. Townsend took the keenest interest. He was familiar with the aspects of the place at all times of year and under all conditions. On week ends in autumn, winter, or spring, often with one or two congenial companions, he would escape from the congested city to the Ipswich haven. In fair weather or foul, rain, shine or snow, the long tramp across fields and byways from the town brought one at length to the hospitable shelter of the cottage; the stove was soon going, supper eaten, and then to bed for an early start in the morning, often on winter nights with a hot brick wrapped in a cloth for a bed companion! Sunrise would find him cooking a camper's breakfast, ready for a forenoon's tramp through the dunes. As an outgrowth of the Ipswich experiences, he published in 1905 his 'Birds of Essex County' (Memoirs of the Nuttall Ornithological Club, No. 3). This, his first extensive contribution to natural

history, records many observations, carried out over a series of years, not only on the bird life of the region but on the local conditions of animal and plant life as well. The shifting of the dunes he measured over a series of years, and recorded the effects on the surrounding flora and fauna; the formation of an artificial pond and its development, with new cattail swamps and buttonwood thickets, bringing in new animal life, was watched by him with growing interest. Many of these observations were chronicled in this memoir, which has been specially commended by a well-known naturalist as an outstanding contribution to the ecology of a circumscribed area. In 1920 he published a 'Supplement' to the list and later prepared two books—'Sand Dunes and Salt Marshes' and 'Beach Grass,'—giving a general account of the natural history of the area in a series of brief informal sketches.

What might appropriately be called the third or travel period of Dr. Townsend's ornithological career, begins perhaps in 1906, when with the writer, he made a summer's journey by mail steamer along the eastern coast of Labrador, notes on which, together with a list of the birds of the peninsula, we published in the following year. As a boy he had read with eagerness Audubon's account of his visit to these barren shores and ever since had longed to see them for himself. As was his wont, he filled every moment of the trip with activity, and when we were not afield would produce a pad of yellow paper and with facile pen wrote on the spot a running narrative of the things that had most impressed him. At the close of our summer's journey the manuscript of his first formal book—'Along the Labrador Coast' (1907)—was nearly ready for the printer, a colorful and charming account of the coast, its people and its bird life, impressions mainly, to be sure, but nevertheless a permanent record of value. In 1909, three years later, in company with Arthur C. Bent, he undertook a second visit, this time starting early in the season in order to be in time for the opening of spring in southern Labrador. Leaving Quebec by the mail steamer he made the journey down the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Natashquan and return and as before, recorded his impressions of the North Shore in a second small volume entitled 'A Labrador Spring' (1910). In 1911 he prepared an abridged and annotated edition of Captain Cartwright's 'Journal' kept during his attempt to establish a settlement on this coast at Cape Charles, published in three volumes in 1792, bringing together especially the natural history notes. He was now imbued with the desire to undertake a modest exploration of this rugged country in a more independent manner, for it appealed to him most strongly. Accordingly in July 1912, he made a canoe journey with a guide up the Natashquan River for some eighty miles into the wilderness during four weeks of almost continuously stormy weather, an account of which he prepared for the American Geo-

graphical Society. Three years later, with Dr. Harold St. John, he filled in the remainder of the south coast of Labrador by a journey from Natashquan eastward to Blanc Sablon, following, as he delighted to recall, in the footsteps of Audubon who skirted these coasts in the previous century. Again a small volume, 'In Audubon's Labrador,' chronicled his impressions, and he also appeared in print with a strong plea for better protection of the breeding Eider Ducks along these shores. In following years he made several shorter excursions to the North Country,—Gaspé, the Shickshocks, Grand Manan, and the Bay of Fundy, sometimes accompanied by his wife, and so became familiar with much of this rugged area and its bird life. A number of short papers came from his pen as a result of these journeys, although the only bird to which he gave a new name, proved to be merely the little-known immature plumage of the Hudsonian Chickadee. Other brief contributions included papers on the courtship actions particularly of the Ducks, to which he gave special attention; even the habits of Pigeons and House Sparrows in the city engaged his observation.

Few men live to carry out their cherished plans for peace and opportunity to study in their later years, but he was an exception. He had often expressed to me his desire to retire from active practice and live in his beloved Ipswich the year round in closer contact with its natural attractions while still well able to enjoy them. This cherished desire he finally accomplished and following the death of his wife in 1917, gave up his medical work and devoted himself to study and travel, making his residence at the Ipswich home. In 1919 he married his sister-in-law, Sarah G. Flint, who died in 1924. In 1925 he again followed Audubon's track, making a journey down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers by river-boat and visiting the southern states to see their abundant winter bird life. In 1926 and 1927 he made a journey by steamer around the world in a leisurely way, stopping at the Hawaiian Islands, Japan, China, Java and Ceylon. The years 1928-29 found him voyaging once more through the Panama Canal and down the west coast of South America, thence across Argentina to the Atlantic side of the continent, and by boat home. The impressions of this journey he embodied in another volume of informal narrative, 'From Panama to Patagonia' (1931). Again in 1931 and 1932 he extended his travels by a tour around the African continent, stopping at various regulation points on the Mediterranean and East African coasts, with occasional side excursions inland.

He seemed still the embodiment of vigorous health when an internal disorder developed, which notwithstanding his strong constitution, eventually proved fatal. Even to within a few days of his death (on April 3, 1934) his active pen was busy preparing notes from his field observations. A strong, positive nature, generous of heart, active in mind and body, ever

quick to see the humor of a situation, he was a delightful companion in the field and a keen observer. His many contributions to ornithology exemplify how much a busy professional worker may accomplish through the life-long habit of using spare moments to advantage.

Dr. Townsend affiliated himself with many other scientific societies in addition to those maintained by the medical profession. He was a valued member of the Nuttall Ornithological Club and served for a time as a vice-president and as a member of the Council; he was also a member of the Cooper Ornithological Club, the Wilson Ornithological Club, the Deutsche Ornithologische Gesellschaft, and a charter member of the Essex County Ornithological Club. In addition he was a member of the Boston Society of Natural History and at the time of his death, a director of the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

Museum of Comparative Zoölogy
Cambridge, Mass.