

In Memoriam: Walter E. Bryant^a

Born 14th January, 1861.—Died 21st May, 1905

BY WALTER K. FISHER

WITH PORTRAIT

NOT since the lamented Chester Barlow passed away, nearly three years ago, has this Society suffered so severe a loss as from the recent death of our esteemed honorary member, Walter E. Bryant. And in this case, too, the final dissolution was wholly unexpected, because none of his friends were aware of his illness until a few days before the sad event. In June 1904 Mr Bryant was sent to San Blas, Mexico, to investigate the tangled affairs of a large fruit concern. With his usual conscientious care he did his work with great completeness and unearthed a system of graft which had all but rendered the company bankrupt. He had never been of robust health, and from overwork and worry in an abominable climate, with worse food, he became seriously ill. He remained at his post, however, until his successor arrived, and then left only after repeated urgings from a friend who happened to be stopping temporarily at San Blas. Mr. Bryant did not fully realize his precarious condition. After his arrival in San Francisco he was sent to a sanatorium, but failed to rally, and passed away on May 21st, at the age of forty-four years.

Although he was still a young man, Bryant may be considered a pioneer in his chosen field because his work was mostly done in, until then, practically unexplored regions or regions which had been only touched. His name, therefore, occupies an important place in West Coast ornithology by reason of his important explorations and his substantial and accurate contributions to the literature of the subject. He collected also mammals, plants, and insects, and published several important papers on mammalogical subjects. Although his first article on natural history appeared as early as 1878 in *Science News*, 1, No. 7, it was not till after his appointment as curator in the California Academy of Sciences, in 1886, that he began to write extensively. As Mr. Grinnell has summarized on another page, "the majority of his published writings appeared from 1887 to 1889 in the 'Bulletin' and 'Proceedings' of the California Academy of Sciences, and from 1890 to 1893 in 'Zoe'; a periodical published for four years at San Francisco." During this time which spans his period of activity in ornithological lines, Mr. Bryant published about forty titles, including reviews. A complete list of his ornithological papers has been compiled by Mr. Grinnell and is appended at the end of this sketch.

Probably the West has never produced a better field ornithologist than Mr. Bryant. He was a most intelligent and painstaking observer, and as a preparator of specimens he certainly stood without a peer. In the Academy of Sciences are many examples of his work, accomplished under great difficulties, and without exception the skins are good. When he had leisure and proper facilities his specimens were works of art. He was also expert in mounting birds, and mounted hummingbirds in the field. In addition to being a skilled preparator, Mr. Bryant was an intrepid explorer. His visit to Guadalupe Island, as an instance, was accomplished in the face of serious physical difficulties, and he nearly starved to death, being obliged to stay about three times as long as he had originally intended.

Walter E. Bryant was born January 14, 1861, at Sonoma, Sonoma Co., California, and was the son of Daniel Sharp, and Susan H. Bryant, who survive him.

^a Read at the September meeting of the Cooper Ornithological Club.

From the time he was four years old he resided at Oakland, California (with few exceptions) until 1896, when he moved to Santa Rosa. His education was secured in a private, and afterwards in the public schools of Oakland. As a boy he was always interested in natural history, which predilection announced itself at an early age, when he was never without a bouquet of wild flowers—even in bed. He was trained from childhood by his father in the use of fire-arms, his first gun having been given him when he was seven years old. While still quite young he commenced collecting insects and eggs, and he also mounted birds. He was fond of boating, and built his first boat himself. In 1884 Mr. Bryant took lessons from Mr. William T. Hornaday in mounting mammals, and studied museum work at the National Museum, and the Museum of Comparative Zoology.

The greater part of Mr. Bryant's time was given to ornithology and other natural history work. From 1886 to 1894 he was curator in the California Academy of Sciences where he made a host of friends. His principal trips, during which he collected birds and mammals were as follows: 1883, summer in Oregon; 1884, Guadalupe Island in December; winter of 1885-'86, Guadalupe Island for four months; 1887-'88, California and Nevada; 1889, vicinity of Magdalena Bay and adjacent islands, Lower California; 1890, Gulf Region, Lower California; 1892, in the spring, Santa Rosa del Cabo and vicinity, L. C.; 1901, Central America; 1902 and 1903, summers in Alaska; June 1904 to April 1905, San Blas, Mexico.

Mr. Bryant was especially interested in hummingbirds, of which he had a large collection, which with his collection of nests and eggs is now the property of his mother. His mounted birds were given to his father previous to his last trip, and his mammals were sent last year to the Milwaukee Museum. His other bird skins were disposed of a number of years ago to the California Academy of Sciences.

In 1888 Mr. Bryant became an Active Member of the American Ornithologists' Union but at the time of his death was a Corresponding Fellow. He was one of the founders and first president of the California Ornithological Club, established in 1889, a forerunner of the present Cooper Ornithological Club. He was an early president of the latter organization, of which he was made an honorary member in 1894.

Mr. Bryant holds a high place in the esteem of his fellow workers because he was a good ornithologist and a good friend. He was exceptionally kind to young ornithologists and was ever willing to lend a helping hand. By nature he was reserved and quiet, but generous and loyal, and cheerful under adverse circumstances. One who knew him better perhaps than did any other member of the Club, writes as follows:

"Today tender memories are awakened of one who has passed away. I have just found one of his letters, written some twenty years ago. Friend Walter Bryant and I had been much afield together. In this finely penned note he tells me of some specimens he has saved for me, also stating having found in a San Francisco taxidermist's shop an example of *Selasphorus florësi*, the second specimen, as he says, known to ornithologists.

"Mr. Bryant, as I have known him, was a quiet, reserved, sparely built man, whom it was necessary to know by close association to appreciate his true worth. He was not given to joking but could tell a good story, and was kind to a degree to all. His was a large heart and an honest intent. He always had a good word for every one and was ready to help the novice in bird lore as I had on many an occasion to learn in our early acquaintance.

"No insect or bird could escape his eye or ear, as I learned from camp life with him under the white-limbed buckeyes on the banks of a trickling stream be-

neath Chick's Cliff in the famed 'Pine Canyon.' The first thing in early day-break, with the last call of the poor-will, Bryant would turn over and say from under his night-cap: 'Come, Emerson, a fire, a cup of coffee, and then off for the early bird.' No matter where or how hard the tramp might be, he was ready for it, and would take you to the nesting grounds of the gnatcatcher or to the duck-hawk's eyry in some 'Castle Rocks.' He was slow of movement but sure of purpose, and to tell him of some little known bird or animal was to start him off for it at once."

Our veteran ornithologist, Mr. Lyman Belding, on hearing of Mr. Bryant's death, wrote the following appreciation:

"He inherited a love of nature and a love of adventure which in early youth took him to the cliffs of Mount Diablo for eggs of the Prairie Falcon, and other ornithological prizes, and later to inhospitable Guadalupe Island and more distant parts of the Pacific Coast. He was a good observer, a facile writer, and a most agreeable companion. During a long, intimate acquaintance covering quite extended collecting trips, the writer invariably found him genial and gentlemanly."

The Ornithological Writings of Walter E. Bryant

BY JOSEPH GRINNELL

AS will be noticed from a perusal of the following list of titles, the majority of Bryant's published writings appeared from 1887 to 1889 in the "Bulletin" and "Proceedings" of the California Academy of Sciences, and from 1890 to 1893 in "Zoe," a periodical published for four years at San Francisco. These seven years marked the period of Bryant's greatest activity in Natural History lines, and the articles resulting from this work evince an evident endeavor to express plainly and accurately whatever he thought worthy of record. Not that his descriptions and recitals are tiresomely commonplace; for I have seldom read anything more fascinating to a naturalist than the accounts of his experiences while collecting in Lower California and on Guadalupe Island. These, in particular, I would advise every CONDOR reader to look up, and read, as well worth while. And as for the scientific value of Bryant's recorded observations, where can we find any more reliable and valuable contributions to West Coast ornithology? The life-histories of many of our remotely restricted species would remain today almost wholly unknown, if Bryant had not spent lonely months in their study, and then composed what he learned in the form in which we find it now so instructive.

1880. Notes on the Habits of *Rallus obsoletus*, with a Description of its Eggs. <Bull. Nutt. Orn. Club V, April, pp. 124-125.
1884. Nest and Eggs of *Myiadestes townsendi*. <Auk I, January, pp. 91-92.
1885. The Relationship of *Podiceps occidentalis* and *P. clarkii*. <Auk II, July, pp. 313-314.
1886. Additions to California Avifauna. <Forest & Stream XXVI, June, p. 426.
1887. *Piranga rubriceps* and *Tringa fuscicollis* in California. <Auk IV, January, pp. 78-79.
1887. Additions to the Ornithology of Guadalupe Island. <Bull. Cal. Ac. Sc. II, January, pp. 269-318.
1887. Discovery of the Nest and Eggs of the Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertina*). <Bull. Cal. Ac. Sc. II, July, p. 449.