

ALBERT MILLS INGERSOLL—AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

WITH PHOTO

THE UNDERSIGNED prefers to believe that his life history is of too little general interest to warrant appearance on the pages of THE CONDOR. But after the third urgent request from his esteemed friend, the Editor, the writer sets aside his own preferences and with due apologies submits the following autobiography.

I, Albert Mills Ingersoll, the third child of Dr. J. O. M. and Caroline E. Ingersoll, was born at Ithaca, New York, August 9, 1857. From hearsay, I learned that I came into this world a very frail baby and that my parents scarcely expected to raise me. At the age of eighteen months, I was picked up and tossed in the air by a playful physician, who exclaimed "this is the way to make weak babies grow". Unfortunately, he didn't realize that he was performing the act in a room having a rather low ceiling, and the result was an unconscious child. I struck the ceiling midway between two joists, the flexible laths taking up some of the shock. My little head made a dent in the plaster that was easily discernible in later years when pointed out to me.

The worst accident that happened to me, occurred in 1868. Slipping on an ice-covered gate my head was thrown violently against a post. Somewhat dazed, but scarcely realizing how seriously injured I was, I rose up and started toward school, fainted, and was carried home, never again to enter a school-house as a pupil. This blow, occurring at the age of eleven, had a far-reaching effect on the future course of my life and was the indirect cause of my having ample time to engage in natural history pursuits. Dimness of vision increased gradually until it was impossible for me to distinguish men from women at a distance of one hundred feet. My mother took me to consult the famous oculist, Dr. Agnew, of New York City. His diagnosis of my affliction was passive congestion of the optic nerve. He advised that I refrain from reading or resuming my studies under a year and warned me that I would court blindness by straining my eyes while in their present condition. I was told that by living an out-of-door life and taking suitable medicines to build up my impaired health it was reasonable to expect the eye trouble would pass away by the time I was of age.

After weary months of suffering my eyes became as keen of sight as formerly, but they never recovered from certain muscular troubles; and to this day reading and writing is so trying that they effect my general health if carried on for more than an hour or so. On many days, I can only skim over the daily papers.

Hampered by poor health in addition to this serious eye trouble, I experienced difficulty in choosing an occupation, realizing the necessity of selecting a business requiring of me but a minimum amount of clerical work. Always extravagantly fond of flowers and candy, I fancied I could succeed in making a living in either the florist or confectionary business. As time rolled on, the craving for sweets appealed to me stronger than the love for flowers; so, concentrating on a purpose, I decided to move to San Diego and engage in the candy and ice cream business.

On September 22, 1888, "Ingersoll's Palace of Sweets" opened its doors to the public. That memorable event occurred during my thirty-first year of life,

and I had never worked for anybody or had business experience of my own. Nevertheless my success was such as to prove a surprise to other San Diego confectioners who had said I would "go broke" before many months. The venture was highly satisfactory in every way. Prospering from the beginning, and getting in the lead, I was able to retire at the end of eighteen years. On



Fig. 16. ALBERT MILLS INGERSOLL.

selling out, a larger price was obtained for the goodwill, and right to continue business under my name, than for the entire stock of goods and fixtures combined.

Recalling some of my boyhood experiences to mind, I distinctly remember that the first eggs I took were robin's. Imagining eggs of such a beautiful blue would be more palatable than plain colored hen's eggs, and wishing some

good "eats", I dropped them into a teakettle to boil. The rapid ebullition burst the shells and liberated two disgusting embryos. These, on being poured into a pan by a servant, caused her to exclaim, "Mrs. Ingersoll! Mrs. Ingersoll! come out to the kitchen and see the horrid bugs I found in the hot water". The sight of those big-eyed objects was not at all appetizing, and a gentle lecture from my mother was intended to teach me the error of robbing birds of their treasures.

Generally taking up whatever fad was in vogue among my boy associates, various objects were collected in a desultory way during my youthful days. Recital of incidents in connection with some of them may not be out of place. My interest in postage stamps and coins was squelched by a few words from Prof. George Latura Smith. As near as I can recollect, he said, "But why waste time by giving attention to such inanimate things when nature offers so much of greater interest? Anyone can purchase old stamps and coins, but money won't buy the pleasure and satisfaction to be gained in the study, collecting and preparation of specimens of living things." Beginning to realize that I was on the wrong track, a quick decision switched off two of my hobbies. My album of stamps was traded to a gentleman connected with the Ithaca glass works for a rowboat and for sheets of glass especially bent to magnify objects in an aquarium for aquatic plants and insects.

My entomological efforts had heretofore lain in the accumulation of showy butterflies and moths, taken principally through a selfish desire to outdo the other boys. Seeing my error, I resolved to learn everything possible in regard to the lives of these beautiful creations of nature, and also of insects in general. Various insects were successfully raised in breeding cages provided with earth or water for the growing of plants suitable for the larvae of the various species to live on. Prying into the habits of some nocturnal insects necessitated night work, but as these investigations were carried on previous to the era of electric lights, I found the gaining of knowledge by aid of a dark lantern and oil lamp too injurious to my eyes to be continued. My enthusiasm in this wonderfully interesting study had been aroused to a degree that made the mere collecting of specimens impracticable. Circumstances, as indicated, turned my attention to larger objects.

Capturing a ferocious coon at a despoiled wood duck's nest, I decided he should form the nucleus of a menagerie that had been in contemplation since the latest visit of "the largest show on earth". Several Ithaca boys started menageries during that particular period, and rivalry amongst us was at a high pitch, when Velvet, my seven-toed cat, "did her bit" by furnishing a greater attraction than any of my competitors could boast of. By drowning, her numerous litters of kittens were invariably reduced to two. On one occasion, after half of her day-old kittens had been fed to my captive great horned owls, I chanced to find a red squirrel's nest with young as small as mice, with hairless tails and unopened eyes. They were the homeliest animals imaginable. The mother was shot, and wishing to raise two of the young ones to maturity, they were taken home and substituted for Velvet's destroyed kittens. The cat resented the imposition at first; but on being shown the dead mother, she seemed to sense that it was her duty to foster the orphans. From then on, she was as solicitous for their comfort as for that of her own kittens. Later, on taking a squirrel and kitten away from her and placing them on the floor, Velvet jumped out, caught the squirrel by its neck, and carried it to her bas-

ket; her own kitten was then taken home in the same manner. This annoying act of mine was repeated frequently in the presence of visitors to show to them the cat's apparent affection and greater care for the orphan.

An acquaintance caused an article to appear in a local newspaper calling attention to "Bert Ingersoll's Zoo". Curiosity brought many people to see my squirrels and kittens feeding at the same "lunch counter". My lovable old cat once surprised me by retrieving, uninjured, a small garter snake that had escaped to a neighbor's garden while being transferred to a new reptile cage.

The rearing of some young screech owls, captured as they were about strong enough to leave a snug hollow in an elm, proved amusing in several ways. One, in reddish phase of plumage, was a favorite and entertained us by taking from the hand large angleworms as offered, swallowing them alive. Closing beak and eyes, the bird would simulate sleep and remain motionless. In the course of forty or fifty seconds the struggling worms would slowly emerge from between the mandibles, slip out an inch or two, and swing loosely around in space until feathers were touched. Violent efforts to escape in their direction always roused the owl to action. Reswallowing these squirming tidbits, she would assume her previous attitude and be ready for a repetition of the performance. It was such a nauseating sight that one spectator said she could hardly keep her own mouth closed! Angleworms seeming to be a favorite food of this screech owl, it is reasonable to suppose that it was an enjoyable sensation to have its palate tickled by them.

My adult screech owl would not eat raw or cooked vegetable matter in any form; but the two immature birds reared by me would eagerly swallow young leaves and tender shoots of certain plants. A preference was shown for those of the grapevine. Later, advanced growth making the grape unacceptable to them, and having difficulty in finding a palatable substitute that would be eaten from my hand, I placed an assortment of green stuff in their cage, that the kind needed might be selected during the night and eaten by them. As my pets gradually lost their craving for this line of food, and stopped eating it altogether after being in captivity a month or two, I am inclined to believe screech owls require a mixed diet of animal and vegetable matter during an early period of life.

The reading of Samuels' "Birds of New England and Adjacent States", a treasured 1871 Christmas gift, had much to do in awakening my interest in ornithology and oology. Starting a collection of bird skins with an albino robin, accidentally killed by coming in contact with a baseball, did not lead to the taking of albinos only. Birds' eggs were first taken without nests and kept, a pair of a kind, in a spool cabinet. I had never seen a well arranged or large collection of eggs. But observing, after a little field work, that eggs looked more attractive in original nests than in a sawdust-lined drawer or box, I decided that my collection should have one nest, with complete set of eggs displayed in it, of every obtainable species, and also a set of each species of eggs to be kept by itself. This resolution was made in 1875. In June of that year I collected a nest and four eggs of the Vesper Sparrow at Ithaca, New York. This initial set is still in my collection, and owing to painstaking care, this and all my earlier collected specimens are now in as fine a state of preservation as when first placed in my cabinets.

My field work has mainly been carried on in twenty-four counties of Cali-

fornia; but the birds of New York, Illinois, Florida, Arizona and Idaho have also received visits from me. Favorable opportunities enabled me to add to my collection of nests and eggs a larger proportion of personally taken species and subspecies than is commonly the privilege of an oologist. A set of Spotted Owl, taken in San Diego County, March 24, 1884, is the most highly prized of any set in my collection. Most oologists, however, might consider as of greater value my Condor egg or either one of the following nests accompanied by beautifully marked sets of eggs: Everglade Kite, Golden Eagle, Farallon Rail. My collection of bird skins, nests and eggs is willed to the California Museum of Vertebrate Zoology.

The most important capture of my life, is Mrs. Ingersoll, formerly Miss Laura I. Stevens, of Sacramento, California.

ALBERT MILLS INGERSOLL.

San Diego, California, January 18, 1919.

NOTES ON THE BREEDING HABITS OF THE RED CROSSBILL IN THE OKANAGAN VALLEY, BRITISH COLUMBIA

By J. A. MUNRO

THE FOLLOWING notes apply chiefly to a small section of timbered country close to Okanagan Landing, its topography being the familiar Okanagan type of low mountain covered with Douglas fir and yellow pine, including both original forest and second growth.

Red Crossbills (*Loxia curvirostra minor*) were present in unusually large numbers during the year 1918, and in order to compare their relative abundance with other years, a synopsis of my field notes, taken since 1911, is included.

These birds were fairly common on December 14, 1911, in yellow pine country near Okanagan Landing. A series of males collected on this date had the sex organs enlarged, but no mated birds were seen. It is probable that these birds remained until the following spring, but as no special interest was taken in them at the time, no attempt was made to keep a record of their movement as was done in subsequent years. The only record for 1912 was made on March 13, when a flock of fifteen birds was seen at Nahun, fifteen miles south of Okanagan Landing on the west side of the lake. A small flock was seen several times in the same district at an altitude of 4000 feet during the first week of December, 1913.

No other records were made until July 21, 1915, when a small flock was seen at Okanagan Landing, probably their first appearance for that year. As this locality was being carefully worked at the time it is unlikely that they would have escaped observation, had they arrived before this. A female taken on August 5, and another taken on August 18, had the worn abdominal patch of breeding birds and a third female in breeding condition, was taken on February 24, 1916. This small flock was seen at intervals until April 20, 1916, which was the last date on which Crossbills were observed until the big year 1918, when they were first noted on January 9. They were seen daily there-