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## ALEXANDER WILSON.

### I. THE AUDUBON CONTROVERSY.

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The brief, almost accidental, meeting of Alexander Wilson and John James Audubon in the latter's counting-room, Louisville, Kentucky, March 9th, 1810, and the ill-considered if not brutal accusations and recriminations following, proved the fruitful source of subsequent contentions not at all creditable to those involved. On Alexander Wilson, who had left unsaid a single unkind word of his rival; long after death had claimed him for his own and personal vindication was out of the question; the offense was onerously placed. On the very last day's journey to that most disappointing town of Louisville, he was exposed to a storm from which he could not protect himself, because his greatcoat was in request to cover his precious bird skins![1]

The exposure and privations of that western trip resulted in the contraction of dysentery, fatal to him in a few brief years. In his poem descriptive of the journey, we have at least a pitiful truth in these lines:

"Through western forests, deep and drear,
Far from the haunts of science thrown,
My long laborious course I steer,
Alone, unguided, and unknown."

—*The Pilgrim.*

[1] Peabody's Life of Wilson.


Alex Wilson

Wilson has almost invariably appeared at a great disadvantage whenever placed in opposition to Audubon, even some of his greatest admirers, without due consideration of all the facts, have taken it for granted that he was altogether at fault, and cravenly hinted at his lowly birth and lack of opportunities in justification! It seems a great pity that those two remarkable men, so unlike in temperament and in everything except their love and devotion to Nature, could not have met in good fellowship on that common ground. To think of there being but two active ornithologists in all the country, each unconscious of the other's existence until a fortuitous meeting should reveal one to the other and start a quarrel of so many decades duration. Of Wilson—the Scotch-American—the very worst that could be said of him is that he was "a poor weaver, suffering from the many blights that had fallen upon his class in a land where the amenities of civilization had not done much to soften the manners of the working classes." [1] "Not accustomed to polished society in his earlier days; and, as he was conscious of possessing powers greatly superior to those of the laborers with whom he associated, his manners, like those of Robert Burns, probably became somewhat impatient and overbearing." [2]

"As a poet he missed greatness by those limitations of passion which seem so sad and unaccountable; as a naturalist, he achieved it by patience that knew no limitations until death interposed." [3]

"Of middle stature, thin, cheek-bones projecting, eyes though hollow, displaying considerable vivacity and intelligence; sallow complexion, a dash of vulgarity in his physiognomy which struck the observer at first view, but which failed to impress one on acquaintance." [4] By turns a poverty-stricken weaver, indorsing his indentures with the following:

[1]Buchanan's Life of Audubon.
[2]Peabody's Life of Wilson.
[3]Coues' Key to North American Birds.
[4]Ord's Life of Wilson.

"Be't kent to a' the world in rhime,
That wi' right mickle wark and toil,
For three long years I've ser't my time,
Whiles feasted wi the hazel oil."

An itinerant peddler when nothing better offered; or to satisfy his longing for travel:

"Hard fate has this ordain't, that I
Maun dauner thro the warl',
The wants o' thousan's to supply,
An' heavy lades to harl;
Sae aft, when E'ening brings the Night,
In lanely desolation,
I seek a corner, out o' sight,
To mourn my condemnation."

—*The Pack.*

And ill-paid schoolmaster, of which he writes:

"Of all professions that this world hath known,—
From humble cobblers upwards to the throne,
From the great architects of Greece and Rome
Down to the maker of a farthing broom,—
The worst for care and undeserving abuse,
The first in real dignity and use
(If kind to teach, and diligent to rule),
Is the learned master of a little school."

—*The Dominie.*

Disappointed in love, a stranger to prosperity though helping others poorer than himself; yet desiring so earnestly that he "might at least leave a small beacon to point out where he perished."

Audubon, on the other hand, was the son of an admiral of France. "Educated with all the advantages wealth could bestow, and his natural taste for painting had been early trained into a rich development under the guidance of the celebrated David." [1]

[1] Brewer's Reminiscences of Audubon.

"Vivid and ardent was his genius; matchless he was with both pen and pencil in giving life and spirit to the beautiful objects he delineated with passionate love. The brilliant French-American naturalist was little of a 'scientist.' Of his work, the magical beauties of form, and color, and movements, are his all; his page is redolent of Nature's fragrance."[1] He was, according to his own description, "five feet, ten inches, erect and with muscles of steel, in temper warm, irascible, and at times violent." Fond of shooting, fishing and riding on horseback, ridiculously fond of dress. "To have seen me going shooting in black satin small-clothes or breeches, with silk stockings, and the finest ruffled shirt Philadelphia could afford, was, as I now realize, an absurd spectacle; but it was one of my many foibles, and I shall not conceal it; I purchased the best horses in the country, and rode well and felt proud of it; my guns and fishing tackle were equally good, always expensive, and richly ornamented, often with silver." [2]

Fond of music, dancing, and drawing, in all of which he was well instructed. Without a care or occupation except that of amusement, until he became united to a woman of the highest devotion, appreciation and refinement; not to have been a little vain and selfish would have been altogether impossible. "He was handsome and he knew it. He was elegant and he prided himself upon it. He was generous in most things, but he did not love his rivals." [3]

To the fastidious Audubon, Wilson's appearance was far from prepossessing. "How well do I remember him, as he walked up to me! His long, rather hooked nose, the keenness of his eyes, and his prominent cheek bones, stamped his countenance with a peculiar character. His dress, too, was of a kind not usually seen in that part of the country,— a short coat, trousers, and a waistcoat of grey cloth."[4]

[1] Coues' Key to North American Birds.
[2] Audubon's Journals.
[3] Buchanan's Life of Audubon.
[4] Audubon's Ornithological Biography.

Wilson opened his books, explained the nature of his occupation, and requested Audubon's patronage. "With hopes humble enough, asking only support equal to his merits, and the laudability of his intentions, expecting no more; and not altogether certain of that." [1] Here were the first two volumes of a work which the great Cuvier afterward pronounced "equal in elegance to the most beautiful works of ornithology published in the old world." Drawn by one "to whom the art of bird painting had been acquired with fingers stiffened by toil and manual labor," [2] and "perhaps no other work on ornithology of equal extent is equally free from error, and its truthfulness is illuminated by a spark of the fire divine. This means immotality." [3] Audubon continues: "I felt surprised and gratified at the sight of his volumes, turned over a few of the plates, and had already taken a pen to write my name in his favor, when my partner, rather abruptly, said to me in French, 'My dear Audubon, what induces you to subscribe to this work? Your drawings are certainly far better, and again, you must know as much of the habits of American birds as this gentleman.' Whether Mr. Wilson understood French or not, or if the suddeness with which I paused disappointed him, I cannot tell; but I clearly perceived he was not pleased. Vanity and the encomiums of my friend prevented me from subscribing." Audubon's frankness has ever been his most winning weapon, yet after cheerfully shifting part of the blame to the vanity of youth and the remainder to his hard-headed friend Rosier, he destroys the whole effect in the following words: "* * * but, dear reader, I did not subscribe to his work, for, even at that time, my collection was greater than his." Eleven years later he vainly endeavored to obtain sight of this work in New Orleans, and the cruel irony of fortune, still later while in Europe he wrote in his journal: "How often I thought during these visits, of Alexander Wilson, when traveling as I am now, to procure subscribers, he, as well as myself, was received with rude coldness and

[1] Wilson's Introduction, American Ornithology.
[2] Brewer's Reminiscences of Audubon.
[3] Coues' Key.

sometimes with that arrogance which belongs to *parvenus*." To the poor Scotch naturalist, Audubon doubtless not only appeared the accomplished sportsman-artist, but a wealthy gentleman of leisure as well, yet so little interested in natural science or the portraits of birds not of his own painting, that he had not taken the trouble to look over more than a few of the plates! That this was characteristic of the gentleman there is little doubt and that he was not at heart a scientist is probably true. "It is singular how two minds possessing the same taste can be so diversified as to differ in *toto* respecting the same subject. During the whole time of Mr. Audubon's residence in Paris, he only visited the ornithological gallery twice( while I was studying for hours almost daily) for the purpose of calling on me; and even then he bestowed that sort of passing glance at the magnificent cases of birds which a careless observer would do while sauntering into the rooms."[1] Wilson, however, took a keen interest in the contents of Audubon's portfolio, being all enthusiasm, and recognized two species as new to him; but the week's canvass in Louisville produced not a single subscriber! No wonder poor Wilson, out of the bitterness of his heart, wrote in his diary: "Science or literature has not one friend in this place," and felt much the same as Audubon did many years later when lack of appreciation seemed about to balk him in his great undertaking. Audubon's apparent, though perhaps unconscious antagonism to Wilson, is fully illustrated in the following extract from his Ornithological Biography under the head of Whooping Crane: "I had, in 1810, the gratification of taking Alexander Wilson to some ponds within a few miles of Louisville, and of showing him many birds of this species, of which he had not previously seen any other than stuffed specimens. I told him that the white birds were adults, and that the grey ones were the young. Wilson, in his article on the Whooping Crane, has alluded to this, but as on other occasions, has not informed his readers whence this information came." This is indeed a most trivial charge if it were not an unjust one. Audubon being of the most positive

[1] Swainson's Taxidermy.

nature, did not stop to consider that it was possible for Wilson to have found out this fact for himself; and furthermore it will be noted that this is about the only intimation extant of the latter being a closet naturalist. Quoting from Wilson's American Ornithology under the head of the above species: "A few sometimes make their appearance in the marshes of Cape May (New Jersey) in December, particularly on and near Egg Island, where they are known by the name of *Storks*. The younger birds are easily distinguished from the rest by the brownness of their plumage. Some linger in these marshes the whole winter, setting out north about the time the ice breaks up. * * * On the tenth of February (1809) I met with several near the Waccaman river, in South Carolina; I also saw a flock at the ponds near Louisville, Kentucky, on the twentieth of March (1810). * * * The vast marshy flats of Siberia are inhabited by a crane very much resembling the present, with the exception of the bill and legs being red; like those of the present, the year old birds are said to be tawny." Under the date of March "21st" (20th), the following extract from Wilson's diary is brief and to the point: "Went out shooting this afternoon with Mr. A(udubon), saw a number of Sandhill Cranes." According to Ord, Wilson never saw the real Sandhill Crane, so the above must apply to *Grus americanus,* Whooping Crane, although there seems no doubt that his friend Bartram identified two distinct species in Florida which he called *Grus pratenses* and *Grus clamator.* Audubon mixed the adult and young of the two species in almost inextricable confusion at the very time he published his cry of stolen knowledge. It appears from Audubon's Journal that he informed Wilson that he had no intentions of publishing; at his request loaned him a few of his drawings during his stay, hunted in company and procured him specimens of birds he had never before seen; and finally offered him his drawings merely on the condition that what he had drawn or might afterward draw and send to him, should be mentioned in his work as coming from Audubon; to this Wilson made no reply, and soon after left Louisville on his way to New Orleans, "little suspecting how

much his talents were appreciated in that little town." Wilson's version of the Louisville visit is exceedingly brief: "March 17. * * * Took my baggage and groped my way to Louisville—put up at the Indian Queen tavern and gladly sat down to rest. March 18. Rose quite refreshed. Found a number of land speculators here. * * March 19. Rambled about town with my gun. Examined Mr. (Audubon)'s drawings in crayon—very good. Saw two new birds he had, both *Montacilla*. March 20. Sat out this afternoon with gun—killed nothing new. * * * Many shopkeepers board in taverns —also boatmen, land speculators, merchants, etc. *No naturalist to keep me company.* March 21. Went out shooting this afternoon with Mr. A(udubon). Saw a number of Sandhill Cranes. Pigeons numerous. March 23. * * * Having parted with great regret, with my paroquet to the gentlemen of the tavern, I bade adieu to Louisville, to which place I had four letters of recommendation, and was taught to expect so much of everything there; but neither received one act of civility from those to whom I was recommended, one new subscriber nor *one new bird;* though I ransacked the woods repeatedly, and visited all the characters likely to subscribe. *Science or literature has not one friend in this place."* Audubon takes exception to the above, almost if not quite a score of years after; time enough to have forgotten much incident to an ordinary interview, if, upon reading Ord's extracts from Wilson's diary, published in 1814, pique had not aided in the recalling of the most vivid points in his favor. On the other hand, Wilson, at perhaps the time of his greatest irritation and discouragement, had written while the memory of his disappointment was fresh in his mind. Obviously Audubon was not one of the gentlemen to whom the letters of introduction were addressed, therefore that part of Wilson's words cannot apply to him. Furthermore the original rendition of the opening words of his diary under date of March 23rd make it appear as if the Paroquet was presented or sold to the gentlemen of the tavern, whereas by his own account he carried it from Big Bone Lick, thirty miles above the Kentucky river, upward of a thousand miles,

in his pocket, and it finally flew overboard and perished in the Gulf of Mexico; a better interpretation would read: "Having parted with the gentlemen of the tavern with great regret, I with my paroquet bade adieu to Louisville." In this connection it will be well to remember that Audubon dwelt under the same roof and was of the company referred to. Wilson's statement that he received not one new bird, appears to have been equally true, Audubon's several statements notwithstanding. The Whooping Crane, *Grus americanus,* as already mentioned, had been met with previously in South Carolina and probably on the New Jersey coast; the Solitary Sandpiper, *Helodranas solitarius,* is a regular transient through Southeastern Pennsylvania and doubtless was first met with near home, though he appears to have also met with it in Kentucky; Wilson's Snipe, *Gallinago delicata,* he mentions especially as having found extremely numerous on the borders of the ponds near Louisville, March 20th, as well as abounding in the meadows bordering the Schuylkill and Delaware rivers. Two new species, the Kentucky Warbler, *Geothlypis formosa,* and the Prairie Warbler, *Dendroica discolor,* are the only ones he appears to have accredited to that state, and the early date on which he departed from Louisville would prove that they were not taken until after he had traveled south some distance, meeting the vernal migration. The tender of the work of another, no matter how valuable and artistic, could not be other than embarrassing to Wilson, who was placed under the most extreme difficulties in bringing out his own production; and his apparent unresponsiveness to the doubtful generosity of Audubon, probably partook of abashment rather than the churlishness attributed to him. At that time the great bird-painter could scarcely have unloaded to the most wealthy publisher on earth, and it afterwards cost him $100,000 to bring out his own work.

Note the gentle sarcasm Audubon employs in the faintest echo of that ever-to-be-regretted visit: "Wilson's Plover! I love the name because of the respect I bear to him to whose memory the bird has been dedicated. How pleasing it would have been to me, to have met him on such an excursion, and,

after procuring a few of his own birds, to have listened to him as he would speak of a thousand interesting facts connected with his favorite science and my ever pleasing pursuits. * * * But alas! Wilson was with me only a few times, and then *nothing* worthy of his attention was procured."[1] But again quoting from Audubon, this time under the head of the Small-headed Flycatcher; here is a most serious charge; one which should never have been made unless the author of it was prepared to prove it beyond the shadow of a doubt: "When Alexander Wilson visited me at Louisville, he found in my already large collection of drawings, a figure of the present species, which being at that time unknown to him, he copied and afterward published in his great work, but without acknowledging the privilege that had thus been granted him. I have more than once regretted this, not by any means so much on my own account, as for the sake of one to whom we are deeply indebted for his elucidations of our ornithology."

While at Nashville, about the last of April, Wilson sent a letter and three sheets of drawings to his engraver's address, which Mr. Lawson never received; and if a copy of Audubon's drawing of the Small-headed Flycatcher was included, it was of course lost with the rest.

At a stated meeting of the American Philosophical Society, September 18th, 1840, George Ord replies to the charge of Wilson's plagiarism of the Small-headed Flycatcher as follows: "The attack upon the reputation of a member of this society, one who, during the long period he dwelt amongst us, was noted for his integrity, ought not to be suffered to pass without examination. Wilson's Small-headed Flycatcher differs in no respect from his ordinary style; that it bears the signet of paternity on its very front. But, as it might be objected that this mode of reasoning is, in conclusion, from the circumstances of several of Mr. Audubon's birds bearing a resemblance to those of Wilson, Mr. Ord obviated this objection, by stating that Mr. Audubon had not scrupled to appropriate the labors of Wilson to his own use;

[1] Ornithological Biographies.

inasmuch as the figures of the female Marsh Blackbird (*Birds of America,* plate 67) and that of the male Mississippi Kite (same work, plate 117) have both been copied from the *American Ornithology,* without the least acknowledgment of the source whence they had been derived. Mr. Ord thought that the charge of plagiarism came with ill grace from one who had been guilty of it himself, as in the instance above named. Wilson states that he shot the bird figured and described in his 6th volume, page 62, in an orchard, on the 24th of April. Mr. Ord confirms this statement, by declaring to this society that he himself was with Wilson on the day in question; that he saw and examined the specimen; and that Wilson assured him it was entirely new to him. Wilson was then residing at the Bartram Botanic Garden near Philadelphia. Mr. Ord further read to the society a letter addressed to him by the artist, Mr. Lawson, who engraved the plate in which the Small-headed Flycatcher is figured. This gentleman affirms, that all the plates, which he engraved for the American Ornithology, were from Wilson's own drawings, and that in respect to the plate in which the Small-headed Flycatcher appeared, *specimens* of all the birds represented accompanied the drawings; and he, after getting his outlines, worked from them. Mr. Ord laid before the society a proof of the etching of this plate, and remarked, that from the minuteness of the details, the point of the engraver had a greater share in producing the desired result, than even the pencil of the ornithologist."[1] It will be recalled that Ord frequently accompanied Wilson on his later local collecting trips. It was on one of those jaunts he secured the first and only example of the Cape May Warbler, *Dendroica tigrina,* Wilson ever saw.

Audubon complained, several years previous to this, that Ord assailed him with bitter enmity. His son Victor G. and other friends loyally replied to Charles Waterton's shallow criticisms and broad display of ignorance,[2] and Dr. John

[1] Proceedings American Philosophical Society, Vol. I, 1840.

[2] London's Magazine of Natural History, Vol. VI, 1833, pp. 215-218. 369-372; Vol. VII, 1834, pp. 66-74. Journal Boston Society of Natural History, Vol. I, 1834, pp. 15-31. National Intelligencer, 1834.

Bachman replied in a kindly manner to George Ord, who had questioned some of the statements appearing in the first volume of the Ornithological Biography,[1] and this is alluded to by his devoted granddaughter,[2] who can discover no evidence of vanity or selfishness in her illustrious ancestor; yet the subject matter under controversy became altogether trivial in comparison to this later charge, which received no notice whatever. Ord's companionship would have counted for little indeed if he had not defended his departed friend from imputation so vile. His defense of Wilson lacked neither dignity nor evidence. Audubon's accusation had been published in the body of a work which the author must have foreseen would have a world-wide circulation and be consulted for many generations. It has been copied in every one of the later editions of his works, and reiterated in almost every one of his biographies, even to the present century. Doubtless a thousand have read and accepted his estimate of Wilson, to one who has as much as seen Ord's defense and counter-charge. Moreover, Ord's attack was not at all cowardly, his adversary was not beneath the sod, but quite capable of being heard had he not chosen to silently pose as unjustly persecuted.

In reference to the Mississippi Kite, Stone has written the following: "It must be admitted that a tracing of Wilson's bird fits exactly over Audubon's figure, but the copyist left out one of the bird's toes. The charge resolves itself solely into a question of veracity between Audubon and Ord; there is no resemblance whatever between the two figures of the Small-headed Flycatcher, while Audubon's statement about Wilson's acceptance of his offer to let him copy some of his drawings are contradictory."[3]

Audubon states that Wilson approached him while at his table, drawing. "Some time elapsed, during which I never heard of him, or of his work. At length, having occasion to

[1] Bucks County (Pennsylvania) Intelligencer, June 10, July 1 and 15, 1835.

[2] Audubon and His Journals, 1897, p. 56.

[3] Auk, Vol. XXIII, 1896, p. 312.

go to Philadelphia, I immediately after my arrival there, inquired for him and paid him a visit. He was then drawing a White-headed Eagle. He received me with civility, and took me to the exhibition rooms of Rembrant Peale, the artist, who had there portrayed Napoleon crossing the Alps. Mr. Wilson spoke not of birds nor drawings. Feeling, as I was forced to do, that my company was not agreeable, I parted from him; and after that never saw him again."[1] At this time the splendid genius of the Painter-Ornithologist was unknown to the world, but his views had broadened. He no longer wished to monopolize all admiration, but had become interested in the work of others. He found that the humble petitioner had surmounted all difficulties encountered and was now reaping the first fruits of his industry.

His final success seemed assured. In Mr. Audubon he recognized the gentleman companion and guide of one or two little tramps about Louisville, a service any loiterer about the settlement might have performed acceptably. In acting as his guide to the Peale art gallery, Wilson thought to return his kindness, and no doubt anticipated the pleasure he was giving an accomplished artist and patriotic Frenchman. That Audubon would expect more was inconceivable! He had taken little interest in his drawings previously, and Audubon would be under the necessity of reopening the subject or leave it untouched.

We may sometimes distrust the evidence of a too positive man. Audubon could hardly be absolutely certain that Wilson used his drawing unless he was conscious of the fictitiousness of the subject himself, and the consequent utter impossibility of duplicating it by any means whatever; in this event he would himself be guilty of creating and perpetuating a gross fraud—a condition so utterly improbable as to pass as almost beyond a possibility, though, indeed, not absolutely so, if hearsay evidence may be credited. Anyone familiar with the journals of Audubon will recall his description of that "odd fish" the eccentric Rafinesque (Schmaltz). The following came from Dr. Kirk-

[1] Ornithological Biography.

land, who in turn received it from Dr. Bachman: "Audubon showed him gravely some ten grotesque drawings of impossible fishes which he had observed 'down the river,' with notes on their habits, and a list of the names by which they were known by the French and English settlers. These, Rafinesque duly copied into his notebooks and later he published descriptions of them as representatives of new genera, such as *Pagostoma, Aplocentrus, Litholepis, Pilodictis, Pomacampes,* and the like. I am informed by Dr. J. A. Allen that there are also some unidentified genera of Herons, similarly described by Rafinesque from drawings kindly shown him by Mr. Audubon. Apparently these also date from the same unlucky practical joke."[1]

Audubon's description of the Small-headed Warbler, according to his own confession, appears to have been taken thirty-two years after the drawing was made! "In those happy days, I thought not of the minute difference by which one species may be distinguished from another in words or the necessity of comparing tarsi, toes, claws and quills." It would seem, too, that he must have been somewhat at fault as to either the locality or the date of capture, unless it was made on a visit immediately preceding his permanent removal from Mill Grove, an event extremely improbable, since there is so much to urge against it in the absence of exact information as to the dates of his earlier trips. He has told us that he was married at Fatland Ford (near Philadelphia), April 8th, 1808, and left on the day following for Louisville, Kentucky. The overland trip to Pittsburgh, on which Mrs. Audubon met with a painful accident incident to the upsetting of the coach on the mountains, must have required a week at least. There was the usual delay incident to the loading of a flatboat with their many goods, and its passage down the Ohio almost wholly dependent on the current which Wilson gave at two and a half miles an hour, so that it was quite probably already late in April when the mouth of the Big Sandy was reached, beyond which lies the nearest Kentucky soil, with Louisville several hundred miles further

[1] Youman's Life of Rafinesque.

down the great Ohio. Wilson was twenty-two days enroute from Pittsburgh and while he made frequent side trips, he more than doubled the speed of a house boat, in his small skiff.

Audubon was on his wedding trip and the exact date of the capture of this bird did not greatly concern him. Coues says: "He was often careless and unreliable in his statements of fact, which often led him to being accused of falsehood."[1]

Audubon writes of "Alexander Wilson the naturalist—not the American naturalist." There is an undeniable tinge of jealousy in more than one passage in his journals. Upon what ground Burroughs judged that Wilson looked upon Audubon as his rival, while at the same time admitting that "in accuracy of observation, Wilson is fully his equal, if not his superior," is problematical. It seems absurd in view of the assurance Audubon had given Wilson that he did not intend to publish. And why should he accept one in preference to the other's statement, while questioning the former's veracity in one of his tales of adventure, which "sounds a good deal like an episode in a dime novel, and may be taken with a grain of allowance.[2] If Audubon acted inconsiderately toward the humbler, less assertive Wilson, he ignored the unbending Ord, considered the devoted Lawson garrulous, intimated that the scholarly Bonaparte was exceedingly ignorant in regard to our birds, considered himself badly used by the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, although he had been given access to its latest acquisitions, thereby misquoting and smothering the gentle, capable Townsend, who had made the shipments of the bird skins from the west; and even proposed purchasing Swainson's talent as he would a portrait, transferring his work to his own.[3] Truly, with the silent, subsidized partnership of the learned MacGillivray, it would seem that a monopoly of American ornithology was no idle dream in those days.

[1] Fourth Installment of Ornithological Bibliography, Proc. U. S. Nat. Mus., Vol. II, p. 396.

[2] Burroughs' John James Audubon.

[3] Gill's William Swainson and His Times, V. Osprey, Vol. IV, p. 171.

Almost a hundred years have passed since that memorable misunderstanding on the banks of the Ohio. This mass of evidence and opinions has been collated with neither animosity nor partisan feeling. A century is entirely too long a period in which to foster a quarrel. In this age of Audubonian worship, an idol need not be shattered in the emphasizing of this man's petty vanity, petulancy and inconsistency; and if in a single encounter, the son of the bourgeois measured up the better, truer man, judged truly according to the evidence; justice does not require perfection from him and indeed faultlessness will not be found; but a juster, more rational estimate of the men and their works should follow a close study of their lives.

Time and success softens the harshest judgment and when Audubon revisited the scenes of his youth, he could well afford to be at peace with all men, for he was in full flush of hard-earned fame and prosperity. He entered in his journal under the date of October 15th, 1836: "Passed poor Alexander Wilson's schoolhouse, and heaved a sigh. Alas, poor Wilson! would that I could once more speak to thee, and listen to thy voice. When I was a youth, the woods stood unmolested here, looking wild and fresh as if just from the Creator's hands; but now hundreds of streets cross them, and thousands of houses and millions of diverse improvements occupy their places. Bartram's Garden is the only place which is unchanged. I walked in the same silent wood I enjoyed on the same spot when first I visited the present owner of it, the descendant of (?) William Bartram, the generous friend of Wilson."[1] But alas! The kindly words were not written until he whom Audubon could never call friend had long since departed; yet how our hearts warm toward the great bird delineator for that one sigh in tribute to the memory of the immortal Wilson.

[1] Life of Audubon by his widow.