



John P. Franklin
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CASSINIA

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William P. Turnbull.*

BY SPENCER TROTTER.

AMERICAN ornithology had its roots in that growth of interest in nature that marked the close of the eighteenth century. For the first hundred years of settlement, there was little if any inquiry, in a scientific way, into the natural history of the New World. There was small chance of encouragement for its development. John Bartram and Benjamin Franklin were unique and shining lights. The minds that were first engaged in collecting and presenting the data concerning the native animals and plants, were those of men who later came to these shores, bringing with them the curiosity and interest that was developing in the atmosphere of European thought—Audubon, Wilson, Michaux, Bonaparte, and Rafinesque, all alike immigrants, but immigrants with a love of nature and a strong bias toward natural history pursuits. Alexander Wilson, the Scotch weaver, had watched birds on the banks of the Calder, and this interest was again awakened in his tramp to Philadelphia along

* The writer is indebted to Mr. Ruthven Deane of Chicago for much of the matter contained in this paper, as well as for the use of "the only known likeness" of Turnbull.

the Delaware, and later brought to a pitch of enthusiasm through his friendship with the native-born William Bartram. Bonaparte, with an undoubted ornithological bent, completed Wilson's work and advanced the scientific side of the study. The artist-naturalist Aududon was, like Bonaparte, a Frenchman, and with all the ear-marks of that gifted race. For the truly scientific portion of his great work, however, he was largely indebted to another Scot, William Macgillivray. So it is toward Scotland and France that we later devotees of the brilliant science of American ornithology may well turn our eyes. If these names are stars of the first magnitude, there are lesser lights, that yet are worthy of our attention, and the subject of this short sketch was, like Wilson and Macgillivray, a Scotchman.

William P. Turnbull was born at Fala, "a village lying on the southeast verge of Mid Lothian," on the twentieth day of June, 1830. So says his biographer, Mr. Robert Gray, a Scotch ornithologist, who published a sketch of Turnbull in the "Proceedings of the Berwickshire Naturalist's Club" (Vol. VIII, 1876-1878, pp. 77-78), about five years after his death. In this sketch, Mr. Gray speaks of Turnbull's boyhood, spent at his father's residence in the village of Gladsmuir, near the wood of that name in East Lothian, where his love for birds was early developed. "Always engaged in catching birds and looking for their nests," his biographer quotes, and I think we can fancy the lad, like one of us, with all that delightful enthusiasm, that after all seems the only thing worth while. His youthful observations, carried on mainly between the years 1845 and 1850, bore fruit in a "simple catalogue," published after he came to America, under the title, "Birds of East Lothian and a portion of the Surrounding Counties," issued from the Caxton press of C. Sherman, Son & Co., Philadelphia, (1863). Gray alludes in this biography to a frequent correspondence with Turnbull in America, and to the fact that he undertook, at Turnbull's suggestion, the preparation of a new edition, which "contains information on the rarer birds collected since the first edition was printed." It was illustrated by William Sinclair, and printed for private circulation, and bears the following title :

THE BIRDS OF EAST LOTHIAN
AND A PORTION OF
THE ADJOINING COUNTIES

BY

WILLIAM P. TURNBULL

Gladsmuir

Member of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia;
of the Lyceum of Natural History, New York;
Corresponding Member of the Natural History Society of Glasgow, etc.

[A vignette of the Dunlin inserted here]

GLASGOW: PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION
1867

There appear to have been two sets of this edition issued, one an octavo of 150 copies, the other a large paper issue of 50 copies, two of which were printed on vellum.* Both of these issues were the same as to printing and paging (48 pages), and contained besides the Dunlin vignette, a frontispiece in color of the Great Spotted Woodpecker, *Picus major*, drawn on stone by Edwin Sheppard, and engraved by Bowen & Co., and twelve other illustrations of birds, scattered through the text. According to Mr. Gray, about one-third of the edition was destroyed by fire in the publishing house at Glasgow, rendering copies of the book very scarce.

Turnbull came to America in the year 1850, when twenty-one years of age. I have not been able to discover anything concerning his occupation or manner of life; but that ornithology was uppermost in his mind is evident from the above-mentioned catalogue. We know he was an enthusiastic admirer of Alexander Wilson, and had in his possession, according to Mr. Gray, a trunk containing all of Mr. Wilson's "personal effects at the time of his death in 1813, his gun, pistols, books, letters, proof sheets, and plates of his great work on the birds of America, paint-box, drawings, saddle, his will, portrait, and annotated copy of his poems—all of which Wilson left to a Miss Sarah

*One of these vellum copies, Mr. S. N. Rhoads informs me, is now in the library of Mr. John E. Thayer of Lancaster, Mass.

Miller, who was pledged to become his wife, and from whose representatives they were purchased by Dr. Turnbull in 1868." We know that Turnbull must have devoted much of his time to the study of the birds of his adopted country, for in 1869, two years after the appearance of the "Birds of East Lothian," he published, in a similar style, his second work, "The Birds of East Pennsylvania and New Jersey," and it is this work that to-day brings him before the readers of "CASSINIA."

The typographical features of the American book are almost the exact counterpart of the East Lothian work, and like it there were two issues, a royal octavo, and a quarto. The title-page of this illustrated edition is as follows,—

THE
BIRDS OF EAST PENNSYLVANIA
AND NEW JERSEY

BY

WILLIAM P. TURNBULL. LL. D.

Author of the "Birds of East Lothian";
Member of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia;
of the Lyceum of Natural History, New York;
Corresponding Member of the Natural History Society of Glasgow, etc.

[A vignette of the Meadowlark inserted here.]

GLASGOW; PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION.
1869.

On the reverse side of the title-page, there is a statement that "the impression has been limited to one hundred and fifty copies 8vo, and fifty 4to—two of the former being on vellum." On the second leaf there is a dedication in Latin and Greek to Wilson, and a beautiful vignette of Wilson's grave and the Old Swedes' Church, done by J. Faulkner, R.H.A. There are altogether twenty drawings by Edwin Sheppard and William Sinclair, drawn upon stone by Frank Bott. The work was edited by Robert Gray, though his name does not appear, and printed by Arch K. Murray and Co. Glasgow. In the "Bibliographical Appendix" to the "Birds of the Colorado Valley" Dr. Coues, remarking upon this edition, says, "This is a sump-

tuous and elegant book—the best printed treatise on American birds extant. One of my amanuenses being set to the task, reported, ‘No typographical error found after close scrutiny.’” Coues further speaks of its scarcity and that “the edition was bought up by J. Sabine & Sons, N. Y., who advertised the 4to copies at \$4.” An American edition of the same date was published by Grambo & Co. of Philadelphia, which according to Coues, appeared before the Glasgow edition, and differs only in the specific name of the Nighthawk, *popetue* instead of *virginianus*. There is also an interesting early reference to the European House Sparrow in America, and an illustration of the same by Sinclair.

Another edition of this same work, identical with and apparently from the same plates as the Glasgow edition, but without illustrations, appeared in pamphlet form, published by Henry Grambo & Co., Philadelphia, 1869. At one time Turnbull appears to have contemplated joining this firm, but for some reason failed to do so. This pamphlet edition is the one commonly quoted and is still occasionally met with among dealers. Coues refers to it as selling “for one-third the price of the other, to which it is inferior in style, though still a handsome pamphlet.” The highly calendered green paper cover bears a title similar to that of the title-page inside, save that it lacks the punctuation and author’s titles, and also the Latin quotation, the space of this last being substituted by an engraving of two birds on a leafy branch, fairly good representations of the Golden-winged and Chestnut-sided Warblers. The Latin quotation referred to is substituted in the space of the title-page for the vignette of the Meadowlark in the illustrated edition. It is from Ovid :

aves, solatia ruris,
Assuetum silvis, innocuumque genus,
Quae facitis nidos, quae plumis ova fovetis,
Et facili dulces editis ore modos.—OVID.

Mr. S. N. Rhoads informs me that a few copies of this 8vo pamphlet had the imprint of C. D. Price, a Philadelphia bookseller. At the end of the last page, (50) is the same reference

to Murray, the printer, as in the Glasgow edition, indicating the transatlantic origin of the plates.

Turnbull left an interesting collection of birds which I remember examining many years ago at the home of the late Professor E. D. Cope, who I believe obtained the specimens from Bernard Hoopes, a local collector. This collection is now in the possession of the Academy of Natural Sciences.

There is one point of interest reflected in the difference as to the author's name in the title-page of the East Lothian and East Pennsylvania books. In the latter the author's name is followed by the letters "LL. D.", the University of Pennsylvania having conferred this degree upon him in August 1868, the year between the appearance of the two works.

As to the personal history of William Turnbull, outside of his work as an ornithologist, I have little to record. In the year 1866, he made a short visit to Scotland, where Gray became personally acquainted with him, and remarks that he was the most enthusiastic lover of birds he had ever met. He possessed a very valuable library, especially complete in works on ornithology. Turnbull was elected a member of the Academy of Natural Sciences on July 28, 1857 and served as a member of the committee on ornithology for 1869-1870. From an obituary notice in an American newspaper quoted by Gray, he appears to have had a wife and child or children. He died in Philadelphia on the 5th of July, 1871, aged forty-one years, and his funeral took place on the 8th inst. from the residence of a sister on Twenty-first Street below Spruce, but his burial place is unknown to me. It is but another illustration of the vanishing of men out of the world of the living, and the difficulty of finding even a trace of them in the span of a generation. The obituary notice above referred to, which I have failed to find, but which Gray quotes in his memorial, without exact reference to its source, concludes thus, "Dr. Turnbull was a warm-hearted friend, a genial companion, a highly cultivated gentleman, a devoted father and husband, and a sympathizing, honest man. His death at so early an age, will in many places, create a void not likely very soon to be filled."