



Sam. Wright

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BY WITMER STONE

THERE was established at the Academy of Natural Sciences, many years ago, by members of the Jessup family, a scholarship for the purpose of aiding young men in the study of Natural History. Many of the beneficiaries have attained greater or less eminence in science, while some who from force of circumstances were compelled to enter other fields of activity have had their love of nature so strengthened by their associations at the Academy, that Natural History has ever remained for them a delightful recreation from the tedium of a business life.

The writer became a student on the Jessup Foundation in 1888, this being the only position available in which he could pursue ornithological study at the Academy and care for the then long neglected collection. In December 1891, Samuel Wright, a school-boy nine years his junior, also accepted a Jessup scholarship, and being more interested in birds than in other subjects became associated with him in the care of the collections. This intimate association, lasting until Wright's departure from the Academy to enter a business career, developed a friendship that endured until his death and became ever more cherished as the years rolled by.

The D. V. O. C. had been established just before Wright's advent at the Academy and he became one of the earliest Associate Members. Developing a deeper interest in its activities as he grew older, he was elected an Active Member in 1901, served as Treasurer from 1908 to 1911, and was one of the most active members of the committee in charge of the twentieth anniversary meeting, he and the writer preparing the souvenir publication which was issued at that time. As stated on its pages the Club has succeeded because of the earnest support afforded by the members along various lines. There have always been those who while temporarily prevented from prosecuting field work or original research, have generously lent a hand in such other ways as they were able—caring for the finances, increasing the sociability of the meetings and advancing the publications. Who shall say that these men were not as valuable members as the most active ornithologists among us? And in their front rank stood Samuel Wright. It will always be our great regret that he could not have been spared to enjoy the active participation in field work which the demands of an exacting business life had denied him but to which he was looking forward when a contemplated retirement from business affairs would have left him free to follow his ornithological interests.

"Sam Wright," as we knew him and as he always preferred to sign his name, was born in Conshohocken on the Schuylkill River fourteen miles above Philadelphia, on June 22, 1875, the son of William and Frances Cresson Wright and was educated at the Friend's boarding school at Westtown, Chester Co., Pa., where Thomas Say, John K. Townsend, John Cassin, Edward D. Cope and not a few of the members of the D. V. O. C. received their early training. The Quaker influence, ever keen for the study of Natural History, had no doubt much to do with the kindling in the youthful minds of the scholars that interest in birds which in so many cases led later to the more or less serious study of ornithology. In Wright's case it led to his application for a position on the Jessup Foundation through his cousin the late Dr. Benjamin Sharp, who then spent nearly all his time at the Academy and shortly after became its Corresponding Secretary.

Wright and I occupied a small room opening out of the old library on the Race Street front of the building, where the few bird-skins then belonging to the Academy were assembled, consisting mainly of the collection of North American and West Indian birds of Dr. William L. Abbott, who was then in Africa on his first exploring expedition. All of these Wright and I labeled and catalogued, and then, in conjunction with David McCadden who had been appointed taxidermist at the Academy, we began the dismounting of a large part of the immense exhibition collection of birds which was displayed in the museum, a task which was carried to completion many years later with the assistance of other students of the Jessup Fund—Pennell, Fowler, Lorriliere, Rehn, Culver, etc., all of whom also became members of the Club.

We were both engaged at this time too in forming private collections of birds and every morning during the spring we brought in choice specimens from Germantown and Conshohocken respectively to be compared, commented upon and skinned at lunch time. We also took collecting trips together to the Jersey Pine Barrens for Pine and Prairie Warblers and down the Delaware for winter hawks and rare migrants. Wright formed an ornithological partnership with a boy friend of Conshohocken, Frederic L. Clark son of Charles Heber Clark, the well-known author. They spent part of every summer camping on the upper Perkiomen, in a wild and picturesque spot, on the same stream whose lower waters were explored by Audubon from his home at Mill Grove, some miles below. The results of these campings furnished material for several communications to the Club, at the meetings of which Wright was for years one of the most regular attendants. He also made a valuable study of the Grasshopper Sparrow which appeared in *CASSINIA* for 1901 and which added largely to our knowledge of the bird in our region, especially as regards its migration.

Wright's interests were not wholly ornithological. He was fond of reading and appreciated the best in literature and the drama. He was always attracted by outdoor sports of all kinds, played football and baseball, was an adept with the tennis racket, winning several local championships and was a skilful

bowler. Of slender build and a constitution not over-strong, his success in these strenuous games was remarkable.

Deciding that science did not offer him the opportunities that he felt he must have, Wright left the Academy in 1893 and entered a draughting office, but soon after became connected with the J. Elwood Lee Chemical Company which had just established itself at his home town, Conshohocken, and here he remained until shortly before his death. Devotion to his business was now his main thought and it received the best that was in him. For a time he represented the firm in New York City with exceptional ability, and during the Spanish War succeeded in obtaining large contracts for hospital supplies. Later he was recalled to Conshohocken as Assistant Secretary. Early realizing the future of the automobile, he paid especial attention to the manufacture of rubber tires and was active in the organization in 1911 of the Lee Tire and Rubber Company, an outgrowth of the rubber department of the parent concern, and for five years was its Secretary. Early in 1916 he severed his connection with this company and removed to Yonkers, N. Y., becoming associated with the Philadelphia Rubber Work Company and manager and treasurer of the Acushnet Process Company with offices in Brooklyn and New York.

Wright's constant application to business had its effect on a none too strong constitution and several times he was forced to pause and seek recreation in the outdoor life that he loved so well—in the mountains of North Carolina and in the Adirondack wilderness. In the latter region he later acquired a tract of land which was his great delight and upon which he planned to spend much time later on in ornithological pursuits. But these hopes were never to be realized. A sudden attack of pneumonia proved too great a strain upon his constitution and he passed away on January 18, 1917.

Wright had been married in 1910 to Miss Louise Weston, and she with two small daughters as well as his parents and three sisters survive him.

As a student of birds Samuel Wright was far above the average. He was retiring and seldom displayed the thorough knowledge that he possessed ; but his perception was remarkably

keen and his mind quick to grasp a fact and store it away for future use—qualities that counted quite as heavily in his business successes as in his scientific activities. His ornithological specimens were to him far more than mere specimens. He had studied each one until he knew all that it represented and ever afterward it recalled to his mind many facts that would be lost to others.

In the spring of 1915 accompanied by Mrs. Wright he joined the American Ornithologists' Union party which crossed the continent to attend the San Francisco meeting, and his enjoyment of the trip, with its new associations and new birds, was intense. Again and again on the excursions that were taken *en route*, I was struck anew with his keenness of observation and the unexpected knowledge that he had acquired of western bird life. He had always been a devoted member of the A. O. U., becoming an Associate as early as 1895 and attending every meeting that he possibly could, including the last one in Philadelphia where he met again several of the western ornithologists whose acquaintance he had made on the San Francisco trip.

As a man and a friend Wright was all that these words should imply. Cheerful under all circumstances, generous and unassuming, everyone was drawn to him and many were his debtors for more than one act of kindness or charity. He was typical of the best of the material that has gone to make the Delaware Valley Club what it is.

Love of nature it seems to me must have no small part in forming such characters as his, and the influence of such men is of the best. They are bound to lead in activities to which they devote themselves and by their council and example many another is guided to the paths along which they have passed.