



## J. FLETCHER STREET

BY SAMUEL SCOVILLE, JR.

It was on a Washington's Birthday, in 1908. that I first met Fletcher Street. He wore a red flannel shirt, a red bandana, a slouch hat with a feather and a hole in it, and looked a good deal like a pirate.

The D. V. O. C. had a bird walk that day near Beverly, New Jersey, where Fletcher lived. It was a *Cypripedium acaule* which started our acquaintance. He told me that they grew near Beverly and invited me to come over in the spring and he would show me some.

I spent a May day with him that year. I don't remember that I found any orchids, but we caught a black snake, a puff adder and a big bloated unknown serpent, which we took to a D. V. O. C. meeting, where Fowler identified it as a red-bellied water snake, although we found it at least half a mile from any water in the middle of the woods. It was that day that we planned to collect and photograph all the snakes in Eastern America and write a book about them—the which we never did, although I still have notes and photographs which Fletcher and I made in preparation for that masterpiece.

From that day until Fletcher died, on September 18, 1944, we were close friends. How many, many trips we had together and with other nature lovers. Memories of them crowd into my mind as I write.

There was the day when we got our bird-list up to 60 species in one day, and were properly proud of our prowess. I remember on that day that the blue-winged warbler first flew into our lives. It had the black line through the eye, but refused to say "swee-chee," which Fletcher insisted it should do. Later on, at a more advanced state, we made our first century run, assisted by Julian Potter. He and Fletcher scored 101 and a noble-hearted great blue heron appearing in the twilight at Brigantine got me across the century mark just in time.

Later on, it was Fletcher who helped to organize those matchless century runs, starting from Urner's house at Elizabeth, reaching Troy Meadows before daybreak, and from there sifting the whole State of New Jersey until we arrived at the shore, returning through the Barrens in the early evening in time to pick up the whippoorwill as our final bird of the day. On the last one I attended we made a record of an even 160. My personal record was 149, while Fletcher, as usual, was well up in the 150's. He took the greatest delight in scientifically arranging these bird trips and compiling most elaborate scoring charts for them.

It was Fletcher who organized the Christmas census trips in which we competed against New York and New Jersey. Every foot of the territory was plotted and planned by him and it was through his untiring efforts that we made such remarkable and victorious scores.

I was with Fletcher when a yellow-bellied flycatcher flew out from between his feet in a sphagnum bog on Mt. Pocono and he located its rare nest. I watched Fletcher climb several parasangs up a towering gum tree to an eagle's nest, down by Bombay Hook. Seventy-five feet above the ground he cut and pulled his way through the overhanging nest to secure the eggs for that thorough paced oologist, George Stewart.

In later years it was Fletcher who, repenting of his evil ways, located most of the eagles' nests in South Jersey, climbed up to them and painted the eggs with India ink to protect them from the clutches of collectors.

It was Fletcher who started a campaign for more bluebirds and scattered bluebird boxes profusely all through South Jersey, and who tried to make a census of the birds of the Barrens—most of which turned out to be, as I recall, the omnipresent towhee.

All through those early golden years we journeyed far and fast together. He visited me up in Connecticut and got rattlesnakes in the celebrated Den on the old Indian reservation. When he married his charming and devoted wife, I was his best man. We bought land and built a cabin together down at New Lisbon and when it burned down in a forest fire, undaunted, Fletcher built another and better one, and we spent many and many happy days and nights, winter and summer, in those cabins.

With Stewart and other oologists, we collected cerulean warblers' eggs out at Waynesburg in Western Pennsylvania and American bittern and marsh-hawks' eggs up at Newton in Northern New Jersey and blue-gray gnatcatchers' and summer tanagers' eggs at Birdsnest, Virginia.

Long after he had become one of the best field ornithologists in the D. V. O. C., than which no higher praise can be bestowed, Fletcher took up botany and became nearly as good a botanist as he was an ornithologist.

I shall always remember some of the flower trips I had with him which, with our bird trips, are among the happiest memories of my life. It was he who showed me hidden stations where rare flowers bloomed, pine barren gentians gleaming like deep-blue stars in the green marsh grass, schizea, that rare and infinitesimal fern which looks like a bent green watch spring, and many another botanical treasure.

It was on one of the last trips that I had with Fletcher that he showed me a tiny hidden bog where the lovely *habenaria integra*, that butter-yellow fringeless orchid of the South, grew, some 200 miles out of bounds.

During the last years of Fletcher's life, we again planned to write a book together on the Barrens, that Land Forgotten which in the 18th Century resounded with the sound of triphammers and was filled with forges, furnaces, paper-mills, glassworks, manor houses, taverns and little forgotten settlements everywhere. Now they are as lost and forgotten as Troy and Nineveh and the vast mound which once was Babylon.

Along with various friends, we explored most of the 600 square miles of the Barrens. With Fletcher I climbed the dizzy heights (some 300 feet) of

the hidden Forked River Mountains and read the inscriptions on those pathetic little clay gravestones at Red Oak. It was with Fletcher that I visited the haunted house at Cedar Bridge and learned many of the secrets hidden at Martha and tried to find the nixie which haunts Blue Pool. It was Fletcher who showed me Watering Place Pond where the deer drink at nightfall. I still hope to bring out the book which we had planned, but, ah me, it will lack the touch of his vanished hand and the benefit of his minute and accurate knowledge of all those lost and lovely spots in the Barrens, which he had learned and showed to me.

I wish that there were space in the few pages which I am allowed to tell more about Fletcher Street. Only those who knew him as well as I did could appreciate some of the hidden characteristics of his many-sided nature. To many who knew him but casually, Fletcher seemed to show a rather jesting attitude with life in general. Those who knew him well were sometimes startled to find what depths of earnestness and sincerity were behind his superficial attitude. Let any scientific question arise of ornithology or botany or any kindred subject and Fletcher showed instantly a depth of purpose and a range of knowledge which at once stamped him as a real naturalist. He would take any amount of pains and labor to make sure that he was scientifically accurate in his notes and observations. Moreover, there was a vein of real poetry in his nature, that poetry which recognizes beauty and makes it one of the passions of life.

Among my last memories of Fletcher was his telling me that he would show me the most beautiful spot in the Barrens and toward twilight one fall day he took me to Wells Mills, and as we stood at the edge of the little cedar-circled lake, stained with the colors of the sunset, Fletcher looked at me triumphantly and said nothing, but stood for a long, long time enjoying the silent beauty of the spot.

Again another evening, after four of us had traveled far through the Barrens, stopping here and there to admire rare flowers or hidden places of which Fletcher knew the secret, he insisted that we make a wide detour. At last, in the early fall twilight we crossed a little lonely bridge over a brown stream, with silvered pools showing here and there in the marshland beyond, while all around us was the frost-fire of gums and oaks and the sombre green of the white cedars. Fletcher stopped the car on the bridge and waved his hand across that beautiful stretch of marshland as if inviting us to enjoy with him the lovely ending of that happy day.

Fletcher had the gift of friendship. I have rarely known a man who was more popular, both with men and women alike, or more happy-hearted. I never knew of his having an enemy. No man was ever more generous. He would give of his time and his money and his work unceasingly and unstintingly and without any thought of recompense, often too much for his own good.

As a member of the Art Club, he was universally liked and when that club was merged with the University Club, Fletcher was placed on more commit-

tees than any member of the club. He was a valued member of the Franklin Inn Club, past president of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club and treasurer of the American Ornithologists' Union, a former president of the Geographical Society and a popular member of the Wilderness Club, as well as a member of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States.

In his later years he had trained himself to be an effective speaker and lecturer and as a writer he made frequent contributions to the *Auk* and *Cassinia* and published a book, entitled, "Brief Bird Biographies," illustrated by himself, which had a wide circulation.

Next to Witmer Stone, Street was more responsible for the progress and prosperity of the D. V. O. C., of which he had been a president and secretary, than any other one member.

Even during his long, painful and hopeless illness, Fletcher showed constantly flashes of his old spirit. The last time I saw him in the hospital, shortly before his death, he told me of the many kindnesses which friends had shown him and his wife during his illness and spoke of what a help and comfort she had been to him throughout his life. In her last letter to me, Ethel, his wife, wrote how much she appreciated what his many friends had done and how she had enjoyed being a help to him as a driver in his studies of birds and flowers. The poor girl did not survive him many weeks, but she was a dearly loved and devoted wife to him up to the last.

"I have had a happy life and many friends," said Fletcher to me as I said good-bye to him in the hospital that day. "I am not afraid," were his last words to me.