

WILLIAM BACON EVANS

ROBERT L. HAINES

William Bacon Evans will be remembered by many of today's Club members for his Quaker garb, his clear, concise reporting of observations, and for an occasional, gentle reprimand given to young members with a cigarette between their lips, or to older members who, in the heat of discussion, became careless in the use of expletives.

Bacon Evans was born in Philadelphia. He attended Moorestown Friends Academy and Westtown School, and graduated from Columbia University, where he captained the soccer team. He also studied at Rollins College and Harvard University. He never married, but devoted his long life ministering to the physical, intellectual, and spiritual needs of his fellow man.

He was elected an associate member of the D.V.O.C. in November, 1898, an active member in December, 1900, and an honorary member in January, 1950. When Henry W. Fowler resigned from the office of secretary in March, 1901, William B. Evans was chosen to fill the vacancy and continued as secretary through 1905. From 1901 to 1918 he regularly contributed records for the spring migration studies. Two papers by him appear in the *Proceedings of the D.V.O.C.* and in *Cassinia*: "Some Observations on the Habits of Cross-bills (*Loxia C. Minor*) observed at Hanover, N.J., May 4-6, 1900" and "Trespassing of the Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Zamelodia ludoviciana*) in the Carolinian Fauna". He wrote a number of books including a collection of poems inspired by the songs of familiar birds. Cornelius Weygandt commented to him on these poems as follows: "It is a real pleasure to one of my generation, which is yours, to find a man brought up in the old humanities so completely accurate in science. Of course, what I like best about the bird songs is the way you get the personality of the birds as well as the quality of their songs." The following poem is expressive of Bacon Evans' personality as well as that of the bird:

"The Red-eyed Vireo"

(Chatterbox)

What's the matter?

Have you dined?

Are you fatter?

That is kind!

What is mind?

No matter!

What is matter?

Never mind.

For some years Bacon Evans taught French at Westtown School, where he was called Flicht by the students. Bird club notes in *Cassinia* for 1908



Courtesy Theodore B. Hetzel

WILLIAM BACON EVANS
1875 - 1964

record "During the past year William B. Evans has been appointed Instructor in Natural History at Westtown Boarding School." He also taught in a Quaker orphanage at Ras El Metn, Syria. At various periods in his life he cared for aged members of his family during their last years. Later in life he visited many Friends Meetings and Schools. For the younger children he never failed to produce hand-made puzzles, or graphic examples of the beauties of nature, which were a delight to them. Spiritual truths he was inclined to convey through stories which left his hearers smiling. Many tales are told about him with the same effect. On being introduced to a friend of mine, who grasped his hand quite firmly, he said "At least thy hand is not like a cold fishes' tail."

His true character is best revealed by an occurrence which took place in Syria. He was accompanying Daniel and Emily Oliver, the British Quakers who headed the orphanage where he taught, on a trip, when they were overtaken by a band of Arabs unfriendly to the English. Finding that the Arabs felt it necessary to take the lives of the Olivers in payment for some wrong at the hands of the British, Bacon Evans said: "These are good people, performing a great service; if you must have a life, then take mine." The Arabs were so impressed with his sincerity that they released all of them.

His concern for others and his interest in birds and in all of nature continued through his later years. For fifteen years he worked at the Haverford College Quaker Library on "The Dictionary of Quaker Biography," as yet unpublished. While living in Haverford, he was a familiar figure in town, sitting in his plain clothes, an arrow "piercing" his head from ear to ear, selling his puzzles and nature paintings. The money gathered in this manner was donated to unsuspecting but grateful recipients.

Toward the end of his life he lived at Friends Arch Street Center, and he continued to live there after it was used for an experiment in the study of men from Skid Row. His final gesture toward humanity was to enter the Stephen Smith Home for the Aged, a Negro institution, where he died at the age of 88. At his memorial service a Negro from the Home said that although he had known Bacon Evans only a few weeks he had never had a closer friend.

54 East Main Street, Moorestown, New Jersey