

THE LATE DR. J. WIGLESWORTH.

THE news of the tragic death of Joseph Wigglesworth, which occurred on May 16th last, came as a great shock to many, and the science of ornithology has lost a most devoted adherent. From the naturalist's point of view, he may be said to have died in harness, as he met his death while investigating the possible site of an eyrie of Peregrine Falcons near Porlock in Somerset. He left Porlock Weir alone on the morning of the 16th, but as no one witnessed the accident, it is impossible to say exactly what occurred; the evidence, however, tended to show that he was killed by a fall, the body being discovered on the shore two days later.

Joseph Wigglesworth was born in 1853, and was of high medical distinction. He was a Doctor of Medicine of London and a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, and had been medical superintendent at Rainhill County Asylum, near Liverpool, for thirty years. He became a Member of the British Ornithologists' Union in 1898 and joined the Somerset Archæological and Natural History Society in 1914. Of the Ornithological section of this Society he became Recorder in 1915, and on the death of Lord St. Audries (first president of the section) Dr. Wigglesworth succeeded to the office in 1918, his enthusiasm for the welfare of the section being unbounded. Dr. Wigglesworth's published writings on birds were not voluminous, and perhaps on this account his great field-knowledge of our birds was not generally realized.

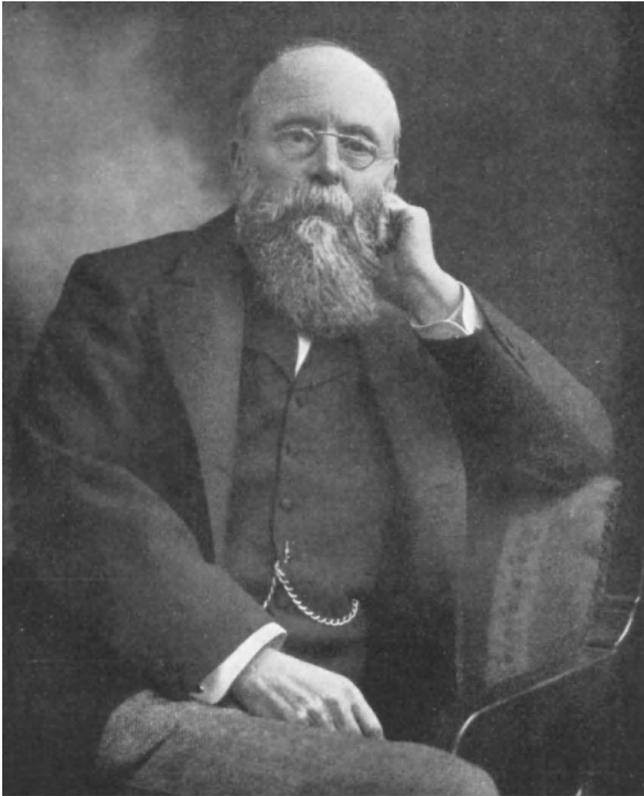
On October 13th, 1899, he delivered his Presidential address before the Liverpool Biological Society, the subject of which was "Flightless Birds," and in Vol. XV. (1901) of the *Transactions* of the same Society appeared an article by him entitled "Notes on the Spread of the Fulmar."

In the summer of 1902 he visited St. Kilda and spent three weeks on the island, and on his return delivered a most interesting lecture before the Liverpool Biological Society on the ornithological results of the expedition. This lecture has been reprinted in book form from the *Transactions* of the Society, and being of very great merit, deserves to be more widely known.

Readers of *British Birds* are acquainted with several short notes, chiefly on rare birds in Somerset, which have appeared from his pen in this periodical.

Dr. Wigglesworth had a magnificent collection of books on birds in his library, which he had got together at great expense

and trouble, and possessed also a very complete collection of British birds' eggs which he had himself collected during his many ornithological rambles up and down the British Islands. It is pleasant to hear that these, in all probability, will not be dispersed.



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Some five years ago Dr. Wiglesworth, with his wife and son, came to live at Winscombe in the Mendip Hills of Somerset, and he at once threw himself with extraordinary energy into the investigation of the birds of the county. Two articles he wrote were published in the *Somerset Archæological and*

Natural History Society's Transactions for 1917 and 1918 on "The Little Owl in Somerset" and "The Heronries of Somerset" and these display something of the care with which he personally verified all records, so far as lay in his power. His energy was directed towards gaining a first-hand personal knowledge of the present avifauna of the county and also towards verifying the records of the past, discovering the whereabouts of rare stuffed Somerset birds, and persuading the owners to present these to the Taunton Castle Museum. In all these directions he had already achieved a large measure of success, and the expeditions he undertook on foot over the Quantocks, Exmoor, along the coast-line, and elsewhere in the county would have taxed the strength of many a younger man.

The writer of this notice, who some eighteen years ago compiled the list of Somerset birds for the Victoria County History series, first came in touch with Dr. Wiglesworth through correspondence early in 1916, and first met him the following year. It was evidently Dr. Wiglesworth's intention, though he does not seem to have declared it very definitely, to publish a book on the Birds of Somerset, and the writer has a pile of correspondence which passed between him and the late Doctor during the last three years. A good book on the birds of the county is much needed, and many were looking forward to the day when such a work should be published under the guidance of Dr. Wiglesworth. It is much to be hoped that his notes and records are sufficiently written and collected to make this work still possible.

But what of the man himself? His widow, to whom our deep sympathy goes out, as the only child, a son in the R.A.F., was killed in a flying accident during the war, informs the writer that his most intimate friends were medical men, who are writing about his medical work. May the present writer give a characteristic example of his love of field-work among the birds? It was June 13th, 1917. We had planned to meet at a wayside station to explore the osier beds in the Somerset headquarters of the Marsh-Warbler. On looking out of the train the writer saw Wiglesworth on the platform, and so was about to alight. "Don't get out," he exclaimed with the enthusiasm of a boy, "we will go on to the next station, I know a better place, and I have got your ticket." And then for the next few hours we spoke and thought of little else but birds. Everything else might have ceased to exist, unless it were the lovely roses in the cottage gardens, for Wiglesworth had a passion for flowers as well. Soon we were in the midst of the Marsh-Warbler's haunts. Several pairs were about, and

suddenly, as we were admiring the beautiful basket nest with the handles woven round the osier and meadowsweet, a cock bird struck up his song and Wiglesworth was lost to the world. On and on went the bird, flinging out carelessly that wonderful song of his without rest or pause, minute after minute, until we thought he would drop exhausted by his rapture. But on and on went the song; now it was Blackbird, now Thrush, now Swallow, now Greenfinch, then other familiar strains, stamped nevertheless with a certain individuality which gave them all an additional charm, and when at last the amazing performance was over, we looked at each other in astonishment, feeling that we were in the presence of a master singer. That was the passion of Wiglesworth, as the writer knew him, to be among his beloved birds. He wrote notes assiduously, he hunted up records with unbounded energy, but first and foremost he was a field-naturalist. Whether on some remote island among the sea-fowl, or on sea-cliff, mountain or moor, it was the truth about the bird inhabitants that he must discover. No casual rumour was enough for a definite record; he must, if possible, be there to prove it with his own eyes and ears, and in the very midst of this search for truth he met his sudden death.

F.L.B.