

OBITUARY.

W. WARDE-FOWLER.

IT is a long time since the day when, as a rather timid undergraduate, I found my way up the old stairs to Warde-Fowler's rooms in Lincoln College. I came to talk about birds with an ornithologist; I went away having talked about birds, but about many other things besides, with a remarkable and lovable man who, among many other devotions, was devoted to birds and their study.

Warde-Fowler, if perhaps not that rarest of beings, a great man, was certainly great as a man; and the news of his death will have meant to many, as it did to me, the loss of a friend. I was privileged to spend occasional days and week-ends in his chosen retirement at Kingham. We would tramp the meadows or the hills all the afternoon, and in the midst of bird-watching or stories of birds he would break off to tell me the name and history of one of the fields, or to discuss the agricultural system of Kingham in feudal times. He was interested in the place and its history because he was unable to remain uninterested in any of the people or things with which he came into contact; and luckily he has given us the fruits of that interest in his village in *Kingham, Old and New*, the only book I know which has the same quality as White's *Selborne*.

It was the same with the birds. He began by loving birds; and because he had intellect as well as heart, he went on to study them, as a glance at the well-used volumes in his library showed. But he never ceased to love them for themselves; he was a naturalist, not a scientist, and did not go to birds only because he wanted to find out something, or much less only to satisfy a collector's instinct by collecting eggs, or skins, or facts.

In his latter years his deafness was a heavy trial; he who knew every bird by its note suffered the loss of their voices one by one, first the low-voiced like the Cuckoo, but all in time. In 1919 he took me to the Marsh-Warbler ground, and there was a cock in full song. I had never seen or heard one, so had to describe the unheard song to him before he was satisfied that he had introduced me to the species. He suffered much from rheumatism too; but one day, after telling me of the difficulties he had in getting much about, and in hearing his birds, he ended with the characteristic sentence: "But after all, I can still walk a good deal; and I can always find more than enough to interest me in any hedgerow."

Nor shall I easily forget the intense interest he displayed in 1920 in the doings of the solitary bees which, he had discovered, built their nests in the mortar of the village houses.

With this intense absorption of his in the details of what happened to come beneath his eye in his own village and his own countryside, it was sometimes difficult to remember that he was a distinguished scholar of world-wide reputation. But then one would look round his library again and see half of it filled with books on the classics and early religion, and realise that he was one of the leading authorities on the history and the interpretation of the religion of classical Rome.

So the evening would pass in the library ; and after dinner he and his sister would play a Mozart duet—for Mozart was another of his loves, and he not only knew all that Mozart had composed, but had written a booklet on the composer and his music ; and so early to bed with the Owls hooting round.

I had one standing ornithological dispute with him. In one of his books he records having heard a Tree-Creeper singing, and comments on the rarity of the occurrence. When I asserted that I used to be woken up by the song of Creepers in a Surrey wood, and, anyhow, that I could hear their song every fine April day in Oxford, he always shook his head with an unconvinced smile at the errors of youth. At last one day I heard the bird singing in his own garden—but, alas, he was too deaf to hear it, and he still did not believe. That was typical of him, too, the holding firmly to whatever he thought or believed. It is a comfort that he will not wholly die. People will continue to read his books because they contain so much of himself. The love of nature for its own sake is as valuable a human trait as the love of truth or of knowledge for its own sake, or of men and women for their own sakes. Warde-Fowler had that love of nature, and his books are full of the spirit of the love of birds and of all animated things.

JULIAN S. HUXLEY,

Mr. Warde-Fowler's output of purely ornithological work was not large. He is perhaps best known by two pleasantly written little books, *A Year with the Birds*, published anonymously in 1886, which reached a third edition, and *Tales of the Birds* (1888). *Kingham Old and New* also contains some references to local bird-life. His observations on Oxfordshire bird-life, mostly contributed to the *Zoologist* between 1885 and 1916, contains many references to the Marsh-Warbler, and in 1906 he summarized the results of fourteen years' observations on this species in an article in the *Zoologist* (pp. 401-9).

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