

what I said in my former paper, and urge my younger colleagues not to be beguiled by the voice of the charmer, but to repudiate this Canon XL and all its mischievous doctrines. Have nothing to do with precepts that would advise you to choose Error before Truth, and elevate Wrong over Right, but stand firmly for grammatical purity and orthographical correctness, a position which, if stoutly held, will not cause you in after years to look back upon your writings with regret, that you knowingly permitted them to be disfigured by the blunders of others. Use your influence to overthrow the Doctrine of Error, that with siren voice has been sung in your ears so long, and the 'few' adherents that are now unwillingly accorded to the ranks of the opponents of this gospel will become a mighty force to battle for the Truth. Sometimes, however, it requires but a little leaven to permeate a large lump and cause it to change its aspect, and the conflict may not be so severe as the Advocates of Error would like to have us believe. As for my friend, who has honored my paper with his criticism, and whose eminent services to Natural Science have been so widely and deservedly acknowledged, and whose long and successful labors in declaring nature's truths makes his position on this subject the more incongruous, of him, in this instance, I am obliged mournfully to say, as did the old prophet of his illustrious but wilful nation, "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone."

"TRUTH *VERSUS* ERROR."

BY J. A. ALLEN.

It is seldom that a title for an essay is more unhappily chosen than in the case of Mr. Elliot's "*Truth versus Error.*" In this long effusion on the subject of Canon XL of the A. O. U. code he betrays "the weakness of his cause," to borrow the phraseology of my esteemed disputant, by beautifully illustrating the maxim he has himself quoted, namely, "When you have a bad cause, abuse the opposing counsel." With this feature removed

we have no points not covered and much better stated in his former comparatively short paper in the October number of 'The Auk.' As the real points in the case have already been sufficiently met in my paper following Mr. Elliot's in the October 'Auk,' all I would ask of any interested reader would be to reread that article in the present connection. Mr. Elliot himself is doubtless well aware that satire is not argument. The last half of his '*Truth versus Error*' is mainly a plea for the plaintiff, while the first part is an attempt to mislead in respect to the real point at issue; neither calls for special comment. To show the character of Mr. Elliot's defense, one or two points may be noted. First, the kind of "stability in nomenclature" here involved is simply that relating to the emendation or rejection of names on purely philological grounds. Hence, it was not "a happily grasped afterthought," by which I saved myself from "a disastrous overthrow," as Mr. Elliot knowingly (it would be discrediting his intelligence to think otherwise) misrepresents the situation.

Mr. Elliot refers triumphantly to the "Great Catalogue of Birds," meaning probably the British Museum Catalogue of Birds, as an example of where Canon XL has been "completely ignored and repudiated" by eminent authorities. But he has failed to tell his readers how many and what other Canons of the A. O. U. Code were equally "completely ignored and repudiated" by these same eminent authorities, as, for example, that fixing the date of the beginning of binomial nomenclature at 1758 instead of 1766, and that providing a trinomial nomenclature for subspecies. This was done, too, in the face of the fact that these two principles have come to be accepted by so large a number of other 'eminent authorities' as to have been incorporated into the recent international codes of nomenclature, and have been otherwise quite generally adopted.

Mr. Elliot refers to the fact that one member of the A. O. U. Committee agrees with him on the subject of Canon XL, and rather intimates that if we knew the whole truth in the case there might be others on his side also. He can be assured that such is not the case; and if he had been present at a discussion of this matter at the last meeting of the A. O. U. he would have been much enlightened, and possibly surprised, by the unanimity with

which Canon XL was sustained by the participants in the discussion, one only speaking in opposition. Mr. Elliot would certainly have derived small encouragement for any hope he may be entertaining that Canon XL may be changed to accord with his wishes by either the present A. O. U. Committee or any other A. O. U. Committee before whom, for some years at least, the matter is likely to come.

Mr. Elliot has given at length his reasons for standing "firmly for grammatical purity and orthographical correctness." I here add the views of a few 'leading authorities' who have equal right to an opinion in the case, and who are not members of the A. O. U. Committee, nor, with one exception, even American ornithologists.

In 1883, the great French botanist, Alphonse de Candolle, in his article 60 of his revised 'Lois de la Nomenclature Botanique,' originally published in 1867, says: "A generic name should subsist just as it was made, though a purely typographical error may be corrected. The termination of a Latin specific name may be changed to bring it into agreement with its generic name." He even accepts hybrid names, which he formerly suppressed, showing the tendency of his mind on this point under the influence of long experience.

The late eminent American botanist, Prof. Asa Gray, stated in one of his later publications that "the tendency among working naturalists is to retain names in spite of faults." This statement of fact, it may be noted, was made long before the promulgation of Canon XL.

Dr. David S. Jordan, President of Leland Stanford University, and the leading ichthyologist of America, in reviewing the A. O. U. Code and Check-List in 1886 (Auk, III, p. 394), in commenting indirectly on Canon XL, said: "An illustration of this may be taken from the last Check-List of Dr. Coues [1882]. This work is in many respects most valuable. In it, however, so much learning and labor has been expended in the mending and remodelling of scientific names, as fairly to bring purism in that regard to *reductio ad absurdum*. Hence the Committee on the new Code, with Dr. Coues at its head, now declare that 'a name is only a name, and has no necessary meaning' and therefore no

necessarily correct orthography. After this experience, the work of strengthening the lame and halting words is hardly likely to be continued in other fields of science."

Perhaps it would not be unfair to history to say that the maxim, "A name is only a name, and has no necessary meaning," when adopted in 1885 received the unanimous approval of the Committee. But with the lapse of time, alas!

Mr. Oldfield Thomas, curator of mammals in the British Museum, not only discountenances the emendation of names, but in a recent paper 'On the Genera of Rodents' (Proc. Zool. Soc., 1896, p. 1015, footnote) makes the following pertinent comment on a question which has greatly agitated Mr. Elliot, namely, the insertion or omission of the Greek aspirate. Apropos of that much emended name *Aplodontia*, he says: "With regard to the insertion of the aspirate into the spelling of this and similar words, inquiry among pure classicists (other than zoölogists) elicits the opinion that the Latins were so careless and irregular themselves in this respect, that it is impossible to make a hard-and-fast rule about it, and that we should therefore accept the original aspiration or non-aspiration of scientific names. Personally I look with loathing on these *h*-less names, but I feel bound to recognize that it is not right to alter words formed by authors who Latinized their Greek in the very way that the Latins themselves sometimes did."

Mr. F. A. Lucas, in commenting in 'Science' (Nov. 4, 1898, p. 626) on Mr. Elliot's paper in the October Auk, makes the following timely remarks: "Zoölogical names are not literature, but simply handles by which species may be grasped, and they serve their purpose equally well if rough hewn or grammatically polished. LeConte used *Gyascutus* as a generic name simply to illustrate the point that a name need not of necessity have any meaning, and Dr. Leidy coined names with the express statement that they were not etymologically correct, but used because they were shorter than if correctly formed." This, it may be added, has often been the case with many scholarly naturalists, as stated in my reply to Mr. Elliot in the Oct. Auk.

Mr. Thomas R. R. Stebbins, M. A., F. R. S., etc., a leading English authority in Carcinology, in the 'Zoölogist' for Oct., 1898,

(p. 424), in commenting on the proposed new International Code of Nomenclature, says: "It should surely be the object of an International Code to interfere with individual liberty as little as possible, and to protect accepted names from any change that can be avoided. But in correcting names which may be considered to offend against grammar or philology, more inconvenience than advantage is likely to arise. A longer name . . . will often have to be substituted for a shorter one. The practical nuisance of this will be understood by those who have to write labels for small bottles and glass slips. It is also contrary to the tendency of language, which is constantly condensing instead of expanding forms. . . . By correction a name will sometimes secure a different initial, . . . which is apt to be very confusing when an index has to be consulted. The principle of priority is weakened when the original form of a name is relinquished not in the interest of science, but of scholarship. On the other hand, it is so easy to let names alone, carrying with them their small but interesting touches of autobiography, and no possible harm is done if we do leave to the polished scholar some occasion for chuckling over us untutored sons of science."

I will conclude these extracts—which might be indefinitely extended—by the testimony of a philologist, Mr. Walter Miller, Professor of Classical Philology in the Leland Stanford University, who in a paper on 'Scientific Names of Latin and Greek Derivation,' published recently in the Proceedings of the California Academy of Sciences (3d Ser., I, No. 3, 1897, p. 143) says: "We may recognize the law of priority as absolute, and retain the many monstrous and misspelled names to be found on the records of natural history, just as their makers left them. They are historic facts and serve to mark the group of animals or plants to which they apply, but these misshapen forms of words are not ornamental and they are unworthy of scholars. It is to be hoped that, in future, greater care may be taken to make words that give correctly the idea the author may have intended."

This paper may fittingly close with the following extract from the 'Introduction' (p. 12) to the A. O. U. Code:

"Thus, in seeking to attain a basis of uniformity and stability, it is always necessary to go back to the original forms of names,

and consistently adhere to them, in entire disregard of the verbal innovations of purists or grammarians, who, aiming at classical correctness in names, have too often brought about instability and confusion."

SIXTEENTH CONGRESS OF THE AMERICAN ORNITHOLOGISTS' UNION.

THE SIXTEENTH CONGRESS of the American Ornithologists' Union convened in Washington, D. C., Monday evening, November 14, 1898, the business meeting being held at the Army Medical Museum. The public sessions, commencing Tuesday, November 15, and lasting three days, were held at the U. S. National Museum, the Central High School, and at the Cosmos Club.

BUSINESS SESSION. — The meeting was called to order by Vice-President Dr. C. Hart Merriam, in the absence of the President, Mr. William Brewster. Seventeen active members were present. The Secretary's report gave the membership of the Union at the opening of the present Congress as 695, constituted as follows: Active, 47; Honorary, 17; Corresponding, 66; Associate, 565.

During the year the Union lost sixty-four members — six by death, twenty-one by resignation, and thirty-seven were dropped for non-payment of dues. The members lost by death were Osbert Salvin,¹ an Honorary Member, who died at Hawksfold, near Haslemere, England, June 1, 1898, aged 63 years; Dr. Anders Johan Malmgren,² a Corresponding Member, who died in Helsingfors, Finland, April 12, 1897, at the age of 63; and Dr. Felix Georg Herman August Mojsisovics von Mojsvár,³ also a

¹ For an obituary notice, see *Auk*, XV, pp. 343-345.

² For an obituary notice, see *Ibid*, pp. 214-215.

³ For an obituary notice, see *Ibid*, p. 215.