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IN MEMORIAM—HENRY NEHRLING. 1853-1929.

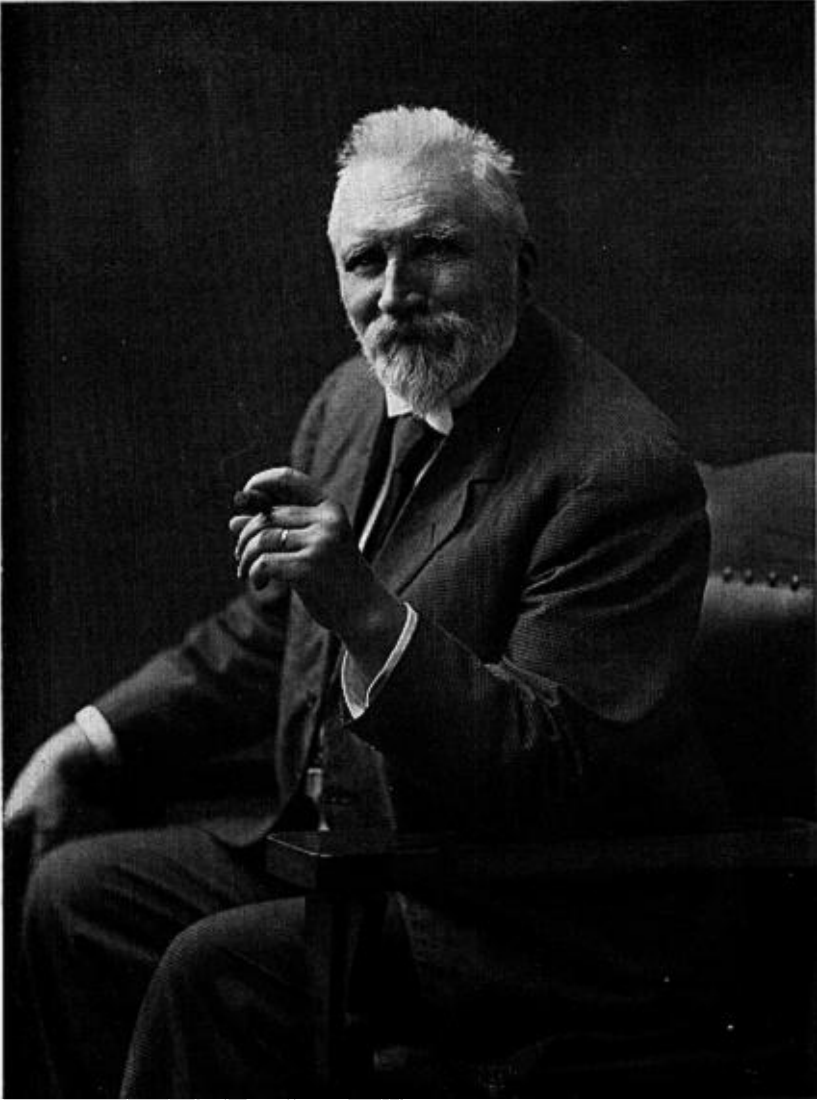
BY WITMER STONE.

Plate V.

ON September 26, 1883, twenty-one ornithologists met in New York City to organize the American Ornithologist's Union. Two who had been prominent in the preliminary arrangements but who were unable to be present were enrolled among the founders and twenty-four additional Active Members were chosen from those known personally to the founders or from their published ornithological works. Among these was Henry Nehrling then living in the state of Missouri.

Of the Founders only five survive today and of the additional Active Members only six, so that in length of membership, Henry Nehrling with his forty-six years in the ranks of the A. O. U. stood close to the top of the list—a record of loyalty to our Society of which he might well have been proud, especially when we consider the few opportunities that he enjoyed of personal contact with his fellow members. Indeed so far as I can ascertain he attended but one meeting of the Union and while personally known to Dr. Merriam and probably to Mr. Ridgway and others his visits to the ornithological centers of the East seem to have been few indeed.

Henry Nehrling was born of German-American parentage in the town of Herman, near Howard's Grove, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin, on May 9, 1853. His father was Carl Nehrling and his mother Elizabeth Ruge. His early education he received from his mother and grandfather and he was later sent to a Lutheran



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parochial school located several miles from his home. His daily walks winter and summer to and from school, through the then primeval forest, familiarized him with every aspect of nature and helped to develop the passionate love for the out-doors—the birds and flowers, that characterized his entire life. He soon learned the haunts of the wild things of the woods and fields—where the Wild Pigeons roosted, where the Grouse had its drumming log and where grew the rarer plants.

From 1869 to 1873 he attended the State Normal School at Addison, Illinois, and upon graduation became a teacher in the Lutheran schools, a position which he held until 1887, teaching at various places in Illinois, Missouri and Texas. It has been said, probably with much truth, that he looked upon his teaching mainly as an instrument by means of which he could carry on his studies of ornithology, and the changes from one locality to another added constantly to the breadth of his knowledge of bird life. During all this time he was accumulating data on the life-histories of North American birds and was publishing articles in popular magazines both in this country and in Germany, while a paper in the 'Bulletin of the Nuttall Club' presented his observations on the birds of parts of Texas about which comparatively little was known at that time. His studies of our native birds culminated with the appearance, in 1889, of the first part of a pretentious work published simultaneously in German and English and dealing with the life histories of our familiar species. This work, a prospectus of which appeared in 1886, was apparently originally planned as a publication in German only, 'Die Nordamerikanische Vögelwelt,' but by the time of the appearance of the first part an English edition had been added under the title of 'North American Birds,' which, when the twelve parts constituting Vol. I were completed (1893), was changed to 'Our Native Birds of Song and Beauty.' Volume II was completed in 1897. The author tells us that the work "is intended to fill the gap between the very expensive and the merely technical ornithological books" and "to combine accuracy and reliability of biography with a minimum of technical description." The need for such a work was deeply impressed upon him when, as a boy, he craved a book that would tell him about the birds he saw everywhere about him but a

book that could be purchased with the limited means at his disposal.

Dr. Elliott Coues praised Nehrling's work very highly in his several reviews in 'The Auk' and concludes with congratulations on a "work which departs so widely from the average of its kind by making so near an approach to such as Audubon typifies."

That he succeeded in fulfilling the promise of his prospectus is evident to anyone who reads his volumes and they show how thoroughly he knew his birds and how deeply he appreciated the beauties of nature. Unfortunately Nehrling's work does not seem to be so generally known as it should be, possibly on account of a limited edition and lack of publicity. It is really an outstanding title in the literature of American ornithology and should be read by all who delight in pleasing descriptions of bird life and pen pictures of nature in her varied moods. Robert Ridgway made paintings for some of the plates while others were by two German artists, Prof. A. Goering and Gustav Muetzel. The heavy paper with ornamental borders and the sumptuous gold lettered morocco binding are characteristic of the German style in such matters.

In 1887 Nehrling was made deputy collector and inspector of customs at the port of Milwaukee a position which he held until 1890 when he was appointed secretary and custodian of the Public Museum of Milwaukee, a post evidently much more to his liking. During his connection with the museum a former member of his staff states that "he made many important additions to the collections and laid the foundations for the future greatness and educational usefulness of this well known institution." Unfortunately owing to politics Nehrling lost his position in 1903 after twelve years of unselfish service.

As early as 1884 Mr. Nehrling had bought a tract of land at Gotha, Florida, not far from Orlando. He first visited it in 1886 and from that time seemed to have definitely fixed upon Florida as his future permanent home.

Thither, then, he moved in 1904 after a brief association with the Philadelphia Commercial Museum, an association notable particularly for the fact that the American Ornithologists' Union met in Philadelphia in the autumn of 1903 and Nehrling enjoyed

the opportunity for the first time of attending a meeting of the Society of which he had been a member for so many years. It was during this period that I made his acquaintance and much of his time was spent in the bird room at the Academy of Natural Sciences studying the collection—a friendship developing which has always been one of the pleasant memories of my life.

While always a lover of flowers, even from his early boyhood, Nehrling apparently did not seriously take up horticulture until the time of his residence in Milwaukee where he built a greenhouse and devoted his spare time to the rearing of tropical plants, especially species of *Amaryllis* of which he produced many new horticultural varieties.

The exhibit of tropical plants at the Chicago Exposition was a great delight to him, especially the palms and *Caladiums*, and the cultivation and breeding of the latter became one of his hobbies when he removed to Florida. Here on his place at Gotha he developed a wonderful botanic garden and entered into correspondence with horticulturists in all parts of the world securing seeds of rare tropical species for raising and writing many articles on plant breeding for magazines and newspapers, as well as a volume on the *Amaryllis* which remained one of his favorite plants. In his experiments with the *Caladiums* he produced many new and beautiful varieties as a result of long and patient effort. It has been remarked that people are too prone to take the results of the horticulturists' work as a matter of course without any realization of the patience, industry and thought which go into the breeding of new varieties, and few probably realized the devotion of Nehrling to his hobby nor the extent of his knowledge of the subject.

Free to enjoy the practice of his favorite pastime and surrounded by the beauties of semitropical nature one might have thought Nehrling's life one of complete happiness but unfortunately, like many another gifted scientist, he lacked the business sense necessary for material success and absolutely honest himself took honesty for granted in others. The result was that he was often the victim of the unscrupulous and his life was frequently beset by financial difficulties. Indeed it is to be regretted over these that the breakdown in health which resulted in his death is attributed.

His most disastrous experience occurred only three years before his death. He had been induced to combine with others of whom he knew but little in the formation of a nursery at Siebring, Florida, and all of his collections of living plants were removed to this site. He was to receive a handsome salary as president of the company and other perquisites but, when the salary suddenly ceased and investigation was made, it developed that his agreements were mainly verbal, and he had few written guarantees or legal claims. Broken in spirit, he returned to Gotha where he died on November 22, 1929.

In consideration of his outstanding knowledge of horticulture, Nehrling had been appointed a collaborator in the Bureau of Plant Industry of the U. S. Department of Agriculture as early as 1906. At the Garden Club convention at Miami, in March 1929, he was awarded the Meyer Medal for distinguished service in his chosen field, a tribute that brought tears of gratitude to his eyes as in faltering tones he expressed his appreciation.

The life of Henry Nehrling was one wholly devoted to science but always to out-door science and contact with living things, rather than to the technical research of the closet naturalist. It was also pretty evenly divided between his two consuming interests—ornithology and horticulture and, to use the terms of the breeders of plants and animals, the former was the dominant factor in his earlier years and the latter in the closing period of his long and useful career.

On July 20, 1874, about a year after graduation, Nehrling married Miss Sophia Achoff of Oak Park, Illinois. They were blessed with a family of seven children, the eldest son Walter Nehrling, following his father's footsteps and becoming professor of botany in the Illinois State Normal School.

From the wide circle of Mr. Nehrling's acquaintances one hears only the highest praise of his personal character. "Above all" writes Mr. A. H. Andrews, of Estero, Florida, "Dr. Nehrling was intensely human, being a man of genial and kindly disposition, as only a real lover of nature can be. A typical German professor of the old school, of courtly manner and enthusiastically absorbed in his work, he made a host of warm friends and was as pleased as a child when visitors admired his garden."

Dr. David Fairchild writes me: "He was always a naturalist at heart,—reminding me of what I imagined Fritz Mueller of Blumenau, Brazil, was like. A plant savant—and how few others are left!—men who love plants with a passion that is delightful to see. His life was filled with financial worries but it had also a great deal of real pleasure in it for he was always playing with things he adored. His Caladiums, his bromeliads, his palms, bamboos and ficus filled his days with a busy kind of pleasure."

Henry Nehrling's ornithological knowledge is already placed on permanent record in his 'Native Birds of Song and Beauty' and the publication of his contributions to horticulture, which we understand is contemplated would preserve for posterity the accomplishments in this field also, of the gentle, kindly scholar who labored so long and so successfully in interpreting nature and in adding to the knowledge and the pleasure of mankind.

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