

DAVID STARR JORDAN AND HIS INTEREST IN BIRDS

By BARTON WARREN EVERMANN

I first met Doctor Jordan in the spring of 1877. During the previous winter my wife and I had been teachers in the Camden, Indiana, public schools, and I had arranged to spend the summer vacation in Indianapolis as agent for Wilson, Hinkle & Co., school-book publishers of Cincinnati.

As our vacation would be a rather long one—from March to September—Mrs. Evermann suggested that we live in Irvington, four miles east of Indianapolis, and that she enter Butler University, located there, as a student. We both agreed that that would be a fine thing to do, so we went out to Butler to look the situation over. We called at the President's office. The President was out of town, and we were advised to see Professor Jordan who was acting president for the time being. When we entered the room to which we were directed, we saw a tall young man seated, writing, at a small narrow table facing the door. He had light colored hair, equally light, sparse beard, and was wearing a light gray suit. He was seated well down in the chair, with his legs well under the table.

He looked up as we approached and, in his efforts to get his feet and legs from under the table, almost upset it! Mrs. Evermann explained to him that she wished to register as a student, and that she wished especially to get work in English literature and botany. When she mentioned botany he seemed pleased; he said that botany was one of his subjects, and that she might enter his class at once.

When we asked where we could get room and board he suggested that his friends, Dr. and Mrs. A. W. Brayton, were living at Mrs. Beadle's and he thought Mrs. Beadle had an extra room we might get. He remarked that the Braytons were both enthusiastic botanists and, withal, very charming people, which we found them to be; that he and Mrs. Jordan and a young special student of his, Charley Gilbert, lived next door to the Beadles, and that they all, including the Braytons, took their meals there.

As all were then enthusiastically collecting and studying plants and birds, he suggested that Mrs. Evermann might find it pleasant and worth while to join the group. She did so. All of them, including Professor Jordan, were doing a great deal of collecting of plants and birds that spring, identifying the specimens obtained, pressing the plants for the herbarium and skinning the birds for study specimens. The wild flowers were at their best, and the air was fragrant with the sweet odors of spring. The spring migrations were at their height, and the woods were filled with beautiful warblers, thrushes, tanagers, orioles and hummingbirds. Brayton and Gilbert did most of the actual bird collecting, but Professor Jordan sometimes himself took a hand, and all took part in identifying and skinning the specimens collected.

This was a wonderful opportunity for Mrs. Evermann and she became an enthusiastic student of botany and ornithology. As a prize for the most satisfactory progress in botany and ornithology made by any member in the class, Dr. Jordan presented to Mrs. Evermann a copy of the first edition of his "Manual of the Vertebrates of the Northern United States," which had just been published, an honor which she greatly appreciated. By September she had a collection of more than a hundred bird skins, many of them prepared under the instruction and sometimes with the actual help of Dr. Jordan or others of the group; for Brayton, Gilbert, Mrs. Jordan and Mrs. Brayton were each able to make very good study skins.

Dr. Jordan's interest in ornithology began very early, when a young boy on the old farm near Gainesville, New York. Writing of his boyhood interest in nature, he said: "Toward geology and ornithology I had meanwhile felt a growing attraction". While in the Indianapolis high school and at Butler College, as a teacher, he made constant use of ornithology as a means of developing in his students a live and abiding interest in systematic zoology. Writing of those days he said: "In connection with my work, I interested several of my students in the field study of birds. The tall trees of Maywood down the White River were the favorite resort of the migrating warblers, and nearly all the species that cross Indiana could be found there. I know of no finer out-of-door study than ornithology. It has, however, the almost fatal drawback that to secure any degree of thoroughness, one must kill. Dealing with such highly developed organisms is and ought to be painful. Someone has said that in shooting a wood thrush one feels he has destroyed a 'superior being'. I never killed anything for the pleasure of it, and since 1880 I have not even owned a gun nor fired a shot at any living creature; my last attempt was directed at a California Burrowing Owl which got away with its life. But in 1874 to 1876, in Wisconsin and Indiana, I made large collections of birds, and prepared a series of descriptions for my first real contribution to science—'A Manual of Vertebrates of the Eastern United States', published in 1876."

It should be mentioned, however, that two years earlier (1874) he had prepared and published a small booklet entitled: "A Popular Key | to the | Birds, Reptiles, | Batrachians and Fishes, | of the | Northern United States, | East of the Mississippi River." | By | Prof. David S. Jordan, M. S., | and | Balfour H. Van Vleck. | Appleton, Wis.: | Reid & Miller, Printers and Publishers. | 1874.

This little book, of which Dr. Elliott Coues said "the less said the better, except that it paved the way to the excellent Manual of Vertebrates", contains 88 pages (of which 34 are devoted to birds) plus 16 pages containing a key to the Fishes of the Great Lakes, plus 4 pages of advertisements. The page is $5\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and the booklet in paper cover sold at 75 cents.

Soon after Professor Jordan came to the Indianapolis high school he was joined by Herbert Copeland, a Cornell chum, and the two lived together in Indianapolis for some months during which he says: "We resumed our studies of flowers and birds begun at Cornell and continued in Wisconsin."

In my days of close association in the field with Dr. Jordan, and they have been many and in many countries, he was always interested in the birds we saw. Of those seen in Indiana and New England and in the central and southern states, he knew most of them at sight. Those about Indianapolis and Bloomington and elsewhere in Indiana, he knew most intimately. But wherever we went and whatever species he saw (and he could see about as many as any one else) he would make interesting comments and often have interesting stories to tell.

Although he did no actual collecting of birds after 1880, he never ceased to enjoy seeing the birds and hearing their song. He was a real naturalist who was able to find "Nature when out of doors" and able to interpret her ways.

California Academy of Sciences, San Francisco, November 22, 1931.