



Edward Harris

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IN the first number of *CASSINIA* we were so fortunate as to be able to give for our frontispiece an admirable portrait of John Cassin. His was a name well known throughout the scientific world, and in honor of him we chose the title of our magazine. This year we open with the portrait of a man less known to fame, and yet we believe that were the whole truth told of the life and deeds of Edward Harris, the ornithological world at least would learn that it owed him a deep debt of gratitude in more ways than one.

It is true that in the fields of actual discovery his name is hardly known. It was as a friend and patron of scientific men that he made his influence felt—an influence exerted so quietly and modestly that its full force might easily be overlooked, especially at this late day. Of those who shared the friendships and reaped the bounty of Edward Harris it is probable that no one was more deeply indebted to him than Audubon.

The subject of benefits conferred and accepted is always a rather delicate one, and it is not our desire to give publicity to

the private affairs of Edward Harris or his friends. We only wish the present generation of ornithologists to realize the important part he played in the early history of bird study in this country. It is true that Mr. Harris's greatest influence on ornithology was exerted through others; yet it would be doing him an injustice to give the impression that he was not a keen, careful and hard-working naturalist himself. We have been so fortunate as to have had access to a considerable number of his notes and journals, and they prove him to have been an enthusiastic and accurate student of nature. The results of his observations however seem rarely to have been published. Whether this was due to modesty or indifference we cannot say. His letters, notes and diaries have that fresh charm about them which we find in the writings of even the great ornithologists of his day when they were all learning things which the humblest bird student now knows. We always feel a quick wave of sympathetic interest and fellowship when we read of these old ornithological fathers puzzling over some bird problem, long since solved, which to us is clear enough, thanks to the labors of these very men.

Edward Harris was born at Moorestown, New Jersey, September 7, 1799, and although quite a traveler this was his only home until his death. Inheriting, as he did, a considerable fortune, it was never necessary for him to actively engage in money-making occupations. He was, however, keenly interested in agriculture and gave close and intelligent attention to the farm estate at Moorestown. The breeding of fine stock seems to have been somewhat of a hobby with him. While traveling in Europe in 1839 he attended the great horse fair in Normandy, and was so impressed with the splendid animals there exhibited that he straightway imported a number of them to this country. To him belongs the honor of having first introduced the Norman horse into America.

He was a grave and dignified man, with the courtly manner of the best gentlemen of his time. He appears to have been of a somewhat reserved nature, but always kind-hearted and generous. When once he made a friendship it was for life, and those who knew him best became deeply attached to him. One

of his warmest friends was his brother-in-law, Dr John Spencer, who was a great-uncle of the writer. The letters of Mr. Harris to Dr. Spencer are extremely interesting, especially those which he wrote while on his different scientific expeditions.

He was always fond of nature, but it is probable that he did very little in the way of serious scientific study or collecting until some years after he was of age. In 1835 he was elected a member of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, being at that time 36 years old. He was on good terms with John Cassin, then a leading man at the Philadelphia Academy, and Cassin frequently refers to him in his letters and notes. On August 20, 1845, we find Cassin and Harris going together on a trip to Cape May. On June 23, 1845, Cassin in a letter to Baird speaks of Harris having called at the Academy with Audubon. This seems to have been the first time that Cassin and Audubon met, and there is reason for believing that it was the last. The meeting appears not to have been an altogether happy one, and they parted none too amicably after a warm dispute as to who discovered *Falco harrisii*. Again, on February 20, 1846, Cassin writes to Baird as follows. "Our ornithological corps is doing nothing. Heermann is in Baltimore studying medicine, Gambel and Woodhouse, here doing the same thing. Townsend has set up his pole as a dentist. Harris lives at home like a gentleman, as he is, and your humble servant (in his lucid intervals) tries to mind his own business with more or less success."

In the Proceedings of the Academy we find the name of Edward Harris mentioned a number of times, either as a contributor of specimens or of papers relating to various branches of natural history. In May, 1844, he exhibited an Everglade Kite. In May, 1845, he contributed a paper on certain geological formations of the upper Missouri River. In December, 1845, he presented a paper on a new titmouse, *Parus septentrionalis*. In December, 1846, he presented to the Museum a specimen of the Arkansas Flycatcher—*Tyrannus verticalis*—taken in New Jersey, which specimen is still in the Academy collection. In March, 1846, he read a paper on the difference

in height of the waters of the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. In October, 1848, he presented 119 bird skins to the Academy. In May, 1857, he read some notes on the beaver, observed in the Yellowstone region. In June, 1858, he wrote a letter to the Academy from St. Croix River, describing a certain species of trout—*Salmo gloverii*.

His name does not appear again until five years later, when on June 9, 1863, at a meeting of the Academy, Mr. Cassin announced the death at Moorestown, New Jersey, of the late member, Edward Harris, aged 64 years.

The Academy records show him to have been a member of the Committee on Zoology from 1842 to 1848, and of the Committee on Ornithology from 1849 to 1856. Excepting as a member of these committees he seems never to have served the Academy in any official capacity.

As has before been said, Mr. Harris was a traveler of large experience. He made several trips to Europe, while his journals and letters show him to have had a thorough personal knowledge of his own country at a time when travel was a much more serious problem than at the present day.

His scientific notes made in New England and the Middle States are extremely interesting. In 1837 he went upon a trip through the South with Audubon, sailing from New York to Charleston, and from there traveling overland through the South Atlantic and Gulf States to New Orleans. Mr. Harris's notes on this trip, while very entertaining, do not indicate that any important scientific results were achieved.

In 1843 he went with Audubon, Bell and others upon the famous Missouri River expedition to the Yellowstone region, the results of which have been to a great extent given to the world by Audubon.

Evidently Mr. Harris was a keen sportsman. His journals make frequent reference to his work with dog and gun, while he gives interesting narratives of deer hunting in the South and the pursuit of the buffalo in the West. In his desire to keep the neighborhood of Moorestown a good shooting ground he frequently released live quail in considerable numbers. His note-books show how many pairs he turned out upon the local farms, and upon whose ground they were released.

In the life of Edward Harris there are no great events to point to, no strenuous efforts after fame or notoriety; yet the kind heart and generous nature of the man made him so strong in his friendships that his influence was really far-reaching. The beneficent results of that quiet, gentle, unobtrusive life reach down through the years to us of the present day, and after half a century we are glad that Edward Harris lived.