

Obituary Notice.

FOLLOWING the announcement of the death of Dr. R. Bowdler Sharpe in the last issue of *The Emu* (p. 178), with the publication of a letter he was good enough to forward to the editors, a further notice of that distinguished ornithologist is now given.

Dr. Sharpe was present at the meeting of the British Ornithologists' Club on the evening of the 16th December last, when he seemed to be in his usual cheerful mood and health. The following day he took to his bed, pneumonia and other complications supervened, and he passed away early on the morning of Christmas Day.

The following sketch of his ornithological career appeared in the recent Jubilee Supplement of *The Ibis* (1909):—

"Richard Bowdler Sharpe was born on the 22nd of November, 1847, being the eldest son of Thomas Bowdler Sharpe, a well-known publisher in his day. At the age of six he was sent to Brighton, where his aunt, the widow of the Rev. James Lloyd Wallace, formerly head-master of Sevenoaks Grammar School, had a boys' school, to be well grounded in Latin and Greek. At nine years of age he was transferred to Peterborough Grammar School, of which his cousin, the Rev. James Wallace, had been appointed head-master after his return from the Crimea, where he had served as an Army-Chaplain. Within a few days of his arrival at Peterborough, Sharpe gained a King's scholarship, which gave him a free education, while he was also a choir-boy in the Cathedral. He left Peterborough with the Rev. James Wallace, on the appointment of the latter to the head-mastership of Loughborough Grammar School, and studied there for some time, commencing his collection of bird-skins; he had already made a large collection of eggs while at Peterborough. He was afterwards sent, with the object of studying for the army, to a private tutor at Stéeples Gidding in Huntingdonshire, the Rector, the Rev. C. Molyneaux, having been a school-fellow of his father's. Here he remembers having seen the late Lord Lilford, with his Falconer and a full train, hawking on Great Gidding Field. Having no taste for mathematics, however, he did little work, but devoted most of his time to bird collecting and taxidermy, making at the same time a considerable collection of insects, and having always a large assortment of living birds.

"His father, who was then living at Cookham, wished the boy to prepare for Oxford, as his mathematical training for the Royal Engineers had been a failure; but the lad thought of nothing but bird-collecting.

"His first paper, on the Birds of Cookham and the neighbourhood, appeared in the Journal of the High Wycombe Natural History Society, and his collection of specimens, made at this time, is in the Natural History Museum.

"At last the old gentleman, who was like Gallio and cared for none of these things, looked upon his son as good-for-nothing, and sent him to London—not with the proverbial shilling, but with a sovereign and a letter, which gained him an immediate situation at Messrs. Smith and Sons', by whom he was always treated most kindly and his natural history tastes encouraged. He afterwards entered the service of the late Mr. Bernard Quaritch, who remained, throughout his life, a most kind and generous friend.

"The Library of the Zoological Society having at this time increased to large proportions, it was determined by the Council to appoint a Librarian, and on the recommendation of the late Osbert Salvin and Dr. P. L. Sclater, the post was offered to Sharpe, and accepted by him. By this time he had commenced his first ornithological work, the 'Monograph of the Kingfishers,' and, owing to the advantages of the Zoological Society's Library, he soon finished this book and commenced (with Mr. H. E. Dresser) the 'Birds of Europe.' In May, 1872, George Robert Gray died, and Sharpe was appointed to succeed him at the British Museum and take charge of the Bird Collection. He entered on his duties on the 11th of September of that year. To write the 'Catalogue of Birds,' he was forced to give up the 'Birds of Europe,' which was completed by Mr. Dresser. Of the 'Catalogue of Birds' he has written with his own pen thirteen and a half out of the twenty-seven volumes, most of the work being done in his un-official time. One of his most important contributions to Ornithological Science has been the 'History of the Bird-Collections in the British Museum,' a history which occupied two years of his private time to write.

"In 1891 he was created an LL.D. of the University of Aberdeen, and in the same year received by an Imperial Decree the great Gold Medal for Science from H.I.M. the Emperor of Austria, the highest award for Science given by that Sovereign. This medal was conferred on the occasion of the Second Ornithological Congress at Budapest, when Dr. Sharpe delivered his presidential address to Section A, on the 'Classification of Birds.' He was also President of Section A at the Third Ornithological Congress at Paris in 1900, and received from the President of the French Republic his appointment as 'Officier de l'Instruction publique.' In 1905 Dr. Sharpe was President of the Fourth Ornithological Congress in London.

"Bowdler Sharpe was the first to conceive the idea of the British Ornithologists' Club, in 1902, and for some years edited its *Bulletin*. He is Foreign or Honorary Member of all the principal Ornithological Societies of the world, and has contributed a very large number of papers to *The Ibis*, as will be seen from the pages of the general subject-index.

"His work has not been limited to the birds of any particular

country, but those of Africa have always been a favourite subject of investigation with him, while one of his best-known works is his edition of Layard's 'Birds of South Africa.' "

An Australian appreciation of the deceased ornithologist, by Mr. Tom Carter, of Western Australia, will be read with interest :—

"My acquaintance with the late Dr. R. Bowdler Sharpe dates back to about 1885, when the late Henry Seebohm introduced me to him. He had then recently returned from India, bringing back the famous Hume collections, part of which he showed us then being unpacked. I had the pleasure of meeting him on many subsequent occasions, the last being on 17th November last year, when I lunched and had a chat with him, two days before my return to Australia. He then seemed well and hearty, and, as he always was, full of enthusiasm and glad to see any ornithologist and learn of anything fresh about birds in any part of the world. He was of a genial disposition, without any ostentation, and, although he always had an immense amount of work on hand, he would cheerfully put it aside to inspect and discuss any new bird specimen. I have known him rise at an ornithological meeting and speak on behalf of an ornithologist (then long passed away) who had been referred to in a disparaging manner by one present, although his (Sharpe's) own views did not at all agree with those of the absent one. Dr. Sharpe was always ready to help and encourage any beginner in the often perplexing study of bird-life, and if he (Sharpe) did make a mistake on any point he would willingly admit it. With his unrivalled capacity for work and world-wide knowledge of birds, his place will indeed be hard to fill."

Besides his wonderful personality, which endeared him to almost everyone he came in contact with, he was a giant at work. It would occupy about four pages of *The Emu*, closely printed, to enumerate all his works, but the following may be cited as of most interest to Australian students, namely :—

"Catalogue of Birds." Of the twenty-seven volumes of this classical reference work he wrote eleven, while he was co-author of two others.

"Handlist of the Genera and Species of Birds," vols. i.-v.

"Monograph of the Birds-of-Paradise and Bower-Birds," folio, parts i.-viii.

"Report on the Collections of Natural History made in the Antarctic Regions during the Voyage of the *Southern Cross*: Aves."

"The Birds of New Guinea and the adjacent Papuan Islands, including any New Species that may be discovered in Australia," folio, parts 13-35 (completed after John Gould's death).