

Spurlock

QK
31
S68J36
1884
SLRA



30
2
QK
31
S68J36
1884
SLRA



IN MEMORIAM—THOMAS W. SPURLOCK.

(Read and referred March 4, 1884.)

Thomas W. Spurlock was born in the village of Cedarville, King William county, Virginia, on the 15th of January, 1803. He learned the trade of a shoemaker, and worked at different times in Richmond, Lynchburg and Fredericksburg. He married about 1831, Miss Martha Ann Davis, and in November, 1836, he moved to Cincinnati, where he lived until his death. He followed his trade until about 1850, when he was engaged by Mr. Harwood, of the firm of Marsh & Harwood, to work in their chemical laboratory. He was employed in the manufacture of sulphuric acid, and continued in that department of the works until about twelve years ago, when his advanced age compelled him to give up active labor. From that time he lived with his son-in-law, Mr. Henry Ambach, on Mohawk street, till he died, of pneumonia, on the 19th of January, 1884, aged 81 years and 4 days.

Mr. Spurlock's deep love for botanical studies, and his general interest in all branches of natural science, together with his contributions to the flora of Cincinnati, entitle him to a notice before this Society.

As a young man, he was fond of hunting, and in his rambles near his native place developed a love for nature which never relaxed its fervor, and which was as warm in his old age as in middle life. Even in his last hours his mind wandered among the wild flowers and ferns, and planned excursions to catch the first blossoms of the coming season.

In Virginia he had studied the flora of the region where he was born, and the recollection of the plants he had known there was dear to him. The discovery of a familiar plant was like meeting an old friend, and his face would beam with delight as he displayed his new-found treasure. His companion in his rambles in bygone years was Dr. Thomas Salter, who kept a drug store at the corner of Ludlow

and Second streets. In later years his botanical excursions were sometimes made in the company (though he usually went alone) of Dr. C. J. Funck and Dr. R. M. Byrnes. Dr. Salter seems to have been an intimate friend, to whom Mr. Spurlock looked for companionship in his studies, and to whose herbarium he made many contributions.

During the eight years' acquaintance which the writer enjoyed with Mr. Spurlock, scarcely a week passed that he did not bring him some rare or beautiful plant. He never collected for himself. He gave freely to his friends the results of his herborizing. He admired plants as they grew. Unlike most collectors, he cared more for their preservation in the woods, the fields or on the hillsides than in herbaria. He

"Loved the wood rose and left it on its stalk."

He often refused to give information as to the locality of a rare plant, for fear some ardent collector would destroy it and it might not appear again. He watched even the most insignificant with as much care as a gardener watches his choicest varieties.

From its first budding to its fruiting the vilest weed, if rare, was the subject of his constant attention, and when the seed had matured, he carefully gathered and scattered it in new places, in the hope—often vain, indeed—that it might germinate, and thus a rare species would be preserved to our flora. It was a favorite scheme of his to place the homely Jamestown weed (*Datura stramonium*) with the beautiful flowered *Datura meteloides*. He scattered many seeds on the hillsides and in the quarries, and though they germinated, the beauty and fragrance of the flowers were the destruction of the plants, and the plan, as might have been expected, failed. Less worthy, though as characteristic, was his endeavor to establish the *Xanthium spinosum* and *Dysodia chrysanthemoides*, and more fortunate for us that he was unsuccessful. He desired to have unusual plants near him, where he could readily get to them, watch them grow and flower and gather a few now and then to please his botanical friends.

The ferns Mr. Spurlock dearly loved and admired. It was a constant source of regret that the rapid spread of the city was destroying the places in which they grew. The locality of a rare species was to him a Mecca demanding a yearly pilgrimage, and how deeply he felt the destruction of such a locality can only be known to those who have heard him gravely complain of his misfortunes.

When botanizing with Mr. Spurlock, he said to the writer: "Come, and I will show you where the New York fern grows." (It is rare in

this region.) He led the way to a small grove of noble beeches, and on a little mound made by the roots of a prostrated tree, lay the remains of a few plants, the fronds broken and crumpled. Tenderly, as if caressing a child, the old man smoothed out the leaves and mourned over the injured plant, sighing at the thought that it might not revive again.

In the latter part of August, 1883, he found a few plants of *Cassia occidentalis*, on the Ohio and Mississippi Railroad below Millcreek. It is an extra limital species, and had never been observed here before. Our old friend's interest was excited. He took botanists to see the plants and visited the spot regularly once a week, until on October 18th he brought a well flowered specimen carefully wrapped in wet cloths, and with a smiling face and twinkling eye, gave it to the writer, with the injunction to press it carefully for an herbarium specimen. He now watched for the seeding, and one day came to say that the section men had almost destroyed his flowers, but that he had saved one broken specimen. This he planted in a pot, bandaged the broken stem carefully, and faithfully watched it till the seed matured. These he saved, and with a generosity so characteristic of him, he brought the two legumes to us and asked us to open one, give him two or three seeds, and keep and plant the remaining ones.

Mr. Spurlock left no herbarium and no notes of his observations, but he did leave to those who knew him the fragrant recollection of a pure, simple love of nature, which in a less modest or more aggressive man would have blossomed forth in work of permanent value. Local botany owes much to him, and his loss will long be felt by those who knew his kindly ways. He found many plants which are named in the Cincinnati Flora of Mr. Jos. F. James, and discovered not a few which, from their retiring habits, had been thought extinct in the vicinity.

He was also a collector of fossils, and many of the collections of the city have been enriched by his "finds." He added to the pleasure of finding that of giving. The rare trilobite *Proteus spurlocki* was found by him and presented to Mr. C. B. Dyer, and the beautiful polyzoan, *Ptilodictya shafferi* was first found and given by Mr. Spurlock to the gentleman whose name is honored in connection with it.

Mr. Spurlock was a very modest and retiring man, quiet in manner and pleasant in conversation when he could be drawn out. He was entirely self educated, had been a great reader, and had a fund of general knowledge which was surprising in a man of his opportunities.

He was well acquainted with the medicinal qualities of herbs, and had considerable knowledge of chemistry and medicine.

In person he was short, spare, and stooped with age, brisk in his movements, and walked usually with a cane.*

He was a life-long member of the First Baptist Church. Uniting with that congregation when he first came to the city, he continued a constant attendant till his death. He was licensed by his church in 1842, and has more than once served in the capacity of preacher. He never obtruded his religious opinions upon any one. He was a simple-hearted believer in Christianity, who "looked through nature up to Nature's God," and saw in the humblest flower "the revelation of His love." To one who visited him in his last illness, he said that with St. Augustine he could say, "*Spes mea Christus.*" In this hope he died. With us he still lives in memory as a man whose love for nature was pure and childlike, and beyond any expectation of gain.

DAVIS L. JAMES.

* His favorite walking stick was a woody stem of *Artemisia*.

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION LIBRARIES



3 9088 00862 8174