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**REMINISCENCES OF THE EARLY DAYS OF THE
NEW YORK ENTOMOLOGICAL SOCIETY.¹**

BY A. T. SLOSSON,

NEW YORK, N. Y.

I am very sorry and really mortified to find that I can give you so few details of the early days of our New York Society. For I am one of the small remnants left of the members who entered it at the beginning, twenty-five years ago. But I had probably already gone from the city to my summer home in Franconia before our first meeting and did not return until October. I think only a few meetings, at irregular intervals, had been held during the summer. Soon after my return from the mountains I attended a meeting at the residence of Mr. Palm. My brother-in-law's old Arab butler escorted me that evening, calling for me later to see me home. I shall never forget the sensation produced by my unexpected entrance into that scientific meeting! Through the smoke of pipes and over mugs of some beverage which foamed in the gaslight in a sudsy sort of way I saw startled, embarrassed faces. "A woman!—and finding us like this!" So their expressions seemed to say. The host himself, good Mr. Palm, seemed somewhat embarrassed. After seating me in the most comfortable chair unoccupied he hastened away to order coffee for me as more appropriate and fitting drink for a feminine throat. We were the weaker sex then, you see—for those were our voteless days—and we must be kept carefully apart from the ways and habits of men in their idle moments. I was not at all shocked at this orgie, for I had five brothers and spent much of my time in a tobacco-smoky atmosphere, seen many a foaming beverage poured and quaffed, and so we were all at our ease in a few minutes and chatting over our summer's adventures and their net profits. I recall a few of those present at that time—Dr. Ottolengui, Messrs. Angell, Siebalt and Julich. After that I attended the meetings quite regularly and came to know very pleasantly most of our members. We met at different houses, Mr. Palm's, Mr. Neumoegen's and at my brother-in-

¹ Read at a special meeting held June 7, 1918, to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the incorporation of the Society.

law's residence on 23d street, where I then lived. Dr. Zabriskie became a member that same year, '92, I think, a charming, genial man, with a young heart even as he waxed old. I remember well my first encounter with him at one of our meetings. I had, some months before, printed in *Harper's Magazine*, a story entitled "Aunt Randy." The heroine was an elderly White Mountain woman with a love for insects. She watched them, studied their habits and, though all unconscious of it, was a sort of natural entomologist. She had her own names for the insects who frequented her small garden and knew them individually as she would know her human neighbors. The mourning cloak butterfly, *Vanessa antiopa*, she spoke of as belonging to the Tough family, giving it the name to express its hardiness and ability to endure the winter's cold, it being one of our few hibernating butterflies. To one of this species who had slept through a Franconia winter near her home and which she knew by a torn wing she gave the Christian name of Mary Ann. So when Dr. Zabriskie and I were introduced one evening his first remark was "How is Mary Ann Tough?", with that twinkle in his eyes we who knew and loved him all remember. I had come to know Mr. Beutenmüller before this through my friendship with Harry Edwards, he having assisted him in the care of his valuable collection and other entomological work and we had talked together in the insect rooms at the Museum of Natural History of the Society's starting some sort of magazine. This was effected, a subscription list started and the first number of our JOURNAL published in March, 1893. The opening article in the first number happens to bear my name as author. It was a paper I had read at one of our meetings held at the German American School on East 52d Street. Because of certain reasons I can give you with confidence the name of one member present. As I finished reading the paper—it was entitled "Common versus proper" and discussed the use of scientific nomenclature as opposed to popular—and modestly left the stage (as a fact we had no stage, then or ever afterward, but that seems a more classical way of putting it) Dr. Roderigues Ottolengui sprang to his feet and burst into words. Such a tribute! I cannot recall details but my poor, simple little paper was extolled to the highest heavens. Not only was it far, far superior to any article read hitherto at any of the meetings of our society, but—well, Cicero, Demosthenes, Patrick Henry and other oratorical stars rated some-

what highly in the opinion of the world before this would have blushed with shame at their inferiority had they been with us that evening and heard the gallant Doctor's comparisons. I was naturally pleased—what woman does not dote on flattery, however gross?—and, you see, I did not at that time know that the doctor was a maker of fiction! “About these days,” as the Farmers' Almanac used to say, we began holding auctions for the sale of rare and desirable insects, the proceeds to be applied to the expenses of the new JOURNAL. As I had been so fortunate as to travel each winter to the extreme southern part of our country and to spend summers in our high northern altitudes, in Franconia and on the summit of Mt. Washington I had duplicates of many rare species and gladly contributed them for the good cause. Those auction sales were most amusing things. I should like to attend one now; the “movies” are nothing compared with them. One evening, at a sale at the residence of Mr. Neumoegen, a reporter from one of the city dailies was present. He was a most puzzled and astonished man. Wandering about the room he asked one after another the meaning of the affair but evidently could not at all understand the attempted explanation given him. Now I belonged to a family of journalists and had been accustomed to reporters and interviewers from childhood. So I beckoned the poor news seeker to my side, telling him I would explain the whole thing to him as it went on. And, knowing the particular jargon of the cult I kept my word and made clear to him—that is as clear as it could be made to a non-entomological person—the meaning of what went on. Only a few weeks ago I came across that article of his, clipped from the newspaper he sent me. I laid it aside and have now looked for it in vain. It was fairly correct, owing to my lucid explanations, but typographical errors were innumerable, as was natural, and the whole article was mildly sarcastic. I find among my papers a letter from Mr. Beutenmüller giving results of one of these auctions held in '98. I see by that specimens of lepidoptera donated by me brought in \$76. *Sphinx canadensis* brought \$5.00, the purchaser having authorized bidding as high as \$12.00 if necessary to secure the desired specimen. Other prices obtained were \$2.45 for *Anchocelis digitalis*, \$1.50 for *Enhalisidota longa*, \$1.15 *Thecla martialis*, 50 cents *Plusia vaccinii*, 55 cents *Plusia mappa*, *P. viridisigma*, 60 cents. There was much

rivalry, and to an outsider like my reportorial friend the sight of mature, often elderly men, shouting bids excitedly like brokers on the stock exchange, for the purchase of mere bugs instead of bonds seemed very funny, not to say absurd. One evening, after, through the late Mr. Jessup's kindness, we were allowed to hold our meetings in the Museum of Natural History, my next neighbor at one of the meetings was a youth with whom I fell into conversation. He owned that he was not a real entomologist but liked all sorts of creatures and was devoted to natural history. In the course of our talk he finally confessed that he liked snakes better than any other creatures and told me sadly that he had his trials in the pursuit of ophidian study for, oddly enough, his mother and other female relatives objected strongly to the presence of rattlesnakes in the house! Though I could see their side of the story I expressed warm sympathy with the lad and we became very good friends. That, in spite of feminine and family opposition, he mastered the reptilian subject and became an expert in his line of research you will not doubt when I tell you that the boy's name was Raymond Ditmars, our famous snake charmer and student. He began young, you see, as do all real naturalists and was as a baby, I am sure, "Pleased with a rattler, tickled with its fang." Well, you have had enough of these wandering reminiscences, I am sure. If you have looked for something *historical* on this wonderful anniversary and found only something *hysterical* and frivolous, please make allowances. I am a woman and an aged one, and such are apt to be garrulous.

But let me just add my warm appreciation of the courtesy and kindness uniformly shown me by the masculine element, so largely in the majority, in this society. I never forget it, can never fail to remember it, and I herewith thank from my heart all you "boys," as I love to style you, who have been such friends and comrades to me these many years.