

William Evans, F.F.A., M.B.O.U. By **James Ritchie, M.A., D.Sc.**

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SCOTLAND has been well served by the naturalists of the old school, whose sympathies were wide and whose activities spanned the full scale of animal and plant life; but the increasing intensiveness of the investigations of modern science has dealt a death-blow to the old school, and William Evans may be looked upon as one of its last representatives.

William Evans was born in 1851 in the Curator's House of the old Experimental Garden in Inverleith Row, which formed the foundation of the present Royal Botanic Garden. His father, William Wilson Evans, by whom the Experimental Garden was managed, was an ardent and capable botanist, and although, at the incorporation of the old garden in the Royal Botanic Garden in 1857, when his son William was but six years old, he forsook Edinburgh to take up farming at Tynefield Farm, near Dunbar, his labours had already made an impression on the young mind. But Botany was not destined to have a free field in the youth's development. At Tynefield he came under the influence of Dr Charles Nelson of Pitcox, whose knowledge of wild life and whose collections of birds and butterflies were freely placed at his service; so that the seven years of his sojourn by the Forth remained ever associated in his mind with the birds, and particularly with their spring and autumnal comings and goings, in that favoured haunt of migrants on the estuary of the Tyne. Here undoubtedly he encountered one of the prime formative influences of his life.

Up to this point he had been schooled at the Free Kirk School of East Linton, but, on his father's appointment as estate agent to Sir G. Clark of Penicuik, he attended Edinburgh Institution, and at the age of 17 became apprenticed to the Scottish Widows' Fund. Here he soon became recognised as a promising actuarial student, and, devoting himself with zeal to this branch of his profession, he published his first paper, "On the Value of a Reversionary Annuity payable oftener than once a Year," in the *Journal of the Institute of Actuaries*, in 1875. In 1892, when ill-health compelled him to retire from professional work, he had reached the post of Assistant Actuary to the Fund, and it is interesting to recall that his election to the Fellowship of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1884 was due to his actuarial and not his naturalist qualifications.

If ill-health lost to actuarial science a skilled devotee, it added a promising recruit to the science of nature, for, compelled to spend much

of his time in the open air, Evans turned his attention whole-heartedly to the study of the plant and animal life of the district. These investigations, which especially aimed at completing a regional survey of the "Forth Area," he pursued, it might be said, literally to the day of his death, dividing his time between observation and collecting in the field, and subsequent identification of his captures in the study. As a result, a constant flow of papers and notes appeared from his pen, mainly in the *Proceedings of the Royal Physical Society*, in the *Annals of Scottish Natural History* and its successor, *The Scottish Naturalist*, of which he was co-editor. To the conduct of the Royal Physical Society he gave much of his attention, serving during many terms on the Council, and acting at one time or other as Secretary, Vice-President, and President. In the last capacity he delivered in 1907 an address "On our Present Knowledge of the Fauna of the Forth Area," which was marked by a catholicity of systematic study such as must of itself have placed him in the foremost rank of field naturalists. He was equally at home with the mammals, birds, fishes, and reptilians of Scotland, and with the more familiar groups of insects, as well as with obscure groups both of insects and arachnids which had been almost entirely neglected in the Forth Area till he focussed his attention upon them; and all his work was well and thoroughly done.

It would be trite to say that if William Evans had confined his investigations within a narrower range he would have gone further; but his uncertain health compelled him to husband his resources and to spend much of his time in the open, where he studied nature for the pleasure it gave him—a pleasure in which variety played no inconsiderable part. As it is, his labours have added much to our knowledge of the plant and animal life of Scotland, and have made the fauna of his favourite Forth Area one of the most thoroughly known assemblages of animals in the country.

In 1879 Evans married Miss Patricia Deuchar, second daughter of John Deuchar of Morningside, and her sudden death, little more than a year before his own demise on 23rd October 1922, undoubtedly weakened his own slender hold on life. He is survived by a son and daughter, both of whom carry on, with enthusiasm and skill, the naturalist traditions of a family, whose sympathy and understanding contributed largely to the pleasure and success of William Evans' labours. No one could meet Evans without marvelling at the unfathomed depths of his observation of wild life, and being stirred by his enthusiasm. He was a good friend, whose critical knowledge was ever at the service of the inquirer, and whose life's work was dominated by the love of accuracy and truth.