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*In Memoriam.*

WALTER W. REEVES.

*By Frederic Hy. Ward, M.R.C.S., F.R.M.S.*

*In a Club like ours, in which the social element is one of the most distinctive features, it would not be meet to allow the death of one of its original founders to pass by without remark. To chronicle our loss becomes still more a duty in the case of our late friend Mr. Reeves, who from his punctual attendance at all meetings, and constant readiness to assist in all matters pertaining to the interests of the Club, might almost be looked upon as its father, rather than one only of its original founders.*

*I could wish that the duty of recording his worth had been committed to more competent hands than mine, but I feel that his name will remain to the last in the affectionate remembrance of his friends and fellow-members, and that nothing can be said or written by anyone which could make it more enduring.*

*Walter Waters Reeves, the eldest son of Thomas Waters Reeves, was born on February 14th, 1819, at Beckley, in Sussex, and was educated under Dr. Davies at the Cranbrook Grammar School. While a schoolboy he showed his fondness for natural history, and was continually collecting specimens. Nothing delighted him more than rambling in the woods and fields, and searching the banks and hedgerows for anything that was alive. Returning home, he would triumphantly produce from his pockets his captures— not always, however, to an admiring home circle when these consisted of snakes or other creatures usually viewed with some repugnance. About this time he made a very good collection of the eggs of British birds, which he subsequently presented to a local museum. He was by no means a collector merely. He carefully watched and studied the birds and their habits at the different seasons, and made himself familiar with their different notes and songs. Down to a very late period he would identify any bird by a few notes, or its mode of flight, where these are distinctive, and I remember his complaining to me comparatively recently that he thought his memory was failing, as he could not always tell what birds he heard.*

*On his leaving school it was decided that he should enter the medical profession, and with this object in view he was articled to a surgeon at Maidstone, where he remained some years. It was here that he commenced the study of botany, to which he devoted most of his leisure time. He thought no trouble too great to be taken in this his favourite pursuit, and soon became acquainted with all the plants in the neighbourhood, often walking 20 miles or more before breakfast that he might find some fresh specimen or obtain material for examination at home. He speedily acquired a very good collection, with the assistance of some of the well known botanists of that day, and on his leaving Maidstone his herbarium contained specimens of almost every British plant, ferns as then classified being particularly well represented. When his period of pupilage expired he was not ambitious to advance himself in his profession by coming to London and entering on hospital work ; in fact, the very idea of hospital practice or operative surgery*

was repugnant" to him. To abandon natural history pursuits was a sacrifice too great, and he went in preference to Farnham as assistant to a surgeon, and afterwards to Tunbridge Wells in the same capacity. I think it was about this time that he had an attack of rheumatic iritis, which permanently injured the sight of one eye, and after laying him by for a considerable time led him to renounce the idea of qualifying for practice.

Almost as soon as photography became a practical art he entered upon it with a good deal of zest, and was even in business for a short time as a photographer. From some cause or other it did not turn out to be very profitable, and there is little doubt that so far as the trade element was concerned he was unfitted for it. By the wax paper process he secured negatives of most of our native ferns, and at one time contemplated issuing a complete series of prints from them. He also, by the same process, commenced a series of views of the parish churches in the neighbourhood. Those who are acquainted with the difficulties of this branch of photography would be astonished at the merit which some of these negatives display.

In 1864 Mr. Reeves joined the Royal Microscopical Society, and in 1868 he was made Assistant Secretary. The appointment he held for 16 years, and on his resignation, in consideration of his services, he was presented with the sum of £100.

Members of the Quekett will remember with pleasure that about this time they embraced the opportunity of his retiring from office to present him with an illuminated address and a purse of sovereigns in recognition not only of his services to microscopy, but also of the esteem in which he was held. This was always a source of great gratification to him, and the address henceforth held a prominent position in his room above the table devoted to microscopic appliances.

It would be unnecessary to detail here the services he rendered to our Club as a Member of the General and Excursion Committees. Virtually he was the leader of the excursions and botanical referee, and so long as the annual dinner was held at Leatherhead he was the principal organizer of the day's proceedings. At the ordinary meetings of the Club he was perhaps the most constant attender, and the register would show that the nights on which he was absent were very, very few.

Towards the close of last year his health began to fail, and his friends noticed an unusual pallor in his face and a gradual loss of flesh. He had complained of rheumatic pains at times for many years, but they were never so bad as to confine him to the house. The first symptoms of his malady – cancer of the stomach – were sickness with diarrhoea, which kept him to his rooms for nearly a week. He would not admit it was anything more than a bilious attack, but after it had recurred several times, and he had on each occasion vomited much blood, he acknowledged that he was failing, and said he wanted someone to nurse him. With this object in view he left London on 30th January, and went to reside with his sister at Middleton Vicarage, taking with him his two pet dormice, which had been his companions for some time. He did not at first appear to have suffered from the journey, but a day or two after his arrival he got worse, and on February 5th he had frequent vomiting of blood. In a few days he rallied, and was able to sit up a little in his bedroom each day, was in his usual good spirits, and frequently talked of the plans he had formed of returning to London to superintend the packing of his treasures and of paying a round of final visits to his friends, before settling down for the remainder of his life in that little Yorkshire village.

On the 24th, however, the same distressing symptoms returned; he became very weak, and it was with great difficulty he could be coaxed into taking any nourishment. In a few days, with the cessation of the sickness, he again improved, and his spirits revived, but he appeared unable to recover the ground he had lost ; for seven or eight hours in the day he would sit up in his bedroom, but was unable to get downstairs. On March 15th he went out into the garden, only remaining a few minutes, and he was glad to return within doors. Shortly after he was seized with acute pain in the stomach, and was helped to bed. On the following day all the worst symptoms returned, and again on the 22nd, lasting each time for two or three

days. On the 29th he confessed that he felt more ill than he had ever done before ; for a day or two was in a very prostrate condition, quite unable to sit up in bed, and took very little interest in anything. Shortly after this he rallied, and from that time had no further return of the sickness. Towards the end of April he was much better, and it was arranged that his niece, who had been nursing him most assiduously, should come up to London, and superintend the packing of his herbarium, books, etc., and he gave special instructions that one of his botanical presses should be sent off at once, as he was contemplating pressing some plants. On the last day of the month all his belongings arrived safely, and he was relieved of the anxiety he had felt, lest any of his apparatus, slides, books, or plants should be injured in the transit. At this time I received two letters written to his dictation, but signed by himself, though the contents were quite in his old style, cheerful and, of course, botanical, when I saw his signature I felt that there was great cause for alarm. But when I heard on May 9th that he was in good spirits and had been visited by some old friends, to whom he had been showing plants and slides, and quite with his old fervour, that he had had no return of the bad symptoms, I began to hope that, as the weather got warmer, he might gain strength and be able once more to get out into the country that he loved, but it was not to be.

Early on the morning of the 16th he became suddenly worse, had acute pain, and was almost collapsed. He obtained relief from the remedies used, and had some hours' sound sleep, but the weakness increased, there appeared to be no power to rally, and at 6 p.m. on the next day he began to sink. Propped up in bed, he retained his consciousness, and at 11 p.m. wished his niece good-night for the last time, then, slowly and calmly sinking, passed away without a sigh or a single struggle, in his sister's presence, at 3.30 the next morning. On the following Saturday his mortal remains were laid to rest in the little churchyard by his brother-in-law, the Vicar of Middleton.

And now to say the last words. Mr. Reeves was of a modest and retiring disposition; his voice was very rarely heard in public, though there were very few subjects that came before our meetings on which he could not have said something. He had a good, all-round knowledge of matters connected with the microscope, but, owing to his limited sight, he did not work much with that instrument. He was, before all things, a botanist – one of the old type of field botanists – and could at once, almost invariably, give the name to any plant he might meet with in his rambles, and nothing gave him greater pleasure than to see them growing in their native habitats.

For over twelve years, and for some thousands of miles, I have accompanied and collected with him, and it was indeed a rare occurrence if he did not find the things he went in search of. The most marked trait in his character was gentleness ; few could have fewer enemies or more friends. His fellow members will not readily forget his kindly features and his genial smile. The place he has left vacant in our Club will remain vacant— our friend will return no more.