

a paper on "*Agrotis ashworthii*: Life-History up to date." In addition to the general history of the life of this interesting moth he gave some very interesting personal experiences of collecting and breeding the insect. Mr. Tait illustrated his paper by a drawer containing a fine series of the perfect insect showing marked variation. His remarks and experiences were confirmed and amplified by Messrs. W. Buckley and C. F. Johnson, who both exhibited a fine series of the perfect insect.—J. F. G. WYNNE, *Hon. Recording Secretary*.

OBITUARY.

W. L. DISTANT.

It is with sincere regret that we record the death, on February 4th, of another old and valued contributor to our pages, who had also been a member of our Reference Committee since February, 1890. After a long illness, due to cancer, the end came, at a nursing home at Wanstead, at the age of seventy-seven years.

Born at Rotherhithe on November 12th, 1845, William Lucas Distant was a son of Capt. Alexander Distant, "who, in old South-Sea whaling-days, sailed round and round the world, and transmitted a love of roaming to his sons." On August 5th, 1867 (which he always spoke of as being the most eventful day of his life), our friend himself started on a voyage to the Malay Peninsula, a voyage which bore fruit in 1882–1886 in the publication of his valuable work '*Rhopalocera Malayana: a Description of the Butterflies of the Malay Peninsula*.'

In 1873 he married Edith Blanche de Rubien, and his family consisted of five sons and three daughters.

In June, 1890, he sailed for a "twelve months' business sojourn in the Transvaal," in connection with the tanning industry, and an account of his observations and experiences as a student of Nature was published in 1892, under the title of '*A Naturalist in the Transvaal*.'

In 1897 he succeeded J. E. Harting as Editor of '*The Zoologist*,' and resigned the editorship at the end of 1914.

Another visit to the Transvaal was made in 1898, and during 1900–1911 appeared the first volume (which had no successor) of '*Insecta Transvaaliensia: A Contribution to a Knowledge of the Entomology of South Africa*.'

From April, 1899, to November, 1920, he was engaged as a part-time Assistant at the British Museum (Natural History), and during this period of 21½ years he re-arranged the national collection of Rhynchota, and described in a voluminous series of memoirs the wealth of new species which he found there. His private collection of about 50,000 specimens, chiefly Rhynchota, and containing altogether over 2,500 types, came to the Museum in 1911, and the purchase of it by the Trustees was completed nine years later. The large and attractive insects forming the Cicadidæ always remained his favourite group.

A series of family bereavements contributed largely to the break-up of his health. In 1913 his second son was drowned in Australia, his wife died in 1914, and in the following year his youngest son died at Alexandria, while serving with the Mediterranean Expeditionary

Force. Towards the end of 1920 he went for a prolonged visit to Yarmouth, which was always a favourite health-resort of his, but, as his colleagues had only too clearly foreseen, he was destined never to resume his labours in the old fields of activity. He was buried in the family grave at Nunhead Cemetery on February 7th, 1922.

His connection with the Entomological Society of London was a long one, for he was elected a Fellow (then termed a Member) as long ago as 1875. He was a Vice-President in 1881 and again in 1900, and acted as one of the Secretaries from 1878 to 1880, while he served upon the Council from 1900 to 1902. Of other learned societies he was Member of the Anthropological Institute (of which he was Director and Honorary Secretary 1878-1881), Member of the Entomological Society of France, and Corresponding Member of the Entomological Society of Stockholm and of the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences.

Distant's literary output was considerable, and reference has already been made to his special memoirs and the books on the Transvaal and the Malay Peninsula. Other important publications were: 'Biologia Centrali-Americana,' 'Hemiptera-Heteroptera,' vol. i (1880-1893) and (in part) 'Hemiptera-Homoptera,' vol. i (1881-1905); 'A Monograph of Oriental Cicadidæ' (1889-1892); 'The Fauna of British India,' 'Rhynchota,' vols. i to vii (1902-1918); and 'A Synonymic Catalogue of Homoptera, Part I—Cicadidæ' (1906).

Although he was keenly sensitive to adverse criticism, his conversation was both humorous and entertaining, as he always had a large fund of anecdote and reminiscence to draw upon, and knew how to tell a good story with the greatest effect. At one time he was an enthusiastic fresh-water fisherman, but, when the burden of years began to press heavily upon him, he found a more congenial pursuit in the cultivation of his flower-garden. Angling and gardening incidents never failed as a basis for friendly intercourse, whenever he met with others who shared in his genuine love for such things.

HERBERT CAMPION.

WILLIAM PURDEY.

As announced in the February number of this magazine, the death of William Purdey took place on January 19th last.

He was born at Folkestone on January 22nd, 1844, and was thus within three days of the completion of the seventy-eighth year of his age on the date of his decease.

By occupation he was a locksmith, and for fifty-six years he faithfully served the South-Eastern Railway Company, his particular duty being to keep in repair the locks on the Channel boats.

Purdey was essentially a field lepidopterist, and his special study, at any rate for many years past, has been the lesser British Lepidoptera, including all groups except the *Tineina*.

He was of an exceptionally persevering and energetic nature, with excellent powers of observation, and the necessary sound judgment to enable him to use these qualities to the best advantage. He was unquestionably, if not *the* best, at any rate one of the very best field workers we have ever produced.

His contributions to the literature of the science were comparatively few, and mostly consisted of records of his captures. The



Campion, Herbert. 1922. "Obituary. W. L. Distant." *The Entomologist* 55, 70–71.

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