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WILLIAM HARRY EVANS

Brigadier WILLIAM HARRY EVANS, C. S. I., C. I. E., D. S. O., was born on 22nd July, 1876, at Shillong, Assam, third son of Sir HORACE MOULE EVANS and ELIZABETH ANNE, daughter of Surgeon General J. T. TRESSIDER. His talented mother undoubtedly did much to kindle in him and share with him her own enlightened interest in nature, so that by the time he was sent to King's School, Canterbury, he already had a strong school-boy interest in butterflies and moths. At the age of eighteen he joined the Royal Engineers. He was posted East in 1898, and in that year he was already collecting butterflies in Chitral. His Indian service was interrupted by duty with the Somaliland Expedition (1902-04) where he sustained an injury to his knee when landing, which handicapped him increasingly over the years. He also served in France from 1914 to 1918. In the latter war he not only distinguished himself by being awarded the D.S.O. and a brevet, but as a result of exposure to gas incurred permanent chest trouble. With characteristic doggedness he made light of these handicaps, which did not grow lighter as time passed. Returning to India in 1919, he was stationed at various Command headquarters. His final post was with Western Command at Quetta as Chief Engineer.

Retiring in 1931 he travelled home via Australia, settling in London in 1932, within easy walking distance of the Natural History Museum; yet in a sense his military service did not even then come to an end, for he was attached to the Non-intervention Committee during the Spanish Civil War, and when in the last war troubles came to London, he unobtrusively assumed the job of Air Raid Warden in his own immediate neighborhood. Stoically, as was so very characteristic of him, he put in a full day's work daily at the Museum throughout the war, at a window facing south on to Cromwell Road, where one morning he was caught in the explosion of a German V1 rocket bomb which burst on the roadway about 100 yards away. Cut, bruised, badly shaken and with his hearing seriously affected (permanently, as it later transpired), his only complaint was of the loss of the specimens he had been examining, and of which nothing remained but the pins and labels. However, within hours he was at work again, though it was little short of a miracle that he was not killed. The incident — not uncommon in London at the time — is related because EVANS'S reaction was so typical of him. He had sent his wife to Bournemouth (where she died in 1945) to escape the raids; and he could justifiably have followed her. As for himself, his task was to complete the Revision of the Hesperiidæ of the World, as he so often said "before he died". Often, during his last few years, we wondered, as he did, whether death would win, but the victory was his.

Throughout his service in India, EVANS collected assiduously, so that few men can have had a fuller or more intimate comparative knowledge of the distribution patterns of the Rhopalocera of that vast sub-continent. Ceylon, Kodai Kanal (S. India), Jabalpur, Simla, Murree, Darjeeling, Chitral, Baluchistan were his principal collecting grounds. He also spent at least one highly profitable leave period in Burma, visited Malaya and the Andaman Islands, and twice travelled to Australia, where the Trapetizinae, a subfamily of peculiar endemic Hesperiid genera, particularly attracted his attention. Owing to the exigencies of army life, EVANS preserved the great bulk of his very extensive material in papers, only setting barely enough for a handy reference collection — and setting was not an art he ever acquired to perfection; red sealing wax, often used to secure wings, does not improve the appearance of specimens!

EVANS'S approach to entomology was essentially practical, methodical, almost matter-of-fact. He was not content solely with the delights of the chase, or the beauty of the quarry; he wanted always to know precisely what it was he caught, how it differed from its related species and where it fitted into the scheme of things. During the twenty-five years that he spent as a close colleague in the Museum he never spoke of the life histories of Indian butterflies as if from personal experience; indeed, in all his writings little will be found on this aspect of the subject. In other words, taxonomy made the strongest appeal to him. In a way this was fortunate for students of the Indian butterflies, the available literature on which was scattered, expensive, voluminous and not always as informative as appearances suggested, for it led EVANS to prepare his *Keys for the Identification of Indian Butterflies*. The *Keys*, published originally in parts in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*, from 1923,

proved at once deservedly popular, were issued in book form in 1927, and again as a revised edition in 1932. For the first time they provided the collector and student in a single volume of some 300 pages with reliable keys to the whole of the families, genera, species and subspecies known to occur in India, Burma and Ceylon. Preceding the actual Keys there is a masterly, concise, practical summary of all the aspects of butterfly collecting in India likely to interest the collector. It is worth careful reading and it throws more light on the author himself than any other of his writings. The clipped, abbreviated text matter of the *Keys* and the rather unattractive half-tone plates do not make an æsthetically pleasing volume; but the success of the Keys was immediate, for they worked. In this work EVANS introduced both the standard set of abbreviations and the rather unorthodox type of Key which he used throughout his later work. For the latter he claimed that it was natural in that it did not rely on 'spot' characters but on true morphologically comparable similarities and differences, and showed simultaneously and continuously the identity of a species and its position in his classification; certain it is that his keys were suited to his mathematical mind and his quite extraordinary faculty for keeping a whole range of related and indeed seemingly unrelated characters in his head simultaneously. He found it quite unnecessary to employ any system of tabulation such as most of us find unavoidable; having 'worked through' a genus, he would write the key virtually without further reference to the specimens on which it was based.

One may perhaps be permitted to wonder why it was that on retirement EVANS selected the Hesperiidæ for his attention. The Lycænidæ were (and still are) almost equally in need of serious overhaul. On a superficial comparison, however, they look 'easier', for clearly they present a great variety of usable 'characters'. The Skippers on this ground alone, however, present a greater challenge, and, besides, there was the vast unorganized assemblage of tropical American species into which nobody had as yet made any serious attempt to introduce order. Here was indeed a challenge worthy of EVANS'S metal; and it is an odd coincidence that the only worthwhile attack ever previously to have been made on the major classification of the Hesperiidæ was also the work of a Sapper, Captain E. Y. WATSON (1893, *Proc. Zool. Soc. London*) who was killed in action before the turn of the century. From the fact that these two workers are in almost complete accordance in their major conclusions much comfort can be drawn by the rest of us.

In the course of preparing his Catalogues of the Hesperiidæ in the British Museum, details of which will be found in the bibliography, EVANS examined critically well over half a million specimens, not counting the very large amount of material which he excluded from the main collection and treated as supplementary. As his classification at specific level, and to a considerable extent at generic level as well, is based on the male genitalia, an astonishingly high proportion of this material was actually dissected and examined by him single-handed. This he achieved by the dry method, often without any visual aid, or at most with the help of a low-powered binocular — for his near sight was quite remarkable, a fact which also accounts, no doubt, for the minuteness

of his handwriting. To see this operation in practice made one shudder, but it paid dividends; and such a mass of material could never have been examined in the time by conventional methods. It is inevitable, however, that only the grosser characters can be appreciated so, and just as inevitable is it that when more refined methods are employed much correction of detail will be necessary. Comparisons of the treatment of the palearctic and nearctic Hesperiidæ by EVANS with the work of REVERDIN, WARREN, SKINNER and WILLIAMS, BELL, LINDSEY, and others clearly illustrates the point. This is not to decry EVANS'S work. It has the enormous merit of being a completely comprehensive revision in which the same criteria have been applied throughout, thus providing us with strictly comparable taxa. Whether one regards his Groups as Families or his subspecies as species is immaterial; within each category the values are pretty constant. One regret, however, may be expressed, and that is that EVANS gave us so little in the way of general conclusions that could, surely, have been drawn from his profound knowledge of the Skippers of the World. It may be because, though he was much influenced in later years by the writings of RENSCH, MAYR, HUXLEY and others on evolution and the species concept, he always regarded phylogeny with the greatest suspicion.

Having finished his self-appointed task and completed his work on the Hesperiidæ, EVANS decided to spend his last years helping others interested in the Skippers, tidying up, etc., etc., till with a sudden renewed enthusiasm for the Lycænidæ he revised the difficult genus *Tarucus* and, in a few months, reduced to order the species of the Oriental genus *Arbopala* which had been a stumbling block to others for generations. The manuscript of the latter revision went to press in September 1956. He died, after a short illness, on November 13th, 1956. His only son, Dr. J. W. EVANS, ably maintains the family interest in entomology and is now Director of the Australian Museum, Sydney.

A quarter of a century seems a long time to spend revising a single family of the Lepidoptera. However, but for the fact that EVANS was entirely his own master, free of all official ties and duties (and in consequence not a little envied by the 'permanent' staff, maybe), it would not have sufficed. EVANS at work was quick, accurate, methodical, and true to his Army training, required an answer to be yes or no — he had no use for compromise. Decision was what he sought, not tangential possibilities; and having reached his decision he was adamant, whether it concerned the status of a species or the position of a comma — which was a pity, for it sometimes led him, and not only him, to unnecessary heart-burnings. Nevertheless he was an endearing character, likeable, deservedly popular, suffering children (whom he enchanted) gladly, but not fools, and utterly dependable.

The Department, of which he was an 'institution' for so long, more regular than the regulars, will for many years cherish the warmest memories of 'the Brigadier'.

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[Editor's note: Brigadier EVANS was one of the five original Honorary Life Members of the Lepidopterists' Society. Prior to completion of the final part of his catalogue of the American Hesperiidæ, he had agreed to prepare for publication in the *Lepidopterists' News* a summary paper setting forth his views of the over-all classification of the Skippers of the world, with a discussion of the basis for his system. He wrote that he must first concentrate all of his efforts on completing the Catalogue. We were expecting the manuscript of the *News* paper when word of EVANS'S passing was received in the form of a letter written by EVANS and mailed at the time of his death on instructions to his niece. It stated, in part: "In 1952 the Lepidopterists' Society paid me the great honor of appointing me an Honorary Life Member of the Society. In 1953 I observed that on the death of Professor G. D. HALE CARPENTER, who had received the same distinction, a very complete obituary was published in the *Lepidopterists' News*. In case the Society decides to follow the same course on my death, I enclose a photograph and a list of my publications." This considerate and orderly act allows us to present the following bibliography, with post-1955 additions by Dr. P. F. BELLINGER. The portrait was taken by KENT H. WILSON in 1952. — C. L. REMINGTON]

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