

Obituary

FRANCIS J. A. MORRIS (1869-1949)

In the death of Francis J. A. Morris Canada has lost a great teacher of English literature, a classical scholar, a writer of charm, in both prose and verse, and a naturalist of distinction. After a lingering illness of some years' duration he died on December 31st, 1949.

Until he was twenty-five years old Frank Morris lived in the British Isles. He was born in 1869 in a parsonage near the Scottish town of Crieff in Perthshire, where he remained until the death of his father, when Frank was thirteen years of age. It was during these boyhood years in Scotland that the foundations of his later interests were laid. He was fascinated by the beauty of all the living things about him. Flowers were his first interest, then, with the companionship of his brother, he became engrossed in birds and birds' nesting, in the rearing of moths and butterflies, and finally in insects generally which, for a few years the brothers collected with avidity.

After the death of their father the boys were moved to London, where they suffered a partial separation by attending different schools, but still carried on their hobbies together. Frank attended Dulwich College, where he became immersed in the Classics and English Literature, reading widely, particularly Nineteenth Century poetry and the novels of the day. The brothers continued to spend their free time together, adding to their collection of insects and, under the guidance of a new school friend, making long excursions into the countryside. Their friend's favourite hobby was fossil collecting and to this new pastime he introduced the Morris brothers, taking them out to the chalk pits near Croydon, where they spent many hours digging out fossils from the chalk beds, and delighting in the many new kinds of birds and insects of the downs.

The brothers still spent their holidays together in their old haunts in Scotland, but when Frank was sixteen his brother set sail for Australia and Frank was thrown on his own resources. School studies claimed most of his time and the boyish interest in collecting waned, although his delight in the contemplation of living nature grew even more intense.

His outlook on nature, however, soon began to be coloured by a rapidly growing interest in Darwinism and the theory of Evolution, which he had often heard discussed at school, although his interest in the subject was not seriously aroused until it was expounded to him by an old army doctor, who was generally the boys' host on their trips to Scotland, and who was a scholar and an ardent disciple of Darwin.

At Oxford University Morris continued to pursue the Classics but varied his reading with many works on Evolution. In spite of this new interest, however, his emotional attitude towards nature not only persisted but was kindled afresh by his discovery that in Wordsworth's poetry was an expression of all his own feelings and sentiments concerning nature.

Soon after graduating from Oxford Morris came out to Canada, spending his first winter in Toronto in attendance at the Normal School. It was in Toronto that he first met Dr. William Brodie to whom he owed his introduction to Canadian natural history. Dr. Brodie remained a close friend to Morris until his death in 1909, which was commemorated by Morris in his poem "The Master Mind".

After a summer in Toronto, Morris was appointed to the staff of the High School at Smiths Falls and here he learned from the science master how to identify plants with a "key", for he had never felt the need of scientific methods

before, as there were plenty of popular guides to the British flowers and birds. This new skill became a veritable obsession to him. He was never tired of adding to his acquaintance with the local flora so that, by the end of the second year, when he left Smiths Falls, he knew most of the commoner flowering plants of the region.

At this time he accepted a private tutorship in the neighbouring town of Perth, and it happened that his pupil was an ardent ornithologist. A close friendship grew up between tutor and pupil of the give-and-take kind and the teacher learned much from the pupil about Ontario birds and their songs and calls.

In 1899 Morris returned to Toronto for the spring and summer. He again had the companionship of Dr. Brodie and enjoyed the opportunity of adding to his acquaintance with the Ontario flora. In the following April he had settled in Port Hope where he had been appointed Classical Master in Trinity College School. His first two seasons here were spent in active pursuit of botany and ornithology. For a time his attention was mainly concentrated on bird watching, but he also gave much of his free time to those pupils who were interested in natural history, particularly in competing for a prize that was offered annually for the best collection of "flowers, foliage and ferns". These boys organized a Field Club, with Morris as their Honorary President.

One April morning a deputation from the Club came to Morris' room to ask if insects could be accepted as a subject for the prize competition. After some consideration Morris agreed to this, but limited the field to moths and butterflies or beetles. Beetles having been chosen by some of the boys, the difficulty of naming them at once became a major problem, and thus Morris was besieged with enquiries morning, noon and night. Beetles had as yet no special place in Morris' hobbies and there was no "Beetle Book" like Holland's *Butterfly Book* and *Moth Book*. So, out of sheer desperation, Morris began to make a collection of beetles for himself and, with the help of various texts, he was soon a beetle addict in an advanced stage. This interest in beetles, particularly the long-horns, became a permanent one and is reflected in a number of delightful essays that appeared in *The Canadian Entomologist* and the Annual Reports of the Entomological Society of Ontario. He served as President of this Society in 1921-1923.

In order to qualify as a Specialist in Classics, Morris attended the University of Toronto and obtained the degree of Master of Arts. In September, 1913, he was appointed to the staff of the Peterborough Collegiate Institute where he taught Classics for a time. Further study at the University of Toronto enabled him to become the head of the English Department in the Peterborough Collegiate Institute, a position which he retained until his retirement in 1936.

It was not long after Morris was settled in Peterborough that he chanced to meet Edward A. Eames of Buffalo, whose hobby was the photography of wild orchids. These were also favourites of Morris and it was not long before the two enthusiasts had planned to collaborate in a book for the amateur naturalist on "Our Wild Orchids", the text to be written by Morris and the illustrations furnished by Eames. A most beautiful book was the outcome, a literary gem in which the incidents recorded about each species are set forth in fine prose with those touches of gentle humour that are a part of the charm of all Morris' writings. Many happy years were spent by the "foursome", consisting of the two authors and their wives, in gathering material for this venture and, even after the book was published, Morris continued to find his greatest delight in tracking down and recording of rare and little-known orchids.

In addition to his writings on Natural History, which included also the widely circulated Federation of Ontario Naturalist's booklet on the Protection of Wild Flowers, Morris contributed articles to *The Canadian Forum* and various other magazines in Canada and the United States. Most of his verse is unpublished but two poems "The First Hepatica" and "Life" are included in Professor Alexander's "Shorter Poems", which has been used for a whole generation in the Ontario High Schools. His love for the Victorian poets is clearly revealed in his own verse.

Any account of Frank Morris' life, however brief, would be inadequate without paying a high tribute to his wife (nee Elma Walker), whom he married while he was living in Port Hope. Even before the long years of his final illness she ministered faithfully and cheerfully to all his needs, for he was, as related by himself, somewhat awkward with his hands, his fingers being "all thumbs". The writer recalls a week spent with the Morrises at Silver Islet, Lake Superior, when he observed with admiration how Mrs. Morris would drive the car to any spot which her husband wished to explore, and would cheerfully wait for hours, if need be, until his return. It was a most fortunate thing for him that he had such a wife to care for him during the years of his decline. To this gracious lady we extend our deepest sympathy.

E. M. WALKER