



ELIZABETH BANGS BRYANT

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It was some years after I had come to Cambridge that I first met Miss Bryant. At that time (1926) the entomologists had their own entrance, and simply going around and making calls was not encouraged. But after Thomas Barbour became director (1928) and after the Biology Department had moved across the street, she and I became neighbors on the fourth floor. She discovered that I made tea for my lunch and suggested that I come in and drink tea with her, and for more than 15 years I usually had lunch with her about three times a week. She must have been about sixty when we first met and she seemed to change very little with the years. She was of medium height, fairly stout, with regal carriage. She had unwrinkled skin, clear blue eyes and white hair. In some quarters of the museum she was referred to, not unkindly, as "Queen Victoria" and although much taller and with a decidedly retroussé nose, her black dress, snow-white hair and somewhat pendulous cheeks gave her a certain resemblance to that lady. She is the only person I have known who used the word "twaddle", and that with as much emphasis as I imagine Queen Victoria did. Behind her sedate exterior she kept a rather youthful spirit. She was extremely well read with a rich vocabulary of old Yankee expressions and after she had used one of these she would suddenly pretend that she was embarrassed: "Oh, Miss Deichmann, I really should not teach you such language!"

It is perhaps quite characteristic that I never had the slightest idea of what her father had been, while I was

extremely well acquainted with the famous cat of her childhood, so dignified that she and her brother always referred to it as *Mister Verdant Green*. She belonged to a good substantial Boston family and seemed to be related to a large number of prominent persons, which did not prevent her from expressing her, not always high, opinion of these relatives. She had evidently had an extremely happy childhood and a youth filled with trips to Europe and the typical Bostonian's cultural interests. The family had even been so progressive that they had allowed her to go to Radcliffe, which definitely was the great adventure of her life, as for all women of her generation who suddenly were allowed to get the same education as their brothers. She belonged to the class of 1897 but she did not graduate. There may have been illness in her family, or it may have been just at that time that her family, as well as many other substantial Bostonians, were rather hard hit financially. Her interests were with natural history and she became early acquainted with the men in the Boston Natural History Museum and those connected with the Agassiz Museum, and in the latter institute she was soon given the little division of spiders to take care of. In her younger days she was an eager field worker: there was a widespread interest in nature study in Boston and she took part in many botanical and zoological excursions and built up quite a collection of New England spiders. Her father died rather early and after that time she took care of her mother for many years, while she regularly appeared in the Agassiz Museum three times a week, but her outdoor activities became quite naturally restricted and her circle of acquaintances limited to men much older than herself, Mr. Samuel Henshaw, Mr. Faxon and especially Mr. J. H. Emerton, who was delighted to see a younger person take over in the spider field.

In the museum she had been fortunate to be allotted a small division. With the myriapods and mites in two neighboring rooms, she was able to have all the spiders around her. She learned to type and besides she wrote hundreds of cards and labels in her precise, clear hand. Her reprint collection was well cared for, with binders which

she bought herself. Her first paper came in 1908; it was merely a list of local species, but it had probably taken some persuasion from her good friend, Mr. Emerton, to let her to allow her name to appear in print. It was 15 years later that her Barbados-Antigua report was published, and then, around 1930, she really began to be a regular contributor. Very likely it was the stimulus she received when Dr. Barbour saw to it that this volunteer worker of almost 30 years standing at last received a small salary. She steadfastly refused to be listed in *American Men of Science*, feeling that that was to intrude into the ranks of professionally trained, and no argument could change her position on that point. It was a great joy to her when other arachnologists visited her and she was always helpful to beginners who came to seek her advice. When somebody brought in a spider she would tell all about its habits and occurrence, and she never crushed the collector with a remark that it was one of the most common forms. "It is such a long time since I have had occasion to see a live specimen of this spider," — so the person went off feeling that his efforts had been fully appreciated.

Her main scientific work was not started until she was 55 years old, and continued to her death. Several large papers on West Indian spiders were illustrated by her clean pen drawings. She was handicapped in her work by an inadequate microscope and light (a modified automobile spotlight). She worked independently of all but a few colleagues in arachnology.

For several years her mother's health was failing and she looked after her with unswerving fidelity. After her mother's death she moved from the house in Allston to a pleasant top floor apartment in Brookline. It looked as if she was going to have more freedom and our long planned trip to St. Lucia in the West Indies, the type locality for so many of the West Indian spiders, seemed near to becoming reality, when the old housekeeper's health gave out and Miss Bryant undertook to care for her, most scornful of the idea that the housekeeper should be put in a Nursing Home.

There was one unusual activity in which Miss Bryant

indulged, and that was taking care of her investments. After her father's death, her mother, mindful of the debacle of some years before, made arrangements, so that she got a fixed income and divided the family fortune between the two children. That was in the happy days before the income tax had been invented. The usual course would have been that Miss Bryant's share be put in a trust fund, but here her old friend, Mr. Henshaw, intervened. She took, as always, his advice and developed into an extremely shrewd and careful investor. Through her interest in her investments, by reading newspapers and magazines, she acquired an unusual understanding of what was going on in the United States and in the world as a whole, and her down to earth realism and a total lack of sentimentality made conversations with her extremely interesting.

In addition to her indisputable business ability, which would have made her a gift to a brokerage firm, she possessed also the virtue, thrift. She saw to it that nothing was wasted in her house, got the utmost wear out of her few garments and she kept all unnecessary expenditures down to zero. She subscribed to a few magazines which she knew she could manage to read, and the back numbers were quickly passed on to some other person for whom she was happy to save the cost of a subscription. While despising people who made themselves miserable by being "penurious" she enjoyed her own little pet economies. For years she would happily trot down a few blocks so that she could get home on the 5 cent fare, and until her last illness it was our monthly joke when she handed me her check for the Faculty Club and asked me to take it over to Harvard Square when I was paying my own bill, adding with mock seriousness: "I just can't *bear* spending 3 cents on such a short distance, and the bus no longer sets me off in Harvard Square."

She felt her responsibility toward the needy, particularly children and old people, and she insisted on knowing where the money went. She saw to it that nothing was lost between her hand and that of the recipient. She lived for years in a rather poor district where as she once expressed it: "They are counting on my contribution" — and they got it. At

one time an over eager Community Chest agent tried to persuade her to give her large contribution through the Museum instead of just the token which she usually gave. But she was adamant, her contribution was going to where it had been going for years, long before the Community Chest had been established. The argument became rather heated: "It was her duty toward the Museum." Then Miss Bryant got up: "My resignation shall be on the Director's desk this afternoon!" The subject was quickly dropped.

When she had been fifty years out of college she received an honorary Phi Beta Kappa membership from Radcliffe as the one of her class who had made the most out of her education, and this was a great pleasure to her. But she appreciated it even more when, at about the same time, she was taken into the Radcliffe Sigma Xi, for this enabled her to get into contact with young people, a pleasure which her duties toward her mother had prevented for years. Contrary to her custom of never going out in the evening, she would attend all their evening meetings.

She continued working after her retirement in 1950, it seemed almost with even greater vigor than before. Several years before that time the difficulties the museum had, and still would have for years, regarding decent pay to the curators were clearly seen by us all; she had also seen how the Boston Natural History Museum had packed several collections aside and had given others away to where they could be used, and she realized that a similar fate might well befall the collections which she was in charge of. Suddenly she realized that she was able to act so that this should not happen. It was with deep emotion that she one day came to me and told me that she had radically altered her will so that the work could go on after her death and she was a changed person from that moment. Her plans for her work became bolder and she decided to get a new and better microscope even at this late time of her life.

It was when I came home from a trip in the fall of 1952 that she informed me that she was not feeling well and that an operation was necessary because of stomach cancer. After the operation I saw her two or three times a week at her home and our conversations went on almost as if she

were still in her office in the Museum. She admitted she was feeling oddly "lighthearted" and there were a few moments when she almost believed that she might get well enough to come back for a short time and do a little work. But when her new microscope at last arrived she sent it straight back to the Museum. At first she was well enough to get up and come out and wave goodby to me on the stair case, later she asked to be excused. The end came on January 6, 1953.

Her will was a model of careful consideration of the needy in the community and her family. Two of the larger bequests, of equal amounts, went to Radcliffe College, which had given her her education, and to the Museum, where she had been able to make use of it. With her usual reticence she had in the latter case succeeded in keeping her name hidden. The bequest was simply named the "Emerton Fund" in honor of the old arachnologist who had taught her to draw and encouraged her in her work.

There were also two small bequests each of 500 dollars to the two Radcliffe Honor societies. In the case of Phi Beta Kappa the money helped to hasten the completion of the \$10,000 Scholarship Fund which this old and fairly wealthy chapter had been working on, and her name was duly added to the Memorial Roll. In the case of the much younger, smaller, and anything but wealthy Chapter of Sigma Xi, the sum, with interest and smaller gifts added, was some years later voted to be used as the nucleus of a much needed loan for Radcliffe science students, and was named the "Elizabeth Bangs Bryant Loan Fund of Sigma Xi."

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