

**THE REV. DR. JOHN BACHMAN,\*  
AUDUBON'S CO LABORER**

By Rev. Michael Reed Minnich, A.M.

The fame of Audubon has gone throughout the world. Historians and scientists have alike delighted to do him honor. His name is a household word.

That his co laborer has not been given equal place in history and among men is due principally to the supreme modesty of the man. Modesty is a good quality, but when it permits history and fact to be obscured, it is not to be commended.

John Bachman laid no great stress on his descent, but frequently said to his family, "I rejoice that I have come from excellent stock; for good, pure blood shows itself in men, as well as in animals, and thus far I prize it."

His paternal ancestor was a native of the Canton of Berne, Switzerland. His first American ancestor was the secretary of William Penn. His maternal progenitors came from the kingdom of Württemberg, German. He was the youngest son of Jacob and Eva Bachman, and was born in Rheinbeck, Dutchess County, N. Y. on February 4, 1790.

He early displayed a taste for Natural History.

He entered Williams College, Mass., but on account of a hemorrhage of the lungs, brought on by too close application to his studies, was obliged to leave before graduating. The degree of A.M. was afterwards conferred upon him by his *alma mater*. It was his original determination to study law, but was finally led to study theology under Pastor Braun. While studying for the ministry he defrayed his expenses by teaching; one year at Frankford; a second at Elwood School, near Germantown, and a third in Philadelphia, when he was licensed to preach. He served the three congregations which formed Gilead Pastorate in his native county one year, when he accepted the pastoral charge of the St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church of Charleston, S. C., where he remained until his death, February 24, 1874. The degrees of D. D., LL. D., Ph. D., were conferred upon him at different periods.

\* Dr. Bachman's whole library and all his collections in Natural History, the accumulation of the labors of a long and industrious life, were burnt by the Federal Army during the Civil War. The very few exceptions that were saved by accident fell into the hands of another member of his family. The loss to the scientific and historical world by this piece of vandalism cannot be estimated.

It is not within the scope of this paper to tell of his faithful and efficient service of sixty years as the beloved pastor of the congregation a forenamed; nor of his many literary efforts and work in general, the volume of which is simply amazing when one bears in remembrance that he carried, in the meantime, the duties, burdens and responsibilities of a large pastorate. Quietly, unobtrusively and modestly he performed his various work.

His modesty is characteristically shown by a note to Audubon: "My Dear Audubon - Your second volume is decidedly superior to the first - it is indeed beautiful. The plates of the Water Birds do you credit. I rejoice over them. You will reap fame, if not wealth.

"Friend Audubon, you must not praise me so much in your articles. I give you fair warning, I have no objection to being referred to with regard to the habits of some birds, but anything more will induce me to score you well. . . . Your references to your *learned friend John Bachman, D. D.*, are all humbug."

Bachman was the co laborer and advisor of Audubon in his preparation of the "Birds of America." Many of the birds were prepared, and the plates painted, at Bachman's home. The sister-in-law of the latter, Miss Maria Martin, painted the flowers and leaves in many of them.

The writer, while living in Staunton, Va., became acquainted with many of the facts herein stated, through the friends and ministerial associates of Dr. Bachman, as well as through his appointed biographer, the Rev. John Bachman Haskill.

We learn from Mr. C. Few Seiss, a member of the Academy of Natural Sciences and the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, of Philadelphia, of the reminiscences of his father, the Rev. Dr. Joseph A. Seiss, who in his early ministry was a personal friend of Dr. Bachman, that they had exchanged visits and that the old Doctor paid him a visit while he was pastor of the Lutheran Church in Baltimore, Md., about 1855 or 1856. Dr. Bachman informed Dr. Seiss "that nearly all of the text of 'Audubon's Birds of America' was written by him. Audubon would send rough notes and items, often accompanied with bird skins, to Dr. Bachman, who would write the scientific descriptions and life histories of the birds. Also that 'the greater part of the flowers and plants introduced in Audubon's plates were the work of Mrs. Bachman (the Miss Maria Martin frequently mentioned), his second wife. Audubon would often send merely drawings of the birds without any decorations, foreground or

background. The artistic floral displays added by Mrs. Bachman constitute much of the beauty and value of the plates. He pronounced his name Backman, not Bachman, as many scientists insist on calling him."

In the autumn of 1831 Audubon, with Mr. Lehman, a landscape painter, and Mr. Ward, a taxidermist, spent a month under the home-roof of the Bachmans. Here began the warm friendship between the two scientists that was afterward to be cemented by closer ties.

In a letter written at the conclusion of this visit to Mrs. J. J. Audubon, dated at Charleston, November 15, 1831, at the request of her husband, he expresses his gratification "to become acquainted with a man who knew more about birds than any man now living-and who, at the same time, was communicative, intelligent, and amiable, to an extent seldom found associated in the same individual."... He continues, "We were engaged in talking about ornithology — in collecting birds — in seeing them prepared, and in laying plans for the accomplishment of that great work which he has undertaken ... He taught my sister, Maria, to draw birds; and she has now such a passion for it that, whilst I am writing, she is drawing a Bittern put up for her at daylight by Mr. Audubon."

December 2, 1831, he wrote to Audubon, "I wish that you could have been with us a month longer; you were scarcely gone before the birds came from the north... I am sure that we would have kept you, Lehman and Mr. Ward all busy... However, the spring will do wonders, and we will astonish you with our new specimens."

Scientists had their tilts and stories as well as fishermen.

Bachman in his "Defense of Audubon" (Bucks county Intelligence, 1835), who had been assailed by Watterton about a "Snake Story," says the latter "tells us of the great `Boa'" which he encountered in his den. "Dashing forward headlong upon the Boa, he pierced him with his lance, and tying up his mouth carried him as a trophy to the British Museum. The snake was so large that it took three men to carry it, and so heavy that they had to rest ten times."

Another time Watterton encountered alone a snake ten feet long. "He seized him by the tail; the snake turned round and came after him with open mouth ... In this emergency he put his fist in his hat, and rammed it down the snake's throat. Suffering the snake to wind itself around his body, he walked home in triumph." Yet

this was the man who accused the American Ornithologist of exaggeration.

Time and space permit only the most brief extracts from letters written by Bachman to Audubon, from Charleston, S. C., The letters have been preserved and copies of them, in full, may be found in the Biography of John Bachman, as completed by his daughter, C. L. Bachman, and published by Walker, Evans & Cogswell Co., Charleston, S. C., 1888.

December 23, 1831, the weather was "almost insupportably cold." He tells of the "Red Tailed" and "Sparrow Hawk". "I found the Solitary and Brown Thrushes, about five of the Woodpecker family, the Robin, the Ruby-Crowned Wren and some of the Duck family abundant; but there was nothing new - nothing even rare, except a Duck, nearly white, which puzzled me ... This duck may be described; but I do not recollect anything that looks like it in Wilson."

"I arrived in Columbia, S. C., almost too late, for the 'House' had just resolved that the State was too poor to subscribe for Audubon's work. I felt that it would be a disgrace to the State; and for the first time in my life I turned to electioneering. And now, behold me among the back countrymen spinning long yarns. The thing, however, took, and your book is subscribed for. In addition to this, a party from the interior has given his name, and Prof. Gibbs has hopes that our plan of twelve subscribers for a copy will secure another set for Columbia. I can, at least, say our prospects are brightening; but I dare not be too sanguine, as I do not want to promise more than I can perform ... Look here, my friend, before I forget it, why are you always talking of a 'load of gratitude' - now suppose we say no more about this."

"Tell Henry Ward that I will never make an attempt at painting, but that I am beginning to stuff birds. . . . My sister Maria paints birds better every day."

October 20, 1832, "My sister Maria has made several drawings which she thinks of sending you; but I am anxious to retain them for awhile iii hopes that you may be tempted to come for them yourself.

"Ever since you left us I have been studying up my Ornithology in order to be useful to you, and, if I am spared, I hope to be so ... I cannot, I find, feel myself at home with new birds without having the skins to refer to ... I shall, next week, write all I know about the Fringilla I found last spring. If you have received my last letter you will perceive that another new Fringilla has been discovered. I shot it a few weeks ago, and have a skin for you. Maria made a correct drawing of it ... What ducks that

are not likely to be obtained for you in Boston would you like Maria to draw for you?"

October 20, 1832, "I have several skins of the new *Fringilla* at your service ... And now, let your good lady mix you a half-tumbler of claret with a little sugar, and listen to what I have to tell you. I have another bird for you; aye, my friend, and one that will interest all lovers of Ornithology. Dr. Strobel brought me from Key West a box of birds — I tumbled and tumbled over the ragged specimens — nothing new, till I came to a little fellow, and what should he be, but a *Trochilus* (Humming Bird), not yet figured ... so we have now two Humming birds."

November 11, 1832, "The new Humming Bird, I believe to be the '*Trochilus Mango*' or Mangrove hummingbird, described but not figured in Shaw's *Zoology*. I hope that we may manage to have this bird figured - when I say 'we' I mean 'you' and my 'amanuensis', Maria. I have nothing new to tell you in the shape of birds - the history of the new birds, as far as I know them, will be faithfully detailed, as soon as I return from my annual (church) tour ... I will send you all the birds that I have a right to; the Humming Bird and the Sparrow, and the drawings and skins of the rest. Maria has figured for you the 'White Hibiscus', and also a Red one, both natives, and beautiful."

After the exchange of several letters and the birds and drawings had been received and acknowledged by Audubon, Bachman writes March 13, 1833, "Sister Maria feels grateful to you for your too flattering opinion of her efforts. I take it, however, as a compliment to myself, inasmuch as though I did not use the brush, I occasionally gave advice generally; however, after the drawings were finished. In answer to the question, did she execute the drawings? I have only to say, '*all that she did not do were done by your humble servant*'."

The letters of Bachman are full of interesting items, and his facetious allusions to Audubon as "old jostle" and his son Victor as "young jostle", or "Jostle No. 1"; and John W. as "Jostle No. 2" are amusing. Both of these young gentlemen afterward became his sons-in-law. John W. first marrying the elder daughter, Maria, in 1837, and Victor G. the second daughter, Mary Eliza, in 1839.

They (letters of Bachman) are so full of interest that it is difficult to know where to stop. But time admonishes us to be brief. We have to content ourselves with the principal items that show his connection with the "Birds of America".

We must forego the pleasure of reciting his visit to Europe, the cordial

reception given him there by Audubon, and their mutual rejoicing upon becoming grandfathers; the journey to Scotland with Audubon, his reception by distinguished personages, and his election as "foreign correspondent of the Zoological Society, London."

Audubon's personal acknowledgments were profuse, but Bachman insists, "your worthy friend', and other humbugs, may be left out to advantage." "Bachman's Warbler", described by Audubon, was named after his friend.

The several members of both families were called into requisition in the preparation of their conjoint works.

Between 1845 and 1849 they published jointly "The Quadrupeds of North America," 3 Vols. "Figures by Audubon, Text by Bachman."

The list of his published works is too numerous to give in this connection. They may be found in the appendix of his biography.

[Read at the meeting of the Historical Society of Montgomery County,  
at Audubon. October 7, 1903]

[Presented at the annual meeting of Pennsylvania Society Sons of the Revolution,  
At Philadelphia on April 3, 1906]