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Herbert William Oakley

by

R. Trimen.

This naturalist, who died very suddenly at Rondebosch, near Cape Town, on the 14the November 1884, was born at Taunton in Somersetshire, in 1848. Early in life he shewed a strong taste for Natural History, and gained much knowledge of the fauna of his native county. At the age of 22 he became assistant to Professor Boyd Dawkins, in the Museum of the Owens College at Manchester. He retained this situation until 1877, gaining the esteem and approval both of his immediate chief and of Dr. Greenwood, the Principal of the College. In 1877, his desire for experiencing something of the zoological and sporting facilities which South Africa affords led to his joining the Cape Mounted Police. Unfavourable as were the conditions of his life as a trooper in that force, he nevertheless managed to make some very interesting notes on the fauna of the Trans-Kei territory, and to form a good collection of the birds of that District. At the storming of Moiroxi's Mountain, in Basutoland, Mr. Oakley greatly distinguished himself, and received most honourable mention in the despatches relating to the affair. It was through the late Sir Bartle Frere, then Governor of the Cape Colony, that Mr. Oakley was enabled to obtain employment more siuted to his training and abilities and was appointed Assistant Curator in the South-African Museum at Cape Town. He held this post until the date of his decease — a period of over five years. His knowledge of geology, special acquaintance with the vertebrate skeleton, and manual skill in the mounting of osteological specimens, were of great value to the Museum; and his zeal and activity

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as a collector resulted in very numerous additions of specimens in all classes, but especially in that of Birds. In addition to frequent exhibitions of interesting animals at the meetings of the South-African Philosophical Society, Mr. Oakley contributed several papers to that body, and the following were published in its Transactions, vid.: — »On the Habits of some of the Birds of the Trans-Kei«; »On the Skeleton of the African Darter or Snake-Bird (Plotus Levaillantii)«; »On the Anatomy and Habits of South-African Snakes«; »On Peripatus Capensis«; and, lastly, »On the Snake called the Mamba of Natal«. He was elected a Member of the Council of the Society in July, 1884. While at Owens College he was entrusted with part of the section relating to the Mammalia in Cassel's large »Natural History«.

Herbert Oakley was in character most modest and retiring, and his natural ability was rather hidden by his habitual reserve and a certain shyness of manners; but his many good qualities of mind and heart were cordially recognized by those who knew him with any intimacy, and his untimely death was the loss to his friends of a most kindly amiable companion, and to zoology of a skilful and enthusiastic collector and observer. R. T.

Cape Town, Cape of Good Hope, South African Museum.
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