

Reply to Dr. Bergroth's „Note on Mr. Kirby's recent paper on the Hemiptera of Ceylon“.

By W. F. Kirby, F. L. S., F. E. S., etc. etc.

My attention has just been called to Dr. Bergroth's article in the Wiener Entomologische Zeitung, vol. XI, pag. 225, 226 (Sept. 1892), and although I greatly dislike the waste of time involved in controversy, I cannot leave the present attack unnoticed, lest my silence should be misconstrued. I have probably seen much more had entomological work than Dr. Bergroth, but should be sorry for my own sake to treat even the worst offenders with such discourtesy.

The forefront of my offending appears to be that I have overrated Walker and underrated Stål, and especially that I did not follow the system of the latter in my paper. Had I been writing a monographic revision, or a systematic Catalogue of a group, I should of course have utilised Stål's system to a greater or less extent, but I do not find that the multiplication of genera and families is any advantage in dealing with a limited fauna. The species is the unit of Entomology, not the genus.

In working out the Cinghalese *Hemiptera* I might indeed have attempted to refer every species to the exact subdivision proposed by Stål, but I should have run a much greater risk of some of them being misinterpreted or overlooked, than by adopting a simpler arrangement, and placing them under more comprehensive genera.

It was of Stål's own genera that I spoke as requiring a thorough and much-needed revision. Stål's synopses of the genera of various families of insects often consist merely of more or less elaborate tables. He did not live to revise the whole of these himself, and some of his genera were never fully

characterised, nor even the types indicated. Had he lived longer, he might have partially remedied this; but we must take his work as he left it.

I must now go fully into the question of the relative value of the work of Walker and Stål, as it is one of vital importance to all Entomologists. Walker's work is very unequal, but it is wholly undeserving of the sweeping condemnation passed upon it by Stål. I admit that much of Walker's work was very indifferent, but many of his errors arose from his describing insects under wrong genera, and a large proportion of his species, like those of others authors, can easily be identified by his descriptions, when the actual species are received from the actual localities. I am convinced that when an Entomologist fails to recognise a described species, it is often because he attempts to apply the description to an allied species from another locality. If a species is described under a wrong genus, the error can easily be rectified, and the insect assigned to a better position, or sunk as a synonym. No serious harm is done, but Stål's work is far more misleading, for he constantly and recklessly misrepresents the work of his predecessors. I could prove this up to the hilt, but will confine myself to two glaring instances.

Stål (Hemiptera Africana IV, pag. 35) sinks *Cicada aurora* Walk. as a synonym of *Tibicen (Quintilia) catena* Fabr. and redescribes the insect as new on the same page as *T. (Qu.) sanguinarius*, which latter name is retained by Dr. Karsch (Berl. Ent. Zeitschr. XXXV, pag. 120), though he prudently, refrains from copying Stål's synonymy of *T. (Qu.) catena*.

Again, Stål described a species under the name of *Platypleura Afzelii*, in 1854, but in 1866 he described a species as *Plat. strumosa* Fabr., quoting as synonyms *P. Afzelii* Stål and *Oxypleura contracta* Walk. In 1881 Distant described a species under the name of *P. aerea*, in which he afterwards recognised Stål's *strumosa*, and figured it under that name in 1883, while in 1890 Karsch described and figured an insect as *P. limpidu*, which appears to be identical with Walker's *Ox. contracta*. But in 1869 Stål described yet another species as the true *P. strumosa* Fabr. without anything beyond a casual reference to *P. Afzelii*, to show that he now considered it distinct from that insect. Stål's three descriptions of *P. Afzelii*, and *P. strumosa*,

are not only at variance with each other, but even the dimensions differ in each case, proving that they were drawn up from three different specimens, if not from three distinct species. Stål's last *P. strumosa*, of 1869 seems to be a species closely allied to *Oxypleura Polydorus* Walk. Stål describes it at some length, but not a word is said as to whether the lateral angles of the thorax are tipped with brown, or not. Although this is perhaps unimportant in itself, it happens to be a point expressly mentioned by Fabricius in his somewhat brief description of the original insect. Whatever the true *P. strumosa*, may be (and I think that the Fabrician description cannot apply to *P. Afzelii* nor to *P. aerea*), I am not prepared to admit that a man whose own work has been proved to be so misleading as that of Stål, had any right to demand that Walker's work should be declared to be nonexistent; or has any claim to be regarded as a specially trustworthy authority by "competent Hemipterists" as one of them (?) lately put it.

Many of Stål's descriptions of species are much worse than the average of Walker's, sometimes consisting only of two or three lines, and quite unrecognisable; nor do I always find his longer descriptions sufficiently definite to allow his species to be readily identified. Stål's descriptions are constantly quoted with doubt by Entomologists who have not examined his types; and in the case of so unreliable an author, I should not be inclined to attach too much authority even to these.

Dr. Bergroth makes another general statement, viz that many of my species are "placed in wrong (sometimes exclusively American) genera". I presume he means genera as restricted by Stål; but he specifies no instances, and offers no evidence to show that Stål was correct in his use of the generic names in question whatever they may have been.

While blaming me for placing Cinghalese species in (alleged) American genera, Dr. Bergroth, rather inconsequently, finds fault with me for not having recognised that my Cinghalese genus *Formicoris* was identical with Stål's Caffrarian genus *Dulichius*. Let him prove this by figuring Stål's insect. I figured nearly all my new genera and a large proportion of my new species; and it is absurd to say that they "will ever remain enigmas till they have been examined by an Hemipterist". On his own showing Dr. Bergroth has already suc-

ceeded in recognising some of them, and I confidently venture to predict that any Hemipterist who takes the trouble to compare my paper with a Cinghalese collection, will easily be able to identify any of my new species it may contain.

Whether my genus *Dicephalus* is synonymous with *Henicocephalus* Westw. or not, I do not see that I was greatly in error in referring it provisionally to the *Reduviidae*.

I will not lengthen my present rejoinder by discussing Karsch's strictures on my writings on *Odonata*, to which Bergroth has gone out of his way to allude; but I certainly think that Karsch would not be so unfair as to deny that he has found them very useful, although he has neglected to look for *Lepthemis Blackburni* Mc. Lachl. and *Æschna viridis* Eversm. in the index to my Catalogue of *Odonata*, and has therefore charged me with omitting them. The former will be found under *Orthetrum*, pag. 36, n. 16 (the only error being that (*Lepth. B.*) in brackets, should have followed the name); and the latter under *Æschna*, App. pag. 185, n. 39.

Finally Bergroth asserts that "Distant has shown that the four new *Cicadae* described by Mr. Kirby are all synonymous with known species". Distant's table is as follows:

Dundubia mixta Kirb. = *Cicada viridis* Fabr

Pomponia Greeni Kirb. = *Pomp. Ranssoneti* Dist.

Pomp. elegans Kirb. = *Terpnosia Psecas* Walk.

Cicada apicalis Kirb. = *Tibicen nubifurca* Walk.

No explanation is offered by Mr. Distant, except that the various synonymic notes in his paper "have been rendered necessary by hasty and perfunctory work"; whose we shall presently see. And yet Bergroth considers the case proved! Certainly no one else would make a secondhand charge of whole sale carelessness without having verified it for himself.

I did not reply to Distant's observations before, partly because I hoped to obtain additional material from Ceylon, and partly because I waited to see the concluding parts of his Monograph of Oriental *Cicadidae*. At present the real facts stand thus:

***Dundubia mixta* Kirb.**

The insect which Stål (rightly or wrongly) identifies with *Cicada viridis* Fabr. is undoubtedly identical with *C. bimaculata* Oliv. (= *C. atrovirens* Guér.) a Javanese species well figured

by Stoll (Cigales pl. XXIV, f. 132). I have now both sexes of my *D. mixta* before me, and although it proves not to be a true *Dundubia*, and will probably fall into some genus allied to *Cicada*, it is a much larger and darker insect than *C. bimaculata* (in fact hardly congeneric) and could not possibly be confounded with it, if compared.

Pomponia Greeni Kirb.

Since I wrote my description, the figure of *P. Ranssoneti*, has been published, and I think the two insects are really identical. But I failed to recognize it from Mr. Distant's description, especially as the expanse of the tegmina was misprinted 95 millim. instead of 59, in his Monograph.

Pomponia elegans Kirb.

The type of *Terpnosia Psecas* Walk., is a female from Java, which differs considerably from *P. elegans*, of which I have only seen males. No further light has been thrown on this question by the notice of the species in Distant's Monograph. He simply quotes Walker's description of *T. Psecas*, and figures an insect from Sikkim as the male. The latter has a comparatively short abdomen, whereas *T. elegans* like the other Cinghalese species, *T. stipata* Walk., has an unusually long one, at least in the male.

Cicada apicalis Kirb.

Walker's *Cicada nubifurca* may be a small pale specimen of this insect, but I do not think the question can be decided until a larger series of these forms is received from Ceylon. If however my insect proves to be congeneric with *C. apicalis* Germ. as Distant makes it, its name will require to be changed. So much for the present as regards Distant's identifications of my *Cicadae*!

I think I have now noticed everything tangible in Bergroth's "Note". It will be observed that it is simply an unprovoked personal attack, and consists merely of assertions unsupported by either evidence or argument. As he has chosen to print it in English, I have replied to him in the same language.

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Zeitschrift/Journal: [Wiener Entomologische Zeitung](#)

Jahr/Year: 1892

Band/Volume: [11](#)

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