



Figure 79. W. S. Blatchley

WILLIS STANLEY BLATCHLEY (1859-1940)

An entry for Sunday, February 12, 1911, in Blatchley's *In Days Agone* throws considerable light on the man:

"On yesterday I turned down an offer of \$2,500 a year to take charge of the alfalfa weevil investigation in Utah. Ten or 15 years ago I would have accepted it with alacrity. What I want in the future is to own my own time—my only true possession here on earth; to be subject to no man's nod or beckon—free to roam as I am doing today, wherever the little god of whim may lead me. I have pondered over this offer for many days. I have made my decision and it is final. Henceforth would I have old mother earth whisper unto me her inmost secrets; her winds play unto me their sweetest music. I would see her fairest sights, taste her most delicious savors, sense her most fragrant odors. Her trees and shrubs would I have yield unto me their secrets and their fruits."

Of the several manuals Blatchley wrote—*Coleoptera of Indiana*, *Rhyncophora or Weevils of Northeastern America* (with C. W. Leng), *Orthoptera of Northeastern America*, and *The Heteroptera or True Bugs of Eastern North America*—he once said, "They will perhaps serve as the monuments by which I shall be best known in the years to come." And, having erected his monuments in his lifetime, he then outlined the story of his life and his accomplishments in *Blatchleyana* and *Blatchleyana II* so that no compiler could garble them at some future date.

Blatchley was born on October 6, 1859, in North Madison, Connecticut, the son of Hiram Silliman and Sarah J. (Hall) Blatchley. In 1860 his parents moved to Indiana, where his father bought a farm. Willis attended the country schools and assisted his father in market gardening. He writes that in 1877 he earned his "first money of any consequence by peddling notions on foot from house to house through the country in Putnam and adjoining counties. Attended in winter my last term of school at Bainbridge. At that time no High School (as now known) in the town, no fixed grades and no graduating exercises."

After taking a six-week summer course in a Normal School, he became a country school teacher. His first job in 1879 paid him \$1.50 a day, out of which he paid \$2.50 a week for board and lodging.

After several years of peddling, teaching school, and attending normal school in the summer, he married Clara A. Fordice in 1882. Their first son was born in 1883, and their second in 1885.

From 1883 to 1887 he attended Indiana University. "Worked my way through," he says, "by janitoring, collecting delinquent taxes, gathering all the

plants used by the botany classes, etc., etc. During the summers sold books and maps. In spring term of 1887 taught botany in the University. Majored in Science (Botany, Zoology and Geology) under Drs. D. S. Jordan and John C. Branner. Took one term's lectures in Entomology under Dr. Branner." He wrote papers on flowers and butterflies while attending the University, and his graduating thesis in 1887 was "The Flora of Monroe County, Indiana."

From 1887 through 1894 he served as head of the science department in a high school in Terre Haute. There he taught chemistry, botany, zoology, physiology, physical geography, and physics, and pursued graduate studies whenever he could, finally receiving his M.A. from Indiana University in 1891 with his thesis, "The Butterflies of Indiana." The University presented him with an honorary LL.D. in 1921.

In the summer of 1889 he worked for the Indiana State Geological Survey, and in the summer of 1891 he accompanied an expedition to determine the height of the Orizaba volcano (18,314 feet) in Mexico. In the summers of 1892 and 1893 he served as an assistant in the U.S. Fish Commission, collecting fishes in the streams and lakes of Northern Indiana and Northwestern Ohio.

In 1894 he was elected Indiana State Geologist on the Republican ticket by a plurality of 46,313, and he served in this capacity for the next sixteen years, until the Democrats won the office. In the years prior to his election, he had published papers on birds, weeds, trees, grasshoppers, crickets, cockroaches, amphibia, reptiles, and high school teaching, among other subjects.

The sixteen years he was State Geologist were prolific years; he was required "by statute to prepare and publish an annual report on the Geology, Natural Resources and Natural History of the State. The winter months were spent in preparing these reports and in work in the State Museum, the summers in gathering data for the reports and in other ways hereafter mentioned."

As State Geologist he prepared sixteen geological reports as well as monographs on caves and cave fauna, ferns, Orthoptera, clays, mineral waters, petroleum industry, lime industry, roads, road material, and the like. He also had to edit all the other reports on geology, zoology, botany, paleontology, and other sciences.

From 1906 to 1910 he worked on the *Coleoptera of Indiana*, published as Bulletin No. 1, Indiana Department of Geology and Natural Resources, with 1,386 pages and 595 figures. Because the State refused to publish this as part of the Geological Survey, it was paid for out of other State funds. Blatchley personally paid for a private edition of 1,000 copies. This monograph has been out of print for many years and a recent (1964) catalogue lists it for fifty dollars. Serious students of Coleoptera still find this work an essential volume in their libraries.

Wade (1940) says that Blatchley was fifty-one when his official career as State Geologist of Indiana was terminated; "the remainder of his life was spent in fulfilling an ambition of a sort to make him the envy and despair of countless other students everywhere who have dreamed, albeit hopelessly, of similar fascinating and delightful achievements. During the twenty-nine years that followed, most of his time was spent in travel, collecting, and exploration, varied at convenient intervals with prolonged periods of intensive study and writing."

In *My Nature Nook*, Blatchley notes in an entry for Sunday, March 13, 1918, on the occasion of his being offered a job as taxonomic entomologist of "a great university," that he would have accepted with alacrity a quarter of a century earlier. He turned the offer down for the same reasons he had rejected the 1911 offer from Utah.

Blatchley made many long collecting trips in the unsettled parts of Florida, and traveled extensively throughout the United States and at various times in Alaska, Canada, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Bolivia, Peru, and Cuba. He attended

scientific meetings, delivered lectures, and studied library material and museum collections. In addition to his permanent home in Indianapolis he purchased in 1913 a winter residence in Florida, where, according to Wade, he spent a considerable portion of each year thereafter.

In 1912 the *Indiana Weed Book* appeared in print, and in 1914 he began work on the *Rhynchophora or Weevils of Indiana*. After completing one-third of the manuscript, Charles W. Leng of Staten Island joined him and the work was enlarged to encompass the eastern United States and eastern Canada. As was his habit, Blatchley visited many museums to study collections. *The Rhynchophora of Northeastern America*, consisting of 682 pages with 155 illustrations, was published in 1916. The *Orthoptera of Northeastern America*, 784 pages with seven plates and 246 figures, appeared in 1920, and in 1926, the *Heteroptera or True Bugs of Eastern North America*, with 1,116 pages, twelve plates, and 215 figures.

Any one of these works alone would have been a major accomplishment for an ordinary man, and reviewers in general approved his Herculean efforts. However, there were a few, whom Blatchley (1928) calls "quit-claim" specialists, who were unhappy with his works, especially on the Orthoptera and Hemiptera. His article "Quit-Claim Specialists vs. the Making of Manuals" complains about the lack of co-operation by certain authorities:

In 1907, realizing the great need of general works, descriptive of certain groups of insects with which I was somewhat familiar, I began the preparation for the novice or beginner of those manuals which have been put forth in the twenty years which have elapsed. In their preparation I have given free, and solely for the good of the cause, not only all my spare time but more than \$12,000 of my previous earnings for their illustrating and publication. This does not include the salary of my faithful assistant, who by thirty years training and practice, has been able to put my longhand hieroglyphics of key and text into typewritten manuscript which the printer could use. The demand for such works as I have put forth is limited, and for that reason I am as yet more than \$4,000 "to the bad" in their publication.

In the preparation of the first two works issued, the "Coleoptera of Indiana" (1910), and in collaboration with Chas. W. Leng, the "Rhynchophora of N. E. America" (1916), I succeeded, without much trouble or delay, in getting such aid as I requested, and when completed there was little published criticism of those works.

In those days there were fewer specialists than now who were imbued with the idea that the Good Lord had given them a "quit-claim deed" to all the species in this country belonging to their especial group, and that no one, not even the author of a manual who desired to include *all* species from the territory he was covering, had any right to "poach on their preserves."

In all likelihood some of the specialists resented the fact that Blatchley was raiding their preserve, and possibly they thought he might mess things up. Obstacles such as these merely spurred him on.

Besides his manuals and other publications, Blatchley wrote seven popular books on nature, *Gleanings from Nature*, 1899; *A Nature Wooing at Ormond by the Sea*, 1902; *Boulder Reveries*, 1906; *Woodland Idyls*, 1912; *My Nature Nook*, 1931; *In Days Agone*, 1932; *South America as I Saw It*, 1934. And in 1938, when he was seventy-nine, appeared his book *The Fishes of Indiana*.

Professor J. J. Davis (1941) says, "Blatchley was an individualist. He depended on no one but himself for his thoughts and ideas and was uninfluenced except by concrete information which was clearly and effectively given. . . . His memory was remarkable, and I doubt if he ever forgot observations he made during his active life. I recall a trip with him some eight or ten years ago to the Wyandotte Cave region where he collected some 15 or 20 years ago. As we would go to this or that place where he had collected before, he would often remark, 'Here is where I took such and such a species, and we should find more of the same species,' and sure enough we would."

Blatchley's wife died in 1928. Soon after, he gave up his entomological labors: "On account of failing eyesight and other infirmities I had been obliged in 1930 to give up the collecting and study of insects, but after many years of continuous activity my brain continued to demand employment of some nature. Therefore I took with me to Florida in November a large collection of cancelled postage stamps from many countries which I had accumulated and put aside since I had had to give up the hobby of philately in 1899. Many of my hours in the years since 1933 have been pleasantly passed in the study and arrangement of these stamps in suitable albums." (*Blatchleyana-II*, 1940)

According to W. T. Davis (1941), he often labored under great physical difficulties in his later years, "and it was, for instance, only his determination to finish a job once undertaken, that finally produced the manual on the 'Hemiptera of Eastern North America.' " In a letter to J. J. Davis, dated March 5, 1933, from his home in Dunedin, Florida, Blatchley writes, "I am still suffering much from neuritis. Not able to do any collecting whatever. . . . Have to sit propped up with cushions to palliate the pain. Have been that way since April 1st. During the summer I wrote, while so propped up & from my note books: 'In Days Agone.' It contains by far more notes on insects than any of the popular books I have written."

Blatchley was "a passionate lover" of books, and his valuable library and his large collection of insects with 470 holotypes were given to Purdue University.

J. J. Davis wrote me on May 15, 1961, "He was miserly and yet generous to the needs of his interests. For example, he gave me \$5,000.00 in negotiable bonds, the agreement signed by his life-long secretary, me and her as Mr. X. He didn't want his two sons to know about it during his life, because, as he said, they would raise hell. I was to pay his former secretary \$500.00 a year as long as she lived & if any remained on her death I was to use it for the Thomas Say Foundation. There was \$2,000.00 left at the time of the secretary's death."

In this same letter, J. J. Davis says, "As I may have told you I gave the 'sermon' at his funeral. A year or two before he died he said to me, 'Davis I don't want a minister at my funeral. If they have to have a service I wish you'd give it.' So I did, with such prominent men present as Eli Lilly. I simply spoke of him as a geologist, a naturalist, an entomologist, a wit, and something else, & the only religion I brought in was at the end when I asked all to stand and repeat the Lord's Prayer. Blatchley was not an atheist, but as he told me he had seen so many funerals which were just evangelistic sermons telling people they were going to hell, etc., that he was disgusted with some ministers. Things are different now but in days gone by I must admit he was right."

Blatchley died after a brief illness at his home in Indianapolis, Indiana, on May 28, 1940, at the age of eighty.