

Biographical Sketch of Dr. R. C. L. Perkins

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On September 30th, 1955, word was received in Honolulu of the death at age 89 of Dr. Robert Cyril Layton Perkins on the previous day in England, where he had lived in retirement on account of poor health since 1912, mostly at Newton Abbott in Devonshire, where his father, who was a Church of England clergyman, had lived.

Some time after his graduation from Oxford University with a B.A. degree, he was engaged by a joint committee of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Royal Society of London to explore the land fauna of the Hawaiian Islands with the assistance of the Bishop Museum of Honolulu. He arrived in Honolulu to begin this work early in 1892 and continued at it until 1902. He collected on the six largest and most lofty of the eight chief islands of the archipelago and it was estimated that more than one hundred thousand specimens were obtained. In this *tour de force* he spent long periods in the cold and wet mountainous country at remote camps with inadequate shelter and food, and it is believed the exposure and privations suffered whilst in the field affected his health and led him to seek rest in a more congenial climate ultimately. Most of the specimens he collected were packed and sent to England for study but some groups Dr. Perkins worked himself, notably the aculeate and (in part) the parasitic Hymenoptera, the Proterhinidae, Anobiidae, Cioidae, the Strepsiptera, Neuroptera, and the Orthoptera. As a result we have the FAUNA HAWAIIENSIS, in three volumes, over two thousand pages, quarto size—a really monumental work. In the Introduction, which he wrote in 1910 from his notes, but which was not published until 1913, he states that altogether he spent twenty years working on the Hawaiian fauna. This masterpiece of exposition gives a most comprehensive account of the insect life of the islands and must serve as the basis from which all succeeding students of Hawaiian insects proceed. In acknowledgment of his valuable contribution to this great work he was given the degree of Doctor of Science by his alma mater in 1909.

Dr. Perkins was a strong supporter of biological control and as early as 1897 published an article in NATURE stating in a very lucid manner his reasons for believing it the method best suited to our need in Hawaii.

In 1902, with collecting for the "FAUNA" finished, Dr. Perkins became a consultant at the Territorial Board of Agriculture and Forestry and worked

in collaboration with Prof. Albert Koebele on the introduction of insects from Mexico to destroy the lantana plant, a pasture weed that was spreading rapidly due to the recently introduced Chinese dove's spreading the seeds; the first attempt, I believe, to use insects to control weeds. He also took charge of the inspection of plants and seeds coming into the Territory and was thus instrumental in keeping out many new insect pests.

In August, 1904, he transferred to the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association Experiment Station to work with Prof. Koebele on biological control of the cane leafhopper, *Perkinsiella saccharicida* Kirkaldy, which in the few years preceding had nearly ruined the sugar industry. This insect was first observed in the latter half of 1900 and nearly a year elapsed before its importance was recognized. Another year was spent in learning its identity and point of origin. When eventually its origin was traced to seed cane importation from Australia, Dr. Perkins went thither with Prof. Koebele to search for natural enemies. They arrived in Queensland in June, 1904, and immediately began collecting material for shipment to Honolulu. This was principally cuttings of cane leaves containing leafhopper eggs heavily parasitized by *Paranagrus* and *Ootetrastichus*. Later cages containing living plants well stocked with leafhopper and parasites were employed. The material so shipped was handled in Honolulu by Messrs. Swezey, Terry and Kirkaldy, who had been added to the staff. The introduction and establishment of these and other parasites and predators sent was successful and soon all the plantations were supplied with enemies of the hopper and damage was effectively stopped. An account of this work is contained in BULL. 1, DIV. ENT., H.S.P.A. EXPT. STA., largely written by Dr. Perkins himself. Dr. Perkins returned to Honolulu at the end of 1904 but Prof. Koebele continued in the field and spent some time in Fiji in 1905. In fact, Dr. Perkins was still working on this and other sugar cane insects when I arrived in Honolulu in 1908, although Prof. Koebele had gone, and I have always considered myself fortunate in making the acquaintance of this talented man. I was just a youthful beginner then, breaking into an entirely new situation. I really needed help to get myself oriented. In all my contacts with Dr. Perkins, I found him congenial, considerate and most helpful. Although extremely busy himself, he never hesitated about giving you his time and attention, and his suggestions were always good and gratefully accepted. However, his health was not good, and he moved again to England with Mrs. Perkins in 1909, not returning until May, 1912, when he came alone and stayed only a few months to complete some work on the Introduction. Whilst remaining in England he was still serving as a consultant on an honorarium from the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association.