Notes on Somerset Fungi.

With Special Reference to the recent Meeting of the British Mycological Society at Taunton.

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THE importance of mycology is still imperfectly recognised, and mycologists are comparatively few; consequently, the fungus floras of the majority of counties have not been investigated to any great extent. Somerset is not so badly off as some in this respect; though but little is known about the fungi of the southern part, the fungus flora of the northern area has received considerable attention. As far back as 1801 we find numerous references in Withering's "Systematic Arrangement of British Plants," to fungi observed by Major Velley and Mr. Stackhouse in the neighbourhood of Bath. In 1852, the Rev. W. R. Crotch published in the *Proceedings* of the Somersetshire Arch. and Nat. Hist. Society a "List of Fungi found in the neighbourhood of Bristol, Bath and Taunton, furnished by H. O. Stephens, Esq., M.R.C.S., Bristol; C. Broome, Esq., Batheaston; and Rev. W. R. Crotch, Taunton." It enumerates 627 species. The compiler remarked that it did "not profess to contain all the species which have been observed, still less to define their distribution. Many of the more minute are either new to Britain or altogether undescribed previous to their occurrence in this district. Such have been noticed lately in the *Annals of Natural History*; and they are inserted here with a view

to their rarity or novelty, which will explain why numbers of very common species do not occur in the list."

The allusion to the *Annals of Natural History* concerns the records therein by Messrs. Berkeley and Broome. The Rev. M. J. Berkeley—one of the most famous of British mycologists, who died in 1889, at the age of 86—frequently stayed with his friend C. E. Broome at Batheaston. They collaborated in publishing a long series of papers in the *Annals and Magazine of Natural History*, extending over a period of nearly forty years, *viz.*, from 1844 to 1883. A list of the new species from Somerset described by these authors is given by Cedric Bucknall in his paper on "Somerset Fungi," published in 1906 in the first volume of the *Victoria History* of the county. It would appear that no less than 342 species were either new to science or were first British records at the time of their discovery.

The list includes several species that are now known to be widely distributed in the southern counties, *e.g.*, *Tricholoma sordidum* (Schum.) Fr., *Lactarius turpis* (Weinm.) Fr., *Clitopilus popinalis*, Fr., *Cortinarius* (*Inoloma*) *Bulliardi* (Pers.) Fr., *Boletus parasiticus* Bull., *Trametes Bulliardi* Fr., and *Clavaria argillacea* (Pers.) Fr.

Illustrations of many of the agarics may be seen in Dr. M. C. Cooke's monumental atlas of "Illustrations of British Fungi," which appeared in the eighties. Amongst other interesting Somerset species therein delineated, attention may be directed to *Cortinarius* (*Telamonia*) *periscelis* Fr., *Inocybe Bongardii* (Weinm.) Fr., *Hygrophorus cerasinus*, Berk., *Collybia floccipes* Fr., and *Lepiota Bucknalli*, B. and Br.

Broome published many papers concerning the fungi of the district around Bath in the "Proceedings of the Bath Natural History Field Club," from 1869 to 1886. He discovered many species of great interest, including the rare and curious *Xylaria Tulasnei* Nitschke, which grows on rabbits' dung on heaths, and is in fruit from October to February. The

black head of the fungus is about the size of a small pea. It is practically stemless when growing on dung on the surface of the soil; but, if the pellets are buried, a stem, which may be three inches in length, is produced.

Berkeley and Broome were ably assisted by Dr. H. O. Stephens, of Bristol, and Mr. J. Aubrey Clark, of Street, who discovered species with which their names will be for ever associated, *e.g.*, *Inocybe Clarkii* B. and Br., and *Octaviania Stephensii* (Berk.) Tul.

Another well-known Somerset mycologist was G. Kendrick Thwaites, F.R.S., who, prior to his departure for Ceylon in 1849, gave Broome valuable assistance in the investigation of the subterranean species. Two species discovered by him are *Hysterangium Thwaitesii* B. and Br., and *Hymenogaster Thwaitesii* B. and Br. The British list of hypogæan Gasteromycetes, as it stands at present, comprises twenty-four species and four varieties. Of these, eleven species and one variety were first recorded for Britain (some were new to science) from Somerset specimens, the majority from Leigh Woods.

Bucknall published between the years 1877 and 1891 papers on the Fungi of the Bristol District in the "Proceedings of the Bristol Naturalists' Society." The "Bristol District" included those portions of *Gloucester* and Somerset delineated in Saunders's map of the Bristol Coalfield. Bucknall observes, however, that more than half of the species were found in Somerset, and that many of those recorded for Gloucester have also been noticed in the former county. He enumerates 1,431 species, and acknowledges his indebtedness for records of many rare forms, principally from Clevedon and Yatton, to Mr. Edmund Wheeler, of Clifton, who made an extensive series of beautiful water-colour drawings of them, which are now deposited in the British Museum of Natural History at South Kensington.

The Mycetozoa of the northern part of the county have been very carefully investigated. Bucknall, in his paper on

"Somerset Fungi," mentions 71 species and several varieties. That Miss Agnes Fry gave him invaluable assistance in preparing the list is evident from the numerous references to species occurring at Failand. The very rare *Fuligo ochracea* Peck was discovered on the stem of a withered plant of *Pteris aquilina* at Porlock in November, 1901, by Mrs. A. Montague. It had previously been found only once in Britain, at Aran Mawddwy, Merionethshire.

It will be observed that the spheres of activity of Somerset mycologists, so far considered, are limited to the north and north-western districts, and particularly to the neighbourhood of Bath and Bristol. These districts have been thoroughly investigated, especially the famous Leigh Woods.

Concerning other parts of the county, mention must first be made of Mr. Aubrey Clark's investigation of the fungus flora of the county about Street and Glastonbury. The following interesting list of first British records from the neighbourhood of Street indicates very clearly that he was a most zealous investigator:—*Tricholoma colossus* Fr., *T. pessundatum* Fr., *T. panæolum* Fr., *Collybia inolens* Fr., *Hygrophorus cerasinus* Fr., *H. livido-albus* Fr., *H. Clarkii* (B. and Br.) W. G. Smith, *H. metapodius* Fr., *Inocybe Clarkii* B. and Br., *Cortinarius* (*Dermocybe*) *cinnabarinus* Fr., and *Hydnum nigrum* Fr.

My interest in fungi dates from about the year 1887. During the following ten years my records chiefly concerned the districts bordered by the three towns—Wincanton, Castle Cary and Bruton, and the greensand hills about Penselwood on the Wiltshire border. Amongst rare and interesting species that I found, and sent to Kew during that time, were *Peziza reticulata* Greville, one of the largest of elfcups, found in apple orchards at Bratton St. Maur, in April, 1894 and 1895; *Hygrophorus chrysodon* (Batsch.) Fr., a beautiful shining white plant with golden-yellow fibrils; *Cortinarius* (*Inoloma*) *Bulliardi* (Pers.) Fr., *Cortinarius* (*Dermocybe*) *valgus* Fr., and *Crepidotus alveolus* (Lasch.) Fr.

Some sketches of a species of *Collybia* that I found at Bratton St. Maur in 1895, but failed to identify at the time, illustrate well the value of coloured drawings. Upon receiving the British Mycological Society's *Transactions* for 1902, I found therein an article on "Recent British Fungi," with a coloured plate of *Collybia pulla* (Schaeff) Fr., which at once recalled to memory my sketches. Comparison left no doubt at all that the Bratton plants were *Collybia pulla*.

I have not resided in Somerset since 1897. I have, however, on several occasions collected fungi in the southern part of the county, chiefly about Rimpton.

The Taunton records by the Rev. W. R. Crotch, in the paper above alluded to, comprise a meagre list of 140 species, mostly common agarics, and precise localities are omitted. I am not aware that the fungus flora of the Taunton district has received special attention between the years 1852 and 1911.

Upon the kind invitation of the Somersetshire Archæological and Natural History Society, the British Mycological Society held a week's fungus foray in the Taunton district from September 18th to 23rd, 1911. Though the season was abnormally dry, many interesting species were found, and numerous additions were made to the county records.

Wood-destroying fungi were observed in abundance in the Home Park at Dunster. The majority of the old elms bore enormous sporophores of *Fomes ulmarius* (Sow.) Fr. Some of them, as shown by the numerous strata of tubes in section, had been growing many years, making annual additions to their bulk by the renewal of the hymenial surface. Some oak stumps exhibited the devastating effects of the presence of the mycelium of *Polyporus sulphureus* (Bull.) Fr., the wood being of a biscuit-like consistency, and flecked with white mycelial threads. In this park was found the curious *Fomes resinaceus* (Boud.) Rea, a species first recorded for Britain by Mr. Carleton Rea, in the *Brit. Mycol. Soc. Trans.*, 1910, from

specimens obtained from beech and oak in Worcestershire. This species has been confused with *Fomes applanatus* (Pers.) Walbr., from which it is abundantly distinct in the light-coloured flesh, and the viscid, laccate surface of the pileus. *Polyporus Schweinitzii* Fr., a very destructive larch parasite, was also taken there. The rare *Femsjonia luteo-alba* Fr., was found at Dunster and at Triscombe Stone. Up to the present it has been recorded only from Devon and Somerset. The writer was with the late Dr. C. B. Plowright, at the Exeter meeting of the Brit. Mycol. Soc. in 1901, when the latter found it in Whitestone Woods, near Newton St. Cyres. It was also taken in France in the same year. In its early state it resembles *Exidia recisa* (Ditm.) Fr., and might easily be passed over for that species. The cup-like form rapidly disappears and the white tomentum of the exterior is evanescent, peculiarities which, as Dr. Plowright observed, caused this fungus to be so long overlooked in Great Britain.

Additional interesting species observed at Dunster were *Boletus parasiticus* Bull. growing on *Scleroderma vulgare* Hornem, a cæspitose form of *Pholiota dura* (Bolton) Fr., *Hydnum udum* Fr., *Clavaria umbrinella* Sacc., *Collybia longipes* (Bull.) Fr., *Porothelium confusum* B. and Br. (first recorded from Leigh Woods), and *Cyphella villosa* (Pers.) Karst.

But little of interest was found in the Staple Park Woods, excepting in a valley containing some fish-ponds, the upper woods being very dry. Many specimens of the Beef-steak fungus, *Fistulina hepatica* (Huds.) Fr., were observed on some old oaks near Staple Park Farm. Several Boleti were gathered in the vicinity of the ponds, including the rare *Boletus candicans* Fries (it is recorded by Bucknall from Leigh Woods), also *B. elegans* Schum. and *B. chrysenteron* Bull., a trio not mentioned by Crotch for the Taunton district.

It seldom happens now-a-days that, amongst the larger fungi, a species necessitating the establishment of a new

genus, is discovered in this country. Such a record was made on the Staple Park day, when *Phœcotremella pseudofoliacea* Rea was found on decaying wood. This fungus superficially resembles the uncommon *Ulocolla foliacea* (Pers.) Bref., from which it is abundantly distinct in the brown spores. Other uncommon species from that district were *Hypocrea lactea* Fr. and *Mycena Iris* Berk.

During the excursion, in the Triscombe Stone district, some interesting species were found in Cockercombe, chiefly beneath fallen timber. Here *Femsjonia luteo-alba* Fr. occurred on rotting oak branches, and a quantity of the sober-coloured *Pleurotus accrosus* Fries was found in the ruts of a cart track. The chief "find" was *Coprinus plicatiloides* Buller, a new British record, determined by Professor A. H. R. Buller, the authority on the genus Coprinus. It is a minute species much resembling the well-known *C. plicatilis* (Curt.) Fr. Its disc is depressed at maturity, as in *C. plicatilis*, but it is narrow instead of being broad. The gills are not attached to a collar, and the spores are oval.[1] Other species worthy of mention are *Hydnum membranaceum*, *Corticium porosum* B. and Curt., and *Naucoria eriuacea* Fr.

In the woods in the neighbourhood of Buncombe cross roads, visited on the last day of the foray, the conditions were similar to those of the previous day at Triscombe Stone. Many interesting species were found in damp spots, those worthy of special mention being *Cortinarius* (*Phlegmacium*) *triumphans* Fr. (a handsome agaric that I note has been recorded from Leigh Woods by Bucknall), *Phlebia vaga* Fr., *Paxillus giganteus* (Sow.) Fr., and *Pleurotus applicatus* (Batsch.) Fr.

Before the publication of the fungus flora of Somerset can be attempted, all the larger parks and woods of the county should be investigated. Records are particularly wanted from

1. Buller's "Researches on Fungi," p. 69.

the neighbourhood of Ilchester, Yeovil, Chard, etc., and from Exmoor in the west. To obtain such, and at the same time to stimulate local interest in mycology, it may be suggested that the Som. Arch. and Nat. Hist. Society should hold a fungus foray annually under the guidance of a competent leader. More field-workers are required. At the time of writing, there are only two Somerset botanists (Miss Agnes Fry and Sir C. T. Dyke Acland), who are members of the British Mycological Society. Mycology is a most fascinating hobby, and there ought to be no difficulty in obtaining recruits. It is to be hoped that the outcome of the visit of the British Mycological Society to Taunton will be the addition of new members who will worthily uphold the great traditions of Somerset Mycology, and do for the south and south-western districts what Berkeley, Broome and others have done so well for the northern parts of the county.