

LETTERS FROM DR. H. H. BEHR TO HERMAN STRECKER¹

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The letters upon which I am reporting are in the Department of Entomology, The Field Museum, Chicago, Illinois. They fall into two groups, 1874–1881 and 1899–1900. The first group was written when H. H. Behr was a busy physician in San Francisco, the second when he was Curator of Entomology at the California Academy of Sciences. Perhaps the most important item demonstrated by the letters is that Behr did not send his butterfly types to Strecker as the latter frequently stated. The specimens in the Strecker Collection at the Field Museum are what Behr thought represented his name for a taxon at the time he made the shipment. From the correspondence between W. H. Edwards and Henry Edwards one draws the conclusion that Behr did not long remember what names he had bestowed upon specimens and that he did not mark any of his material as "type" or with a name. Behr did send to Strecker some, if not all, of the types of the Noctuids he described in 1870.

It is evident from examination of the letterhead dates and the post-marks that many of Behr's letters resided for several days after being written either in his pocket or on his desk. In one case the epistle stayed with Behr for three months after being written. It is not known if among the several thousand letters yet in miscellaneous bundles there are letters from Behr to Strecker that were written between 1881 and 1899. It was around 1881 that many reputable entomologists in the United States stopped their correspondence with Strecker. By then it had been conclusively established that Strecker had ante-dated several numbers of his *Lepidoptera*: *Rhopalocers-Heteroceres* and had admitted this to the Rev. George D. Hulst in writing. Strecker's vituperous comments, especially about Augustus Grote and W. H. Edwards, added to the resentment against Strecker of serious students of insects in this country. This still casts a shadow over the true worth of Strecker's work. In spite of his personal shortcomings he was an able and industrious worker.

None of the 40 letters written by Behr to Strecker is trivial. Strecker's part of the correspondence is not known to me and probably was

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destroyed in the San Francisco fire of 1906. Thus, these notes and comments depend entirely upon Behr's letters. The earliest letter found is dated May 20, 1874. Along with it Behr dispatched a box of Noctuids of which he wrote: "With this you received the Noctuidae in question. You may consider them as a present, or if you like, send me the corresponding species of the East. Not all of them are in good order, but as they are originals of descriptions [types] I thought them of sufficient interest. They were originally destined for a friend for whose loss the science of Zoology mourns." A little further on Behr scratched out a line that contained the name of this friend. From what is visible it appears that the friend was Lorquin, who died in 1873. These Noctuids were, in part or in whole, the types of the names proposed by Behr in 1870 in his only paper upon the family. He was disappointed in the lack of enthusiasm accorded that paper by North American lepidopterists (letter July 10, 1874.) So, instead of continuing with the series he sent the rest of the moths that he had planned to describe to Strecker on June 12, 1874, with permission for Strecker to name and publish upon them.

The letter of August 14, 1874 is an important one and almost undecipherable. In it Behr recounts what he knows about the habits of some 15 Californian Noctuids (*sensu lato*) and lists his holdings of eastern butterflies. The next letter, written September 12th, is even more difficult to read. In it he agrees with Strecker that the multiplicity of names among the Lycaenidae is regrettable. He also states that he has just sent off a box of these to Keferstein in Erfurt. At first glance a letter postmarked December 19 and probably written on the 17th is just unreadable. However I can make out that Behr is sending Strecker the "continuance of my Noctuides."

On March 4, 1875, Behr wrote that he had sent a "little invoice" and still considers himself to be in debt to Strecker. He states further "I will send you all my duplicates of the *Coloradia*² [Saturnidae] genus, but they will not amount to much, neither in number nor in preparation. *Catocala Irene* and *Stretchii* are Unica [unique = type], but I have reliable drawing made by Mr. Stretch of each of them." This suggests that Strecker may have received the types of both *irene* Behr and *stretchii* Behr.

Some thoughts of Behr upon Lycaenidae are included in his letter of August 28, 1875 (mailed on September 3.) "I send you *Rubidus*,

² Behr did not underscore scientific names at any time in his correspondence. I have done so here to conform with current custom.

Pardalis, my *Lorquini* is identical with *Catalina* of Reakirt. All my specimens are from the Sierra. I have not yet found any near S. Francisco. If you are content with bad specimens I send you *Battoides*. The species is alpine and out of the reach of my excursions. *L. Daedalus* perhaps may be identical with *L. Icaroides*, but this wants investigations. I think *Evius* and *Pheres* are local varieties of the same species. (footnote: "that is of *Pheres*") I have some very intermediate specimens. But in all these conjectures I might be mistaken as it is so very difficult to identify any species from the descriptions given. As to the identity of my *Lorquini* and *Catalina* I am certain as your figure is so true that it cannot be mistaken. *L. Rapahoe* as it is figured in your good work is my *L. Daedalus* and I incline to consider *Daedalus* identical with *Icaroides*. All of these species I can send you a series." From this it can be seen that upon familiar ground Behr's discrimination was good.

In the letter of September 26, 1875, Behr states that he does not know "*L. behrii*" by which, from the context, he refers to *Callipsyche behrii* (Edwards), not the subspecies of *Glaucoopsyche lygdamus*. Both of these, incidently, were returned to Behr by Edwards. Next he wrote "*L. Xerces* will be in the box. It is now extinct as regards the neighborhood of S. Francisco. The locality where it used to be found is converted into building lots and between German chickens and Irish hogs no insect can exist beside louse and flea." On December 31, 1875, Behr wrote "When you receive this letter I hope my box of Lycaenidae and a part of the *Smerinthus* [*ophthalmicus* Bdv.] will safely be in your hands. . . . I have sent you all or nearly all my duplicates of Lycaenidae but have not affixed the names to all of them or else it would have been very late before I could have sent them. They arrive late enough at any rate. . . . Not all my Lycaenides are in a good state of preservation, but I send them as they are."

In his first letter of the new year, January 5, 1876, Behr told Strecker, after complimenting him upon trying to reduce the confusion among Lycaenidae, "I am very much afraid that unknowingly I have contributed to the confusion, at least among the Lycaenides, but the real criminal is, there, Boisduval whose correspondence with my friend Lorquin for a considerable time was my guide in determining Californian Lepidoptera." Apparently Strecker next evinced an interest in the genus *Argynnis* for on February 28 Behr wrote "I am so sending you my *Argynnis* duplicates as you expressed a liking for this genus, and at the same time I hope by your assistance [to resolve] some doubts regarding several species of the *Aglaja* type. It is with them as it is with the Californian

Lycaena.” These were sent on June 27th. On the 12th of September, Behr advises Strecker not to place too much importance on the amount of silvering on *Argynnis* since it seems to be of no import among European species.

A letter written June 8, 1878, carries the news “Harry Edwards is leaving us. He is an active collector and scientist and I am sorry to leave him. We are but few entomologists and that perhaps is the cause of the good understanding between us. I am arranging at present my Argynnides. There is no doubt that most of our species of the *Aglaja* type are artificial but it is better to distinguish too much than to neglect and the superscription of your letter ‘time at last sets all even’ refers as well to science as to individual affairs. If you look at the Argynnides of ancient European authors with their *A. Eurybia* [?], *Arsilarche*, *Isis*, *Pasianus* [?], Pelopia, Syrinx, you will find we are only in the beginning of the process through which they have gone. We are collecting the material and those after us will sift our harvest.” Near the end of the letter is this: “It is wonderful how many of our species that formerly were quite common are nearly or entirely extinct, for instance, *Lycaena Xerces*. It is probably the change that takes [place] in our vegetation, whose species are gradually superceded by Australian and other immigrants.”

On September 3, 1878, Behr’s letter contained “I have a second specimen of a *Chionobas* [*Oeneis*] from the Sierra, of which I received a specimen in very shattered condition 16 years ago. I do not know if since then it has been described. It looks somewhat like *S. Ridingsii* which by the by impresses me as being also more or less belonging to *Chionobas*.” [In 1870, W. H. Edwards assigned *stretchii*, a subspecies of *ridingsii*, to *Chionobas*.] This probably refers to *Oeneis ivallda* Mead, 1878. Toward the end of the month Behr received a copy of Strecker’s Catalogue which pleased him, especially the large amount of interesting information included. It is as useful today for that information as it was when it was published. It is the only 19th Century catalogue that I use almost daily.

There is a gap until January 7, 1881, when Behr wrote: “I will make a colored sketch of *Neophasia Terlooti* and send it to you. W. H. Edwards is perfectly right, *Neophasia Terlooti* was caught on the Sierra Madre between Mazatlan and Durango and carried from there in a pocketbook by the late Baron Terloot de Popélaire. It is not probable that a man of entomological tastes will enter those dangerous and unsafe regions for a year or two to come. I think I have stated that to Mr. W. H. Edwards and received the answer that the insect probably

extended into southern California. This is not impossible, but as my specimen at present is the only one, very difficult to prove." Time has shown Edwards to be wrong, but the species is known from the Chiricahua Mountains of Arizona. The last of this first group of letters was written February 11, 1881. "I think I will find time to try my painting brush once more. It is now fifteen years that it lay idle. As to species I do not care much to add to my reputation by describing them. If Mr. Grote finds pleasure in describing them, he is welcome to it. It is the progress of science I am interested in, not in affixing my name to a new species."

Behr resumed his correspondence with Strecker after a visit from M. Derkert de la Meillage who had previously been with Strecker in Reading. Apparently Strecker reopened his attempts to get the type of *Neophasia terlooti* but Behr wrote on March 3, 1899, it is "in such shattered condition that it scarcely bears examination, but certainly not transportation." Behr now was 80 years old. His handwriting, never particularly legible, seems if anything a little easier to read! In this letter he said: "As to *Melitaea Quino*, I can comply with your wishes. I think I can send you quite a number of specimens, one of them raised from one of the larvae whose very distinct coloration first pointed out a different species which otherwise probably would have been overlooked up to date." If this specimen can be discovered in the Strecker Collection it will be an invaluable clue to just what insect Behr named *quino*, a question not yet wholly satisfactorily settled. In the next letter, October 29, 1899, we find: "I have sent you last week two specimens of *Mel. Quino* which I suspect very generally is taken for *Anicia* Dbld. Now, I possess a rather shattered specimen of *Anicia* which Dr. Boisduval had received from Doubleday and which he had sent to Mr. Lorquin in S. Francisco. It may be that Doubleday, who probably had but few specimens of both species did not distinguish between the two and that his *Anicia* comprised my *Quino*. But you can easily convince you of the difference if you see the type specimen of *Anicia*. If you wish it, I can send you an *Anicia* very similar to the type, but not in very good order." On November 13th 1899, Behr wrote that he had dispatched "5 *A. Monticola*, 2 *A. Rupestris* probably not distinct from 3 *A. Eurynome*, 4 *A. Epithore*, 3 *A. Nevadensis*, 2 *M. Anicia*, the one with the label agreeing most with the type" and several large moths. It is these *Argynnis* that now stand in the Strecker Collection as Behr's types. They were Behr duplicates. It will be noted that Strecker made no claim to holding the types in his 1878 Catalogue after receiving the earlier shipment of Behr *Argynnis* in 1876.

On January 9, 1900, Alice Eastwood wrote to Strecker that Behr was ill of pneumonia and that he would answer Strecker's letter at a later date. This he did on the 13th. On the 28th he wrote that he would send a "good pair of my *Coronis*." In return Strecker sent some material from the Himalayas which Behr acknowledged on February 9th. On the 14th of March Behr wrote "Hereby I send you 8 *Coronis*, and 6 *Quino*. I thought it advisable to send as many as I could spare to enable you to look at something like a series. If it was not for the upper side, which is so constantly different from that of *Calippe*, I would the species consider identical. But after all, what is a species? Both forms I have observed in their natural haunts and found them different in their habits. *Calippe* haunts the flowers of *Aescalus* [*sic*] in the suburbs of South San Francisco and the Contra Costa range, especially near Mills Seminary. *Coronis* does not show such predilections, it frequently settles on moist ground near Livermore and seems to develop a preference for *Audibertica*, *Baccharis* and *Solidago*. In both species the ♀ are more rare and fly so late after the disappearance of the ♂ that it always was strange to me, how, where and when do they meet. In regard to *Quino* I have no personal experience. Most of my specimens are from the hills near San Diego. What I sent you is about all I can spare. In regard to *Coronis* I have still a supply."

The last letter from Behr in the Strecker files is dated July 30, 1900. In its entirety this letter reads: "A close inspection of specimens has convinced me that *Lycaena Pheres* Boisd. and *L. Xerces* Boisd. cannot be kept separate as species in the old sense. *Pheres* is very variable and *Xerces* is a rather constant aberration analogous to *Artaxerxes* and aberration of *Astrarche* (*Agestis* J. V.) in Europe. A series of specimens collected by Mr. Cottle has furnished me transitional forms that leave no doubt." *Aricia agestis* Schiffm. now is considered a distinct species from *artaxerxes* Fabr. just as *pheres* Bdv. and *xerces* Bdv. are now so considered.

Throughout the correspondence Behr requested African and South American Lepidoptera in exchange for what he sent Strecker. There is every indication that the exchange was satisfactory to both men. Every time that Behr received a part of Strecker's *Lepidoptera*: *Rhopaloceres*-*Heteroceres* he commented upon it. Many of the letters contain information that may be of interest and use to a student of Californian Heterocera. This is in such bits and pieces that intelligently extracting it is all but impossible. The entire correspondence is in my file in xerox copies of the originals and they may be used by qualified students.