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Facts of Fiction : Chermes Alni L. (Psylliidae)

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FACTS OR FICTION: CHERMES ALNI L. (PSYLLIIDAE)

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It is not desirable to begin an episode similar to the historic squabble of “Mr. Kirkaldy, Mr. Distant,” never-the-less after the exceptionally prompt and misleading reply to my short article (Caldwell, 1946), it is necessary to correct the false impression conveyed by Russell (1946).

Russell falsely states that I have taken the identity of alni L. entirely from the Kalm reference when on the contrary alni L. is determined entirely from the original description in the tenth edition of Systema Naturae. Realizing that insects are living organisms fitting into a definite niche in their environment and that they do not spring into being glued to a point nor occur normally under cover-glass, I have pointed out that the biological data in the Kalm reference checks perfectly with the statements in the original description thereby proving that the insect with the “caudis plumosis . . .” occurring on “Betulae Alni . . .” in “America septentrionali.” is the one now determined as Prociphilus tessellatus (Fitch) = Chermes alni L.

After the rise and fall of several dictators, the lay world has realized that if a lie is told often enough it soon is accepted as the truth. This unfortunately has been the case with the statement that alni L. can not be determined from the original description and the scientific (?) world accepts this fiction as fact. The truth is that any normal child of 12 can, by following the limitations imposed by the original description, collect and thus identify this insect anytime in season. The trouble has been, absurd as it may seem, that the closet naturalists, and especially those in America septentrionali, have never ventured into the great out-of-doors to observe what goes on in nature but instead have trained their bifocals on the Latin phrase “caudis plumosis tectae” and emphatically declared that alni L. can not be identified from three words.

Article 25 very foolishly erects about five possibilities for the support of a valid name and makes no reservation in case two or more occur at the same time. Alni L. will include about four possibilities; however, if one were to use a little common sense or some resemblance of logic, one would believe that the original description should have preference over all citations. When we let the “monster” called nomenclature create biological impossibilities as it has in the past with alni L., then it is high time to part company with the monster and stick to biological facts which are the truth, “novel” as the idea may seem.

REFERENCES