Section 1

Introduction

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W. Thomas Edmondson

W. Thomas Edmondson (Tommy to all his friends, as in the present notice) was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on 24 April 1916. His widowed mother later moved to New Haven, Connecticut, in the justified hope that Yale University would provide the scene for the education of her three sons. Tommy's Yale course was by no means the beginning of his academic career. While at Hillhouse High School in New Haven (the old building on Broadway, now demolished), he pursued an amateur interest in microscopy, particularly studying rotifers. His biology teacher, Miss Ruth Ross, whence *Trichocerca rossae* (Fig. 1), realized that he was exceptionally talented and arranged to see Prof. L. L. Woodruff, the best known undergraduate teacher of biology at Yale and a man who delighted in helping promising students in a quiet way. As a result of this visit Miss Ross got permission for both Tommy and herself to attend the Yale undergraduate course on invertebrate zoology. This course was ordinarily given by Prof. Alexander Petrunkevitch, but as he was on sabbatical I was given the pleasant duty of admitting both the visitors.

I was soon able to devote a corner of my laboratory to Tommy for his studies and here he began to work on the taxonomic problems of the rotifers collected by himself, by the Yale North India Expedition, and by Dr. Richard Bond during Bond's limnological studies in Haiti. In all this work we were greatly assisted by F. J. Myers, an Atlantic City businessman who had become one of the two or three leading students of the taxonomy of rotifers then living. Myers checked all our new taxa and helped with the determination of some difficult species.

Once I remember Tommy greeting me from the corner of the laboratory, with the remark "I can do something that you can't do." It appeared that the city government of New Haven had issued regulations limiting the use of roller skates on the streets to adolescents of a certain age which was permissible for Tommy but obviously not for me.

When Tommy entered Yale in 1934 I was able to help him in planning his studies. My major advice, ultimately derived indirectly from that of my father to me, was to go on taking mathematics courses until he failed one. He wisely did not actually follow this titrational method quite strictly, the end-point being a "C" in advanced differential equations in his junior year, but the procedure certainly paid off. He also asked me about his nonscientific courses, and I, knowing his interest in music, sent him, in some trepidation, as I myself hardly knew the great harpsichordist, to see Ralph Kirkpatrick, who was giving a course on the music of Bach. Ralph not only admitted him to the course but throughout the years a close friendship grew up between the two which was accentuated later when Tommy and Yvette met.

Tommy continued publishing as an undergraduate. He received a B.S. from Yale in 1938. He applied for and received an assistantship at the University of Wisconsin. At Madison (1938–1939) he was able to use the list of records of the sessile rotifers that he collected there, in conjunction with the huge mass of analytical data assembled by Birge and Juday on the lakes of the state, to examine the question as to the relative significance of calcium concentration, bicarbonate concentration, and pH as measures of alkalinity, a subject still not as well investigated as would be desirable. Returning to Yale as war

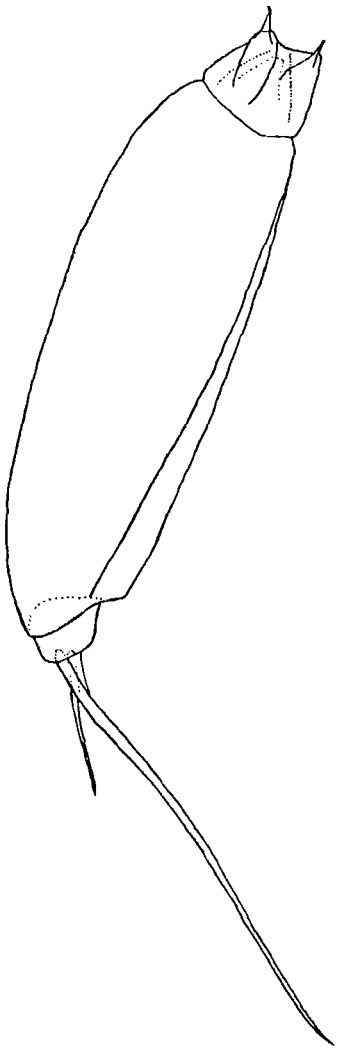

Fig. 1. *Trichocerca rossae* Edmondson.

was threatening Europe and doubtless about to involve America, he presented his Ph.D. thesis at Yale on the population dynamics and other aspects of the ecology of sessile rotifers. In this work he showed very beautifully how individuals of *Floscularia conifera* growing as social aggregates could have a longer expectation of life than solitaries (*see cover*).

During the war he spent some time at the American Museum of Natural History doing work for the Navy under A. E. Parr and then later at Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution. His sojourn at Woods Hole was later most useful to him in providing opportunities for the development of many scientific friendships, as indeed happened with a number of young limnologists and oceanographers after the war. Some years later the whole aquatic profession became greatly indebted to him when he revised and edited Ward and Whipple's *Freshwater biology,* published in 1959.

He spent three years as a lecturer at Harvard and then received a more permanent position at the University of Washington. There he continued working on the ecology of rotifers and on the extraordinary group of lakes in the lower Grand Coulee. One of these lakes, Soap Lake, has a notice signed by the local mayor announcing the presence of trace quantities of rubidium, inter alia, in its water, a unique example of biogeochemistry unwittingly allied to local politics. Most significantly, Tommy has influenced and conducted research on what is probably the best restorative program on a eutrophic lake anywhere in the world, namely Lake Washington at Seattle. Very important results on the biology and history of the lake were also obtained. His work has been widely studied and imitated in other parts of the world. It is not necessary to read Marx to realize that

in a case of this sort theory and practice go hand in hand. As one may well imagine, Tommy's retirement makes little difference to his work.

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