



Memoir of John L. LeConte, M. D.

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of himself and his own attainments and accomplishments as anything more than an effort to follow in the footsteps of him who had given him the ability and opportunity to do so.

I dwell principally upon the moral qualities of our departed friend, because I trust that the Society will obtain a complete account of his scientific abilities from Dr. Horn, who has been first his pupil and then his collaborator for twenty odd years. Let us place on our records that memorial of a blameless career in science, and its application to the uses of human existence.

For myself I can only speak of what fills my heart to the exclusion of all other thoughts—of the lovable nature of the friend whom we shall never again see. Let the world reverence his memory as a discoverer, as a philosopher, as a genius. I can only remember John Le Conte as an engaging friend, a faithful friend, a speaker of the truth, a judicious adviser, a companion to think with, a reliable coadjutor to deal with, but still, above all, as a most affectionate and trustworthy friend.

I place above all his other exceptionally shining qualities his affectionateness. He was a lover; and all the world loves a lover. But good lovers are said to be good haters. I doubt the truth of the saying. Selfish lovers may be good haters, but the perfect lover is incapable of any hate that deserves the appellation. Le Conte was one of the men who liked to be called John. He had a regularly woman's heart. And yet he could not hate anybody. When he tried, he simply made himself ridiculous. I have often laughed at his wrath; it would no more counterfeit real hatred than a crystal of smoky quartz can counterfeit charcoal. His innate lucidity of good nature could not be veiled; it was as if a cherub knit its brows. And this innate good nature, allying him with the universe, was the salvation of his science, for it protected his mind against those damaging and delaying passions which futilize the career of men of talent, hough their horses and steal the linchpins from their chariot-wheels.

Lovingly he lived and worked many, many years—as many as were good for him. The world wants us all; and yet needs none of us. It is of no great consequence who is who, or what or how much any one does. What one leaves another takes; what one begins, some one else is sure to finish. But surely the memory of a friend is blessed, and such a friend as has just left us can never be forgotten.

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*Memoir of John L. LeConte, M.D. By George H. Horn, M.D.*

*(Read before the American Philosophical Society, December 7, 1883.)*

John Lawrence LeConte was born in New York City, May 13, 1825, and died in Philadelphia, November 15, 1883. He was the son of Major John Eatton LeConte and Mary A. H. Lawrence. When but a few weeks old his mother died, and the father thenceforth seemed to live solely for the

care and development of his only child. The devotion of the father was rewarded in living to see the son take a foremost place among the scientists of his day, honored at home and abroad. The father had already made the name well known in science, when the son entered the field and added greatly to its renown.

After arriving at a suitable age, the boy was placed in St. Mary's College, Maryland, from which he graduated in 1842. From the Doctor's account the discipline of the school was severe, the training accurate and thorough, and the tutors conscientious in the discharge of their duties. At this early period of his life he exhibited the tastes of a naturalist, and he has often recounted the annoyances and ridicule to which he was subjected by his fellow-pupils, who had no sympathy with his pursuits. His teachers, even, feared that his, to them, more important studies would be neglected, and the father was made acquainted with their suspicions. Finding that the pupil was in no respect deficient in his regular duties, the father directed that these tendencies should not be repressed. The boy made rapid progress, and exhibited a peculiar aptitude for the study of languages and mathematics, and, doubtless, in this manner laid the foundation for that accuracy and retentiveness of his memory so characteristic of his maturer years.

After the completion of the collegiate course, he returned to New York, and entered the College of Physicians and Surgeons, receiving his medical degree in 1846. Before this date his first essays in original work made their appearance, and, to use his own language, gave unmistakable evidence of his youth and inexperience.

During 1849 he made several visits to the upper shore of Lake Superior, collecting largely, and publishing the results, with many new species, in Agassiz's work on that region. In the autumn of 1850 he visited California, stopping for a short time at Panama, remaining absent during the greater portion of the following year. His explorations in California were made, for the most part, south of San Francisco, at San José, San Diego and their surroundings. From the latter point he crossed the Colorado desert, then and for many years after a terror to travelers, going as far eastward as the Pima villages. The entire region was a new one to science, and he made abundant use of his opportunities. On his return the results of his journey were published in the "Annals of the Lyceum" of New York. The new material was, however, so abundant that some yet remains in his cabinet unstudied.

In 1852 the LeContes removed to Philadelphia, and the works of both have, with few exceptions, been published in the periodicals of our societies since that time.

For a few months in 1857 he accompanied the Honduras Inter-Oceanic Survey, under the command of the late John C. Trautwine, publishing his observations in that region in the report of the survey. At the same time he visited the Fuente de Sangre, publishing his account of that phenomenon in Squier's Nicaragua.

After these voyages, his scientific studies were uninterrupted until the early years of the war, when he was appointed surgeon of volunteers, and shortly after medical inspector, with the rank of Lieut.-Colonel, in which he showed that his capability for direction and organization was adaptable to wider uses than the cabinet to which he had hitherto confined himself.

During the summer of 1867 he accompanied General W. W. Wright on the survey for the extension of the Union Pacific Railway southward to Fort Craig, in the capacity of geologist. His report, which in no way detracts from his reputation as an entomologist, was published as part of the report of the survey.

In the autumn of 1869 he determined on a visit to Europe, in which he was accompanied by his family, remaining abroad until near the close of 1872, visiting also Algiers and Egypt. His residence abroad interrupted somewhat his authorship, but not his studies, and his letters to me, now doubly valuable, gave abundant evidence of his activity. He visited all the accessible public and private museums, and his wonderful memory of the species in his own cabinet enabled him to settle many hitherto doubtful points of synonymy. Those who met him abroad were deeply impressed by his thorough scholarship, and his quick and accurate perception of the affinities of insects never before seen by him. On his return to Philadelphia his work continued, with but slight interruptions by periods of sickness, until within a week of his death.

The lives of men eminent in science are rarely fertile in events of general interest, and LeConte's is no exception. Trained from his boyhood as a naturalist, with no cares, and no interruptions by daily professional or business duties, his life was passed in the pursuit of his favorite studies and the pleasures of social life. The father died in 1860, leaving the son in possession of an ample estate. The following year Dr. LeConte married Helen, daughter of the late Judge Robert C. Grier, who, with two sons, survives her husband.

The account of the life in science of LeConte should properly begin with that of the father—the one is the result and continuation of the other. An abler pen than mine has already traced the life of the elder LeConte, and I merely purpose to recall such incidents in his life as seem to have a bearing in determining the subsequent studies of the son.

Major LeConte contributed a short entomological paper to the "Annals of the Lyceum," of New York, as early as 1824, describing a few new species, illustrated by a plate drawn by himself. At this time Say and the elder Melsheimer were at the height of their career, and entomology, through the labors of Latrielle in France, was assuming a higher position among the sciences. The Major was an ardent collector, and, desiring the light not attainable at home, much of his material was sent abroad; he, however, retained either carefully compared specimens or drawings to permit the future identification of the species. The cabinet thus formed, small in comparison with what we now have, made the basis of the subsequent work of the son. In 1845 the father and son contributed entomological

papers to the Boston "Journal of Natural History," the former a monograph of Histeridæ, the drawings for which were made by the son, the latter a small paper of little moment.

The first paper by Dr. LeConte appeared in 1844, in the "Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences," having been transmitted by the Entomological Society of Pennsylvania, an association with no permanent locality, consisting of, probably, not more than a half score of enthusiasts, who met at long intervals at the house of one or another. Among the number we find the two Melsheimers, Ziegler and Haldeman, while the Rev. J. G. Morris, D.D., of Baltimore, alone survives to recount their history.

The early papers by LeConte gave very little evidence of his analytical power until, in 1850, he published his "Monograph of Pselaphidæ," proposing an arrangement which remains at present the basis of the general classification of these minute insects. In the same year appeared the commencement of his "Attempt to Classify the Longicorn Coleoptera of America north of Mexico," requiring several years in publication, a work of much wider application than indicated by its title, contributing much that was new to science, and aiding greatly in the rational classification of these favorite beetles.

From this period his contributions to entomology were for the most part monographic, and from their importance soon attracted attention abroad, many of them being reprinted in foreign journals, winning for their author the reputation he justly deserved. In their scope his papers cover nearly every portion of his specialty. They contain evidences of patient and original research, and added greatly to science. His work was in every case an improvement on what had previously been done; he left a subject better than he found it.

Several of his works call for special mention. In 1859 he collected the entomological works of Say, with notes on the species described. In this he was assisted in their specialties by Baron Osten-Sacken and Mr. P. R. Uhler. The writings of Say were widely scattered in almost inaccessible publications, his typical collection almost entirely destroyed, and the species depended practically on traditional knowledge; and while some of Say's cotemporaries were yet living LeConte gathered the information possessed by them, and placed it in permanent form.

Realizing that his specialty needed greater assistance, he undertook, at the request of the Smithsonian Institution, the "Classification of the Coleoptera of North America," with the "List of Species," and descriptions of new ones. The first parts appeared in 1861 and 1862; its continuation was interrupted by the war and his absence abroad. It was resumed in 1873, but never completed. The assistance thus given to students vastly increased their number, and the limited edition soon became exhausted, and it became necessary to decide either for a reprint or a new book.

Before a new edition could be completed, it became imperative to study the Rhynchophora, and at this point LeConte made one of the boldest strokes of his career in the isolation of that series, and purposing a classi-

fication as remarkable in novelty as it was true to nature. This was followed in 1876 by the "Species of Rhynchophora," published as a separate volume of the Proceedings of our Society.

The preliminary studies having been completed, LeConte's desires seemed to be concentrated in the preparation of a new "classification," which should be complete in all its parts. He invited my coöperation in the preparation of monographic essays, hoping thereby to lighten his own labor, and prepare the work in a shorter time. Two years ago, when he realized that his health was failing, he expressed the desire that I should join him in more active authorship in the work. The first pages went to press in January, 1882, and the book was completed in March of this year, in time for him to realize that it has been, at least, well received. For obvious reasons I cannot dwell upon the merits even of his share of this work, except to say that his earlier edition is the basis of the present; without the former the latter might not have appeared. Evidences of his influence will be found on every page, and whatever it was my privilege to contribute was made possible entirely by his early instruction and guidance.

Since last spring he has done but little study, his general health, uncertain vision and unsteady hand having unfitted him for close application. He, however, continued work in the form of "short studies," until within a few days of his death, and the incomplete manuscript now in my hands will appear in the form in which he desired to present it.

While LeConte's reputation as a naturalist will rest upon his entomological writings, he did not limit himself to this field. Mention has already been made of several important geological contributions; there are others of less moment. He has contributed a number of articles on Vertebrate Paleontology, and several synopses of some genera of rodents. His "Zoölogical Notes of a Visit to Panama," illustrate the extent of his study in another department of science. At least one article on purely social science, has emanated from his pen.

In a general review of LeConte's writings, we find them remarkably free from controversial tendencies. He gave to science the results of careful study, knowing that in time whatever was worthy would be adopted. His dissent from the views of another was always couched in the mildest terms. He was above the limit of those petty jealousies which too often prevail between those working in the same field.

Numerous were the demands for his advice and assistance from all parts of the country; rarely did he repel them, and no small portion of his time was consumed in the determination of specimens for correspondents, with no other reward than the hope that the seed thus sown might some day bear fruit.

The results of LeConte's works in Coleopterology in America are plainly marked. He entered the field ten years after the death of Say, who seems to have had no higher ambition, if indeed capacity, than the description of the species which he collected. LeConte, on the other hand, began the

framework of a systematic structure which he lived to see completed in all its parts. He reduced chaos to order. His influence in entomological progress in general is admitted on all hands, and so rapid has been the advance that we now have nearly as many purely entomological societies and clubs as there were interested individuals forty years ago. At that time the American literature consisted of very little beyond the works of Say; to-day five periodicals are devoted solely to entomology.

Some idea of the actual work performed by LeConte may be obtained from a summary recently published, in which more than five hundred genera and nearly five thousand species are placed to his credit, three-fourths in each series remaining valid. It would, however, be unfair to estimate the value of his work from a mere numerical basis; others have done much more, but the systematic, analytical studies, spread over the vast field of Coleopterology, show the real power of his mind. While he was quick to perceive specific differences, he was not always happy in expressing them; in his analyses his reasoning was always clear without the slightest ambiguity.

That his work has been appreciated at home and abroad is shown by the number of societies which have elected him to membership. Diplomas from fifteen American and seventeen European societies may be seen in his portfolio. Prominent among them are the diplomas of honorary membership in the entomological societies of London, France, Berlin, Brussels and Stettin, an honor rarely conferred and given only to the most worthy.

In 1874 LeConte was elected President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and his address on retiring, regarding the relation of the geographical distribution of Coleoptera to Paleontology, opened a new line of investigation, showing how a combination of the facts of two such dissimilar sciences might result in advantage to both.

He was one of the founders of the American Entomological Society, and at the time of his death its President; of our own Society he was a Vice-President, and has been a member nearly thirty-one years.

We all knew him as a cultured scholar, a refined gentleman, a genial companion, a true friend. To me he was more. For nearly twenty-five years our association has been of the most intimate nature. I sought his advice and instruction as a neophyte in entomology, finding a welcome which I had no reason to except. Our friendship ripened to an intimacy never shadowed by the slightest cloud. My last visit to him, two days before his fatal attack, will never be forgotten; bright, cheerful and much clearer in mind than he had been for weeks before, he seemed to have regained his mental and bodily strength, and gave me strong hopes that we might for some time enjoy his society. When called to his bedside two days after, the change from brilliant intellect to death-portending coma was almost too great to realize. His life closed painlessly, without a struggle. A few short hours sufficed to extinguish a bright light in science, and inflict on us an irreparable loss.

Dr. Horn testified to the scientific ability, activity and reputation of Dr. LeConte; and Mr. Fraley to his personal worth.

On motion of Mr. Eli K. Price, Dr. Horn was appointed to prepare an obituary notice of Dr. LeConte, and accepted the appointment.

Dr. Brinton reported his reception as delegate of the Society to the Congress of Americanists at Copenhagen, and described the proceedings.

Mr. Phillips, the other delegate, explained that he had been unable to attend the Congress.

General Thayer described the trial balloon which he is building, and explained the principles involved in the problem of aerial navigation. (See 301.)

Professor Cope described the geological formation and fossil wealth of the valleys and mountains of New Mexico, traversed by him during his recent explorations.

Pending nominations Nos. 985 to 1008 and new nominations Nos. 1009 and 1010 were read.

The minutes of the last meeting of the Board of Officers and members in Council were read.

The Committee of Five reported the following resolution, which was adopted:

*Resolved*, That hereafter at the stated elections for members of the Society, the presiding member shall appoint two tellers to open the ballot-boxes, and report to him the result of the poll.

On motion of Mr. Law, the following was adopted:

*Resolved*, That Dr. Brinton be authorized to translate and prepare for publication the Kakchiquil Grammar now in the archives of the Society, and that the same be published in the Proceedings in such type as the Secretary may deem best suited to the purpose.

Mr. Phillips noticed an ambiguity in Sec. 3, Chap. I, of the By-Laws, and Mr. Fraley recounted the traditional interpretation of it by the Society.

The meeting was then adjourned.