

MISCELLANEOUS.

JOSEPH LE CONTE.

(1823-1901.)

In the death of Prof. Joseph Le Conte on July 6th last, the American scientific world has lost one of its most conspicuous and interesting figures. In him there passed away a rare and ingenious inquirer of the olden type, which held the universality of Leibnitz and Thomas Young as their ideal, and never lost touch with the general movement of human thought to inhume itself in specialisation. His interests embraced all fields,—physics, geology, biology, the theory of evolution,



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philosophy, and scientific theology,—and his expositions and labors in each of these departments, while not epoch-making in their character, were all marked by originality and independence of thought; they stood quite apart from the common run of manufactured professional products, and were distinguished by a simplicity and lucidity of presentation that could not fail to assure them the success they have achieved. One need but glance, even now, years after their appearance, at his *Elements of Geology* and his work on *Sight* in the International Scientific Series, to appreciate the charm and scientific solidity of these books. His work on *Religion and Science* (1874), one of the first to consider that ancient conflict from a calm and un hysterical point of view, has become celebrated. Professor Le Conte's views on this subject are familiar to the readers of *The Open Court* and

The Monist, to which he several times contributed (*The Monist*, Vol. I., No. 3; Vol. V., No. 4; Vol. VI., No. 3. *The Open Court*, No. 191), and his views on the idea of God came again recently into prominence through Professor Royce's latest work. It was the ethical and religious side of science, in fact, that claimed his highest interest always, and it was his mastery of science that lent tone and author-

ity to his utterances on ethical questions, where the same opinions from smatterers would have been unlistened to.

In his religious development Prof. Joseph Le Conte started from the orthodox faith of traditional Christianity; but his views widened with the growth of his scientific knowledge. He wrote for *The Monist*, not merely for business reasons, but because he took a deep interest in its aims and methods. In a personal interview with the editor of *The Monist*, Joseph Le Conte frankly expressed his readiness to accept the monistic solution of the soul-problem, while to the God-idea he assented without reserve. Prof. Joseph Le Conte was a deeply religious man and as much a theologian as a geologist and botanist. His development is characteristic of the scientific type of men, and his life is a noble instance which, we are confident, is a prophetic symptom of the future.

Prof. Joseph Le Conte was born February 26, 1823, in Liberty County, Georgia. He was a purely American product, like his brother John Le Conte, like Joseph Henry and the late Professors Cope and Rowland. He came of a distinguished family, of French Huguenot descent, and also one of affluence. He was educated in Georgia, one of his teachers having been the celebrated American statesman, Alexander H. Stephens, and was graduated from Franklin College, in the University of Georgia, afterwards receiving a medical education in New York and studying in Cambridge under the great naturalist Agassiz.

Professor Le Conte has left us, in his memoir of his brother (1894) which we fortunately have at hand, a delightful account of his own boyhood days, which shows us an environment from which talent might well have sprung, and which we cannot refrain from quoting here at some length. It gives us a delightful insight, not only into the moral and educational atmosphere of a family from which several bright minds have come, but also into the more cheerful aspects of the patriarchal life of the South before the war, which was not always so bad as it is painted.

John Le Conte, of whom Joseph speaks in this memoir, was the first to notice and explain the beautiful phenomena of sensitive flames now so familiar to physicists, and to introduce by his discovery a new method of research which in the hands of Barrett, Tyndall, Koenig, and others has revolutionised the science of acoustics. Louis Le Conte, the father of John and Joseph Le Conte, was the elder brother of Major John Eatton Le Conte, a name also well known in the history of American science. He was born in 1782, was graduated at Columbia, and in 1810 took possession of the large Georgia plantation left him by his father.

Prof. Joseph Le Conte speaks as follows of his home and surroundings: "Liberty County was originally settled by a colony of English Puritans, who have left their strong impress on the character of the people of that county even to the present day. A more intelligent and moral community I have never seen. It received its name of Liberty in recognition of the fact that it was the first colony in Georgia to raise the flag of independence on the breaking out of the war of the Revolution, in 1776.

"Our father, Louis, lived on his plantation and devoted himself entirely to the care and management of his large property and to the passionate pursuit of science in nearly all departments, but especially in those of chemistry and botany, in both of which his knowledge was both extensive and accurate. The large attic of his plantation-house was fitted up as a chemical laboratory, in which he carried on researches daily. I well remember what a privilege it was to us boys to be per-

mitted sometimes to be present, and with what silent awe and tiptoe steps we, especially John, followed him about and watched these mysterious experiments.

"His devotion to botany was even, if possible, still more intense. A large area of several acres of enclosed premises was devoted to the maintenance of a botanical and floral garden, widely known at that time as one of the best in the United States, and often visited by botanists, both American and foreign. Far removed from any city (Savannah was near forty miles distant), this garden was used only for scientific study and refined enjoyment. It was the never-ceasing delight of the children. The tenderest memories cluster around it, especially about the image of our father in his daily walks there after breakfast, sipping his last cup of coffee, enjoying its beauty, planning improvements, and directing the labor of the old negro gardener, 'Daddy Dick.' It is, alas, in ruins now, but some of the grand camelia japonica trees, of which there were eight or ten, still remain. I said 'trees,' for in December, 1891, I visited the old place and measured some of these. The largest, a double white, measured fifty-four inches in girth, ten inches from the ground where the first branches came off. In bygone days I have seen at least one thousand pure white blossoms five inches in diameter and double to the center on it at once.

"To supply this garden he made many excursions, often with visiting botanists or collectors, sometimes lasting several days, and always returning laden with botanical treasures. As evidence of his keen perception of the true affinities of plants, it is noteworthy that although the Linnean system was at that time universally used, yet even at this early day he always spoke of the affinities of plants in terms of their natural orders.

"Nor was he neglectful of other departments of science. This was well shown in the composition of his large library of scientific books and periodicals. In fact, his love of nature was so spontaneous and passionate that it could not but extend in all directions. Mathematics, astronomy, physics, geology, and zoölogy alike engaged his attention. I remember well the intense enthusiasm with which he read Lyell's *Principles of Geology* when first published. I remember, too, his delight in working out the most complex mathematical puzzles; such, for example, as magic squares. The boys were all ardent gunners, but under his influence we never failed to observe carefully what we shot. Every new form of bird or beast was brought home in triumph to be determined in name and affinities by him.

"Nor was he wanting in kinds of culture other than scientific. His training in Latin, for example, was so thorough that he read it at sight almost as readily as English.

"It is easy to see from the above sketch that Louis Le Conte was one of a type of scholars now almost extinct. Such simple, disinterested love of truth for its own sake, such open-eyed, yet thoughtful, observation in all directions, such passionate love of nature, and all combined with such utter forgetfulness of self and absence of any ambition or vanity or reputation. Those who knew him best, but especially his brother, Major John Le Conte, affirmed that he made many important discoveries in both chemistry and botany, yet he never published a line, but freely gave away his new things in the latter science to his many correspondents in New York.

"Here, then, until his death, in 1838, he lived his simple, quiet life of intellectual culture and beneficent activity, administering the affairs of an estate with two hundred slaves with firmness and kindness, daily directing their labor, visiting the sick, and caring for the old. His medical knowledge was of inestimable value

to him now, not only on his own place, but to the poor of the surrounding country, who were unable to pay for medical service. His plantation was on the borders of the pine barrens of McIntosh County, inhabited only by a shiftless class of 'Pine Knockers.' For twenty miles about, in pure charity, he visited these people in their sickness; and in chronic cases even bringing their children to his own house, as the only hope of their recovery. In order to diminish their sense of dependence and to cultivate in them, if possible, a sense of self-respect he sometimes required of them in return some light work, as picking of cotton or gathering of corn. He was looked up to by these poor people as a being of another order from themselves.

"It is easy to imagine the passionate love, the reverence, approaching to fear and even to worship, with which he inspired his children. The effect of such a life and such a character on young John is simply inestimable. To the day of his death John looked back on his father with the greatest love and reverence and upon his influence as the greatest of all influences in forming his character; and, indeed, of all the children John most resembled his father.

"I have dwelt somewhat on the life and character of Louis Le Conte, not only because of its paramount influence on his children, especially John, but also because such a life and such a character ought not to go wholly unrecorded."

Such was the father as described in Joseph Le Conte's own words, and such the environment of two of the most prominent and lovable figures in the history of American science. They both put to splendid usury the talents entrusted them, and left an unostentatious yet distinct impress on American thought and education: John Le Conte was the "father of the University of California," which he was called to organise, and Joseph Le Conte was the second pillar and mainstay of that institution, in which from 1869 he held the professorship of Geology and Natural History, and an honorary professorship of Biology. Professor Le Conte remained active in his literary, educational, and scientific labors to the last, and died suddenly while on a geological excursion in the Yosemite Valley, at the age of seventy-eight.

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THE ENCYCLOPÆDIA BIBLICA.

A MONUMENT OF BIBLICAL SCHOLARSHIP.¹

Theology is frequently discredited, not only by progressive liberals but also by conservative believers, and placed in an unfavorable contrast to religion. Religion is frequently praised as the genuine article, while theology is blamed for all the evils that appear under certain circumstances to crop out from religion. This view is utterly unjustified and unjustifiable, and is based upon a radical misconception of the nature of theology. Actually, it is held only by those whose judgments are the product of their sentiments, and who allow themselves to be carried away by prejudices. The truth is that if theology were better known there would be fewer misconceptions of religion. If a man like Ingersoll had been familiar with modern

¹*Encyclopædia Biblica*. A Critical Dictionary of the Literary, Political, and Religious History, the Archæology, Geography, and Natural History of the Bible. Edited by the Rev. T. K. Cheyne, M. A., D. D., and J. Sutherland Black, M. A., LL. D. New York: The Macmillan Company. London: Adam and Charles Black. Vol. I., *A to D*, pages, xxviii, 572, 1899; Vol. II., *E to K*, pages, 772, 1901. Price, \$5.00 each.