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LOUIS POPE GRATACAP

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FOR forty-one years connected with the American Museum of Natural History, Louis Pope Gratacap was dean of its many curators. His sudden death, on December 19, 1917, found him still the active and valued head of the departments of mineralogy and conchology.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, November 1, 1850, his parents soon thereafter located at West Brighton, Staten Island, where until his death he lived in the family homestead with his elder brother, Thomas Benton Gratacap. Their father, John Louis Gratacap, was of French descent and their mother, Lucinda Benton, whose brother, Pope Benton, contributed to Louis' name, was of a well-known New York family of English ancestry.

Graduating from the College of the City of New York in 1869 with the degree of A.B., he received an A.M. from his alma mater eleven years later. In 1870 he studied at the General Theological Seminary for a year but soon gave up his plans for the ministry. His first position was with the National Park Bank, but even advancement failed to hold him in an uncongenial field. He accordingly studied at the School of Mines of Columbia University, from which he obtained the degree of Ph.B. in 1876. He then became chemist for a gas company, which took but part of his time and left him free to study, and join in the commencement of the American Museum with which he became formally associated in 1876. About 1886 the writer, then a boy student of minerals, first met Mr. Gratacap while visiting the Museum. At that time, he was assistant to R. P. Whitfield, of the department of geology, and the fossils required most of his attention. About 1890 Mr. Gratacap was made curator of mineralogy, to which later was added conchology, and his development of these collections then commenced.

The gift by J. Pierpont Morgan, of the Bement Collection and the Tiffany Gem Collection, and their incorporation with that of the Museum, made the collection in Mr. Gratacap's care one of the finest in existence. His skill in arrangement and his judg-

ment in the choice of display specimens enhanced the collection's beauty and its value to students. The extent of these collections required a great amount of labor in installation and cataloging, most of which was done by Mr. Gratacap himself. When to this was added the work on the large collection of shells one wonders how he could possibly have accomplished so much so well. Yet all was done correctly and expeditiously, for his knowledge was accurate, his work conscientious, his industry tireless.

That he made a study of museums and museum display is evidenced by four or five comprehensive articles on this subject written by him. Despite many calls upon his time he was courteous and helpful to all inquirers, were they school children or scientists, and no question, however simple or difficult, was ever inadequately answered. As he modestly refrained from any exhibition of knowledge, one had to probe in many directions to discover the surprising depth of his information.

Tho his work at the Musuem was prodigious and his daily journey from and to his home occupied more than three hours, his time while travelling and at home was spent in varied, tho mostly serious reading, study and writing, partly evidenced by his many and divers articles, pamphlets and books. He had no personal collections except of books; his fine library was as comprehensive as his broad knowledge.

The following partial bibliography will indicate his versatility. His theological books were his earliest, the third having been written years before it was published. "Philosophy of Ritual-Apologia pro Ritu," 1887; "The Analytics of a Belief in a Future Life," 1888; "The World as Intention," 1905; and "The World's Prayer," 1915. They show a religious spirit, wide reading and extensive knowledge of philosophy, theology as well as of natural science. Always a good citizen and believing it everyone's duty to further good government, he wrote "The Political Mission of Tammany Hall," 1892; "Protection a Reasonable Doctrine," 1892; "A Silver Catechism," 1894; "The Political Mission of Reform," 1895; and "Why the Democrats Must Go," 1914.

His "Geology of the City of New York," in the first edition of 1901 containing only 82 pages, is in its third edition of 1909 a valuable work of 232 pages. His "Popular Guide to Minerals," 1912, 330 pages, has also 74 photographic plates of notable specimens in the Bement Collection. The text is an example of the author's ability to present the salient features of a subject in a clear and often novel way.

Apparently as a diversion, for he took but little interest in their distribution, Mr. Gratacap wrote and published some books of fiction, among which were: "The Certainty of a Future Life in Mars," 1903; "A Woman of the Ice Age," 1906; "The Evacuation of England," 1908; and "The New Northland-Kröcker Land," 1915. All these were pseudo-scientific fiction, well exhibiting his general scientific knowledge. His "Mayor

of New York" and "Benjamin, the Jew" were novels, the latter with many passages of Hebrew, showing the author's care in details. His "Substance of Literature," 1913, shows the extent of his reading in other fields. Then came the great war, inspiring in 1915 the serious "Europe's Handicap—Tribe and Class," and in 1917 the last of his books to be published, a bit of fantastical fiction, "The End—How the Great War was Stopped."

Others in manuscript were awaiting publication, including one on cremation, and his last manuscript, a 10,000-word tribute to Abbé Haüy, written at high speed for the 175th anniversary celebration of that savant's birth.¹

With all his knowledge and study he was ever interested in everybody and everything. Always ready to help the humblest, beloved by all who knew him, cheering the discouraged, helping the sick and unfortunate often to his own inconvenience, devoting his time to folk who had no claim upon him, ready with a helping hand or good cheer to brighten his corner. His modesty made him reserved, but once intimate his friendship and enthusiasm knew no bounds. He could accommodate himself to any company, so that many never suspected the extent of his learning, the depths of which few dared to probe.

He was fond of music, especially of opera, and was a good pianist. The writer has often heard him play, handicapped by a piano of his ancestors. The theater also appealed to him from his youth, when as an amateur he played Hamlet, until his death. Indeed he was buried on the day he had planned taking his assistant to a matinee.

His modesty seldom permitted him to lecture, but the writer well remembers his lecture on his trip to Iceland, given at the American Museum. It was most polished, and his voice and delivery were charming. Perhaps he was at his best in his speeches to his C. C. N. Y. fellow-alumni. The writer was fortunate in hearing two and they were perfect gems of oratory. But he could seldom be urged into the limelight, for he belittled himself and, it often seemed, overrated others.

To have known Louis Pope Gratacap is to have been blessed with an example of one true to the highest ideals of duty and with unselfish devotion to the inspiration and encouragement of others. Unhandicapped by his modesty, his bachelordom, a generosity large for his income, and a devotion to his not easily accessible home, he would perhaps have shone even brighter.

Fond of travel, of people, of the quaint and the old, he enthused not only about distant things, but about his own old New York, its Greenwich Village, its St. John's Park and its old Trinity Churchyard where his body now rests, a stone's throw from that Broadway-Wall Street maelstrom of his beloved city.

¹ To be published in the Haüy celebration number of this magazine (June, 1918).