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LOUIS POPE GRATACAP 1850-1917

By GILMAN S. STANTON and GEORGE F. KUNZ

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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-

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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 Museum 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-Krocker 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. Unhampered 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 enthusiasm 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 mausoleum of his beloved city.

¹To be published in the Haüy celebration number of this magazine (June, 1918).
THE LOUIS P. GRATACAP MEMORIAL MEETING OF THE NEW YORK MINERALOGICAL CLUB.

Thus announced, the first meeting of the club for 1918 was held at the American Museum of Natural History on January 16. Dr. George F. Kunz, the President, was in the chair and 16 members and 17 guests present.

In the museum foyer adjoining the entrance to the meeting room a case had been provided in which was displayed a loan collection of books and pamphlets comprising most of those written and published by Mr. Gratacap during his active life.

When the meeting came to order the first part of the evening was devoted to a review of the life and work, and to personal reminiscences of the late L. P. Gratacap, who died suddenly on December 19, 1917. Mr. Gratacap and the President, Dr. Kunz, were among the associates who instituted the N. Y. Mineralogical Club in November, 1888, and organized it in June, 1887; Mr. Gratacap was at that time elected curator of its collections, an office he still held at the time of his death.

The President presented a detailed and extremely interesting resumé of the achievements of Mr. Gratacap, following which many of those present contributed expressions of regret at his demise and related interesting personal reminiscences of him.

Among the speakers were Mr. Gilman S. Stanton, Mr. Lazard Cahn, Mr. George E. Ashby, Mr. Frederick I. Allen, Mr. David J. Atkins, Mr. Albert Operti, and the Secretary. Mr. Stanton, who attended Mr. Gratacap's funeral services as a representative of the Club, stated that his remains were interred in Old Trinity churchyard, midway the south side of the church, in the heart of the business section of New York City. Messrs. E. O. Hovey, D. J. Atkins, L. Cahn, and H. S. Williams were among other members of the Club present.

WALLACE GOOLD LEVISON, Secretary
Biographical Sketch of the Late L. P. Gratacap

By GEORGE FREDERICK KUNZ
President of the New York Mineralogical Club

The late curator of mineralogy at the American Museum of Natural History, Mr. Louis Pope Gratacap, was born at Gowanus, Long Island, on November 1, 1851. He was of English and French ancestry. He received his education in the schools of New York City and was graduated in 1869 from the College of the City of New York. After a year in the General Theological Seminary, he entered the Columbia School of Mines, from which he was graduated in 1876. Thereafter he devoted his life to scientific and literary pursuits. He came to the American Museum of Natural History (then in the Arsenal Building in Central Park) in 1876, and was appointed assistant curator in mineralogy in 1880, curator of the department of mineralogy in 1909, and curator of Mollusca in the same year. He was a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and a member of the Society of Naturalists of New York City, as well as assistant general of the Natural Science Association of Staten Island.

In the death of Mr. Gratacap, on December 19, 1917, the American Museum of Natural History lost one of its most valued officers. Earnestly devoted to the study of mineralogy, Mr. Gratacap combined to an unusual degree a knowledge of minerals with a happy faculty of making this knowledge available for the benefit of the many students attracted to the Museum by its splendid collections. The work he accomplished in the cause of public education and in the diffusion of a love for mineralogy scarcely can be overestimated.

Mr. Gratacap was a pupil of Dr. Thomas Egleston—a pupil of Dr. Thomas Egleston—one of his most notable students. He was preeminently a "curator," and the mineralogical and precious stone collection of the American Museum of Natural History, as it stands today, is probably the best displayed collection in this country or abroad. It is remarkable for its absolute cleanliness and for its labeling, and for the evidence of great attention given to specimens. Minerals require care not necessary in the case of many other exhibits, for a single hard touch may mean the permanent injury of a specimen and may result in the displacement of a brittle crystal, such as of sulphur, cinnabar, or wulfenite. With the work that his position involved, much of his time was consumed, preventing him—as has been the case with many other museum curators—from devoting the time to original work that would have been possible if he had assumed charge of a well-established collection rather than of one in its formative period.

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In addition to his special activity as curator, Mr. Gratacap found time to write a great number of valuable papers for scientific journals on his favorite subject and to compose several books of sterling merit, in which may be noted a most happy blending of scientific accuracy and wise popularity. Examples of the latter are his "Geology of the City of New York" and "Popular Guide to Minerals." Among the many papers contributed to scientific journals, a group devoted to early museums in New York City, and to the rules to be followed in constructing and arranging a typical museum, is especially worthy of attention as embodying the study and experience of one who had large practical knowledge of this subject.

In his "Formative Museum Period," Mr. Gratacap reminds us that "scientific activity developed more slowly and was less encouraged in New York in the earlier years of this [last] century than in its neighboring rival cities, Boston and Philadelphia." This he attributes, reasonably enough, to the predominant New York interest in mercantile pursuits. In the decade prior to the establishment of the American Museum of Natural History, two societies, the New York Academy of Sciences (founded in 1817 and since 1876 called the Lyceum) and the Torrey Botanical Club (1870), "were the guardians and shrines of the scientific life of the city."

There are very many articles by Mr. Gratacap treating ably a variety of themes. In the Museum Guide Leaflet, he passes in review the principal donations of minerals, the Clarence S. Bement collection, which constituted the nucleus of the Museum's mineralogical display, and the Spang collection acquired in 1891. An interesting paper is that on the singular class of clay stones and concretions which occur in clay beds of recent or Quaternary age. Devoted to a study of certain aspects of plant life, is a paper relating experiments on plants with solutions of hydrochloric, nitric, sulphuric, and carabolic acids. Certain fossils and traces of extinct animals in the Triassic rocks at Weehawken, New Jersey, furnish material for another paper. An interesting study of a very restricted area is that treating of the flora and fauna of Central Park. The important question of the "zoic maxima" of fossils forms the subject of a paper in which the irregular distribution of fossil remains in the successive strata of fossiliferous rocks is considered to depend upon causes still in operation today.

In his "Paleontological Speculations" Mr. Gratacap recognizes the "valuable results secured by surveys like that of New York in the search for those variations whose accumulated force ushers in new forms in the life series, and by whose action on the organism as a whole a kinetic influence is established in a new direction." A more special study in his favorite field of mineralogy is that of a splendid calcite from Joplin, Missouri. The fascinating aspects of faraway Iceland in a geographical and mineralogical direction are well presented in an article "In and Around Iceland," the minerals being specially treated in another paper which gives interesting details regarding the calcite of Iceland, the famous "Iceland spar."

Endowed with an analytical mind, and having a wide scientific culture, Mr. Gratacap was a prolific writer. In addition to his great amount of published material he has left a considerable number of unpublished manuscripts.

As a slight illustration of the high degree of appreciation accorded to his character and achievements by those who long knew him, we add here a few items and extracts from letters recently sent to the writer.

Dr. Robert Abbe, who was a member of the City College class following, states that Mr. Gratacap's classmates were most deeply impressed by his oratorical abilities. Not only his eloquence, but his deep, resonant, and attractive voice compelled attention. He had a very distinguished manner, especially
noticeable in an undergraduate; and he was admired and loved both by the members of his own class and those of the class below him. One could not fail to be impressed with his seriousness of purpose.

Director Charles A. Colton, of the Newark Technical School, writes that his acquaintance with Mr. Gratacap dates back to the latter's student days in the School of Mines, when it was his privilege to be his teacher in crystallography, blowpipe analysis, and mineralogy. He was always a most careful student, and "the surprise and pleasure on his face the first time he obtained a silver button in blowpipe analysis still lingers in my memory. . . . His trip to Iceland was a never ending source of pleasure to him, and he would often entertain his friends with reminiscences, in that pleasing modest way so characteristic of him."

The following testimony of Mr. Gratacap's classmate and best friend, Mr. George C. Lay, serves to explain the stimulating influence he exerted upon those who came in contact with him, either as students of mineralogy or in social and friendly intercourse: "Always of studious habits, wide reading and much originality, he was not only a prolific writer on scientific subjects, but was also the author of several novels. Very early in life he began a diary in which he recorded his travels and the incidents of his life with vivid and rich description. This grew to many volumes. Possessed of an enthusiastic, buoyant temperament, which in spite of all the disappointments and cares of life made him ever cheerful and optimistic, he never lost his intense interest in the struggles of suffering humanity. He was remarkable in his democratic habits, always appearing to put himself on an equality with those who associated with him, however humble, without loss of dignity, and his benefactions and his ever ready sympathy, so characteristic of his kind and genial soul, will long be remembered. He was gifted with a high sense of humor and as a conversationalist he was almost unrivaled. No one could listen to him without imbibing fresh and charming impressions of life and without learning something of interest, which he drew so readily from his stores of learning and research. His modesty, and in the latter years his seclusion in his home life, prevented him from achieving phenomenal success as a lecturer, as would otherwise have been the case; for, gifted with a marvelous vocabulary and flow of speech, he fascinated his auditors by his voice and manner, by his wonderful charm and originality of thought."

One who knew Mr. Gratacap as early as his college years, Mr. Marcus Benjamin of Washington, D. C., considers him to have been an unusually able man, and gifted with great versatility. He says: "He was very modest and even diffident, and it may be that his personality prevented a greater appreciation of his real worth. As I look back over the almost half century since I first met him, I cannot but yield to him all honor and praise for his achievements."

Mr. Julius Hyman, another old friend and fellow student at City College, says of him: "Louis P. Gratacap was a wonderful man. To a superior intellectual ability he had added the power and charm of a wide cultural development. And yet withal he remained a man—a simple human who liked humans and liked to be with them. . . . By instinct and habit he was a gentle-man. A noble courtesy informed all his actions. . . . Endowed beyond the average with natural gifts, he was modest and retiring to the point of diffidence. . . . He had a discerning mind and ever kept his sense of proportion. He despised sham and pretense. He paid homage to merit. In his analysis of leaders of men, in his books on public affairs, he hastened to point out the good in them, and to emphasize the constructive side of their policies. . . . He was a great American, and he loved America greatly. He was for America first, last, and all the time—that America that was to prove the world's leaven. For him America was the justification of history. It was the leavening that would bring salvation
to the world. He used to say to me, 'Hyman, America is the greatest experiment in democracy the world has ever seen. Ultimately the world must come around to us. If we go, then the world goes.' . . .

"Louis P. Gratacap was an optimist. He was perennially young. He had life-zest. He lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow—and loved to describe it in felicitous phrase. He was always enthusiastic—never downcast; his was the Greek's *entheos*, the 'god within.' . . . He was of fine humor, at times almost boyish in its quest. Goldberg's cartoons, with their ingenious grotesqueries, would stir his risibilities much. He had a hearty infectious laugh. He enjoyed a joke and could tell a funny story. And he did love contemporaneous life—the life of our cosmopolitan New York. Of original native stock, he met the more recent Americans with a discerning eye and a mind of understanding. 'Where others saw but a motley crowd, he saw the soul of man behind it.' In old Trinity's churchyard, on that gentle southern slope, just where the daily flood tide of Broadway's bustling business men, clerks, and jetsam swirls into that swift current of bankers and brokers that comes rushing out of Wall Street's commercial cañon, in the very heart of that old New York he loved so dearly, a true *civis Novi Eboraci*, he now lies in peaceful rest. . . . 'His life was gentle, and the elements so mixed in him, that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, "This was a man."'"

In a paper on Mr. Gratacap, read before the Staten Island Association of Arts and Sciences, Mr. William T. Davis said:

"The versatility of the man, as his bibliography will show when published, was quite remarkable. As a lecturer he had few equals, and his many ideas were not only presented entertainingly, but also through the medium of a remarkable vocabulary. It is related that ex-Governor Benjamin B. Odell, a guest at an alumni dinner, after listening to Mr. Gratacap, turned to the president of the occasion and remarked: 'That man a cold scientist? Why, if he went into public life, he would class with orators like Joseph Choate and Horace Porter.' But Mr. Gratacap did not care to go into public life; he was a student, and thought more of the quiet of his home, where after the death of their parents, he and his brother Thomas lived alone, except for the servant. He lived only for his work and for his friends. Very many can testify to his kindly acts both in financial and other aid."
The New York Mineralogical Club

The New York Mineralogical Club was organized in October, 1886, but it was not until the eighth meeting that officers were elected. Those then chosen were George F. Kunz, Secretary; B. B. Chamberlin, Treasurer; R. P. Whitfield and L. P. Gratacap, Curators. For several years there was no President, the host of the evening filling that office for the occasion, since the meetings were held at private houses.

The object of the Club is to develop and maintain an interest in Mineralogy, especially in the minerals and rocks of Manhattan Island, New York City, through collecting and the study and comparison of existing collections. The principal series in existence at the time of the organization of the Club was that of the late Benjamin B. Chamberlin, who had devoted more than twenty years to the study and to the collection of minerals on Manhattan Island. After the death of Mr. Chamberlin this collection was acquired by the Club, and it is now permanently deposited in the American Museum of Natural History. With this has been deposited the George F. Kunz Collection and the James G. Manchester Collection besides many gifts to and purchases by the Club, the whole forming a nearly complete representation of Manhattan Island minerals, which is now on exhibition in the Morgan Hall of Mineralogy.

The Club meets once a month from October to May, at the American Museum of Natural History, for the consideration of papers upon mineralogical topics. Summer meetings in the shape of field excursions are made from time to time to nearby points of interest to the collector. Persons interested in mineralogy are invited to correspond with the Secretary regarding membership in the Club. The Club is an affiliated society of the New York Academy of Sciences.

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