

THE FORERUNNER OF PASTEUR.

On the 8th of January, 1894, the University of Louvain lost one of her most distinguished sons, and the world of science was called upon to mourn one of its brightest ornaments. On that day the illustrious zoologist and paleontologist, Pierre Joseph Van Beneden, laid down the burden of life at the ripe old age of eighty-five, leaving behind him a record that even the greatest of the world's scientists might envy.

To say that Louvain has lost in Van Beneden one of her most distinguished sons is saying much. In the course of the five hundred years of her existence during all of which period she was one of the great beacon lights of Europe—she has seen in her lecture halls many who now occupy conspicuous positions in the temple of fame. It were, indeed, a difficult matter to recount all her triumphs, or enumerate the long list of those who have fondly saluted her as *Alma Mater*, and who, either as students or as professors, have added unfading lustre to her escutcheon, and contributed, in many ways, to make her name glorious among the great universities of the world. Here it was that Justus Lipsius, the noted humanist, and the immortal commentator of Seneca and Tacitus, studied and taught; here it was that Bellarmine, the prince of polemical theologians, lectured to delighted audiences; here it was that Vives, who, with Erasmus and Budeus, constituted the triumvirate of the republic of letters of the sixteenth century, lectured on polite literature; and here it was that Adrien van Roomen—*Adrianus Romanus*—one of the greatest mathematicians of his age, while professor of mathematics, invented modern or symbolical algebra. It was here that Van Helmont, the illustrious chemist, the discoverer of the third kind of matter—gas—a word invented by him—sought knowledge; it was here that Mercator, the first one to make maps and charts by a projection of the surface of the earth in *plano* completed his studies, and prepared himself for the work in which he subsequently won such renown; it was here, too, that Jean Pierre Minkellers made use of coal gas to light his lecture rooms full eight years before it was introduced in Cornwall by Murdoch, its reputed inventor. Here, where, for five centuries, art, science, and literature flourished; where the most distinguished professors of Europe lectured; where there were as many as 6,000 students at one time; where from the year of its foundation in 1429 until the present day, Louvain has kept pace with the great Universities of Paris, Oxford, Heidelberg, Vienna, Bologna and Rome—here it was, that Van Beneden, the latest of a long list of intellectual giants, won the admiration of his thousands of pupils, and the plaudits of the world.

The future professor of science made his humanities in the archiepiscopal college of Mechlin. Here he met, among his professors, the distinguished ecclesiastic who subsequently became rector of Louvain, and who signalized the beginning of his administration by giving his former pupil the chair of zoology and comparative anatomy, which he filled with such *eclat* for nearly sixty years.

After leaving college he entered in his native city the shop of an apothecary by the name of Stoffels. This gentleman, who subsequently became known to the world by the reflected light of his talented assistant, had a small collection of shells and minerals, which at once excited the interest of young Van Beneden. It was indeed, it may be said, the examination of this collection that gave him his taste for science, and determined his future career. It inspired him with a love of Nature, and from that time forth we find him devoting all his leisure mo-

ments to an enthusiastic study of the manifold forms of the organic world.

At this period of his life, however, his country was in a very unsettled condition, and circumstances were anything but favorable to the prosecution of serious studies of any kind. His country was engaged in a sanguinary war with Holland, and Van Beneden felt that he owed it to the land of his birth to take up arms in her defence. But even as a soldier, he did not forget his love for Nature and her marvels. "I always remember," he tells us himself, "that while fighting under the walls of Antwerp, that I have more than once surprised myself with a fossil shell in one hand, and a cartridge in the other."

Van Beneden's great work was the disproof of the theory, which had obtained since Aristotle, that certain forms of life are of spontaneous existence. The proof that there is no life without previous life was the longest step in the direction of the study of microscopic existence.

Until the conclusion of the researches by Van Beneden on entozoa, and of those by Pasteur on microbes, medicine was at best but an art based on empiricism. Now, thanks to the marvellous discoveries of these investigators, medicine, as well as surgery, is a science; and the physician and surgeon, instead of working in the dark as hitherto, and fighting against invisible foes, whose very existence was formerly ignored, are now able to accomplish results and effects cures which before were impossible. Diseases, that a few decades ago created such havoc among the flocks and herds of the husbandman, and exacted such heavy tributes from afflicted humanity, are now put within the power of the curative art, and the plague, far from exciting the horror it formerly caused, is no longer more a source of danger than any other undesirable visitant which can be checked or put under control. And in the bright galaxy of men of science, two luminaries will ever be conspicuous, two names will always be pronounced with benediction by a grateful race, and these are the names of Van Beneden and Pasteur.

Like Kepler, Newton, Linnæus, Louis Agassiz, Leverrier, and others in the fore-front of the world's great men of science, Van Beneden was a man of deep religious convictions, and real, unaffected piety. He loved to see the handiwork of God in the visible world, and to trace the operations of His providence in the development and conservation of His creatures. He was born and raised a Roman Catholic, and to the day of his death he continued a devoted and consistent member of the faith of his fathers.—*Rev. J. A. Zahm, C.S.C. in the Rosary.*



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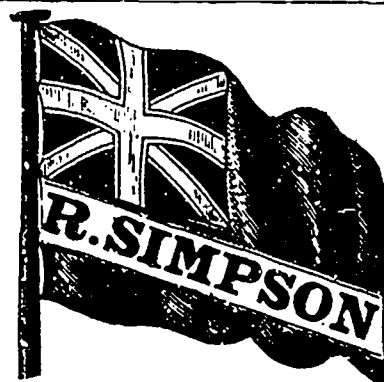
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