

At the University

Although Charles C. Nutting became assistant professor of zoology in 1888, and full professor of systematic zoology the following year, he retained his position as curator of the museum until 1926, the year before he died. Under his management the collection of biological specimens expanded rapidly and took systematic form. In 1886 W. T. Hornaday donated a collection which included about 125 rare birds, Nutting added his own collection of about eight hundred bird skins, and Dr. Asa Horr of Dubuque gave the museum two hundred more bird specimens. The young curator asked for twenty dollars "for the purchase of Taxidermists tools and material for preserving and mounting the specimens which are now coming in almost daily."

"Thanks to Prof. Nutting's endeavors," commented the *Vidette Reporter* on September 26, 1886, "the Museum has lately received an Educational Series of Invertebrates, consisting of 125 species, from the U. S. Fish Commission. Prof. Nutting is sending out circulars to our Alumni, asking their cooperation in securing specimens for our Museum. We hope that he will meet with a

hearty response. He is now engaged in labeling the specimens we now have."

In October, 1892, he wrote in desperation to the Board of Regents that about a hundred boxes of specimens, piled in the basement and attic of the natural science building, could not be examined and displayed until more room was provided. He proposed that the attic be completely floored and two ventilating skylights be placed in the roof at once. Without proper housing the valuable material could "be of no use whatever," he declared.

Professor Nutting had a great ideal. A museum, a *complete* museum, was the center of it. And around the museum he wanted to build a great zoology department. His expeditions, to a large extent, were for the purpose of collecting specimens that students might examine and learn about nature from actual observation. In his "study" museum would be a collection of animals so complete and so arranged that it would illustrate the evolutionary progress of life, in order that students could see that progress graphically, vividly illustrated. And he wanted to house it in a strong, fireproof, beautiful building.

Toward the turn of the century a new building program was inaugurated to keep pace with the growth of the student body. After the liberal arts

building (Schaeffer Hall) was finished, the science faculty urged that adequate quarters be provided for their departments in preference to a proposed assembly and gymnasium hall. Their recommendations prevailed and in 1904 work began on the natural science building (Macbride Hall) on the site of the old science building which was moved to its present location across the street. Classes and other activities in the large three-story brick building were uninterrupted during the process. When the new science building was completed in 1908 the library and the zoology department with its museum were installed. Geology and botany stayed in the old science hall.

Professor Nutting seems to have fought against the intrusion of the library and the assembly hall, but, as a man with the interests of the University at heart, he gave in. He was frequently a member of the library committee, and he knew the situation from both sides. The temporary character of the arrangements seemed to justify them, even though many of his museum showcases had to go into the corridors. He worked hard over the plans, for he wanted this to be a beautiful building with a museum in the center. He planned it so that his ideal might eventually be realized — when the library and the auditorium were gone at last. The exterior decorations of the building —

animal heads, turtles, fish, leaves — all refer to natural science objects.

The library has been a guest ever since. It grew from the central room to the basement and up into the ends of the building, getting a stronger and stronger hold on the building with its book-stack tentacles. Nor was a new auditorium built. With the growth of the department of zoology, much crowding resulted.

And before Professor Nutting died, he saw his beautiful ideal reduced quite to ashes. The museum had ceased to be an instrument for study, and was divorced from the jurisdiction of the zoology department. He was still alive when the department made plans to move completely out of the natural science building into the laboratory building vacated by the medical college in 1926.

In matters relating to the development of his department of zoology, Professor Nutting brooked no frustration. He believed in the importance of his subject and the necessity of larger appropriations for zoology and for his museum. In the administration of his department, he was a skillful politician, getting his own way, usually, without fireworks. He was cautious, preferring to build slowly and solidly. He wanted to be shown a reason for changing, and he insisted on judging the reason.

For himself he accumulated very little property, though he was thrifty in many small things, investing all he had in travel for himself and his family. On his expeditions for the University, he usually paid all his own expenses as did the other members of the party. Faculty members, however, received their regular salaries during the time they were on expedition, because they were working for the University by collecting specimens to enlarge the museum and publicizing the school in the scientific world by their explorations. The University usually appropriated the necessary sums for containers, preservatives, and shipping charges on specimens, but very little more. And the value of the collections netted by the museum was judged far in excess of the cost.

A man of strong convictions, Professor Nutting was prepared to fight for what he *knew* to be right. When the faculty decided the University's policies by majority vote (to an extent unknown now), he was utterly fearless and outspoken — even opposing the president, when that seemed necessary, with all his energy. Nor was he afraid of antagonizing the whole world if in that manner he thought he could accomplish a desirable purpose. His sincerity was never questioned. He was respected for it, and no one seems to have been appointed on more committees than he.

For many years he led a faction of standpatters who resisted the introduction of commercial subjects into the curriculum and the reduction of the classical requirements for a Bachelor of Arts degree. The University, he felt, was not intended to teach people how to make a living, but how to live. It should raise its standards and weed out the unfit according to the Darwinian doctrine of survival of the fittest.

Organic evolution was one of his major interests. He was ready to support Charles Darwin and his theories against all comers. "By tongue and pen he would rush to the defense of this master", testified his son Willis. "It was a delicate matter, in which no opposition could be brooked, and although I very early developed a strong antipathy for Mr. Darwin and spent a lot of time picking flaws in his theory, I don't believe that I dared to argue with my father on that point more than once or twice, and then I felt myself more or less tongue-tied, not overcome by arguments, but silenced by thunderbolts."

When Professor Nutting fought he gave no quarter and asked none. Before he struck, he organized his attack carefully, then waited for the most effective moment. And when it came, he rose to his feet and said his mind with the force of a thunderbolt. There was no hedging on the is-

sue, no ambiguity, no finesse except that involved in lighting the fuse to his bomb at the right moment.

As a speaker he was interesting and convincing rather than a polished orator. His enthusiasm, his fund of personal anecdotes that fitted every situation, and the dramatic sense that told him when to put in a bit of humor made him popular. After returning from each of his expeditions, he gave one or more public lectures, frequently illustrated with lantern slides, and the room was always packed. In the fall after the Fiji-New Zealand Expedition he filled the natural science auditorium one night a week for five successive weeks. His enunciation was that of the average midwesterner, his gestures were those of a classroom instructor exhibiting the objects on his desk, and his voice a little high in register with a tendency toward huskiness. But he was always interesting.

Many members of the faculty gave extension lectures. But it seems correct to assert that Professor Nutting's were among the most popular. He loved to impart information while people listened. Never boring, he could make neat, compact speeches that just fitted the forty-five minutes usually allowed. And the public liked his stories and the feeling of getting a little new knowledge.

Professor Nutting was in his forty-first year at the University of Iowa when he died. He was growing rather old and tired. Besides, he felt that the outlook of science was changing, growing away from him. In 1924, he told President Jessup that at the end of two more years he would be ready to resign as head of the department of zoology and curator of the museum. In accordance with this plan he partially retired to a professorship with a few classes and his research.

On Sunday, January 23, 1927, he died at his home in Iowa City, over sixty-eight years old. He is remembered as one of the "great triumvirate". According to Robert B. Wylie, head of the botany department and Nutting's cabinmate on the Fiji-New Zealand Expedition in 1922, Professors Calvin, Macbride, and Nutting, "long associated in the science work of our university, gave it such strength, character, and dignity that their names were almost synonymous with that of their university through a long period of years. While at present no fewer than twenty well-trained men teach in these three departments [geology, botany, zoology], they together make relatively less impression upon the State of Iowa as a whole than did these three men in their day."

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