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The Man

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The Man

To say that Charles C. Nutting was a scientist is to tell only half the truth. There were two quite definitely marked sides to his personality — a sociable, lovable, tolerant, expansive side and a serious, fighting, business-like, smashing one. He had a great capacity for appreciation and affection, and when he spoke of any member of his family, his face was usually lit by a big smile. He disliked being separated from them, and on most of his expeditions one or more of them went along.

His first wife died in 1891, a few days after the birth of Elizabeth, his only daughter. To take care of the baby and keep him from being too lonely, his sister Caroline came to live with him. Upon his little girl he showered affection and sympathetic understanding, respecting her wishes and cultivating her judgment. One day, while they were on a long walk, he asked his six-year-old daughter if she didn't think Eloise Willis was a very lovely lady. Elizabeth confirmed her father's opinion. He then suggested that she ask Miss Willis if she would be willing to be her new mother. Thus tactfully he won the consent of both ladies to his second marriage. Eloise Willis

Nutting became the mother of his sons, Willis and Charles.

Though he expected unquestioning obedience from his children he was generous with them. When Elizabeth was quarantined for scarlet fever he came every day to her window and brought a new toy. But he was never indulgent in "important" matters. He could punish severely. Willis remembers that he did not scold, but "his judgments were as inflexible as fate itself." If he found that he had punished unjustly he frankly admitted his mistake and apologized.

Next to his love for his family, Charles Nutting loved nature. He seems to have become a naturalist chiefly because of this. His love of nature was very nearly a religion, yet he did not say, as did Professor Macbride, that he could see God in everything. He seems to have loved nature for itself.

Of the ocean he was extravagantly fond. If he had been born on the seacoast, he might have been a sailor. His son, Charles, says, "I have seen him spend hours just looking at the sea." Seasickness never bothered him, and his delight in teasing less fortunate people was one of his chief social shortcomings. As he grew older he became quite considerate, but he found it hard to sympathize with such weakness.

Most people remember him in the last years of his life as having a pink, round, commanding head and piercing blue eyes that twinkled quizzically under heavy lids. His head was rather like that of H. G. Wells; with whiter, thinner hair in his later years, but with the same thick, short-cropped mustache, the same domed forehead, the same forceful and intelligent expression. His complexion was florid — had been all his life — with a pink-and-white transparency that many girls are said to have envied. His heavy cheeks were cross-hatched with innumerable lines.

Professor Nutting was a rather Napoleonic little man — physically, that is, and at a distance. At close range one forgot his size, noted the strength of his personality instead. Nor did one much notice his rather shabby clothing: he never cared much about his appearance. Habitually he wore dark suits that were seldom pressed, and ties that no one can recall the color of, and round-toed shoes that were comfortable.

His short legs accounted, to some extent, for his size. He sat down tall enough, but he stood up short. His hands and feet were small, and he walked the mile between his office in what is now Macbride Hall and his home at 922 East Washington Street with short jerky steps.

When studying, he would perch his pince-nez

glasses insecurely on his nose and settle down to work. In conversation he was continually playing with them, putting them on, taking them off, gesturing with them unconsciously while he expanded humorously on one of his travel yarns. He had a hearty and pleasant voice that everyone recalls. It was rather high, slightly husky, and youthfully enthusiastic.

Professor Nutting had a passion for orderliness that carried through all his work and even to his daily life. No doubt the volume, scope, and thoroughness of his scientific contributions, his expeditions, his semi-popular writings can be explained only in relation to his love for order, his attention to detail. His desks, both at the University and at home, were always piled high with his projects, but he insisted that he knew exactly where everything was and discouraged everyone from disturbing the mass of books, papers, and notes.

He lived strictly according to rule. All his classes he arranged to have come in the morning, and each afternoon he secluded himself for two or three hours in his office, locked the door, and dug into his special work. He allowed no one to disturb him, even refused to have a telephone installed. Then, at exactly 4:30 o'clock, he went to play billiards.

Club life was probably his most enjoyed relax-

ation. He loved aggressive, friendly argument, and was never slow to give vigorous expression to his own opinions and defend them valiantly. He liked crowds, and he liked to dominate them, be the center of them. He liked to lead group singing, to entertain incessantly with stories almost too good to be true, to tell of the famous people he had met, and especially to narrate his varied travel experiences. He told them all with twinkling eyes and infectious, robust humor. Nor was he afraid to sing little songs that he made up on the spur of the moment. At banquets he was the sort of after-dinner speaker that justified all others. This ability to entertain he carried over into his popular science lectures (always well attended by the public), into his classrooms, and even into his Sunday school teaching at the Presbyterian Church.

Among the social organizations to which he belonged were the Triangle Club, where he went every Saturday night and six afternoons a week, the Know Nothing Club, made up of faculty members and their wives who meet twice a month on Sunday evening, the Left Over Club, and one named merely "The Clan". He was the wit and the life of them all. But, though he loved society, he cared nothing for social prestige. He cordially disliked pompous stiff-necked people. He himself

was honest, blunt, democratic, and always more hearty than effusive.

Besides smoking cigars and telling stories, billiards was Professor Nutting's favorite pastime. Regularly at 4:30 o'clock six afternoons a week until the death of Judge Samuel Hayes, the two men met for a game of billiards in the rooms of the Triangle Club. There the same table and cues were always reserved for them, and they played silently, only an occasional "Pshaw!" expressive of the deepest disgust coming now and then from the judge. And each time the ejaculation came, it struck Professor Nutting with such amusement that he could scarcely conceal it. So regularly did they meet to play together, and so deep was their friendship, that when Professor Nutting had to go out of town he would mail a card of apology in advance.

Though he was courteous and considerate of others, he was at heart a "rugged individualist" who believed in the ruthless theory of natural selection, the survival of the fittest. It was his creed. Socialistic utopias, according to his reasoning, could not succeed because there would be no economic competition, hence no incentive to work. He himself worked hard, and he expected hard work of his associates. Though he trained many Doctors of Philosophy, he was too busy to acquire

that degree himself. Of the easy-going, communistic Fijians, who had been relegated to a position of inferiority by the aggressive Hindus who had invaded their islands, he wrote, "The lesson, then, is that communism, although an alluring ideal, is but an iridescent dream doomed by an inexorable natural law to failure when brought into competition with a people inured to the struggle for existence by which progress is alone possible from the biological point of view."

In spite of this rigorous philosophy, he was an optimist. He did not believe in complaining. Though afflicted with three major ailments he always remained cheerful. While he was still a young man he found himself unable to pass an insurance examination. "Rapid heart," the doctor told him, "but no immediate danger."

About 1907 he first noticed a swelling on the right side of his neck, and in a few years he had a goitre of conspicuous proportions. He took to wearing high collars, claimed it did not bother him, and refused to let it curtail his social or scientific activities. In 1919, about seven and one-half years before his death, he decided to have it removed. The operation, under the circumstances, was considered a dangerous one. It was successful, however, and he came back from the Mayo clinic very happy with the result.

Glaucoma, an ailment for which there is no known cure, assailed his eyes; and for at least fifteen years he had to go to a doctor regularly for treatment, yet few people knew of this trouble. Glaucoma is a disease in which the fluid content of the eyeball increases and the pressure within tends to deaden the optic nerve. It made his work more difficult during the last years.

In the end it was his heart that failed.

The walls of his study at home were lined with books. Near his desk was a revolving bookcase. In one side of it were the complete works of Charles Darwin, and in the other the complete works of Mark Twain.

WILSON L. TAYLOR