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CONTENTS:

Muttkowski—George Williams Peckham, M.D., LL.D.....145

George Williams Peckham, M.D., LL.D.

1845–1814.

(Portrait, Plate VI.)

Fährt der Blitz aus Wolkenmitte,
Schlägt er wohl die stärkste Eiche;
Tritt der Tod in unsre Mitte,
Schlägt den Stärksten er zur Fische

—*Musikantenfahrt.*

On January 10, 1914, Milwaukee's circle of nature students lost one of its most prominent members through death. Latent heart trouble, with an attack of angina pectoris as the immediate factor, ended the life of Dr. George Williams Peckham, patriot, educator, scholar and scientist.

Dr. Peckham was born in Albany, New York, on March 23, 1845. In 1853 he came to Milwaukee, where he attended the public schools and proved himself both mentally and physically

a leader of men. At the outbreak of the Civil War he wished to join the Union ranks, but it was not till 1863 that parental consent was obtained. Within a month after his enlistment he was made a sergeant, and later fought with such personal valor in an artillery regiment, that he was made a first lieutenant at the age of 19 and placed in charge of a battery.

After the war he went to Antioch College, in Ohio, and later to the Law School in Albany, New York, where he was admitted to the bar. In 1870 he enrolled in the medical course, at Ann Arbor, Michigan, being awarded the degree of Doctor of Medicine in 1872.

Fitted for both the professions of law and medicine, Dr. Peckham decided to follow neither of the two, but took up the teaching of Biology in the East Division High School, then the only one in Milwaukee.

In 1880 he married Elizabeth Gifford; and from that period date practically all of Dr. Peckham's researches, most of them collaborations with his devoted wife. Three children, now living, proved the blessing of their union.

About 1888 Dr. Peckham was appointed principal of the high school in which he taught. Four years later, in 1891, he was made Superintendent of Public Instruction, which office he held till 1897, when he accepted the office of Director of the Milwaukee Public Library, where he remained till his retirement, in 1910.

In dealing with the work of Dr. Peckham, we cannot separate therefrom the work of his wife and collaborator. From the time of their marriage these two are inseparably linked in all phases of their work, in their researches, in their travels, in their very thoughts. Scientifically, their researches followed two definite lines each, in a way, logically the outcome of the other, that of psychology of spiders and wasps, and that of taxonomy of spiders.

In taxonomy the Peckhams dwelt exclusively with the Attidae-group of spiders; the first of their many papers on the subject appeared early in the eighties and was followed by annual or biennial contributions of various length, the chief

of which appeared in the *Proceedings*, the *Occasional Papers* and the *Bulletin of the Wisconsin Natural History Society*, and in the *Transactions of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters*.

The earliest contribution on what may be broadly termed "Animal Psychology" appeared about 1883, in the *Journal of Morphology*—a brief treatise on mental powers of spiders. This was followed by several minor contributions in the publications of the Wisconsin Natural History Society, on both wasps and spiders, a larger treatise on Sexual Selection and Protective Resemblance (1890), and finally, by the epoch-making work, "On the Instincts and Habits of Solitary Wasps." *Bulletin No. 2, Wisconsin Geological Survey*, pp. 4 & 245, 14 pls., 1898.

It is upon this last-named work that the Peckhams' chief claim to fame rests. Based upon years of difficult and laborious observations, it bore at once the impress of scientist, scholar and poet; the scientist analyzed, the scholar synthesized, and the poet idealized. Just as the "Origin of Species" has its fixed place as a classic of Biological Science, so the Peckhams' "Habits of Solitary Wasps" bids fair to become a classic of, at least, the psychological phase of animal study.

Before this, scientific recognition had come to Dr. Peckham in the form of the presidency of the Wisconsin Natural History Society and of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters; in 1876, the University of Wisconsin honored him with the degree of Doctor of Laws.

The trait of "nature student" dominated in Dr. Peckham's life. To this he sacrificed the careers of lawyer and physician; to this he sacrificed his vacations and what leisure hours he could spare from his arduous duties. Dr. Peckham, as the writer knew him, was a small man, somewhat bent with age, rheumatism and the close application necessitated by his myopia. The scholarly stoop, the silvery white hair, and the moderate gait impressed everyone as attributes of a man who has made his mark on the world. On public or semi-public occasions the thoroughness and breadth of Dr. Peckham's infor-

mation was surprising, even as the modesty and moderation with which it was put forth won him innumerable friends. Amiable, moderate, modest, kindly and scholarly,—in these words his personality is best described.

There is one aspect of his work which is probably very little known, or if known, appreciated. This is the literary aspect of his work. "For literary attainment among modern writers I look to Dr. Peckham," a well-known professor of English has said to the writer. "For clearness, elegance and simplicity of style, combined with lucidity and aptness of diction, Dr. Peckham merits a place among the best of modern literary men, and certainly one of the very best among scientific men."

With his retirement, in 1910, Dr. Peckham practically ceased his scientific labors. It was then his intention, as stated repeatedly to the writer, to devote all of his time to his favorite studies, but the revolutions in Mexico interfered with his planned investigations in that country, and his severe rheumatism would not permit much outdoor work at Milwaukee. The year 1910 therefore practically marks the close of Dr. Peckham's career as educator and scientist.

As stated on a former occasion (*Ent. News*, 22, p. 460, 1911) Dr. Peckham's types have been deposited chiefly in the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Cambridge, while the remainder of his spider collections and the greater part of his library on spiders have been donated to the Milwaukee Public Museum.

Although Mrs. Peckham has expressed a contrary intention to the writer, it is hoped that she will continue the work so well begun and carried on with her collaboration. To her, the able wife of an able husband, these meager words are dedicated.

R. A. MUTTKOWSKI, Madison Wis.



DR. GEORGE WILLIAMS PECKHAM

(Courtesy of the Wisconsin Natural History Society.)