

MEMOIR
OF
FIELDING BRADFORD MEEK.
1817-1876.

BY
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BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR OF FIELDING BRADFORD MEEK.

Mr. President and Members of the Academy :

As no formal memoir of Mr. Meek has been presented to the Academy, although it is now twenty years since he died, I offer the following sketch for our archives. It is necessarily brief, because he was himself very reticent concerning all his personal affairs, even with his intimate associates, and because he had survived all his relatives except a few who were comparative strangers to him, and he to them. It was my good fortune to be acquainted with him during the last ten or twelve years of his life and to be admitted to a large share of his confidence. While engaged with him in some paleontological studies a few months before his death I seized upon an unusually favorable occasion to obtain from his own lips the following biographical data :

Mr. Meek was born in the city of Madison, Indiana, December 10, 1817. The ancestral home was in county Armagh, Ireland. His grandparents, who were communicants of the Irish Presbyterian church, emigrated to America about the year 1768, and made their new home in Hamilton county, Ohio. There his father grew up to manhood and married; but a few years afterward, with his young family, he removed to Madison, where he became a lawyer of considerable eminence. The family, including the children born in Madison, consisted of the parents, two sons, and two daughters, all of whom were dead many years before Mr. Meek's own decease. The father died when Fielding was only three years old, leaving the family in only moderate circumstances.

Fielding's early youth was spent in the city of his birth, where he attended the best schools that were then established there, but his ill health greatly interfered with his education. Still, the time of those years was not wasted, for it was then that he began to develop a love for natural science, by his contributions to which he afterward became distinguished. Upon reaching manhood, by advice of his friends but against his own inclina-

tion, he invested his small patrimony in a mercantile business, first in Madison and afterward in Owensboro, Kentucky. The result was financial failure. After this he labored at whatever he could find to do, struggling with poverty and ill health, but improving every opportunity to advance his studies, which then began in earnest to include the fossils found in the region of his home. His earnestness in this direction drew the attention of Dr. D. D. Owen, who, when he began to organize his United States Geological Survey of Iowa, Wisconsin, and Minnesota, made young Meek one of his assistants. He held that position during the years 1848 and 1849, at the end of which time he returned to Owensboro.

He remained in Owensboro until 1852, when he went to Albany, New York, as assistant to Prof. James Hall in the paleontological work of that State. He entered upon this work with zeal and effectiveness, for he had then not only acquired large knowledge of invertebrate fossils, but he had become very skillful with his pencil in their delineation. With the exception of three summers, he remained at Albany continuously until 1858. Two summers were spent upon the Geological Survey of Missouri, under the direction of Prof. G. C. Swallow, and the other, that of 1853, in exploring the Bad-lands of Nebraska. In this work he was associated with Dr. F. V. Hayden, both of them having been commissioned by Professor Hall to do that work in his interest.

Three years after that exploration he, in collaboration with Professor Hall, prepared for publication by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences of Boston an important memoir on Cretaceous fossils from Nebraska. This was his first published paleontological work, and it was a worthy introduction to his subsequent career.

In 1858 Mr. Meek left Albany and went to Washington, D. C., where he resided until his death. The main building of the Smithsonian Institution had then been only a short time completed and all its rooms were not then needed for its business. The Secretary, Professor Henry, who encouraged the gathering at the Institution of scientific workers, not only gave them all its advantages for study, but he allotted some of the unoccupied rooms as sleeping apartments to such as were without a family. One of these rooms, situated in the main tower, was allotted to

Mr. Meek when he first went to Washington, and it remained his only home, as well as his usual working place, until his death.

The association which he formed with Dr. Hayden in their western explorations in 1853 was at least tacitly continued as long as Mr. Meek lived. All the invertebrate fossils collected by Dr. Hayden in his afterward famous western explorations were investigated and prepared for publication by Mr. Meek, although a large part of the results of those labors was published under the joint name of Meek and Hayden. In the principal work which was published under this partnership name, "The Paleontology of the Upper Missouri," Mr. Meek evinced a high order of paleontological ability, and the reputation thus gained was well sustained by his subsequent work.

Notwithstanding his intimate relation with Dr. Hayden, Mr. Meek declined to accept any regularly salaried position upon the survey organized by the former, preferring to command his own time and opportunities to do work in other inviting fields. He thus did for the Geological Survey of Illinois much the greater part of the work on invertebrate fossils which has made that series of reports famous, although it was published under the joint name of Meek and Worthen.

The appended list shows the extent of Mr. Meek's labors, and therefore mention will be made here only of his last one, which he justly regarded as the most important work of his life. It is volume ix of the quarto series of the United States Geological Survey of the Territories, and contains more than 600 pages of text and 45 full-page plates of illustrations.

Because twenty years have passed since Mr. Meek finally laid down his pen, and because his work is now held in as high esteem as when he was alive, it is unnecessary to speak at length here of its character. It is enough to say that it was characterized by thoroughness, scrupulous exactness, nice power of discrimination, and a comprehensive grasp of his subject.

Mr. Meek was never robust in health, and during a large part of his life he was more or less an invalid, his malady having been pulmonary tuberculosis. As age advanced his periods of exhaustion became more frequent and more pronounced until they ended in death. He died in Washington December 21, 1876, having only a few days before completed his 59th year.

His funeral was held in a hall of the Smithsonian building, where Professor Henry delivered a funeral oration, and the burial was made in the Congressional cemetery, in the eastern suburb of Washington.

In person Mr. Meek was moderately tall, rather slender, and of dignified bearing. Although he was never strong and often ill he never complained, was always cheerful, always hopeful, and always passionately devoted to his scientific work. He was genial, sincere, pure-minded, and honorable. Gentleness and candor were apparent in every lineament of his face and in every word he uttered; yet he was eminently self-reliant and rigorously circumspect in all his actions. His hearing began to fail in early manhood, and the infliction increased until he became totally deaf several years before he died, so that his friends could converse with him only by writing. This affliction, together with his natural diffidence, caused him to avoid social gatherings, but he was always ready, and even eager, to meet and converse with his friends, especially those who were engaged in kindred studies.

He was never miserly, but his habits were so frugal that at the time of his death he had accumulated what to him was a comfortable provision for old age. He seemed to have had no morbid fear of death, but none of his friends, not even Professor Henry, who had great influence with him, could induce him to make his will. The result was that his accumulations went to a distant relative, who was a comparative stranger to him in life.

Few men will be remembered, both for eminent ability and sterling personal qualities, so long as Fielding Bradford Meek.

The following is a list of his writings, arranged chronologically:

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Hall, James, and Meek, F. B.—Descriptions of new species of fossils from the Cretaceous formations of Nebraska, with observations upon *Baculites ovatus* and *B. compressus*, and the progressive development of the septa in *Baculites*, *Ammonites*, and *Scaphites*. <Mem. Amer. Acad. Arts and Sci., vol. v, new ser., pp. 379-411, and 8 plates. Cambridge, 1856.

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Meek, F. B., and Hayden, F. V.—Descriptions of new species of Gasteropoda from the Cretaceous formations of Nebraska Territory. <Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Philad., vol. viii, pp. 63-69. Philadelphia, 1857.

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