

Mead succeeds in showing her readers that culture is a significant factor in the way men and women behave. The book provides a great deal of stimulating thought about a question that often plagues our society in the current century. This well written book offers an easily understood and worthwhile reading experience for a student, professional, or lay person.

LOUIS AGASSIZ: A LIFE IN SCIENCE

Edward Lurie, 1988

Review by Wade A. Parsons

In the biography Louis Agassiz: A Life in Science, the author Edward Lurie has presented a superior account of this 19th century scientist and natural historian. Agassiz, a giant in his own right, made major contributions to modern knowledge in zoology, geology and paleontology. But more than anything else, Agassiz is portrayed as a student of nature who thought of himself as reflecting the wonder of that realm through his perceptions. As a student of nature, Louis Agassiz had an uncommon spiritual, emotional, and physical involvement with the grandeur of that realm. For more than fifty years the world of science would feel the impact of his accomplishments and the intensity of his drive to become "first naturalist."

In chapters 1, 2 and 3, Lurie artfully peels back the obvious successes of Agassiz and shows many of the underlying reasons for his triumphs as a man, a scientist, and as an educator. This engaging' account of Agassiz begins with his boyhood days in Switzerland, where his deep love of nature had already become evident. At the age of fifteen, when most boys dream of girls, sports, or wealth, Agassiz was outlining his first set of personal intellectual goals. The first words of his memorandum were, "I wish to advance in the sciences and to become a man of letters." In spite of the familial and social expectations he had to overcome, Agassiz never lost sight of his goal to become the premier naturalist.

Lurie portrays the young Agassiz as much more than a scientist. He was also a well-rounded person who possessed a considerable level of social skills, along with a handsome, athletic, physical appearance. Neither his superior intellect nor other outstanding abilities ever seemed to distance him from the ordinary person: .Even in later years, success came often to Agassiz because of his youthful optimistic determination. He also had an ability to master and then shape the society around him. Agassiz seemed to possess a magical charm, which influenced people from all walks of life. People generally wanted him to succeed and when he was successful, his supporters felt

like they were an important part of the victory. He was an intellectual that most people could understand and therefore liked.

Lurie gives good detail concerning the educational progress of Agassiz within the various European universities he attended. When Agassiz's ideas concerning Ice Age glaciers and his first volume on ichthyology are published, Lurie helps the reader feel the excitement of those moments. Each success opened the door to bigger accomplishments not to mention his entrance upon the intellectual life of America.

In chapter four, Lurie now draws Agassiz as a "man of destiny," who brings the wisdom of Europe to nurture the intellectual growth of a young America. Agassiz became a folk hero to both the general and literate public. Agassiz was determined to (1) study the natural history of America and the, (2) promote that subject to the public, but Agassiz was tom by these two driving forces. In a rare moment of insight, he said, "I am falling behind in my influence among scientific men." He knew his writings were designed to reach the general public. The natural history museum at Harvard was a weight that kept him from more intellectual pursuits. Obtaining fund for building this institution, maintaining its collections, not to mention his seaside teach education facility at Penikese were a continual drain on the physical and intellectual energies of Agassiz. Those who are quick to criticize his opposition to evolution, should be just as quick to praise his long lasting contributions toward educating the people of America.

Louis Agassiz will never be portrayed as a spokesperson for the theory of evolution. He was in fact one of the more vocal opponents against this rapidly rising point of view. Throughout his career he rejected any evolutionary concepts, maintaining a worldview which recognized a Creator. It was Agassiz's basic tenet that the highest function of a naturalist was to interpret the wonders of God's creation. In spite of his opposition to evolution those who would casually criticize his beliefs should realize that he stood between the idealism of an older religious worldview and the so called empiricism of modern times. In a sense he acted as a step on the stairway of scientific progress. He probably did more to educate the general population about natural history than any person of his time. His lasting contributions in the fields of geology, paleontology, and ichthyology helped create attitudes toward science that would ultimately increase the influence of his own worldview.

In the later years of his life, Agassiz was still actively pursuing knowledge, in spite of an apparent stroke, which kept him down for over a year. At the age of 65, he journeyed from the east to the west coast on an experimental research ship called the Hassler. This voyage was a sign that Agassiz attempted a more open-minded attitude toward views different from his own. Before his death in 1873, Agassiz gave a series of lectures on the evolution question to

make clear the essential points of his intellectual disagreement. Agassiz also reestablished friendly relations with Darwin, but clearly remained opposed to his views. In an Atlantic Monthly article, 'Evolution, and Permanence of Type,' he gave Darwin credit for originality and status for his convincing observations.

He refused to concede any development from simple to complex forms or that variations were permanently transmitted from parent to offspring. Another basic tenet of Agassiz was that changes in an individual doesn't imply change within a species. Agassiz's arguments often pointed to serious gaps in Darwin's chain of reasoning showing him to be an incisive critic of evolution.

Agassiz died of a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of 66. The entire university shut down to honor Agassiz and Boston newspapers reporting the event were edged in black. Scientists, teachers, students, and ordinary people all came to express their sense of loss over the death of America's greatest naturalist.

More information concerning the family and religious background of Agassiz would have been nice compliment to this volume. Lurie's works also do not give a clear picture of how Agassiz synthesized his scientific views with his religious beliefs. Agassiz is also presented in such a favorable light the reader finds himself wondering if he was really that well accepted as a man by the general population.