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CHARLES ALEXANDRE LESUEUR.

## SKETCH OF CHARLES A. LE SUEUR.

By DAVID STARR JORDAN,  
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SOME years ago I began to collect material for biographical sketches of several of the early naturalists in America. Among these was CHARLES A. LE SUEUR, the artist, traveler, and naturalist, who was "the first to study the ichthyology of the Great American Lakes." Le Sueur traveled widely in Pennsylvania, New York, and New England from 1817 to 1828. He was an artist of high degree, a careful and faithful observer, and according to accounts, a man of most genial and attractive character. He had won a high reputation in Europe as an artist. As a naturalist he had been around the world with Péron and La Pérouse. He was one of the founders of the Academy of Natural Sciences at Philadelphia. When the famous socialistic colony was established by Robert Owen at New Harmony, Ind., Le Sueur was one of its members. He came down from Pittsburg in the famous "boat-load of knowledge" with which the colony was intellectually equipped.

During his stay at New Harmony, Le Sueur made considerable collections and many drawings, some of which are still preserved, and others have been published in the Journals of the Academy at Philadelphia. A most spirited portrait of the old Governor Vigo is still extant. I have received an account of the drop-curtain painted by Le Sueur for the old theater in New Harmony. On this curtain were represented a rattlesnake and the Falls of Niagara, as two natural features most characteristically American.

After the failure of the New Harmony colony, Le Sueur returned to Philadelphia, and probably went from there to Paris, where, according to Swainson, he earned a precarious livelihood as a teacher of painting. For the latter part of his life he was curator of the museum at Havre. His scientific work was done chiefly in America, and it ranked with the best of its kind at the time. Le Sueur's most important memoir was a monograph of the suckers, a group of American fishes constituting his genus *Catostomus*, each species being represented by a clever and accurate figure—drawing and engraving being both by the hand of Le Sueur. In 1878 I had occasion to speak of this paper as "an excellent one, comparing favorably with most that has since been written on the group." Other valuable papers were on certain blennies, rays, and flying fishes, accounts of new species from the West Indies, and descriptions of tortoises and other reptiles.

The Royal Society's Catalogue of Scientific Papers contains the titles of nine papers of which Le Sueur was joint author with

François Péron. These appeared in 1809 and 1810 in French scientific serials and deal with jelly-fishes and some other marine animals. Le Sueur was joint author with Anselme G. Desmarest of two papers on certain mollusks and sea-mosses in 1814 and 1815. The papers of which he was sole author number forty-three. They begin in 1813 with a memoir on several new species of mollusks and radiates, published in the *Journal de Physique*. The first six were written before he came to America, and he picked up material for the seventh on his way over. It deals with three new slug-like mollusks, and is entitled *Characters of a New Genus (Firoloida) and Descriptions of Three New Species upon which it is Formed; Discovered in the Atlantic Ocean, in the Months of March and April, 1816, lat. 22° 9'*. It appeared in Volume I of the *Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia*, in 1817. Dr. Ruschenberger relates, in his *Notice of the Academy*, that in the first year of the *Journal*, "Mr. Ord, anxious to forward the publication, translated or rather prepared the papers of M. Le Sueur from materials furnished by him, as that gentleman, who immigrated from France in 1816, possessed very little knowledge of the English language." The last three of the list appeared in Paris in 1827, 1831, and 1839 respectively. Two are on certain tortoises, the other is an observation on a bite of a viper. Three other papers, written while he was in this country, were published in Paris; the rest appeared in the *Journal of the Philadelphia Academy*, except one in the *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*. He evidently restricted himself quite closely to the fishes and other aquatic animals, though with an occasional excursion among the reptiles.

His descriptions are clear, exact, and honest. His drawings are not accurate only, but spirited. They are works of art rather than mechanical representations. With less range of learning than Rafinesque and some other contemporaries, Le Sueur had, what Rafinesque had not, sound sense and faithfulness in the study of details. In America he was perhaps the first of that school of systematic zoölogy which regards no fact as so unimportant that it need not be correctly ascertained and stated—a method of work with which has been rightly associated the name of Prof. Spencer F. Baird. This attention to accuracy in detail marks the so-called "Bairdian epoch" in vertebrate zoölogy.

The pressure of other duties has led me to abandon the gathering of materials for the study of the lives of the earlier American naturalists. I therefore leave this sketch unfinished,\* using it

\* In the hope that this sketch may some time be completed, I ask any one having additional information regarding Le Sueur's history or his personality to send it either to the editor of *The Popular Science Monthly* or to the writer.

only as a reason for printing the most valuable of original documents concerning Le Sueur. This is a personal letter from the late Prof. Richard Owen, whose early life was spent at New Harmony, and who was my predecessor in the chair of Biology in the University of Indiana.

Prof. Owen writes as follows under date of December 14, 1886:

“Charles A. Le Sueur was, when I knew him in 1828, about fifty to fifty-five years of age, tall, rather spare in muscle, but hardy and enduring. He permitted his beard to grow, which at that time was quite unusual; hence he sometimes platted it and tucked it almost out of sight when he went from home. In New Harmony he usually went barenecked, often bareheaded, and in summer occasionally barefooted, or at least without socks. His hair had been dark, but was sprinkled (as well as his beard) with gray. His manner and movements were quick; his fondness for natural history (as it was then called) led him to hunt and fish a good deal.

“In summer he was fond of swimming in the Wabash, and I frequently accompanied him. He instructed me how to feel with my feet for *Unios* and other shells as we waded sometimes up to our necks in the river or ponds, searching to add to our collections. When he went fishing with others he always exchanged his fine common fishes for the smallest and to them most indifferent-looking, when he recognized some new species or even variety. This item I have from Mr. Sampson, who is well acquainted with the fish of the Wabash, but who confesses he could see no difference in many caught until Mr. Le Sueur, who at once detected that difference, had pointed it out.

“He was temperate and active in all his habits, smoking being the only objectionable habit in which he indulged. His temper was quick and used to call out an occasional “God bless my soul!” the only approach to anything like irritation that he evinced; he was very kind-hearted.

“In conversation with Agassiz about Mr. Le Sueur, the great Swiss ichthyologist paid a high compliment to Le Sueur’s acquirements in that department, considering him then (as I inferred) the next best to himself at that time in the United States. He was, however, I judge, remarkably conversant with other branches of biology, inasmuch as nearly all the magnificent drawings he had made when left in New Holland (as it was then called) were mammals, chiefly the ornithorhynchus, echidna, and other rare animals. In showing his drawings he generally offered a lens, that you might see every hair distinctly delineated.

“He was a magnificent artist, good alike in drawing and coloring. I have some of his sketches yet, in which, when I was taking drawing lessons from him, he showed me how to outline, for in-

stance, the skeleton of the human figure, then to add the muscular system, then the clothing, drapery, etc. We usually took views from Nature. Although so minute in details of fine paintings, he was equally good in large scenery. For many years we had here the scenes he painted for a Thespian Society of this place, where, amid the forest trees, he had squirrels, birds, etc. Being fond of hunting, he had made to order by a native gunsmith, who was quite a genius, a double-barrel piece, one a rifle, the other a smooth-bore. Gillson, the gunsmith, made the barrels, bored the rifle, made the stock, and an admirable lock; the stock was inlaid with silver and engraved by the same skillful hand, bearing Le Sueur's name and an appropriate device. I do not remember exactly the price, but think it was about a hundred dollars.

"In consequence of his having been with La Pérouse (until, fortunately for his life, he was left to work up the animals of Australia), the French Government gave him a pension, which he drew annually, until they notified him that, unless he returned and gave his time and talents to his native country (France), the pension would be withheld. He went at a time when I was absent, and those who here knew him well have forgotten the date. He became curator of the museum at Havre, and then, after some years, died and was buried there. The exact date of his death those three have also forgotten.

"When he came to New Harmony during the social experiment he was directly from the West Indies, and brought a young lad and a child, both of whom subsequently married, but both are now dead. It was from their relatives that I expected to get dates, but failed.

"When the 'Preliminary Society' (at New Harmony) resolved itself into the (1) Educational, (2) Agricultural, and (3) Commercial Societies, Mr. Le Sueur joined the first, and I have in my box of valuable papers a deed of a lot (for the purpose of erecting a foundry), executed by the Educational Society, and signed by my father-in-law, Mr. Neef, and his family, Drs. Troost, C. A. Le Sueur, William Phiquepal, and a number of others.

"Some of the relatives of those who came with him think there was a notice in some public journal of his death, etc., but I never saw it. I just recall two incidents:

"When we were together, going sketching, I think, we found and killed a large blacksnake, uncommonly distended. Mr. Le Sueur, when we reached home, used a large syringe and injected water into the stomach, from which he then stripped four young rabbits. Another time we obtained a female opossum, and he very deftly dissected it and showed me the young adhering to the small teats in the pouch or marsupium."