

# Simon Henry Gage

*May 20, 1851 — October 20, 1944*

Simon Henry Gage was born at Crumhorn Lake, Otsego County, New York on May 20, 1851. In a prayer meeting that he attended as a youth he first heard of Cornell University from a clergyman who urged his young listeners to have nothing to do with “that godless institution.” Gage was not one to let such an indictment pass without a study of the facts. Convinced by his inquiries of the injustice of the charge, and persuaded that Cornell was the place for him, he matriculated in the fall of 1873—and for seventy-one fruitful years his place it turned out to be.

Gage’s enthusiastic interest in biology immediately attracted the attention of Professor Burt Green Wilder, whom he assisted throughout his undergraduate years. Upon receiving the degree of B.S. in 1877 he was appointed Instructor in Microscopy and Practical Physiology. His subsequent titles were: Assistant Professor of Physiology and Lecturer in Microscopical Technology, 1881; Associate Professor (as above), 1889; Associate Professor of Anatomy, Histology, and Embryology, 1895; Professor of Microscopy, Histology, and Embryology, 1896; Professor of Histology and Embryology, 1902.

In 1896 he organized in the newly established Veterinary College an independent department of histology and embryology which in 1902 was transferred to Stimson Hall, then the new home of the Ithaca division of the Medical College. He retired from teaching in 1908 on a pension provided by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, in order to devote his whole time to the research which he prosecuted with vigor and enthusiasm until his last illness. His final visit to his laboratory was made only ten days before his death.

In 1893 he joined Professor Comstock in establishing the Comstock Publishing Company, which, through the bequest of Comstock and the gift of Gage, became the property of Cornell in 1931 when Professor Gage became president of the company, an office he held until his death. The profits of this enterprise continue to be one of the major sources of the support of the Cornell University Press.

Professor Gage was ever most generous to the university of his affections. In 1915 he and his son, Henry Phelps Gage, presented a fund in memory of his first wife, Susanna Phelps Gage, herself an able biologist. This endowment, now amounting to almost \$7000, will eventually be used for a room in a new dormitory for women. Three years later they established the Susanna Phelps Gage Endowment of \$10,000 for research in Physics. These larger gifts were supplemented by many others, including valuable books, sets of periodicals, and apparatus.

In 1921-22 Professor Gage was a faculty member of the University Board of Trustees. From 1923-40 he was Librarian ("Responsible Librarian," he chose to call himself) of the Van Cleef Memorial Library, now the library of the Department of Zoology. It was, indeed, Professor Gage who persuaded Mynderse Van Cleef to found this memorial to his brother, Charles Edward Van Cleef.

Professor Gage was a prolific contributor to professional journals. Microscopy was perhaps his dominant interest, stemming probably from his earlier interest in photography, but he also made notable additions to our knowledge of the biology of the lamprey in a series of fundamental researches published over a period of fifty years. The Southern Brook Lamprey has been named in his honor *Ichthyomyzpn Gagei*. His studies of the fat particles of the blood and of the rate at which fat is deposited in the tissues are also noteworthy.

Of his books the most characteristic is "The Microscope," first published in 1881 and probably the most widely used American text on the subject. The seventeenth edition appeared on his ninetieth birthday in 1941. With Burt G. Wilder he was co-author of "Anatomical Technology," 1882; with B. F. Kingsbury of "Vertebrate Histology," 1899; and with his son, Henry Phelps Gage, of "Optic Projection," 1914. In 1893, he and John Henry Comstock edited "The Wilder Quarter-Century Book," said to be the first American collection of researches published in honor of a university teacher. Shortly before his death he completed a history of the Comstock Publishing Company, and he leaves the nearly completed manuscript of a history of microscopy in America, a work which is being edited for publication by his wife, Clara Starrett Gage, and his son, Henry Phelps Gage.

Gage was long a member of the American Society of Zoologists, one of the original members of the American Association of Anatomists, and a member of the first board of editors of the American Journal of Anatomy, which he assisted in establishing. He was also a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and twice presided over the meetings of its Zoological Section; a member of the New York State Science Teachers Association (President, 1896), American Microscopical Society (President, 1895-96, 1906), American Society of Naturalists, Royal Society of Arts, Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences, American Fisheries Society, Optical Society of America, and the National Association for the Prevention of Tuberculosis.

He was a man whom his students and colleagues delighted to honor. At his sixty-fifth birthday dinner there was announced the establishment of a fund in support of the Simon Henry Gage Fellowship in Animal Biology. By his ninetieth birthday this had reached the sum of \$10,000 and the first fellow was then appointed. His seventy-fifth birthday was observed by a dinner given in his honor by the American Association of Anatomists in New Haven, and his eightieth by a dinner given in Philadelphia by the Advisory Board of the Wistar Institute of Anatomy, of

which he had been a member since its organization in 1905; and on this occasion he was presented with a copy of volume 48 of the American Journal of Anatomy, which was dedicated to him.

But no mere statement of the positions he occupied, or of the honors accorded him can convey the true qualities of the man; to know these was the high privilege only of those who worked near and with him. He was a lover of life, and with him life and work meant the same thing. He had an infectious enthusiasm for work which age never affected. To the end he lived in the future; no one was ever readier to discard the outworn or outmoded, to adopt what was new if it were better than the old. In the classroom and out he was a great teacher, for his whole life was a pattern that provoked emulation, exemplifying as it did the best traditions of the profession. His laboratory was a magnet that drew a constant stream of inquirers and of those who felt the need of refreshment and inspiration. His sincere and youthful enthusiasm, his fresh and forward-looking point of view, his fine sense of humor, his hearty, refreshing laugh, and his kindly interest in men and their problems struck a responsive chord in all with whom he came in contact. His many friends and this University that he loved so well and served so long and devotedly are the richer for his life; as with all great teachers, his influence will continue to be felt for generations.