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Baron Osten Sacken.

BY J. M. ALDRICH.

(Plate XI)

Karl Robert Romanovich, Baron von der Osten Sacken, commonly known among entomologists as C. R. Osten Sacken, was born in St. Petersburg, August 21, 1828, and died at his home in Heidelberg, Germany, on May 20, 1906.

In 1849 young Osten Sacken entered the service of the Russian Imperial Foreign Office. After some years of apprenticeship in diplomacy, he was in 1856 appointed Secretary of Legation in Washington. In 1862 he was made Consul General for Russia in New York City, and held the position until 1871, when he retired from the diplomatic service. After several journeys to Europe and back, he again settled in the United States, this time as a private citizen, and remained until 1877; in this year he returned to Europe, making his home in Heidelberg the remainder of his life.

From 1856 to 1877, it will be seen, Osten Sacken was almost continuously a resident of the United States. Before this he had begun to work on Diptera, especially Tipulidæ. Imme-

We have received two interesting accounts of the life of Baron Osten Sacken, who may almost be called an American entomologist. These are by two eminent dipterists, and, not caring to discriminate, we decided to publish both.—EDS.

diately on getting settled in this country he began to organize things for extensive dipterological research. He published (in 1859) a catalogue of the described North American Diptera; he collected a large amount of material in the order; he made the acquaintance of most of the collectors in various parts of the country, and had them send him their Diptera; most of his accumulations he sent to Loew in Guben, Prussia, for description, reserving only a few families, principally the Tipulidæ and Tabanidæ, for himself; he also established relations with the Smithsonian Institution which resulted in the publication of a large part of the descriptive matter prepared by Loew and himself in the four volumes called by the general title of "Monographs of North American Diptera"; in short, it may be said that for some twenty-one years nearly all the work done on the order was directly due to the tremendous energy of Osten Sacken. Toward the close of the period, after visiting the principal type collections of Diptera in Europe, he published a second catalogue of North American Diptera, this time critical in character and exhibiting the actual status of the order in a manner which for clearness, completeness, and absolute mastery of the subject must forever remain an unapproachable model for later workers in the order. Osten Sacken had practically created himself all the main subject matter of the catalogue; hence the impossibility of any later entomologist ever occupying a similar position with regard to it.

In addition to the Smithsonian monographs and his two catalogues, Osten Sacken's Prodrôme to a Monograph of North American Tabanidæ, published by the Boston Society of Natural History, and Loew's Centuries of North American Diptera (one thousand new species, published in Germany), embody the principal results of his labors.

As a fitting climax to his achievements, Osten Sacken successfully conducted a rather difficult and delicate negotiation, by which Loew was reimbursed for his labors on the North American material, and surrendered it all to the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard, at that time much the best depository in the United States for such material. Osten

Sacken donated all his own material to the same institution, and the Loew-Osten Sacken type collection of Diptera was thus established; it still remains in good condition, and we may expect will continue to be useful for many years to come.

After returning to Europe, Osten Sacken felt that his labors in descriptive entomology were practically at an end. He continued to publish papers on the larger phases of classification, on insect habits, historical researches on entomology, etc., up to a few years before his death. In 1886-87 he published 216 pages of Vol. I. of the Diptera in the *Biologia Centrali-Americana*. In 1903 and 1904 he published his "Record of My Life Work in Entomology" (parts I and II printed in Cambridge, Mass.; part III in Heidelberg), which gives not only a review of his own activity, but includes critical estimates of several contemporary entomologists, and much historical matter on dipterology in general.

Osten Sacken's entomological work was almost completed twenty-eight years ago, hence he seems to belong to a generation that has long passed away. Only one living dipterist of this country, so far as I know, had a personal acquaintance with him—I allude to S. W. Williston, who met him on his last trip to this country.

Osten Sacken wrote in Russian, German, French, Italian, English, and on occasion in Latin; he preferred English, in which he had a literary style distinguished for clearness, force and accuracy. The striking qualities of his character were energy, farsightedness, persistence, keen discrimination, and conscientiousness. No pecuniary consideration ever lessened the completeness of his devotion to the Diptera. He always sought to be impartial, but the bent of his mind was such that he could never appreciate the argument of a man who disagreed with him. Such people seemed to him either mildly insane, or else animated with a personal animosity towards himself. In a letter to the writer, he says in regard to Loew, "I am conscious of having been perfectly fair towards him in my Record. I never doubted for an instant that he was a perfectly honest and veracious man. His idiosyncrasies I incline to ascribe to a congenital defect of the brain which

disturbed its normal function and finally culminated in the brain disease to which he succumbed. Every one of us, very probably, is afflicted with some malformation of this kind which more or less impairs his mental vision." May we be as charitable with Osten Sacken in regard to the two or three animosities which he especially cherished.

As a correspondent, he was delightful. During his American residence he accumulated large numbers of letters from entomologists in various parts of the country, which it seems from his Record he faithfully preserved till his death. This material would be of great value if ultimately acquired by some American institution; the history of American entomology during the '50's, '60's and '70's is largely embalmed therein.

Two years ago he wrote, "As the Grandfather of American Dipterology, I am very much interested in the progress of my descendants."

On another occasion, "At my age a man does well, when he is able to do so, to withdraw from his usual occupation or profession, and to leave the field for a younger generation. For about fifty years I have worked hard in my science and have reason to be content with the result. My Record I hope to have published bye and bye, and shall allow myself from time to time to publish "obiter dicta" on dipterology, like the short articles which have appeared in the Ent. M. M., London, recently. But, with these exceptions, I give up entomology, and shall not take any part in discussions. In many points my opinions are peculiar. I have explained them distinctly enough in my writings, and posterity will pronounce upon them. For this reason I do not enter into any further discussion about * * *, the result of which is, for me, of sovereign indifference."

And yet again, "My health is excellent, but my brain is easily tired and my working power has much diminished. I am in the position of a traveler at a railway station, waiting for a train to depart with. This departure I expect without the slightest apprehension."

He was a man, take him for all in all,
I shall not look upon his like again.



Aldrich, John Merton. 1906. "Baron Osten Sacken." *Entomological news, and proceedings of the Entomological Section of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia* 17, 269–272.

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