

# HARVARD ALUMNI BULLETIN

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VOLUME 42

APRIL 19, 1940

NUMBER 25

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COVER: PAUL REVERE CREAMPOT: Owned by the Fogg Museum of Art.

*Photograph by the Staff of the Fogg Museum*

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HARVARD ALUMNI BULLETIN: JOSEPH R. HAMLIN, '04, PRESIDENT AND PUBLISHER; DAVID McCORD, '21, ACTING EDITOR; JANE E. HOWARD, ASSISTANT TO THE EDITOR; H. M. MAHON, '23, BUSINESS MANAGER.

Published every Friday during the academic year by the Harvard Bulletin, Inc., for the Harvard Alumni Association. Editorial Office, 18 Plympton Street; Business Office, 1400 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Mass.

*Entered as Second Class Matter, October 7, 1910, at Boston, Mass., under the Act of March 3, 1879.*

Annual subscription: In the United States and possessions, \$4; in Canada, \$4.40; in other countries, \$4.75. Single copies, 15 cents. A subscriber who wishes to discontinue his subscription should give notice to that effect before its expiration; otherwise it will be continued.

Printed by the Crimson Printing Company, 14 Plympton Street, Cambridge, Mass.

# BEETLES: A GREAT COLLECTION FOR HARVARD

BY PHILIP J. DARLINGTON, Jr., '26

**D**URING the winter of 1939-40 the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy at Harvard has received one of the finest collections of North American beetles in existence—that of the late Dr. Henry Clinton Fall. It contains about a quarter of a million specimens, ranging in size from giants several inches long to pygmies much smaller than the head of a pin. More than one hundred thousand of the specimens, about fifteen thousand species, are in a main North American series which fills to overflowing 296 boxes, each 12 by 8 inches. Nearly another hundred thousand are in a second North American series which came to Dr. Fall a few years ago from Charles Liebeck. The balance of the quarter million is made up by exotic beetles, and there are also a few thousand good butterflies and moths. All of the specimens are beautifully prepared and arranged.

Many of the exotics are showy, but the Fall Collection is not for show. It is not and never will be on exhibition to the public. The North American section in particular is a *working* collection of the very greatest value, which will be reserved for the use of scientists. To understand the scientific value of an enormous accumulation of specimens of this sort, one must know something of the purposes and methods of museum work.

Most big zoölogical museums have two functions: the obvious one of exhibition and

education, and the less obvious one of research. Museum research is concerned primarily with what is called taxonomy—with the classification of animals. It is the business of a museum man to find out what sort of animals there are, where they come from, and how they may be distinguished. He does this by getting together and studying large numbers of properly preserved and labeled specimens. And when he has done it, he gives names to the different kinds, and publishes a concise scheme of classification. And the specimens he has used are stored away in the museum for checking and for future use.

Now, museum work is fun, or there would be few people engaged in it, for it is not well paid. But it is also useful in an unostentatious way, if it is properly done and if the results are properly published so that other people can use them. The classification of animals is, perhaps, not important in itself, unless the pleasure it gives to many amateur and professional taxonomists is important, but it is a means to several useful ends.

The first great use of animal classification is to set up a system which is like a giant card index, in which each animal has its place and name by means of which all sorts of information can be filed away *and found again*. How such a system works is best shown by example.

Suppose (for example—it really happened) a mosquito suddenly appears in Brazil and raises hell with the malarial rate. The first thing to do is to find out the name of the mosquito and its place in classification, either by direct comparison with a scientific collection, or by consulting a specialist, who has studied collections. And suppose (as was the case) the mosquito turns out to be a common African species, *Anopheles gambiae*. Then one can look up that name in bibliographies and indexes, and go from them to articles in scattered scientific journals, and may find a good deal on record about the habits and control of that particular mosquito neatly filed away (so to speak) under the name. And even if no further information is found, the

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Childhood collections of shells and butterflies lie at the back and bottom of many American hall closets—cracked and moth-eaten evidence that the collection impulse flowers (and generally dies) young. That it continues to stir the pulses of the rare adult, and causes him to pursue all sorts of ephemera to the ultimate satisfaction of the glass bottle and the cork and common pin, is beyond the understanding of the average layman. The author explains it all in this brief article.

Philip J. Darlington, Jr., '26, S.M. '27, Ph.D. '31, is assistant curator of insects in the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy. He has just been appointed first Fall Curator of Coleoptera at the Museum, a permanent position established in honor of Henry Clinton Fall, Dartmouth '84, donor of the Collection of North American beetles which the Museum has recently received.

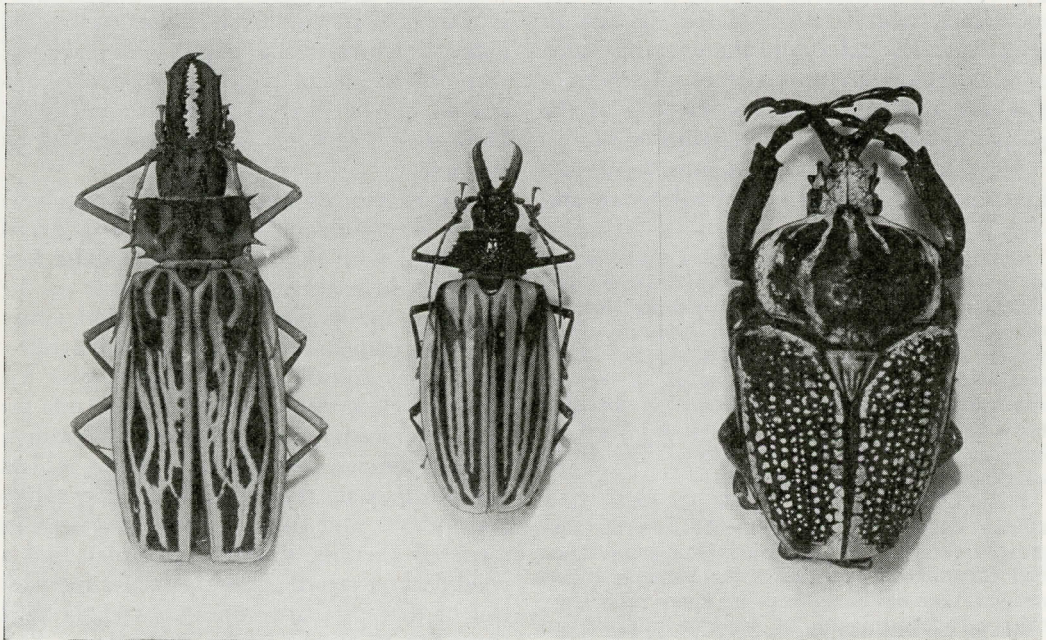
knowledge that the insect is African and has invaded Brazil, probably arriving as an uninvited guest in an airplane, warns that the species can enter new country with disastrous results and that it must be guarded against, by fumigation of airplanes from infected regions and by other means. But if the mosquito did not have a name and a place in classification to distinguish it from all other mosquitoes, it would be next to impossible to discover that it came to Brazil from Africa or that anything had been known about it before.

Or suppose (this really happened, too) a striped beetle appears in Germany and attacks potato plants so severely that it is officially proclaimed "Farmers' Enemy Number 1". It is easy to discover in any of several good German museums that it is the American "Potato Bug", *Leptinotarsa decemlineata*, and then it is easy to look up the best way to fight it, without costly delay.

Of course, it is not always necessary to rush to a museum to identify a pest, for museums do not have a corner on animal classification. But the sort of work which is done in research museums is what makes identification pos-

sible, not only in emergencies but in thousands of less spectacular cases. And with the increasing size of modern collections and the increasing volume of the literature, museums are carrying more and more of the load of naming and indexing the animal world.

**T**AXONOMY—the classification of animals and plants—has contributed to pure science too, more than most laymen realize. It contributed, for instance, to the discovery of the theory of evolution by natural selection, which has had such profound influence not only on biology but on modern thought. The principle of natural selection was uncovered independently by two men, Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace. Both of these men were deeply interested in classification and in the closely related problem of geographical distribution of organisms. Both men traveled widely, collecting animals and plants and finding many new species, some of which were later given the names *darwini* and *wallacei*. Darwin widened his interests greatly in later life; Wallace was always primarily a student of classification and distribution. It is no accident that these two in-



IN THE FALL COLLECTION: THREE EXOTIC NORTH AMERICAN BEETLES

## LA GUARDIA AT FIRST SENIOR-ALUMNI DINNER

THREE hundred and fifty seniors—nearly half the class—filled to capacity the Eliot House dining hall on the occasion of the first Senior-Alumni Dinner last Thursday. The occasion was the fulfillment of the long-cherished conviction of Dr. Elliott C. Cutler, '09, President of the Harvard Alumni Association, that seniors would be glad to be informed of their rights and privileges as alumni before leaving the University.

When first consulted, the senior officers immediately responded to the suggestion by the appointment of the three marshals, Thomas V. Healey, Phil C. Neal, Ernest J. Sargeant, and Frederick Holdsworth, Jr., as a committee to manage the dinner. Professor Roger B. Merriman, '96, Master of Eliot House, enthusiastically approved the choice of the Eliot dining room. Roy L. Westcott, manager of the University Dining Halls, provided a special dinner, and the Alumni Association contributed free beer and cigarettes.

At the first meeting, the senior committee expressed the hope that the class might be addressed by a national figure who would give them an optimistic view of their chances in the troubled world they would encounter when they left the University. Through the excellent offices of a classmate of Dr. Cutler's father, Charles C. Burlingham, '79, whom Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia described as "the first citizen of New York City," the New York Mayor was prevailed upon to make a special trip to Cambridge to address the Senior Class.

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The energetic and popular Mayor La Guardia of New York City paid a flying visit to Harvard last week to speak at the first Senior-Alumni Dinner (Eliot House) and to address afterwards (Indoor Athletic Building) some 700 students at a meeting sponsored by the Council of Government Concentrators. His Honor came to the Senior-Alumni Dinner on the invitation of Dr. Elliott C. Cutler, '09, President of the Alumni Association, and through the offices of a past President, Charles C. Burlingham, '79. The success of the evening is evidenced by this article prepared for the BULLETIN by William G. Roelker, '09.

Three quarters of an hour ahead of time, the seniors began to pack both entries to the dining hall. Every seat was quickly filled, and some thirty or forty late arrivals could not be accommodated. Under prolonged applause the Mayor entered the hall under the escort of Dr. Cutler, Professor Merriman, and several Alumni Directors.

When the dinner had advanced from mock turtle soup to strawberry ice-cream and coffee, Professor Merriman rose to welcome the Mayor to Harvard and Eliot House. "The Class of 1940 is fortunate to have the opportunity tonight to be addressed by the Mayor of New York," he said, "and His Honor is equally privileged to have as an audience one of the best classes I have ever known in my fifty years' connection with the University."

Dr. Cutler, introducing the subject of the rights which the seniors will enjoy when they become alumni, touched on the history of the College and the Alumni Association. "Ex-President John Quincy Adams, 1787, was elected first President when the organization was founded at Commencement, 1840. For a number of years it was largely a social organization whose meetings, consisting of a two-hour oration and a dinner followed by numerous speeches, lasted until sunset. By 1848 the Association had nearly petered out.

At this time the Board of Overseers was still composed of officials of the Commonwealth and the ministers of the neighboring towns—Boston, Watertown, etc.—as it had been since the foundation of the College. The Corporation, created by the Charter of 1650 as a sort of executive committee for the Overseers, was composed, as it is today, of five Fellows, in perpetual succession, and the President and Treasurer. This body must have the consent of the Overseers for its undertakings, and thus the Overseers act as a sort of brake and safeguard upon the Corporation.

In 1848 a number of men were elected to the Legislature who felt that Harvard was 25 years behind the times both in teaching and in organization. A bill was introduced to remodel the Charter by increasing the Corporation to fifteen

dependent discoverers of natural selection had similar training and lived at the same time. Until a multitude of obscure taxonomists had carried the classification of the animal and plant worlds to the point where relationships could be appreciated, neither Darwin nor anyone else could very well conceive of natural selection. But when that point was reached, the conception was certain, and would certainly have come to someone else if neither Darwin nor Wallace had got it.

And there is no reason to think that the contributions of taxonomy to pure science are over. The most striking recent advances in evolutionary theory have come chiefly from genetics laboratories. But we do not yet know whether or not geneticists are on the track of evolution as it really occurs in nature. Many persons think not. Taxonomists and paleontologists, most of whom are taxonomists too, who study the differences which have really evolved among living and fossil animals, see the real products of evolution, and these persons are in the best position to criticize the geneticists' conclusions. The next great contribution to our knowledge of evolution will probably not be made by taxonomists directly, but their criticism is likely to help geneticists and cytologists to make it. And evolution is worth understanding. One of these days, if Professor Hooton is sufficiently eloquent, we may try to direct the evolution of man. Then evolutionary theory will cease to be pure science and will become of the most vital, practical importance.

But to come back to Dr. Fall's beetles: I do not mean, of course, that they will save us from some insidious insect pest or that they will introduce a new era in biological thought. What I do mean is that the Fall Collection has a far greater value than if it were merely a quarter of a million pretty insects pinned at random into a few hundred boxes. It represents a very real contribution to taxonomy, and through taxonomy to all science. It represents not only the value of the individual specimens, but also a lifetime of intelligent work. On the basis of this collection, Dr.

Fall published 144 scientific papers, described and named about 1,400 new species, and revised (reclassified) a number of our largest and most difficult genera. And even this is not all. Taxonomy is, or should be, a co-operative undertaking carried on by many persons, generation after generation, according to specific rules which have been established by an international committee. And throughout his work Dr. Fall did cooperate and did abide by the rules—some persons do not, and make more confusion than they do good. He took the trouble (and it is often a lot of trouble) to check back to the specimens studied by earlier taxonomists to make sure just what they were talking about when their descriptions were ambiguous, and he kept in touch with his contemporaries. His boxes are full not only of his own authentic "types" but of specimens compared with other famous collections, and of authentic specimens received from other workers. The Fall Collection represents, as well as any one man's work can, a complete cross section of modern classification of North American beetles. It is not only a monument to Dr. Fall, who made it, and a fine acquisition for the museum as it stands, it is also a first-class basis for further work, in this and future generations.

And a little by way of biography: Henry Clinton Fall was born December 25, 1862, at Farmington, N. H., and died November 14, 1939, at Tyngsboro, Mass. He went to Dartmouth College ('84), and received an honorary Sc.D. from Dartmouth in 1929. He was, by profession, a teacher of physics and chemistry. His interest was turned to the study of beetles as an avocation when he was fifteen years old: July 17, 1878, at Wakefield, Mass., at 7.30 in the evening, when he caught and was fascinated by a specimen of a big "longicorn", *Prionus pocularis*. He preserved and labeled the specimen. It was the first of his quarter million.

We feel that it is a great compliment to the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy that Dr. Fall, who was not a Harvard man, chose to leave his collection to us for safe keeping and for future use.