

RS3-45

W. LAWRENCE WHITE

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(WITH PORTRAIT)

Doctor W. Lawrence White, Director of the Farlow Library and Herbarium and Associate Professor of Botany, Harvard University, died on July 30, 1952 at the age of 44. With his passing the mycological world lost one of its leading and potentially dominant taxonomists and stimulating personalities. Recognized among mycologists for his pioneering work in several areas of taxonomic mycology he was known even more widely for his reputation as an authority on Tropical Deterioration by the military, industrial and scientific world. With his appointment in 1948 as the new Director of the Farlow Herbarium he soon renovated the organization which had lain fallow since the passing of Dr. David Linder. Clearly a renaissance was in progress. Prospects for the maturation and harvest of his own research efforts and for the future of the Farlow could not have been brighter. But the anticipation was not to be fulfilled. All was obliterated in a split-second by a dreadful automobile accident on Concord Pike on rainy July 27, 1952.

Dr. White was born in Salina, Pennsylvania, on May 29, 1908. His undergraduate days were spent at the Pennsylvania State College. There he was deeply influenced by Professor L. O. Overholts, whom he served as laboratory assistant. They had much in common—farm background, modesty, friendliness, sincerity, ability and, above all, an intense devotion to taxonomy. A strong bond of affection naturally developed. Many of the professor's mannerisms and work habits were assiduously copied by the young student. One of these, which was to serve Dr. White well later in life, was the almost fanatical accumulation of mycological facts and tidbits for future reference. Under the steady guidance of Professor Overholts, White gained an early intimacy

with the Basidiomycetes both in the field and the laboratory. His knowledge of the Polyporaceae and the Thelephoraceae was supplemented by the acquisition of a good understanding of the rusts from Professors F. D. Kern and H. W. Thurston, and of the smuts from Professor G. L. Zundel. It was unusual that an undergraduate was provided such excellent and intensive mycological guidance. Even more important to White was the friendly interest shown him by these professors, and by Dr. J. W. Sinden. The latter was largely responsible for his going to Cornell after receiving the baccalaureate degree in 1934.

A different directional influence was exerted during his graduate study at Cornell University. Laboratory emphasis replaced field trips. From his major professor, Dr. H. M. Fitzpatrick, he learned to channel his propensity for collecting tidbits into logical order and coherent taxonomic patterns. Through Professor H. H. Whetzel he developed an enthusiastic interest in the inoperculate discomycetes. For his own specialization Dr. White selected the large and complex group of the Helotiaceae. He plunged into the examination of the group with such skill and intensity that within five years he was thoroughly familiar with these fungi. Unfortunately, economic pressure forced Dr. White to accept more remunerative employment as soon as he completed his doctorate in 1940. While several papers covering small segments of this research did reach publication, a monograph was never put into final shape. Its completion would have been a significant contribution to mycology; and he was the one best qualified to execute it. During the later years, he frequently talked about the manuscript with deep-felt nostalgia. There was, at times, a suggestive twinkle in his eyes—possibly some of his future graduate students would complete the work he had started. Had fate been generous with the years this might have come to pass. His graduate years were interspersed with seasonal employment, which rounded out his mycological training. Two summers were spent studying Ascomycetes with Dr. F. J. Seaver at the New York Botanical Garden (1936, 1937). Two more were spent working on the Dutch Elm disease.

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ecetes, Dr. White selected as his first post-Ph.D. professional employment, one which provided him an excellent opportunity of extending his knowledge into the Fungi Imperfecti. In 1941 he became Bibliographer and Assistant Curator of Fungi at the Farlow Herbarium under the late Dr. D. H. Linder. His principal energy was directed towards bringing Seymour's Host Index up to date. This particularly painstaking revision was completed in manuscript form up to 1942.



Dr. W. L. White examining mildewed fabric at the Quartermaster Tropical Deterioration Research Laboratory. 1947.

During this period he met Mary Rebecca Old, a graduate student in Biology at Radcliffe, and they were married in October 1942. "Becky" continued to work as an assistant in research to aid financially during the first years of their marriage.

With the inception of World War II the attention of scientific, industrial and military minds became sharply focused upon the

problems of tropical deterioration. What had been anticipated as a brilliant future in classical taxonomic mycology was diverted to mycological research in connection with the mildew-proofing of materiel with the Chemical Corps at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1943.

This was his first exposure to non-academic scientific life. The previous limitation of his activities to highly specialized taxonomic research revealed its eminent disadvantages in the strange environment. His approach and his personality did not fit into the alien schema of a highly practical, management-conscious organization. The demands for concurrent participation in multifold activities involving conflicting codes of behavior, rapid decisions based on approximations, mental resiliency and adaptations under compromising situations, impinged on unsuspecting Dr. White. His educational foundation provided neither the requisite points of departure, nor behavior models, nor "types" to which he could refer. Accordingly, when he went into military research with the Host Index unpublished, he was unable to carry on both activities at the same time. He could not switch back and forth from the immediate practical approximations of war-time deterioration problems to the detailed, meticulously accurate, patient completion of the Host Index. His compromise was to drop the Host Index. Viewed scientifically, this was unfortunate. Viewed practically, what other course was open to him?

Similar bifurcations confronted Dr. White when he became Chief of the Tropical Deterioration Research Laboratory in July 1944—a post he held for 4 years. Should he devote his energies to fundamental taxonomic research on the microorganisms themselves, or should he become involved in the practical and managerial demands of the situation? Recognizing his principal talents and envisioning that the war would soon be over, he wisely chose the basic research avenue. He adopted the singular purpose of setting up the Quartermaster Culture Collection on a firm taxonomic basis. The managerial, administrative and practical unpleasanties he would ignore and stoically bear the consequences. That his intuitive judgment was wise no one would deny today. The Collection soon became the focal point for much

and vigorous world-wide basic research in taxonomy, physiology and biochemistry. The cumulated data serve today as the basis for the practical development of mildew-proofing treatments for textiles, leather, paper, wood and other materials. Its cultures are the commercial standards used in annual procurement of millions of dollars worth of fungus-proofed material.

The four years exposure to this highly practical environment was not without impression upon his general outlook and thinking. His first organizational actions at the Farlow Herbarium and his later philosophy of taxonomic research provide an indication of this influence.

When Dr. White became Director of the Farlow Herbarium in April 1948, he was faced with the necessity of operating on funds the purchasing value of which had undergone a drastic decline. One of his first actions was to change the time-honored system of filing specimens. The phylogenetic or natural scheme was replaced by an alphabetical system, based on large groups. The distribution of specimens by mail was restricted. Boxes of unclassified material of unknown value were discarded. Only by such drastic actions was he able to hew out a bit of time for his own research.

During the war, Dr. White was deeply impressed with the eternal and awesome consequences of mistakes—mistakes that set up chains of irreversible decisions, acts and consequences. Corrections never seemed to catch up. This recognition moved him to adopt extreme caution in the field of his own specialty. His recent publications reveal a bringing together of information on organisms, specimens and records dealing with a particular species. But he rarely committed himself on the validity of names. He was never certain that he had *all* the evidence. As a specialist in several groups, he recognized the many misidentifications cluttering the literature. He hesitated to add another. As a mycologist of wide acquaintance, he was familiar with the abilities of his contemporaries. He knew that the reports of some were based on inadequate study and hasty publication. Wasn't it logical to assume that some of the "authorities" of the past were equally negligent? He viewed the straightening out of mycological tax-

onomy as a hopeless task, unless drastic action were taken. First, a halt must be called to the introduction of new names. Second, there must be a vigorous reworking of the entire taxonomic literature, and a weeding out of errors. He determined to set an example. One may demur that if the most skilful experts—and Dr. White certainly was a prominent one—do not set forth their views and estimates on new species, from whom will the less-informed learn? Yet Dr. White felt that drastic ailments require drastic remedies. He was willing to sacrifice his own publications for the cause.

Recognition came to Dr. White early. He served as vice president of the Mycological Society of America, and as Secretary and Chairman of the Microbiological Section of the Botanical Society of America. While with the Quartermaster Laboratory, he was invited by the Air Force to serve as mycologist on the round-the-world flight of the Air Technical Service Command Tropical Science Mission. The field experience gave him valuable first hand information on the extent and nature of deterioration of materiel by microorganisms. Recognition of White as the authority in this field is attested to by the fact that at the Farlow he was working on two projects for governmental agencies (Chemical Corps; Quartermaster Corps), and his assistance was being sought by three others.

This sketch brings us to early July 1952. Here was a most competent taxonomist on the threshold of his most productive period. Here was a world authority on the Helotiaceae and the Fungi Imperfecti, with a wealth of experience in the Basidiomycetes and Ascomycetes. Here was a friendly, democratic, helpful and competent professor. Here was a rare combination of the scientific and the practical, the academic and the managerial. Here was the synthesis of an essence to be handed down to the first of many graduate students and to be distilled for the scientific world. Then fate stepped in.

We who called him friend are thankful that his path crossed ours. His association has enriched our lives. His memory we cherish. We recall fondly the many incidents typifying the man—how he pounded his hand through a streetcar door when the

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driver failed to stop—how his taste in food went to hamburger
and potatoes—how he loved to stay up all night in discussion
groups loudly putting forth his opinions. We remember that his
struggle for an education was hard, that his success was largely
due to his inherent goodness, his stubborn persistence, his intuitive
taxonomic sense, and to those who loved him and helped him on.
He needed no hobby; his enthusiasm and enjoyment were in his
work and his family.

PIONEERING RESEARCH LABORATORIES,
U. S. ARMY QUARTERMASTER CORPS,
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

PUBLICATIONS OF W. LAWRENCE WHITE

(arranged chronologically)

1. (with H. W. Thurston, Jr.) Notes on the Rusts of Pennsylvania. Proc. Penna. Acad. Sci. 7: 140-148. 1933.
2. A new species of *Chondropodium* on *Pseudotsuga taxifolia*. Mycologia 28: 433-438. 1936.
3. Note on *Conidiobolus*. Mycologia 29: 148-149. 1937.
4. (with H. H. Whetzel). Pleomorphic life cycles in a new genus of the Helotiaceae. Mycologia 30: 187-203. 1938.
5. (with H. H. Whetzel). *Mollisia tetrica*, *Peziza Sejournei*, and the genera *Phaeociboria* and *Pycnopieziza*. Mycologia 32: 609-620. 1940.
6. A Monograph of the genus *Rutstroemia* (Discomycetes). Lloydia 4: 153-240. 1941. [Thesis-Cornell.]
7. A new Hemiascomycete. Canadian Jour. Res. 20(C): 389-395. 1942.
8. Studies in the genus *Helotium*. I. A review of the species described by Peck. Mycologia 34: 154-179. 1942.
9. Studies in the genus *Helotium*. II. *Lachnum pygmaeum* and the status of the genus *Helolachnum*. Amer. Midl. Nat. 28: 512-523. 1942.
10. Studies in the genus *Helotium*. III. History and diagnosis of certain European and North American foliicolous species. Farlowia 1: 135-170. 1943.
11. Studies in the genus *Helotium*. IV. Some miscellaneous species. Farlowia 1: 599-617. 1944.
12. (with R. Singer and W. H. Snell). The taxonomic position of *Polyporoletus sublividus*. Mycologia 37: 124-128. 1945.
13. Deterioration of Quartermaster fabrics in the tropics. Quartermaster Rev. 26: 16-17; 63-64; 67. 1946.
14. "Mycological factors." pp. 25-46 in Report of Army Air Forces Tropical Science Mission. Tropical Deterioration of Air Force Materiel and Equipment. Air Technical Service Command, Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio. 1946.

15. (with Mary H. Downing). The identity of "*Metarrhizium glutinosum*." *Mycologia* 39: 546-555. 1947.
16. (with R. G. H. Siu). Resistance of resin-impregnated cotton fabrics to microorganisms. *Ind. and Eng. Chem.* 39: 1628-1630. 1947.
17. (with R. T. Darby, Gladys M. Stechert, and Kathryn Sanderson). Assay of cellulolytic activity of fungi isolated from fabrics and related materials exposed in the tropics. *Mycologia* 40: 34-84. 1948.
18. (with R. G. H. Siu and E. T. Reese). The black *Aspergilli* in relation to cellulosic substrata. *Bull. Torrey Bot. Club* 75: 604-632. 1948.
19. (with C. C. Yeager and Helen Shotts). History, distribution and economic significance of the cellulose-destroying fungus *Memnoniella echinata*. *Farlowia* 3: 399-423. 1949.
20. (with E. T. Reese, H. S. Levinson, and Mary H. Downing). Quarter-master Culture Collection. *Farlowia* 4: 45-86. 1950.
21. (with G. R. Mandels and R. G. H. Siu). Fungi in relation to the degradation of woolen fabrics. *Mycologia* 42: 199-223. 1950.
22. (with Mary H. Downing). *Coccospora agricola* Goddard, its specific status, relationships, and cellulolytic activity. *Mycologia* 43: 645-657. 1951.
23. (with R. T. Darby). A refrigerator cabinet for fungal cultures. *Mycologia* 44: 578-580. 1952.
24. (with Mary H. Downing). *Humicola grisea* Traaen, soil-inhabiting, cellulolytic Hyphomycete. *Mycologia* 45. 1953 (in press).
25. (with G. D. Darker). Supplement to the Host Index of the Fungi of North America. (In manuscript; approx. 400 page book—unpublished.

Note: Government and University reports, abstracts, and book reviews have been omitted from the above list.