

Louis Pasteur (1822 – 1895)

He discovered the existence of bacteria in fermentation and put medical science on the track of the cause of many diseases. He crushed the terrors of anthrax, hydrophobia, and rabies.

Pasteur was born on December 27, 1822, at Dole, Jura. He was the son of a tanner who had been a sergeant major in Napoleon's Army of the Peninsula.

Shortly after Pasteur's birth, his family removed to Arbois, and there he first attended school in the Latin Quarter of Paris, where homesickness and loneliness caused a breakdown in his health. The only brother died in infancy, encouraged by his parents and sisters, his youthful enthusiasms was not science but painting and drawing.

His whole interest lay in his work. Had it not been wife. Pasteur's constant vigilance at the required times, he would never have attended the meetings of the academics and committees to which he belonged. She only opposed him, and then sweetly and gently, when she thought his work was affecting his health. To him, silence was indispensable when he was working.

In 1865 Pasteur was requested by the French Government to investigate a disease which was attacking silk worms. Within three years he was successful. At this time he was stricken with semi-paralysis, but he was able to return to Paris and continue working.

Pasteur was so eager to secure specimens of the germ of rabies that on one occasion he actually sucked through a tube the saliva of a mad dog. The sublime courage of this act will be realized when it is remembered that it is through the saliva that the mad dog transmits the disease. He ended by discovering a curative serum.

By the time of Pasteur's death in 1895, about 20,000 people world wide had been treated for rabies, with fewer than 100 deaths.

His seventieth birthday was an international event, made even more moving by his increasing frailty and by the knowledge that for almost twenty-five years he had soldiered on with the serious physical disability of a left-sided paralysis, following an almost fatal stroke.

On September 27, 1895, when someone leaned over his bed to offer him a cup of milk, he said sadly: "I cannot", and with a look of perfect resignation and peace, seemed to fall asleep. He never again opened his eyes to the cares and sufferings of a world, which he had done so much to relieve and to conquer.

