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# William Gates Le Duc

## COMMISSIONER of AGRICULTURE

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DURING the administration of President Rutherford B. Hayes, Minnesota made its sole contribution to the leadership of the federal agricultural agency in the person of William Gates Le Duc. He served in a period when appropriations were inadequate and when the head of the department of agriculture was a commissioner without a seat in the president's cabinet. Although an office for the collection of statistics and "other agricultural purposes" was authorized by Congress as early as 1839, the department of agriculture was not created until 1862, and it was not until 1889 that it became a full-fledged executive department.

Le Duc, who was born and raised in Ohio, was graduated from Kenyon College in 1848 and settled in Minnesota in 1850.

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<sup>1</sup>For biographical information on Le Duc see Claribel R. Barnett, in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, 11:92 (New York, 1933); an obituary by Gideon S. Ives in the *Minnesota History Bulletin*, 3:57-65 (May, 1919); and Le Duc's "Recollections of a Quartermaster," a manuscript autobiography. The latter is in the library of the United States department of agriculture in Washington. Another copy, which is restricted, is among the Le Duc Papers owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

During the next decade, he played a vital and dynamic part in building the new territory and in readying it for statehood. He obtained the first railroad charter granted in the territory, organized a company to build the Wabasha Street Bridge across the Mississippi at St. Paul, laid out the town of West St. Paul, was in charge of Minnesota's exhibits at the New York Crystal Palace Exhibition, and pioneered in the milling of spring wheat at Hastings, which he considered his home from 1857 until his death sixty years later.<sup>1</sup>

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Le Duc volunteered, was commissioned a captain, served under McClellan, Hooker, and Sherman, and was discharged with the brevet rank of brigadier-general. He then returned to Minnesota, where he made a short-lived, unsuccessful, and disillusioning attempt at railroading. After a brief and equally unsuccessful effort to recoup his losses by mining in Utah, Le Duc returned to Minnesota to farm. From agriculture, he made enough money to pay some of his debts, support his family, send his children to school, and "help friends to political preferment." In 1877, while he was interested

chiefly in agricultural pursuits, Le Duc was called to Washington to become President Hayes' commissioner of agriculture. Though the department of which Le Duc took charge was not highly regarded in Washington or in the farm press, the new commissioner was convinced of the importance of his job. He immediately made an effort to reform abuses, to expand the activities of the department, and to make it a truly meaningful agency for the American farmer.<sup>2</sup>

Basic to all Le Duc's actions was his philosophy that agriculture was the fundamental industry, and that farmers should remain on the land. He was alarmed by the rapid growth of cities, for he was convinced that "we can dig a substance from the fields that the pavements of cities never can or will yield." Of the farm-to-city migrants, he asked "What are they going to do? If they cannot work they have got to starve. If they don't starve they will rob, murder, steal, and plunder." A corollary of a large farm population was increased agricultural production, but this was regarded as beneficial not only by the commissioner but by most of the farm press and by the agricultural societies which tended to measure farm prosperity directly by production.<sup>3</sup>

In Le Duc's first annual report as commissioner, however, he seemed to refute his own argument. Comparing the corn crops of 1867 and 1875, he remarked that in the former year 768,000,000 bushels yielded the farmer a greater aggregate income than 1,340,000,000 bushels in the latter.<sup>4</sup> Many an observer might have concluded that increased production meant depression, but not Le Duc. In his opinion the problem could be solved by diversification. He felt that if some farmers who had been overproducing corn raised instead commodities which Americans were purchasing abroad, the price of corn would go up and the country would no longer have to depend on foreigners for any agricultural products.

Arguing that to be truly prosperous the

United States must produce "everything now imported from other nations," Le Duc continually called attention to the bullion drawn off to pay for raw materials which might be raised at home. In 1877 he set the figure for unnecessarily exported gold at \$236,295,981.00.<sup>5</sup> Since sugar and tea accounted for the bulk of the nation's agricultural imports, it is not surprising that, immediately upon taking office, the vigorous commissioner began to do what he could to encourage their production.

During the Civil War the department had made halfhearted efforts to encourage sugar production in the North, and following the war it endeavored to rehabilitate the sugarcane industry in Louisiana. Not until the time of Le Duc's administration, however, was any real attempt made to achieve self-sufficiency in this basic imported commodity. Convinced that the United States must grow its own sugar or go "to the devil on the down grade and with no brakes," Le Duc predicted that before he left office the United States would be importing very little sugar.<sup>6</sup>

On becoming commissioner, Le Duc tried first to increase the production of cane sugar, but while attending the Minnesota State Fair in 1877 he changed his mind in favor of a substitute. There he saw "sitting by itself without label or notice of any class to which it might belong, a common

<sup>2</sup> Le Duc, "Recollections," 257-276; *Rural New Yorker* (New York), 39:820 (December 11, 1880).

<sup>3</sup> Transcripts of conversations between the commissioner and exhibitors at the St. Louis fair, October 5, 1877, and of conversations (January 2 to June 30, 1878) in the commissioner's office, May 2, 1878, Le Duc Papers; *Cultivator* (Albany, New York), 12:326 (October, 1864); Commissioner of Agriculture, *Reports*, 1862, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Commissioner of Agriculture, *Reports*, 1877, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Commissioner of Agriculture, *Reports*, 1877, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> H. D. Emory to Jacob R. Dodge, October 15, 1862, and Lewis Bollman to Isaac Newton, October 18, 1862, in Chemistry Division Letter Books, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Commissioner of Agriculture, *Reports*, 1866, p. 7; conversations in the commissioner's office, June 5, 1878, Le Duc Papers.

horse bucket filled with brown sugar and standing beside it, a flat patent medicine bottle filled with a bright clear syrup." Le Duc asked what they were, and was informed that the bucket contained sorghum sugar and the bottle sorghum syrup which "Old Seth Kenney" had brought to the fair. Le Duc inspected the sugar and syrup and found both to be first-class. He was eager to talk to Kenney, but when he wrote and asked the farmer to return to the city for an interview, Kenney replied that he was "too busy with his sorghum and could not leave home." The sorghum successfully cultivated by Kenney in Minnesota was a development of his own called Early Amber that would ripen in ninety days. Although Le Duc did take samples back to Washington to be analyzed, he found in Seth Kenney's horse bucket and patent medicine bottle evidence enough that sorghum sugar would be commercially successful, and he began to purchase Early Amber seed immediately for distribution throughout the country in time for planting in 1878.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Le Duc, "Recollections," 278; Commissioner of Agriculture, *Reports*, 1878, p. 8.

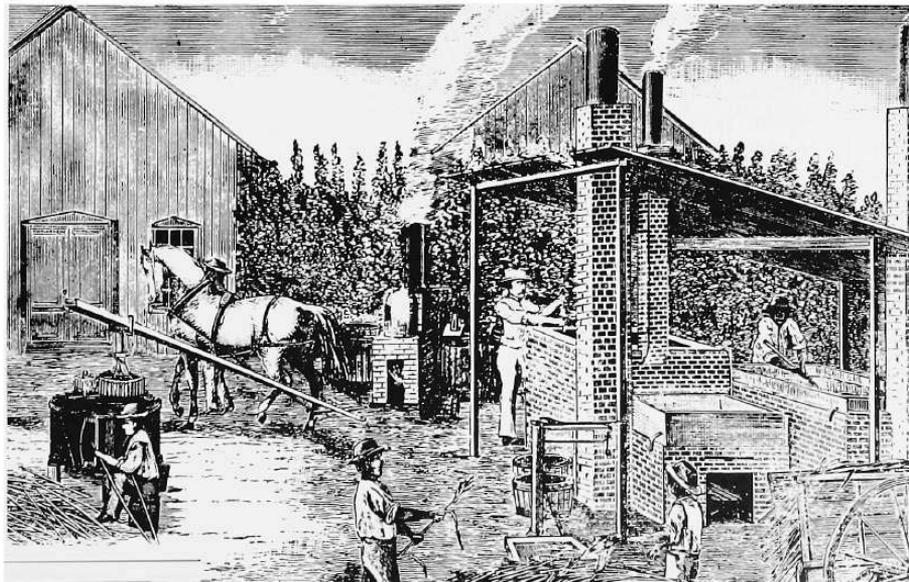
<sup>8</sup> *Chicago Tribune*, February 15, 1879; Le Duc to Sibley, December 31, 1879, Sibley Papers, owned by the Minnesota Historical Society; Le Duc to a Kansas farmer, November 3, 1879, and to Malcolm MacDowell, January 9, 1880, Commissioner of Agriculture, outgoing letters, National Archives.

From this time on, Le Duc was a sorghum man. He publicized sorghum through personal letters to interested farmers, through speeches to farm groups, through departmental circulars, and through contacts with other government officers. In January, 1879, he journeyed to St. Louis to speak at a cane growers' convention, where he stated categorically that sugar could be economically extracted from sorghum. A year later he wrote his Minnesota friend Henry H. Sibley that he was making a quick trip to Minneapolis to attend a meeting of the "cane growers sugar boilers etc. A hurried trip but one I think I must make." To a Kansas farmer, Le Duc wrote optimistically in 1879: "Sugar and syrup is being made from Texas to northern Minnesota from the Early Amber cane. . . . By the ordinary farmer's method sugar can be made from the Early Amber for less than three cents a pound." In January, 1880, the commissioner wrote a Chicago manufacturer of sugar machinery to say that he had visited the commissioner of Indian affairs "for the purpose of stirring him up on the sorghum sugar business" and urging him "to promote and establish the cultivation of sorghum at the different agencies."<sup>8</sup>

It was with great difficulty, however, that Le Duc obtained financial aid from Congress for his sugar program. In June, 1880, he approached his fellow Minnesotan, Sena-

FROM THE REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER OF AGRICULTURE

SUGAR machinery of  
the department  
of agriculture, 1879



tor William Windom, and asked for ten thousand dollars for machinery to conduct sugar experiments and five thousand dollars for laboratory expenses involved in the investigation. In spite of Windom's aid, Congress appropriated only sixty-five hundred dollars, and in his report Le Duc complained that the sum was "entirely inadequate to the object in view."<sup>9</sup>

In 1881 the commissioner started to work on Congress earlier, and he asked for more money. This time Congress voted twenty-five thousand dollars, but before Le Duc had a chance to spend any of it, he was replaced in office by Dr. George B. Loring of Massachusetts, who was not at all convinced that the sugar program was practical and thus allowed it to languish. Le Duc was despondent in 1881 as he wrote to his old friend Sibley: "I would like to carry out what I have begun and prosecuted almost to full and complete success, and reaped the full reward of self satisfaction at the final accomplishment of one of the greatest achievements any man ever had it in his power to do for his country i.e. to inaugurate successfully an industry that shall create from the earth a hundred millions a year and give employment to thousands & hundreds of thousands of people."<sup>10</sup>

THOUGH Le Duc's dream never materialized and sorghum never became a major source of sugar, the introduction and popularizing of a new crop was a genuine contribution to American agriculture, a contribution for which he deserves much of the credit. Not so with tea, another of the commissioner's pet projects.

For some time in Washington there had been a sporadic interest in the raising of tea, and it came sharply into focus when Le Duc took over as commissioner of agriculture in 1877. In his first report, Le Duc estimated that by growing tea at home, the nation could save from nineteen to twenty million dollars "which annually finds its way into the coffers of British merchants." In January, 1878, he interviewed the depart-

ment gardener, William Saunders, who told the commissioner of the earlier distribution of tea seeds by the agricultural agency, and added that "if it hadn't been for the war, we would have more information about tea."<sup>11</sup>

Le Duc's interest in the subject heightened, and the following month he arranged an interview with a Mr. Houser, who had observed the production of tea in India. Houser told Le Duc that it was no more difficult to harvest tea leaves than to pick cotton, but warned him against trying to compete with cheap Indian labor. "You can get labor there for \$1.50 to \$2.50 per month and the man boards himself," said Houser, adding that "There is no doubt about your being able to raise tea but the labor is the trouble." Le Duc was unmoved by this argument. He expressed his opinion on the subject to a South Carolina farmer who shared Houser's worry: "A Yankee brain and an American machine shop will accomplish more than all the Chinese ever on earth."<sup>12</sup>

Convinced that the United States could raise its own tea, Le Duc made an all-out effort to encourage tea production through publicity and the distribution of plants. He also urged Congress to appropriate money to finance experiments in tea cultivation. The possibilities of diverting at least a share of any government grant into his own pocket were interesting to a certain John Jackson, who wrote that he had been en-

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<sup>9</sup> *Congressional Record*, 46 Congress, 2 session, 3870, 4413; Commissioner of Agriculture, *Reports*, 1880, p. 7-9.

<sup>10</sup> *Congressional Record*, 46 Congress, 3 session, 1803, 1849; Le Duc to Sibley, June 22, 1881, Sibley Papers.

<sup>11</sup> Nelson Klose, "Experiments in Tea Production in the United States," in *Agricultural History*, 24:156-161 (July, 1950); Commissioner of Agriculture, *Reports*, 1877, p. 8; conversations in the commissioner's office, January 7, 1878, Le Duc Papers.

<sup>12</sup> Conversations in the commissioner's office, February 25, 1878, Le Duc Papers; Le Duc to a South Carolina farmer, January 5, 1880, Commissioner of Agriculture, outgoing letters.

gaged in the India tea industry for many years and just happened to be in the United States for six months of travel to improve his wife's health. After taking over an abandoned Georgia plantation on which tea plants set out in the 1850s were growing wild, he asked the department for aid. Le Duc sent him twenty thousand tea plants, and Jackson responded by promising the commissioner some of the first tea produced and requesting twenty thousand more plants. In April Jackson forwarded nine pounds of tea which he described as "not nearly so good as I could have wished to have sent you." He blamed its poor quality on lack of rain, unusually cold weather in March, unsatisfactory implements, and inefficient labor. In the meantime Le Duc asked Congress for twenty-five thousand dollars for tea experiments. In May Jackson reported that the weather was better, predicted success for his enterprise, and suggested that, since he was working on tea for the department, he should receive material assistance from any Congressional grant "if not the whole of it."<sup>13</sup> Jackson's efforts to obtain a substantial governmental appropriation for tea cultivation did not produce the desired results. Congress was not so generous as Le Duc expected, granting only five thousand dollars for tea in 1880. Moreover, the tea companies which had tested Jackson's first offerings returned unsatisfactory reports to the commissioner.<sup>14</sup> The unsuccessful Jackson abandoned his Georgia plantation.

In the following year, a Congressional

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<sup>13</sup> Transcript of conversations at the Columbia, South Carolina, fair; John Jackson, "Personal Memoir"; Jackson to Le Duc, March 27, April 23, May 7, 18, June 3, 1880, Le Duc Papers.

<sup>14</sup> *Congressional Record*, 46 Congress, 2 session, 3867; A. A. Low and Brothers, and Martin Gillet to Le Duc, June 15, 16, 1880, Le Duc Papers.

<sup>15</sup> Klose, in *Agricultural History*, 24:160; Le Duc, "Recollections," 279-281, 286; G. S. Jouett to Le Duc, December 31, 1880, Le Duc Papers; Commissioner of Agriculture, *Reports*, 1881-82, p. 21, 28; Alfred C. True, *A History of Agricultural Experimentation and Research in the United States*, 62 (Washington, 1937).

grant of ten thousand dollars for tea brought Jackson back into the business of government tea raising. On his advice, Le Duc decided to spend the money on a tea farm some place in the South. Though several likely sites were suggested, Le Duc chose a two-hundred-acre plantation near Summerville, South Carolina, on which he was able to secure a twenty-year lease for one dollar. The lessor was not as charitable as the agreement sounds, for the plantation, which was abandoned and in bad repair, was to be returned to him after twenty years with all improvements. The jobless Jackson, who had failed in Georgia, willingly accepted a position as manager of the government tea farm and immediately began to spend the special appropriation on rehabilitating the plantation and starting to cultivate tea. When Le Duc left office, the Summerville project was barely under way, and his successor, unconvinced of the practicability of tea raising, immediately entered upon a process of liquidation which took six years to complete.<sup>15</sup>

THOUGH Le Duc's efforts to promote tea ended in failure, some by-products of the venture were of immediate benefit to the country. In the first place, tea could be raised only in the South, and Le Duc's interest in this commodity and in other semi-tropical crops was evidence to many Southerners that the government in Washington really had their interests at heart. At a time when politicians were still waving the "bloody shirt," this indication of interest undoubtedly helped close the breach between North and South. When Le Duc left office, the *New Orleans Democrat* praised him for his "unsectional labors." A South Carolinian wrote that the commissioner's efforts on behalf of Southern agriculture had resulted in universal approbation throughout the South. A Louisiana planter called Le Duc "a benefactor to his kind." From Murfreesboro, Tennessee, the president of the gas light company wrote: "I am a raw headed fool democrat. But I am for

you against the world, democrat, republican, white man, nigger, indian or Chinaman notwithstanding.”<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, the Summerville plantation which was essentially a branch of the department of agriculture, illustrates Le Duc's interest in decentralized agricultural experimentation. In his report for 1878, the commissioner had called attention to the nation's wide climatic variations and had asked Congress for a thousand-acre farm at Washington and eight or ten experiment stations scattered throughout the country. Two years later, while testifying before a Congressional investigating committee, he bemoaned the fact that Congress had done nothing along these lines and urged that two branches of the department be established immediately, one near the frost line in Florida and one in the arid regions of the West.<sup>17</sup>

Le Duc believed firmly, however, that such experiment stations should be controlled from Washington. He was lukewarm toward locally administered experimentation and was polite but indefinite in his replies to offers of co-operation from the land-grant colleges. Furthermore, while he was commissioner he did not encourage agricultural groups to meet in Washington. When a Mr. Flagg wrote requesting the use of part of the department building for a meeting of an agricultural congress, Le Duc asked who called these meetings, and remarked: “It seems to me that such a thing should be called by authority, not by two or three fellows gotten together as a sort of mutual admiration society.” Le Duc used even stronger language when he discovered that he had been named a member of the committee on arrangements: “As for being a committee on reception or a committee on arrangements to look out for their hotels, get them good rooms, and be responsible for the gas bills, I'll be damned if I will do it.”<sup>18</sup>

Le Duc was running against the tide, however, and in the decade after he left office Congress passed the Hatch Act, which

provided for decentralized control as well as decentralized experimentation. The only federal feature of the program was the financing. The results of this act did not measure up to the aspirations of its advocates. In many cases the appropriations granted to states for agricultural experimentation were diverted to other uses or were wasted by poor management. It was not until 1894, when Congress began to compromise with Le Duc's ideas by granting greater powers of supervision over the state establishments to the office of experiment stations, that experimental work was established on a sound basis.<sup>19</sup>

ANOTHER phase of decentralized experimentation with which the energetic commissioner concerned himself was the department's distribution of seeds. Long before a government agency for agriculture was organized, consuls, navy officers, and interested travelers had sent seeds to the federal government from abroad. Since there were no facilities in Washington for their receipt or distribution, many of them were never planted or cultivated. When Henry Ellsworth became patent commissioner in 1836, he made his office the center for incoming seeds, and since he had no appropriation for their distribution, he persuaded Congressmen to use their franking privilege to put the seeds into the hands of farmers. Finding their constituents appreciative, the Congressmen clung to their function as seed distributors. In 1839 they began to appropriate money for agricul-

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<sup>16</sup> Clipping from the *New Orleans Democrat*, 1881; J. J. Lucas, J. W. Sparks, and C. W. Miles to Le Duc, January 18, February 8, 16, 1881, Le Duc Papers.

<sup>17</sup> Commissioner of Agriculture, *Reports*, 1879, p. 15; Le Duc's testimony before a Congressional investigation, 1880, p. 12, 13, Le Duc Papers.

<sup>18</sup> Conversations in the commissioner's office, January 29, February 18, 1878; undated letter from George E. Morrow to Le Duc, Le Duc Papers; Le Duc to Morrow, September 22, 1879, Commissioner of Agriculture, outgoing letters.

<sup>19</sup> True, *History of Agricultural Experimentation*, 132.

ture largely to increase the number of seeds that would become available for distribution with a resulting increase in votes. During the period from 1839 to 1862, when agriculture was a division of the patent office, seed distribution was its primary role, and it accounted for about twenty-five per cent of the department's annual appropriation during the era of the commissioner-ship.<sup>20</sup>

As might be expected, this political prostitution of a practice designed to be experimental was annoying to Le Duc, who determined to do something about it. In 1873 Congress had inadvertently included in a statute a provision that the department should distribute new and valuable seeds to agriculturists. Le Duc claimed that this made it illegal to disseminate seeds through Congressmen, and predicted that Congressional distribution would stop. Whenever he was asked for seed, Le Duc suggested that the Congressman furnish the department with a list of the best farmers in his district. If the commissioner received more requests for seed from one district than he could fill, he sent some of the constituents letters saying that "Your member of Congress has urgently requested this Department to send seeds. We regret that under law it is impossible." Le Duc explained to doubting Congressmen that those who received the letter would say: "My member is all right but it's the Commr. of Agri. that is wrong."<sup>21</sup> By combining skillful diplomacy and outright refusal, Le Duc temporarily succeeded in supervising closely the actual distribution of the department's seeds.

<sup>20</sup> Charles H. Greathouse, *Historical Sketch of the United States Department of Agriculture*, 53-68 (Washington, 1898).

<sup>21</sup> United States, *Revised Statutes*, vol. 18, part 1, p. 87, sec. 526; conversations in the commissioner's office, January 18, 1878, Le Duc Papers; Le Duc to Mariano Otero and to Nicholas Ford, December 14, 19, 1879, Commissioner of Agriculture, outgoing letters.

<sup>22</sup> *Congressional Record*, 46 Congress, 2 session, 4593; 3 session, 2285; *Husbandman* (Elmira, New York), April 6, 1881.



THE Le Duc house in Hastings during the visit of President Hayes, September, 1879

His attitude alienated many Congressmen, however, and after investigating the department, they provided by law in 1880 that three-fourths of all seeds should be distributed to members of Congress. In the following year they reduced this proportion to one-half, but on the whole Le Duc fought a losing battle with the evils of Congressional seed distribution. When he left office, an editorial writer for an agricultural journal commented as follows: "In the matter of free seed distribution it has not been possible to make it conform to the requirements of sober common sense . . . but there has been improvement in this service."<sup>22</sup> In spite of Le Duc's valiant efforts to terminate Congressional seed distribution during his administration, it continued to plague commissioners and secretaries of agriculture until 1923.

LE DUC also got into difficulties with Congress about the hiring and firing of department employees. This was especially true in the seed division. Unskilled women, most of whom were appointed on recommendations of Congressmen, sewed seed bags, packaged seeds, and mailed them. These

"proteges" had long been the "subject of invidious comment throughout the community," and the moment Le Duc took office in 1877, he was besieged by applications from Congressmen. Among them were appeals on behalf of a woman "who applies for some place under you by which she may be enabled to support herself & child," for a job for "a most worthy, estimable and deserving lady; but now in destitute circumstances," and for many others in similar straits. In a letter to Sibley, Le Duc complained bitterly about this practice: "I am beset by certain members of Congress & senators who think the Department places are made for their use. . . . I have had the entire delegation of a state with the exception of one senator come in person and demand that I put on my rolls a woman whom I had discharged and who was the protege of one of the delegation. I declined & with no great amount of meekness as you may suppose. A few days after the members were enemies."<sup>23</sup>

In hiring help, Le Duc considered the applicant's need rather than Congressional recommendation. Since his administration coincided with a depression, many of the women who applied to him for work were actually in financial distress. A visitor seeking a position for a woman whose daughter had a job in the post office was told that "that is very much against" the applicant, since "there is so much necessity in this city, and so much suffering that we feel obliged to take on those people . . . who are actually necessitous, and in want of bread." One belligerent job-seeker refused to be turned away, announcing that "I am going to set down here and I am going to sit here until you tell me my daughter can have a place. I came to see you because I am not going to take no for an answer." To this the commissioner replied, "Well, Madam, I hope you are quite comfortable. I assure you you will have a long seige of it." On another occasion a woman who was seeking employment suggested that "some ladies" got work in the treasury department.

To this Le Duc answered: "Where there are 3 or 4 thousand people of course some body is dying or getting sick or going home [,] but in a little department like this where there are only five ladies they wont resign, they wont marry, they wont die, so what am I to do?"<sup>24</sup> Le Duc's office records show that of forty-seven applicants seeking places in his department in the first six months of 1878, he hired or promised employment to only three.

LE DUC was not satisfied to operate only in the established areas of experimentation and plant introduction; he also urged Congress to make it possible for him to enter such new areas as forest conservation and the prevention of animal diseases. Congress, to be sure, had authorized the expenditure of two thousand dollars for a report on forests which was started by Dr. Franklin B. Hough in the year before Le Duc took office. This initial report was published during Le Duc's term, and the commissioner urged Congress to appropriate six thousand dollars for continued investigation into forestry in 1878. Congress, however, failed to make a grant, and Le Duc, refusing to abandon the project, diverted money from other areas in order to finance the preparation of a second report under Hough's direction in 1879. This was printed in 1880. Under pressure from Le Duc and Hough, Congress finally voted five thousand dollars in 1880 for a third report.<sup>25</sup> It was now possible to put Hough on the department payroll as its first regularly

<sup>23</sup> Horace Capron, "Autobiography," 1:147, a manuscript in the library of the United States department of agriculture; Alexander H. Stephens, John Pool, D. J. Morrell, and Milton G. Uner to Le Duc, January 4, 14, 1878, March 10, 1879, January 28, 1880, Le Duc Papers; Le Duc to Sibley, December 31, 1879, Sibley Papers.

<sup>24</sup> Conversations in the commissioner's office, January 11, 14, February 6, 1878, Le Duc Papers.

<sup>25</sup> Commissioner of Agriculture, *Reports*, 1878, p. 27, 31; *Congressional Record*, 46 Congress, 2 session, 3528-3530; 47 Congress, 1 session, 1772, 2990; True, *History of Agricultural Experimentation*, 55, 58.

paid employee in charge of forestry. The continuous work of the agriculture department in this field of activity dates from that time.

It was also during Le Duc's administration that a beginning was made in the field of preventing animal diseases. Pleuropneumonia, a disease of cattle, had existed here and there in the United States before the Civil War, but as transportation facilities improved it rapidly spread throughout the country. State quarantine laws, inadequate in any case, were declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court at about the same time that the British government ordered all American cattle to be slaughtered at the docks.<sup>26</sup> Clearly it was time for some sort of federal action.

The logical existing agency which might deal with pleuropneumonia was, of course, the department of agriculture. Commissioner Le Duc in 1878 had circulated throughout the country questionnaires requesting information on losses due to animal disease. The answers received indicated an annual loss of thirty million dollars, and Le Duc asked Congress for thirty thousand dollars—"one tenth of one per cent of the loss of last year"—to deal with the problem. Congress granted only ten thousand dollars, and Le Duc was forced to curtail his proposed program. During the rest of his administration he continued to urge annihilation of diseased animals as the only cure for pleuropneumonia, the establishment of a veterinary division to organize the attack, and "the interference of the strong arm backed by the full purse of the general government in whatever broad prairie or corner acre a single case of

pleuro-pneumonia may be found." A writer for the *National Livestock Journal*, however, believed it unlikely that legislation on the subject would be passed in 1880. "The question of averting the calamity of this plague. . ." he predicted, "will be quite lost sight of in the question . . . of who shall next occupy the White House."<sup>27</sup> The *Journal* was correct; nothing was done.

AT FIRST GLANCE, Le Duc's administration as commissioner of agriculture might appear unproductive. Sugar still is not manufactured in any quantity from sorghum; tea still comes from Asia; experiment stations are state-directed; Congressmen continued to distribute seeds until 1923; and the results of Le Duc's efforts in the fields of forestry and animal disease were obviously meager.

But it would be wise to look again before making too quick an evaluation of Le Duc's accomplishments as commissioner. In sorghum, he encouraged the cultivation of a valuable crop. His tea experiments were not particularly costly, and his interest in a crop which could be grown only in the South did give the Republican-run federal department of agriculture prestige in that section of the country. He may have lost the battle of the experiment stations, but the victors soon recognized that there was more merit in close federal control than they had originally imagined. If he did not actually take seed distribution from Congressmen and make it into a real experimental function of the department, he surely tried, and his efforts helped call the attention of the country to the evils of the existing system. Though there were shortcomings in the fields of forestry and animal disease, they were due more to the niggardliness of Congress than to any lack of interest or ability on the part of the commissioner. In short, Le Duc did the best he could under the circumstances. Minnesotans have every right to be proud of this honest, aggressive, persistent, and energetic commissioner of agriculture.

<sup>26</sup> Hannibal and St. Joe Railroad Company vs Husen in 5 *Otto*, 465; *National Livestock Journal* (Chicago), 11: 282, 415 (July, October, 1880).

<sup>27</sup> Commissioner of Agriculture, *Reports*, 1878, p. 24-26; 1880, p. 26-33; conversations in the commissioner's office, May 3, 1878, Le Duc Papers; Le Duc to C. P. Lyman, December 12, 1879, January 2, 1880, Commissioner of Agriculture, outgoing letters; *National Livestock Journal*, 11:141, 144 (April, 1880).



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