

## George A. Matile

(30 May 1807 – 6 Feb 1881)

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*The Evening Star, February 7, 1881*

### Death of Old and Prominent Citizens

Professor George A. Matile, of the Patent Office library, died suddenly at his room, No. 423 11th street, yesterday afternoon, of apoplexy, while seated at his desk writing. He was about 65 years of age, and a native of Switzerland, where he was a classmate at College with the late Professors Agassiz and Guyot, the three having come to this country together. Prof. Matile has written extensive and valuable treatises upon international law which are regarded as standard authorities in France and Germany. He was attacked with vertigo last Monday, on the steps of the Patent Office, and falling sprained his ankle. Since then he had been confined to the house. He leaves a wife and two grown children.

*The Lutheran Observer, February 25, 1881*

### Death of Prof. Matile

Dear Dr. Conrad:

I offer this tribute of respect to one who was recently gone from our midst. Prof. George A. Matile was born in Switzerland, on the 30th of May, 1807. He died at Washington, D.C., on Sunday morning, February 6th, 1881. For the past three years he has been a parishioner of St. Paul's English Lutheran Church, worshiped with us, and communed with us at the Lord's table. He was a remarkable man, and merits more than the mention I can make of him in this communication. He came into this country in 1849, landing at New York. He came to Washington in 1862, under the administration of President Lincoln, and since then has been in the service of the government with the exception of one year, during which he was employed as antiquarian in the museum of Princeton College, N.J., Prof. Matile was a man of great scholarly attainments. He was a graduate with Profs. Agassiz and Guyot at the University of Neuchatel, Switzerland, the former having been one day older, and the other three days younger than Mr. Matile. These men came over to this country about the same time, and having been associated together from boyhood, they kept up that association by correspondence, in the land of their adoption. Of this trio of remarkable men, Prof. Guyot, of Princeton College, alone remains. A letter from Guyot was received only a few days before the death of Mr. Matile. He spoke of this letter with tender interest, as coming from so precious a friend.

After his graduation at the University of Neuchatel, Prof. Matile prosecuted his studies a while longer at Berlin and Paris. He was a thorough classical scholar, had studied the Hebrew, and spoke with more or less readiness nearly all the languages of Europe. He understood the Arabic, and was, in short, a polyglottal scholar. He was a graduate in the department of law, then became a professor in the law-school of the university at which he was graduated. Afterwards he became a practitioner of law, and was subsequently promoted to a judgeship in one of the cantons of Switzerland. Sometime after his arrival in America, he was admitted to the Philadelphia bar, and practiced law, for several years, in that city. He was the author of several works on International Law, which are regarded as valuable contributions to law literature in Switzerland, Germany and France. He was also a frequent contributor to the press both in this country and Europe. In scientific researches he took prominent rank, and because of his scientific attainments he was called, for a time, to the museum of Princeton College. He had made himself familiar also, with the great questions of modern thought. The skepticism of both hemispheres he had studied with great ability, thoroughness and care. The profoundest theological literature engaged his attention, and with his own pen he had translated some valuable discussions in

polemic theology. But what I would specially emphasize is the Christian character of this man. As such his name must be added to the roll of Christian scholars and scientists, with such men as Prof. Henry, of the Smithsonian Institute, Profs. Agassiz, Guyot, and others, whose profounder gaze has rested on the gates of jasper and pearl, whose ears have listened to the voice of God sounding out from the crays and summits of creation, and whose testimony to the Divine Christ is in harmony with the song the angels sing.

Mr. Matile was a man of strong religious convictions. Into these he had come by rigid and careful processes of independent investigation. He was a critical student of the Bible. His French New Testament was always at hand, and it was filled with annotations, showing his careful and constant study of the divine word. The prevalent agnosticism of the age he regarded as unworthy of respect. He denounced it was empty of scientific truth, and, in rational thought, as baseless as it was impudent and pernicious. His testimony to the truity of Christianity was unequivocal, intelligent, fearless. Christ was to him no vague abstraction, no mythological uncertainty, but a personal Saviour, and the word of God his only infallible rule of faith and practice." When the final hour came, he was busy at the Master's work. No long confinement to a sick-room preceded his departure. Only an attack of vertigo, and a little consequent weakness, indicated the approach of the evening shadows. He was seated at his desk early on Sunday morning, writing an article on the temperance reform for the New York Witness, when the wish and prayer of his life were answered in a sudden and painless death. His pen fell on the unfinished article, and with drooping head he passed into the last sleep! No one was present when he died except his cherished and devoted wife. His funeral was attended by many of his associates in office. The Secretary of the Interior, Mr. Schurz, acted as one of the pallbearers. Passing out of the house, the honorable Secretary remarked: "I have known Mr. Matile for many years, he was an upright, noble man." A heritage of distinguished greatness and goodness he has left to his wife and children, and a glorious testimony to Christianity and the Church by his scholarly, useful and consecrated life: "So shine out the stars in heavens high dome."

Very kindly

S. Donner

Washington, D.C., February 15, 1881