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Lefever Family

Lefever, John Russel, M. D., homoeopathist, Lykens, Pa., was born in New Bloomfield, Perry County, Pa., October 7, 1860. The various branches of the **Lefever** family found widely scattered in Pennsylvania and southward generally claim descent from Huguenot ancestors, exiled from France by religious persecution some two centuries ago. They are to be met with in York, Cumberland, Crawford and Adams Counties, Pa., about Winchester, Va., and in other localities, but it has become impossible to trace relationships among them. The **Lefevers** of Crawford county and of Winchester are probably the most closely allied to the family treated of in this sketch, having descended from uncles of **Jacob Lefever**, who was **Dr. John R.**'s grandfather.

Jacob Lefever was born near Newville, Cumberland County, Pa., May 31, 1795. He remained at home on his father's farm until he was about twenty, when he went into a printing office in Carlisle, Pa. Leaving Carlisle in 1818, he went to Gettysburg and there established a newspaper, which he called the Republican Compiler, and which he conducted until 1839, when Governor Porter appointed him register and recorder of Adams County. He held the office until the Constitution made it elective. At the time of his appointment he retired from the paper, and soon after the expiration of his term of office returned to Cumberland County and engaged in farming. In the spring of 1848 **Mr. Lefever** represented Cumberland County in the State Legislature. He was still a resident of this county when he died, April 26, 1875, in his eightieth year.

Dr. Isaac Lefever was the son of **Jacob Lefever** and his wife **Elizabeth**, a native of Gettysburg, and of German descent. He was born in Gettysburg, June 15, 1820, and spent in that town the first twenty-five years of his life. It may be said that his education was mainly acquired through his diligent application while employed in his father's printing office; for, although he attended school regularly from the early age of five until he reached his thirteenth year, it was but a common school education, sufficient only to acquaint him with the elementary branches. When nearly thirteen he went into the printing office, worked during the day and studied at night, often rising before daylight on winter mornings to read and study in the office until breakfast time. The busy young printer even found time for Latin, reciting on winter evenings, about 1833 or 1834, to **Dr. J. H. Marsden**, now of York Springs, Pa., but at that time principal of an academy for girls at Gettysburg. After his father's return to Cumberland County, **Isaac Lefever** conducted the Compiler until the spring of 1842, when he sold the establishment, intending to remove from Gettysburg. But at this time a new impulse was given to his life, by the influence of David Gilbert, M. D., whose lectures on anatomy and physiology before the senior class of Pennsylvania College he had attended, by invitation of Dr. Gilbert, two or three years before. The Doctor now sought an interview with the young man, whose talents he had discerned, and suggested that he should study medicine. The idea was new to **Mr. Lefever**, but after mature consideration and consultation with friends he decided to act upon it, and accordingly commenced reading with Dr. Gilbert in the summer of the same year. He studied under his preceptor until October, 1844, meanwhile attending a course of lectures on chemistry at Pennsylvania College, by Prof. M. Jacobs. During the winter of 1844 and 1845 **Mr. Lefever**

attended lectures at the medical department of Pennsylvania College, in Philadelphia, in which Dr. Gilbert then occupied the chair of surgery. The other professors were Drs. William R. Grant, William Darrach, H. L. Patterson, J. Wiltbank, and Washington L. Atlee. Of this group of distinguished men, Dr. Atlee is now the sole survivor. Pennsylvania Medical College then, and for a few years after, occupied a building afterwards the seat of Hahnemann College, but the former was always allopathic in its principles.

Dr. Isaac Lefever first practiced his profession at Mount Rock, Cumberland County, Pa., for one year, then moved to Loysville, in Sherman's Valley, Perry County; in November, 1855, removed to New Bloomfield, county seat of Perry County. Here he joined the Perry County Medical Society, served in all its offices and held his membership until he took up homeopathy. He was also connected with the State Medical Society, and among its records are several reports made by him on behalf of the Perry County Society. In 1860 **Dr. Lefever** was appointed postmaster of New Bloomfield, accepting the office principally on account of some financial difficulties affecting himself and others as sureties for the previous incumbent; these difficulties being removed, his resignation was tendered and accepted, and he was relieved of office in 1861. In that year he was appointed surgeon of the Third brigade, Fifteenth division, Uniformed militia of Pennsylvania, and held the commission until the then existing militia system was remodeled. In October, 1862, he was elected associate judge of the courts of Perry County, and served in that office for a term of five years.

In 1862 **Dr. Lefever** wished to apply for an appointment in the medical department of the army, but could not obtain the consent of his wife and family to this step until 1864. The application made, after due examination, he was commissioned and ordered to report to the Seventy-sixth Pennsylvania volunteers. With some little difficulty he reached his regiment, which was encamped close by the battlefield of Chupin's Farm, and remained with it until it was discharged. Although his commission was that of assistant surgeon, yet as he was the only medical officer with the regiment he performed surgeon's duty. During a part of the time he also served in the same capacity a New York battery of artillery, besides rendering similar services occasionally to other regiments deprived of their medical officers. In July, 1865, the regiment was discharged at Raleigh, N. C, and the Doctor returned home and resumed his practice.

Even before his graduation from Pennsylvania Medical College, which took place in March, 1854, **Dr. Lefever** had given some consideration to the subject of homeopathy, but laboring under the misapprehension common among allopathic physicians that that system consists merely in giving very minute doses of medicine, he paid it little attention. Still, with a candid desire for information, he purchased and read Hahnemann's Organon, as well as the treatise of Professor Simpson, of Edinburg, against homeopathy. Influenced, however, rather by the latter book, which was most in accordance with his education, he again dismissed the subject from his mind and continued allopathic practice. But now, after his return from the army, it was in some way brought again under his consideration. Meeting with a very intelligent homoeopathic physician, and receiving satisfactory answers to the many inquiries which he made of this gentleman, **Dr. Lefever** began to experiment as well as to read carefully on the subject. Preparing some medicines he treated several cases, as he then supposed homeopathically, but found afterwards that he had only made an approach to that practice; yet he obtained results which led to further experiment with growing light on the subject and strengthening convictions,

until, actually against his inclination, he became fully convinced of the truth of homeopathy, and wholly discarded allopathic drugs. The longer he is engaged in homeopathic practice, the stronger is his conviction that it is the true method of treating diseases. In the spring of 1869 he left New Bloomfield for Mechanicsburg, Cumberland County, from which place, in November, 1872, he removed to Harrisburg, Pa., where he died October 20, 1893, and his remains were interred in the cemetery at New Bloomfield, Perry County, Pa.

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