

**Edmund Beecher Wilson**, For. Mem. R.S., Hon. F.R.S.E.

IN 1923, when Professor E. B. Wilson was elected an Honorary Fellow of this Society, he had already for a generation been a leader in the most rapidly developing of all the kin branches of Biology—the study of the cell. He saw the new science of cytology rise upon the discoveries of Boveri and Van Beneden, and the successive editions of his own work upon *The Cell* mark the stages of that phenomenal progress. The first edition, published in 1896, not long after these discoveries, guided attention to and focussed it upon the new development; the second, published in 1900, remained for a quarter of a century the handbook and inspiration of student and researcher.

And since the cell is the foundation of all living organisms his conceptions opened up fresh avenues of exploration in many directions. The discovery that at an early stage in the developing egg, a cell might retain the power of reproducing the whole organism, or might be set aside as the starting-point of a particular organ, led to the idea of cell-lineage in embryology.

It was he and his students who laid the foundation of modern notions of the inheritance of characters by interpreting Mendelian segregation as a matter of parental chromosomes kept distinct in the germ cells, and who later discovered the sex-determining chromosomes in certain insects.

These and the multitudinous discoveries of the first quarter of the present century, including the revolutionary work of a colleague of Wilson's in Columbia University, T. H. Morgan, followed the appearance of the second edition of *The Cell*, and demanded the production of a new summing up of the situation. So there appeared in 1925 a third edition, entirely rewritten and much bulkier, under the title *The Cell in Development and Heredity*, which another of his American colleagues, Professor E. G. Conklin, in presenting him for the Daniel Giraud Elliot Medal of the National Academy of Sciences, called "in every respect a monumental work, one of the most complete and perfect that American science has produced in any field."

Wilson made other important contributions to zoological knowledge, but his name will be most closely associated with the rise of the twin branches of cytology and genetics. He died on March 3, 1939, eighty-two years of age.

See also *Obituary Notices of Fellows of the Royal Society*, vol. iii, No. 8, 1940, pp. 123–138.

J. R.