

Robert Alexander Robertson, M.A., B.Sc.

WITHIN four months of his retirement from the Chair of Botany in the University of St Andrews, Professor R. A. Robertson passed away. Thus terminated forty-four years of strenuous service for the University and a life devoted to the advancement of botany in Scotland.

Born in Rattray, Perthshire, in 1873, Robertson went from the village school to the University of Edinburgh, where he graduated in arts and science. Physiology under Rutherford and botany under Dickson and Bayley Balfour were the subjects most frequently mentioned by him as holding his interest while a student. In 1889 he came to St Andrews to assist Professor W. C. McIntosh in the practical zoology class, but he lectured in botany and in physiology. In 1891 he was appointed Lecturer in Botany, his status being raised to that of Reader in 1915. In 1929 a Chair of Botany in the University was instituted, and Professor Robertson became its first occupant. He retired from the Chair in September 1934, and passed away on January 22, 1935. To his pioneer work the University owes its present flourishing department of Botany, whose alumni have gained recognition for their chief across the seven seas.

Robertson was a great teacher. Labouring incessantly to keep himself proficient, he had the power of imparting knowledge, developing initiative, and creating enthusiasm. Pioneer work in the identification of timbers illustrated by microphotographs, the use of anatomy as an aid to taxonomy in the Genus *Potentilla*, together with advocating the conception of "functional inertia" by examples drawn from the vegetable kingdom stand out as lines of investigation during Robertson's early years at St Andrews. His fame as a teacher had its penalty. Classes increasing in numbers and conducted single-handed, in accommodation no longer adequate, rendered personal research impossible. A commodious new department of Botany was provided in 1932, but in the intervening years a steady stream of young enthusiasts worked under his guidance. The flow of publications continued under the names of the investigators, Robertson refusing to countenance joint authorship.

Captain Robertson will be remembered almost as much for his services to the Officers' Training Corps. He was an enthusiast for military training, and at the outbreak of the World War was Captain of the St Andrews

O.T.C. Due to his efficiency in training, St Andrews was able to take a worthy share when the crisis came.

Robertson, who was elected a Fellow of the Botanical Society of Edinburgh in 1890, became its President in 1915. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1902, and of the Linnean Society in 1903. He was elected to the Honorary Committee of Management of the Imperial Bureau of Mycology from its inception in 1922.

He was a man of high principles, who never stooped to subterfuge, steadfast in his loyalty to justice and honour, and was lacking neither in sympathy nor in humour.

R. J. D. G.