

SIR RUBERT BOYCE, F.R.S.

THE news of the premature death of Sir Rubert Boyce, at the age of forty-eight, will come as a shock to many, not only at home, but throughout the tropical world. A bare record of his scientific work would give but little idea of what his achievements really were. His rare abilities were of a practical nature, and took shape eventually in the initiation and organisation of manifold activities. He was educated in London, Heidelberg, and Paris, and after taking his medical degree in 1889 he devoted himself to research work, mainly on the pathology of the nervous system, under Sir Victor Horsley, at University College, and in 1893 was appointed professor of pathology at the then University College, Liverpool. Soon afterwards he was asked to take up the position of bacteriologist to the city of Liverpool, which he held until his death.

In 1902 Sir Rubert Boyce was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. He was a member of the Royal Commission on Sewage Disposal, and for a period of five years he supervised the researches conducted for the Commission at Liverpool. In 1904 he was appointed a member of the Royal Commission on Tuberculosis, and on the day of his death he was to have signed the final report of the Commission.

During these years his powers of organisation were being put into practice, and to mention one project only, his part in the transformation of University College into the University of Liverpool is a well-known fact. While this and many other achievements—for in each he took a most active part—represent an amount of work and energy that can only be appreciated by those who know the manifold difficulties and the dead weight of opposition that has to be removed before such objects can be successfully carried through, yet they were still to be followed by even greater things.

Sir Rubert Boyce had established a close relationship, often indeed a warm friendship, with those other great organisers who mould the destiny of the great commercial world of Liverpool. He was never tired of telling the commercial community that science was not merely an academic pursuit, but was intimately connected with the carrying on of their business. Whilst he preached that science was not merely an academic pursuit, his practice was a proof of it. One of the most remarkable and devoted of his friendships was with one of the most striking of the great personalities of Liverpool—the late Sir Alfred Jones. Sir Alfred himself was a man of great practical organising genius, and the great organising powers of Sir Rubert Boyce now found their full scope in association with this untiring originator of ideas. It was in 1898 that he, together with Sir Alfred Jones, founded the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, which rapidly became known throughout the whole world, both scientific and non-scientific, for its work. Now also at his initiative commenced that remarkable series of expeditions which, apart from their scientific side, fired the imagination of all residents in the tropics.

Tropical medicine was forced on the ear of the public, and their help and that of the governors in the tropical dependencies was enlisted, in securing that the conditions in the tropics should be improved. The improvement in the last ten years has been great, but the work has really only begun. Sir Ronald Ross had at this time been conducting his anti-malarial campaign, but there was more to be done, and Sir Rubert, not content with having founded a great school, himself actually went into the field to see matters at first hand.

In 1905 an outbreak of yellow fever occurred at
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New Orleans. He quickly availed himself of the opportunity, offered by the American authorities, to take part in the campaign. He then laid the foundation of that experience which was to bear fruit later. At the same time, at the request of the British Government, he visited British Honduras, where also yellow fever had broken out. In 1906 the first symptoms of the illness that eventually proved fatal occurred. In 1909 again, at the request of the Government, he visited the West Indian Islands to investigate yellow fever, and in 1910 he made his last expedition to West Africa, where an epidemic of yellow fever had occurred.

Not content simply with official reports of these expeditions, he determined to impress the importance of these subjects, of which yellow fever was only one, on the public. The result was in two short years three popular works, "Mosquito or Man," "Health Progress and Administration in the West Indies," and "Yellow Fever and its Prevention," stating in clear and forcible language the bearing of scientific results on the health and prosperity of the community. The success of these works was immediate, and the name of Sir Rubert Boyce became a household word to every European in the tropics. But even this was not enough; he must do something to remedy the state of affairs revealed, and the formation of the Bureau of Yellow Fever at Liverpool marks the last of his many practical works. It is as a great scientific organiser that Sir Rubert Boyce will take his place, and when the history of tropical medicine comes to be written, his will be a foremost and revered name.

In tropical medicine it may well be said that he found the passion of his life. The founding of the school may be regarded as the culminating effort of his practical genius, but his actual experience of tropical medicine in the field, in his visits to the tropics, so impressed his imagination that it is impossible to think he ever would have forsaken it; and, very shortly before his death, which he knew might take him at any moment, he declared that his one desire in life was to do some work to alleviate the condition of those who lived in the tropics. His methods came as a sharp electrical shock to those accustomed to more sedate ways. Financial difficulties seemed to present to him no obstacle, once he had seen that the end was desirable; his unrivalled success in collecting funds from the most unpromising quarters was well known, and he will be sorely missed not least by those who suffered gladly in this way at his hands.

His care and thought for those who worked with him were often unsuspected, but those who did their work thoroughly found that they were not forgotten in the race, and there are many in various parts of the world who can testify to his generous help.

His many activities often aroused keen antagonisms, and to many perhaps his personal qualities were quite unknown. But those who knew him in his private life, who had enjoyed his hospitality, or had further had the privilege of his friendship, found in him a warm, generous, and noble spirit.

J. W. W. S.

SCIENCE AND CORONATION HONOURS.

OWING to the necessity of going to press earlier than usual last week no reference was made to the list of Coronation honours. There is, however, little to record; for though the list is very long, the services which men of science render to the State are but scantily represented in it. From a national point of view this disregard of scientific work must be considered as unenlightened policy. A title does not