OBITUARY

Sir Robert Pickard, F.R.S.

ROBERT HOWSON PICKARD was the eldest son of the late J. H. Pickard, of Edgbaston, Birmingham, and was educated at King Edward's Grammar School, Camp Hill, and at Mason College, where he studied chemistry under Tilden and P. F. Frankland; and the University of Munich, where he received his Ph.D. degree in 1898. A year later he was appointed head of the Chemical Department of Blackburn Technical College, and he became principal eight years later, at the early age of thirty-one. He held this dual post until he moved to London in 1919 to become principal of Battersea Polytechnic. Here he undertook additional duties as director of the newly formed British Leather Manufacturers' Research Association, an organisation with which he was later associated in an advisory capacity up to the time of his death. During this period he served on the Senate of the University of London and on the councils of the British Launderers' Research Association, the Boot, Shoe and Allied Trades Research Association, and on many important committees including the Burnham Committee, of which he was for some time secretary. He was director of the British Cotton Industry Research Association during 1927-43, vice-chancellor of the University of London (1937-39), chairman of the Chemical Council (1936-38), and president of the Institute of Chemistry (1936-39). He was a past president of the Society of Chemical Industry, twice vice-president of the Chemical Society, a member of the Research Committee of the Federation of British Industries, and chairman of the Committee of Directors of Research Associations. He was knighted in 1937.

This mere recital of the positions he held, remarkable though it may be, gives little indication of his most distinguished record. He infused life and vigour into everything with which he was associated. During the Blackburn period, his contact with the textile industry led him to see that there was wide scope for the application of science and scientific methods, and the extensive knowledge and experience thus gained proved to be of great use to him when he became director of the Shirley Institute. Another feature of the Blackburn period was his own research work. His main interest as a chemist lay in stereochemistry, and particularly in the relationship between chemical constitution and the magnitude of optical rotatory power. About 1905, in conjunction with his colleagues at Blackburn, he devised a method of resolving racemic secondary alcohols into their pure optically active isomerides. By this means, which proved to be of wide application, a number of homologous series of optically active alcohols and their esters were prepared and their rotatory powers for light of different wave-lengths determined. He was elected to fellowship of the Royal Society in 1917 while still at Blackburn, in itself a remarkable achievement and a great honour to a provincial technical school.

When the British Cotton Industry Research Association was formed in 1919, Pickard had hoped to be appointed director. Instead, he left Lancashire to take up the appointment at Battersea Polytechnic. Under his vigorous leadership the Polytechnic sprang to life in a way it never had before. I am told that his guidance at this time was literally the salvation of many ex-Service students seeking to repair the damages caused by years of mental stagnation. It

is largely due to his insight and vision that the university side of the Polytechnic teaching activities was widened and encouraged. During this period he still continued his scientific work, but with decreasing intensity as the pressure of administrative duties bore increasingly upon him.

When the directorship of the Cotton Research Association became vacant through the death of Dr. Crossley, the position was advertised; but Pickard would not apply. Fortunately there were wise men in Lancashire who realized that he was the man for the post, and a deputation came to London and persuaded him to return to Lancashire. Thus he entered on what proved to be the greatest period of his career.

When he came to the Shirley Institute in 1927, he found that a vast amount of first-class scientific knowledge had been accumulated, but that after six years the industry was getting impatient and wanting more practical results. He saw that the time was opportune for an intensive application of the knowledge already gained, and for the introduction of special means to link the scientists more closely with the practical men in the mills. The success of his policy may be gauged from the fact that when he retired after seventeen strenuous years, the Research Association was recognized on all sides as an essential part of the textile industry and its name was known throughout the world. I would say he did more than any other man to justify the principle of the research association movement.

Pickard's other great interest was in education. He was for many years chairman of the Roedean School Council, member of the Courts of the Universities of Birmingham and Manchester, and in his later years a member of the Education Committee of the Surrey County Council. I have already referred to his connexions with the University of London. In 1948 he became chairman of Convocation, a position he held until shortly before his death. Many are the tributes that have been paid to the wisdom and sagacity he showed in those great and honourable positions.

He believed intensely in the value of leading the full life at school and college, and at his own College he was secretary of four societies and chairman of the Union. He was a great sportsman who excelled at cricket and tennis, and he associated himself closely with the social life of all the organisations he directed.

Pickard had a quick grasp of details and a remarkably retentive memory. He was a most severe critic, sometimes to the point of raising resentment in those he criticized. But he was also constructive, and the number is legion of those who have cause to thank him for advice and guidance in their life and work. He respected those who talked to him as frankly and fearlessly as he did to them. To some his outward bearing was somewhat harsh; but to know him intimately was to recognize a very human man with a high sense of moral values, whose word was his bond.

His family life was a happy one until a few years ago, when he suffered two severe blows, in the death of his wife and, shortly after, his only daughter. He is survived by an only son, at whose home in Surrey he died in his sleep on October 18, at the age of seventy-six.

Even the generous columns of *Nature* are not sufficient to do full justice to Pickard's life and work. In science and technology, industry and education, he has left the impress of a remarkable personality.

F. C. TOY