

OBITUARIES

Prof. James Ritchie, C.B.E.

BORN in 1882 at Port Elphinstone, Aberdeenshire, the son of the local schoolmaster, James Ritchie, emeritus professor of natural history in the University of Edinburgh and president of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, died suddenly in Edinburgh on October 19 at the age of seventy-six. He had a notable career. Educated at Gordon's College and then at the University of Aberdeen, he joined the staff of the Natural History Department of the Royal Scottish Museum in 1907. Assistant keeper in 1919, he succeeded Dr. Eagle Clarke as keeper of the Department in 1921, but nine years later was appointed to the regius chair of natural history in the University of Aberdeen, following Sir J. Arthur Thomson, under whom he had been trained. In 1936 he returned to Edinburgh as professor of natural history, retiring in 1952. He was elected president of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1954.

It was highly fitting that the posts James Ritchie occupied were all designated, as largely remains the custom in Scotland, 'natural history'. He was, above all else, a naturalist, and no one had a better knowledge of the fauna of his country, both in the present and in the past, and more concern for its future. He published extensively and over an exceptionally wide field, ranging from marine hydroids and polyzoans to birds and mammals, and also made notable contributions to archaeology, an interest he gained from his father, an earlier James Ritchie and a well-known amateur archaeologist. He wrote three books, "The Influence of Man on Animal Life in Scotland" (1920), "Beasts and Birds as Farm Pests" (1931) and "Design in Nature" (1937).

The first of these represents his major contribution—and it is a great one—to knowledge of animal life in Scotland. It may be described as a work of scholarship written by a born naturalist. Ritchie had the advantage, which he stressed, of dealing with a small country and with the changes in the purely post-glacial fauna which neolithic man found when, some 9,000 years ago, he followed the northward migration of these animals into Scotland. He had the further advantage of the recorded observations of many generations of Scottish naturalists, of whom he was the worthy successor and ideal interpreter. This book had great influence on the growth of the youthful science of animal ecology, with its applications in conservation. It won international recognition for its author, including an award of a silver medal by the Société Nationale d'Acclimatation de France.

His investigations and advice were largely responsible for measures of protection for both seals and birds in Scotland. He found, by examination of the contents of caves near Inchnadamph in Sutherland, evidence of an arctic fauna with indications of the presence of paleolithic man. In archaeology, his long and extensively illustrated account of the lake dwellings in Loch Treig is a classic description, and he was engaged on further work of this type at the time of his death.

Ritchie's activities were as wide as his interests. From its first inception in 1909, he took a great part in the development of the Royal Scottish Zoological Society, of which he became vice-president; he was

secretary and later president of the Royal Physical Society; vice-president of the Scottish Marine Biological Association; chairman of the Council of the Royal Scottish Geographical Society; president of Section D (Zoology) of the British Association in 1939. He was for fourteen years editor of the *Scottish Naturalist* and was the natural choice as chairman of the Scottish Wild Life Conservation Committee which prepared the way for the establishment of the Scottish Committee of the Nature Conservancy, of which he was an initial member. Elected to the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1916, he served many times on its Council, being secretary, later a vice-president and finally, in 1954, president. He was awarded the Keith Prize of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1944, was created C.B.E. in 1948 and received the honorary doctorate of laws from his own University of Aberdeen in 1952.

By his writings, his lectures to university students and to a wider public, and by his charming water-colour paintings of the Scottish landscape, James Ritchie was widely known, and his loss will be felt far beyond the circle of his friends and colleagues. He married Miss Jessie J. Elliot, who died in 1933, and is survived by his son, Prof. A. E. Ritchie, Chandos professor of physiology in the University of St. Andrews, and by his two daughters.

C. M. YONGE

Dr. T. A. Sprague

DR. THOMAS ARCHIBALD SPRAGUE, well known as a taxonomic botanist and an authority on plant nomenclature, died at his home in Cheltenham on October 22, at the age of eighty-one.

He took the degree of B.Sc. at Edinburgh, under Prof. Bayley Balfour. In 1898, he undertook, with Captain H. W. Dowding, R.N., an expedition to Venezuela and Colombia, and the first set of the plants he collected are at Kew. Sprague was appointed to the staff of the Herbarium of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, in 1900, and for about two decades was in charge of the Thalamiflorae and Disciflorae (in the system of Bentham and Hooker). The division of work was, however, not strictly adhered to, and some of Sprague's best taxonomic work concerned the Loranthaceae of tropical and south Africa, for the "Flora of Tropical Africa" and the "Flora Capensis", respectively, and the Bignoniaceae. Later, he was in charge of the American collections. He made, with Mr. (later Dr.) John Hutchinson, a botanical excursion to the Canary Islands in the summer of 1913. He served with the artillery in the First World War and was stationed in India and did some plant collecting in the Punjab. Sprague was awarded the degree of doctor of science by the University of Edinburgh in 1930 and was, the same year, appointed deputy keeper of the Herbarium. He was a fellow of the Linnean Society of London from 1903, and on May 12, 1937, was presented with the Coronation Medal of George VI. He retired from his post at Kew on October 31, 1945.

Soon after his return from military service, Sprague devoted a large proportion of his official and private time to botanical nomenclature and to the study of certain herbals. Those who knew his careful critical researches on the systematics of various groups