

Ernest Lee: 1886-1915.

THE death of Ernest Lee in the trenches of the Western Front on July 10, 1915, has robbed British Botany of a capable teacher and promising investigator, and will be greatly regretted by all who knew him or his work.

He was born on April 11, 1886, at Stanley-Lane End in Yorkshire, whence his family removed to Burnley while he was still a small child. In Burnley, therefore, he grew up, and there, in spite of hard work during the day-time, he contrived to attend the evening classes of the Burnley Technical Institute. He soon developed a deep interest in Natural Science, and so excellent was his work that he obtained a National Scholarship in Geology in 1906. This took him to the then Royal College of Science, London, where his enthusiasm for biology found scope, and where he won a First Class in the A.R.C.Sc. examination in 1909, and in the same year received the Edward Forbes Medal and Prize in Botany and a Marshall Scholarship.

His scholarship enabled him to spend another year in Professor Farmer's laboratories in an investigation, the result of which was his paper on Leaf Fall,¹ a piece of work which brought him into correspondence with various older botanists.

He earned the approval of his fellow students as 'a thoroughly good sort', and one who was always willing to give help. He was highly thought of by the staff and left behind him the reputation of a first-rate worker.

In May, 1910, he was appointed Demonstrator, and in the following autumn Assistant Lecturer in Botany at Birkbeck College, London, where he remained till the autumn of 1913.

During these three years of close association in the work of the department I came to know Mr. Lee well and to think highly both of his character and his abilities. He was one of the keenest colleagues one could have had, always on the track of some scheme for the development of the department, some fresh possibility of research, some method of bringing home to the students the interest of his special subjects.

He worked at various semi-physiological as well as anatomical investi-

¹ The Morphology of Leaf Fall. *Ann. of Bot.*, 1911, p. 51.

gations, he got under weigh the study of a Mendelian problem, and he published the first of his two papers¹ on seedling anatomy.

He became a Fellow of the Linnean Society and a member of the British Ecological Society.

But it was not only from the professional standpoint that Mr. Lee showed himself eminently likeable. He possessed an enthusiasm which was not merely youthful but based on both experience and reading for all sorts of reform, and especially for such developments as might bring biological considerations within the sphere of politics; and certain discussions—arguments—in which he bore his share are very pleasant memories.

In the autumn of 1912 he was nominated for the chair of Botany in the Ahmedabad Institute of Science, India, and he only did not undertake those distant responsibilities because the medical officer reported him unsuited to the climate. The following autumn he joined the department of Agricultural Botany in the University of Leeds.

Mr. Lee was a good 'shot', and at Leeds he joined the Officers' Training Corps of the University and thus found himself, when war broke out, in a position not only to volunteer but to be of immediate use. He spent August in helping with the organization of the O.T.C., which was thrown open to professional men in Leeds, and he had charge of the musketry. In the beginning of September he obtained a commission as second lieutenant in the 4th Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment. He became machine-gun officer, and by the end of the month was gazetted lieutenant. Already at the time of his death he had been specially marked for further promotion.

In November, 1914, he married Miss H. S. Chambers, B.Sc., then Lecturer in Botany at the Royal Holloway College, to whom he had been engaged for some two years. It was a marriage which promised all the happiness of shared interests.

On April 12, 1915, Mr. Lee was sent to the front. He was just 29 years of age.

He had hard work; it interested him, and he was happy in it and as full of enthusiasm for his military duties as he had been for his botanical work. His men were devoted to him and his praise of them was high.

His death was caused by a bullet which penetrated the parapet of the trench and went through his head. He was carried down to the dressing-station but was not conscious again, and died within two hours.

It is striking to notice how the impression which Mr. Lee made on his brother officers and on his men coincided with that of his colleagues

¹ Observations on the Seedling Anatomy of certain Sympetalae: I, Tubiflorae. *Ann. of Bot.*, 1912, p. 727. Observations on the Seedling Anatomy of certain Sympetalae: II, Compositae. *Ann. of Bot.*, 1914, p. 303.

and students under very different conditions. To all he was the energetic worker, the interested student, the 'keenest of officers devoted to his work'; and the machine-gunners of his section who wrote of 'the close friendship between Mr. Lee and his men' will find their echo in the thoughts of his students.

It is in such letters that Mr. Lee's best epitaph may be found :

'He never spared himself when there was work to be done', and 'he died . . . in the execution of his duty'.

H. C. I. GWYNNE-VAUGHAN.



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