OBITUARY.

JAMES ALLAN THOMSON. 1881-1928.

JAMES ALLAN THOMSON, who died on 6th May, was one of the most distinguished of the men of science New Zealand has produced. Born in Dunedin in 1881 he had a successful school and college career, and won all the the usual honours and distinctions that the University confers on its students who display capacity and originality. He specialized in Geology, having inherited a marked bent in the direction of natural science from his father, G. M. Thomson, a naturalist of no mean ability, an aptitude developed and stimulated by the influence of Dr. P. Marshall who had a little earlier been appointed to the charge of this geological department at Otago University. His marked academic ability, his keen enthusiasm in University matters, and his fondness for and success in athletics were very largely responsible for his being elected the first Rhodes Scholar for New Zealand. He was also awarded the Exhibition Science Scholarship, and in the year 1905 he entered at St. John's College, Oxford, where he won the Burdett-Coutts Scholarship in Geology and was appointed Demonstrator and finally, in 1907, Lecturer in the subject at the College. Next year he was appointed Demonstrator in Petrology to the University of Oxford—a new position. He had the good fortune to be associated in his work there with Professor Sollas, whose wide and varied scientific attainments, as well as his inspiring personality, were responsible for broadening and developing an intellect naturally susceptible to such influences.

In 1908 he went to Australia with Dr. Maclaren, to report specially on the geological conditions of the West Australian goldfields, his training in petrology both at Dunedin and at Oxford being of the highest value in dealing with such a difficult problem, and it was for scientific work on the petrology of the West Australian gold bearing rocks and their relations that he was in 1912 awarded the degree of D.Sc. by the University of New Zealand.

In 1909 he married Miss Gertrude Kean, who pre-deceased him by several years, and they have left two children to maintain and keep burning the lamps of life and learning.

In 1910 he was proposed as chief of the scientific staff to the Scott Antarctic Expedition, but unfortunately failed to pass the medical test, and after an interval spent in recruiting his health, having contracted, at Sydney, a chest trouble which never left him, he was appointed Palaeontologist to the New Zealand Geological Survey, a new post which afforded him opportunities for open-air work for a great part of the summer season under most favourable conditions. During the time he acted in that capacity he amassed a fund of knowledge and acquired an intimate acquaintance with the field occurrence of our Tertiary Mollusca and, above all, of the Brachiopoda which later helped him substantially with what must be regarded as his most important scientific work.

In 1914 he was appointed to the position of Director of the Dominion Museum in Wellington, a post he filled till his death, and in the same year he was appointed one of the four Government representatives on the Board of Governors of the New Zealand Institute.

While carrying on his duties as Director he continued his geological work as occasion allowed, although his health was not good, but his superabundant optimism and unfailing courage enabled him to carry out investigations that a less determined and enthusiastic man would have found impossible. His geological work was mostly concerned with our Cretaceous and Tertiary sequence, and to him may be credited very largely the use of stage names, the conception of the existence of diastrophic provinces in the New Zealand area, and the recognition of the weakness of the Lyellian criterion for the determination of the age of the different horizons of our Tertiary sequence on the basis of the percentage of living species unless due weight be given to the possible presence of species at particular horizons by 'implication,' a criterion which demands a more thorough knowledge of the occurrence of species in various localities than we possess at present.

Thomson's main work, however, concerns the Brachiopods, of which he made a thorough study, basing his conclusions on material collected during the time spent in Palaeonlogical field work and on the collections in various museums and in the hands of the New Zealand Geological Survey. He also had the Brachiopod material collected during the Australasian Antarctic Expedition submitted to him for examination, and his report on the 'Brachiopoda' is one of the numbers issued by the publication committee of that expedition. In this he summarises ably the evidence for the existence of land connections in the southern region of the Southern Hemisphere from the Mesozoic Era onward with particular reference to the connections existing in late Tertiary times. This monumental work established his reputation as an authority on the group. During the period between its issue (1918) and his death he contributed various papers on Brachiopod Morphology to the *Transactions of the New Zealand Institute,* the *Annals and Magazine of Natural History* and to other publications, and finally completed his labours in that direction by the production of the volume on 'Brachiopod Morphology,' which embodied his mature opinions on the structure and phyllogeny of the Tertiary members of the group. This work appeared only a few months before his death, and accentuated the loss to science that this untimely event entailed.

In addition to these lines of investigation, Thomson devoted considerable time to other departments of geology, specially to the framing of a satisfactory scheme of rock classification, to the study of our volcanoes, and those of the mid-Pacific Region, the latter following on a visit he paid to Hawaii and Samoa on the occasion of the meeting of the First Pan-Pacific Science Conference in Honolulu.

An idea of his activity may be gathered on a reading of the list of his papers published from 1906 to 1927, given in the *New Zealand Journal of Science and Technology* for July, 1928, which contains no less than 68 titles.

I have dealt at length with his achievements in the domain of pure science, but he also filled the position of Director of the Dominion Museum with distinction. Such a position demands a wide range of scientific attainment and an attitude sympathetic to many phases of thought, and this he exhibited in a marked degree. In his management of the Museum he was hampered with lack of funds, the incubus of an old and unsuitable building and the absence of any marked public interest in the institution, difficulties which he did his best to overcome in spite of health conditions. He was ever considerate of the interests of other museums, and no fairer minded colleague could possibly have existed or one more careful of the feelings or sympathetic with the ambitions and hopes of others. Purely in the desire of helping other institutions he arranged for the first Museum Conference in New Zealand and did his best to see that its recommendations were carried into effect.

He was Secretary to the Board of Science and Art from its inception in 1916, and editor of the *New Zealand Journal of Science and Technology,* issued by the Board in 1918, until 1921, when ill-health compelled him to surrender the editorial duties to others.

As head of the Dominion Museum he was frequently called on by the Government officials to advise them on all sorts of questions arising in connection with scientific matters and scientific institutions, and with the enforcement of regulations with regard to permits, etc., and in all cases he acted not only with most scrupulous fairness to the Government but also so as to smooth out any difficulties in the way of wishes of the institutions or persons concerned. He was the soul of tact and of upright and sympathetic administration.

He was very largely responsible for the initiation of a Government Department for the correlation and development of scientific research within the Dominion, and he furinshed a noteworthy report in connection therewith whose lines are very closely followed in the present Department of Scientific and Industrial Research.

Enough has been said to indicate the influence which he exerted on various phases of the scientific activity of the country, and it will be generally recognized that his schemes were built on broad and solid foundations. The New Zealand Institute has endorsed this opinion in various ways. He was elected an Original Fellow of the Institute, was awarded the Hutton Medal for his researches in Geology, represented it on various occasions at conferences abroad, and was elected its President at the meeting held in January of the present year, a position he held at his death.

In addition to his scientific attainments he had a generous disposition and a cheerful and optimistic outlook on life; he was an agreeable and a generous companion, and specially so in the field, with a keen sense of humour, and was one who regarded his duty to his country, his profession, his friends, as well as those he differed with, as above all personal consideration whatsoever.

R.S.