

Percival John Parrott

May 28, 1874 — August 10, 1953

Percival John Parrott, formerly Director of the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station at Geneva and Professor of Entomology, Emeritus, Cornell University, died at his home in Geneva on August 10, 1953, following a long illness. He was born at Croydon, England, on May 28, 1874, and was brought to this country by his parents as a small child. The family settled near Clay Center, Kansas, and experiences of his childhood under the pioneer conditions of the time and place were a fertile source of many lively anecdotes in his conversation in later life.

Professor Parrott attended the University of Kansas, receiving the A. B. degree in 1897 and the A. M. degree in 1898. Cornell University also granted him the A. M. degree in 1902; and in 1943 the Kansas State College of Agriculture conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Science.

His first professional assignment was that of assistant entomologist at the Kansas Agricultural Experiment Station at Manhattan, which was followed by appointment as entomologist for the Kansas Horticultural Society. It was in 1900, however, that Professor Parrott began a career dedicated to the interests of New York State farmers that was to continue until the day of his death, with the exception of a period of two years (1902 to 1904) when he was associated with the Ohio Agricultural Experiment Station at Wooster.

He was recalled to the Experiment Station in Geneva in 1904 to head the Department of Entomology there. He served in that position until 1938, acting also as Vice Director of the Experiment Station from 1929 to 1938, when he was named Director. He retired in 1942.

His approach to and successful solution of the first major problem to confront him in 1904 were characteristic of the scientific ability and the qualities of leadership which he was to bring to bear on many other problems through the years. At the time of his appointment the fruit industry in New York State was waging a losing fight against the San Jose scale, and it was his effective and energetic attack on this pest that won him widespread confidence among fruit growers and farmers in general, a confidence which he held through the years by his conservative and commonsense approach to farm problems.

He had a pleasing personality and by his sense of humor, witticisms, and fairness was a great pacifier between groups when tempers became ruffled. He usually was able to evolve points of view which were agreeable to both sides. This was true not only among co-workers in his profession but also applied to meetings of farmers and fruit

growers, all of whom had great respect for his opinions and especially had confidence in his ability to solve their entomological problems by practical means.

“A practical scientist” is a term one commentator employed in reporting Professor Parrott’s passing and it is one that we are sure he would have cherished. Upon his retirement he was made an honorary life member of the New York State Horticultural Society.

But Professor Parrott’s abilities were recognized far beyond the limits of New York State and he was called upon to render important service in far away places. He traveled the entire length of the African Continent in 1936 as a special agent of the federal Department of Agriculture. He was also called upon by the Department as a neutral observer and consultant at the time of a threatened invasion of the Florida citrus industry by the dread Mediterranean fruit fly, in 1929 and 1930. He served for many years on the executive committee of the Division of Biology and Agriculture of the National Research Council. He was a member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, a Fellow of the Entomological Society of America, and a past president (in 1914) of the American Association of Economic Entomologists in which he was active throughout the years. He was the author of numerous Experiment Station publications and articles in scientific journals.

It will be the human qualities of the man that will long be remembered by his professional associates and friends, however. A wholly unpretentious nature and a warm friendliness of spirit made themselves evident to high and low alike upon first meeting and as long as the acquaintanceship endured. “He was such a friendly person” was the universal comment of those who mourned his passing. And this spirit of friendship was also characteristic of his wife, Florence Mildred Hubbard of Geneva, whom he married in 1906 and who died in 1929. The gracious hospitality and friendliness of their home did much to smooth the way for many newcomers to the Experiment Station.

A full and arduous professional life did not interfere with active participation in community affairs. Professor Parrott was truly a civic leader, the YMCA, the Salvation Army, the Geneva Community Chest, the Geneva Youth Center, the Geneva Rotary Club, the North Presbyterian Church, along with numerous other agencies, benefited from his enthusiasm and constructive leadership.

Professor Parrott is survived by a son, John P. of Geneva, a daughter, Mrs. Robert Holt of Montpelier, VT, three sisters, a brother, and four grandchildren. He had a rich and full life and his memory lives on in his good works and in the hearts of his family and friends.