

## OBITUARIES

Compiled by J. E. LOUSLEY.

MERRITT LYNDON FERNALD (1873-1950) was born on 5th October 1873 at Orono, Maine, where his father was head of the Department of Mathematics and Physics at the Maine State College and later president of that institution, which is now the University of Maine. The absorption in botany which filled all his adult life to the exclusion of practically every other interest must have begun while he was still a boy, for we find him writing in February 1891 to Sereno Watson: "I think the one thing I was made for was a botanist, as from early childhood my inclinations have been in that line." His first paper, published only four days after his 17th birthday, was, appropriately enough, a note on the local occurrence of two species of *Carex*, a genus of which he later became one of the leading American students. His second, published six months later, was a fairly lengthy list of noteworthy plants he had found in the vicinity of Orono, including many that were first records for the state; he mentions about 20 species and varieties of *Carex*, and says that 60 others occur there. In it he speaks of having been able to spend the year of 1890, especially the time from May to August (evidently his summer vacation), collecting around Orono, and acknowledges assistance in identification from Sereno Watson, George Vasey, D. C. Eaton, and L. H. Bailey—the last of whom, happily, is still with us. As a consequence of this contact with Watson and of some further correspondence, Fernald was brought down to Cambridge, Massachusetts, in March 1891, by his father, and installed as an assistant at the Gray Herbarium of Harvard University, a connection which was to continue unbroken for the rest of his life, only a few months short of sixty years. In the autumn of that year he entered the Lawrence Scientific School of Harvard, graduating S. B. *magna cum laude* in 1897. He served as an assistant at the Gray Herbarium from 1891 to 1902 (first under Sereno Watson, then under the late B. L. Robinson), then as instructor and assistant professor, and from 1915-1947 as Fisher Professor of Natural History, then as Fisher Professor Emeritus. From 1935-1937 he was Curator, and from 1937-1947 Director of the Gray Herbarium.

Fernald's publications amount to over 750 titles, nearly all in the fields of floristics, phytogeography, and taxonomy of vascular plants. With the exception of a few papers on Mexican and Central American plants, published mostly during his early years at the Gray Herbarium (the last in 1907), they relate almost wholly to the flora of the Gray's *Manual* range, that is, the north-eastern quarter of the United States and the associated provinces of eastern Canada. The bulk of these studies was published in *Rhodora*, the journal of the New England Botanical Club, an organization of which Fernald was one of the founders and definitely the most active member. Of the 621 numbers

of that monthly periodical that appeared from 1899 on in his lifetime (during all of which time he was on the editorial board, and from 1929 on, editor-in-chief) there are comparatively few that do not contain an article, a note, or at least a review from his pen; his trenchant and frequently caustic reviews were through the years one of the outstanding features of this journal. Many of these items, of course, were of only transient significance, but many more are documents of permanent value, such as the very readable reports on his expeditions and the revisions of genera or parts of genera as they were represented in the region with which he concerned himself.

The results of most of his investigations were absorbed into his *magnum opus*, the 8th edition of Gray's *Manual*, but some of his publications not directly contributory to that work are likely to remain, like it, standard in their fields for a long time to come. Among such are his "Soil preferences of certain alpine and subalpine plants" (1907, *Rhodora*, 9, *Contr. Gray Herb.*, 35), a work of much ecological significance; "Notes on the plants of Wineland the Good" (1910, *Rhodora*, 12), an evaluation of the botanical evidence in the old Icelandic sagas which led him to identify the landing place of the Norsemen as probably Labrador rather than New England or Nova Scotia; "Persistence of plants in unglaciated areas of boreal America" (1925, *Mem. Gray Herb.*, 2), a paper which has stimulated further investigation as much in Pleistocene geology as in botany; and his only separately published book (except two editions of Gray's *Manual*), *Edible wild plants of Eastern North America* (1943), written in collaboration with Prof. A. C. Kinsey, into which he poured the results of over half a century's experimentation with more or less edible wild plants and note-taking among late and early writers on the same subject. Among his outstanding systematic papers were: "A synopsis of the Mexican and Central species of *Salvia*" (1900); "The north-eastern *Carices* of the section *Hyparrhenae*" (1902); "The linear-leaved North American species of *Potamogeton*, section *Axillares*" (1932).

His field work was as extensive and as fruitful as his work in the herbarium. Gifted with a keen eye and a prodigious capacity for work, with a marvellously trained memory for plant ranges and diagnostic characters and the ability to select profitable regions for exploration, he unquestionably accomplished more toward the elucidation of plant distribution in the Gray's *Manual* area than any other individual—one might almost say, than all others put together. His collecting trips, beginning as a boy around his home at Orono, gradually led him farther and farther afield. He botanized extensively in Quebec, Newfoundland (of which he planned to write a flora, but never did), Nova Scotia, Cape Cod, Michigan, and, during his last years of active field work (1933-1946), in Virginia.

Among botanists at large, both amateur and professional, Fernald is best known as co-author of the 7th edition of Gray's *Manual of Botany* (with B. L. Robinson, 1908), and as sole author of the 8th edition, issued

in 1950 only a couple of months before his death\*. It is the most critically elaborated flora that has been published for any part of America, and will take high rank among the regional floras of the world. I can think of no other botanist in history who has devoted so many years of such intensive and productive field and herbarium work to the continuous study of a comparable area.

Fernald made two visits to Europe; in 1903, when he studied the Michaux herbarium in Paris, so important for American plants, and in 1930, when he attended the Fifth International Botanical Congress in Cambridge, England.

Among European scientific organizations, he was an honorary member of the Botanical Society of the British Isles from 1908 and a foreign member of the Linnean Society of London from 1936.

For much of the information in this notice I am indebted to the February 1951 *Rhodora*, a memorial number containing a sketch of Fernald's life and other papers discussing his work as a teacher, as a reviser of Gray's *Manual*, as a botanist, and as a field-man.

S. F. BLAKE.

RUTH MARY TRISTRAM (née CARDEW) (1886-1950). Miss R. M. Cardew was born on April 25th, 1886, and became interested in botany at a very early age. The discovery of *Holosteum umbellatum*, previously known in this country only from Suffolk and Norfolk, in Surrey in 1905 by this "young and enthusiastic botanist" brought her to the notice of well-known workers of the day (1905, *J. Bot.*, **43**, 189). A little later she turned her attention to a study of *Plantago* in collaboration with the late E. G. Baker and with a view to an account of the genus for Moss's *Cambridge British Flora*. This resulted in the joint publication of *P. coronopus* var. *Sabrinae* [*P. Sabrinae* (Baker & Cardew) Druce] in 1911, *Rep. Bot. Soc. & E.C.*, **3**, 28-29, and Notes on *Plantago*, 1912, *J. Bot.*, **50**, 55-58.

Meanwhile Miss Cardew had been elected a Fellow of the Linnean Society on December 7th, 1911 (the same meeting at which our late member, Mr. A. J. Wilmott, was elected). As only six years had passed since the Linnean had first admitted women, and as she was only 25 at the time of election, the honour was a very considerable one of which she remained proud until the end of her days.

She was an early member of the Wild Flower Society but did not join the B.E.C. until 1934, resigning under the stress of war in 1940. She married Major G. H. Tristram, R.A., in 1919, and had four children. Mrs. Tristram died on October 22nd, 1950, and her husband and two children survive her.

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\*See Review, p. 140.