

ROBERT M. LAING: A MEMORY.

(Mr Laing died at Christchurch on 19th May. The work he had done for botany in New Zealand was briefly reviewed at the meeting of May 21st by our President who recalled certain incidents in the field to illustrate his tireless enthusiasm. More formal notices to his life and work will appear elsewhere but this personal sketch will interest all who have found "Laing and Blackwell" a trusty guide to the study of native plants, or have had occasion to seek the identification of seaweeds).

I first saw Laing in February 1919, when he was presenting his paper on the vegetation of Banks Peninsula at the Science Congress in Christchurch, and I was struck by the modesty of his demeanour, coupled with an evident but subdued fervour. My own interests in botany had hardly then been awakened, but his references to Mount Peel caught my fancy as I had just spent a pleasant holiday there. He lead an excursion on the Port Hills next day, and one follower at least hung on his words as in his quiet way he pointed out one plant after another of interest. By great good luck I sat next him at lunch, and he spoke of further work to be done at Mt. Peel. Did I know Cockayne? I had sent him some piripiris, and had received letters on what part botany should take in the agricultural courses then being started at the Waitaki High School. "Oh well, if you are any good, he won't let loose of you".

It was not till November 1927 that I again met him, though occasional notes had passed. We were then in the full flush of hybrid hunting, and I was seeing what could be found at Arthur's Pass. Rounding a corner at Peg Leg Creek I saw Laing perched on a rock. "Hello! Allan, if you want hybrid Olearias come along with me!" Pleasant hours passed, and on the homeward journey, Laing - a peace lover - discoursed on international affairs, the need for mutual understanding, and the part scientists could play. While looking over his herbarium in his cottage at the foot of the pass, he spoke of esoteric mysteries that were beyond my ken, though I could feel the deep sincerity of his thoughts on the problems of mind, body and soul.

Another meeting that stands out in my mind was one at Cockayne's house in Ngaio. Laing had just finished his work on the small-leaved Pittosporums, and was full of his interpretations of the ecotypic relations. Cockayne snorted and pooh-poohed, but Laing quietly persisted in his

exposition. While Cockayne was out of the room for a moment, Laing smiled and said, "The old man doesn't mean all he says, he'll be an ecotype enthusiast tomorrow."

So one remembers Laing, modest, whimsical, interested in humanity. He claimed no high place for himself, but what he knew and thought he passed on eagerly, helpfully to others.

H. H. Allan.

The Vegetation of the North Canterbury Foothills.

At the Study Circle on 2nd October Mr. A. J. Healy of the Botany Division of the Plant Research Bureau described the vegetation of the country between the Waipara and the Waiau Rivers and stretching some 15-20 miles inland.

The area treated includes hills running parallel to the coast and cut by gorges with three different series of limestone represented. A rainfall of 35-40" is combined with the sort of winter where 30° of frost is not unknown, South-east faces remain frosted for more than a month on end and the enthusiastic botanist has often to break the ice on the tussocks.

Though a few totaras were seen in gullies there is no real bush. Even after 70-80 years of occupation by farmers and their stock, together with countless thousands of rabbits in later years, one can still picture the general aspect of the original tussock vegetation, developed in the absence of both burning and grazing.

The country was first owned in large blocks on which the tussock was burned at 1-3 year intervals to stimulate new growth for sheep. Areas leased from the Government for 21 or 35 years at a time had been withdrawn from use periodically to recover. Low country sheep brought in to restock such places bring with them each time a fresh supply of seeds of weeds which have together come to occupy an important place not only in the vegetation as a whole but also in the diet of the grazing stock. These as well as the native plants were treated fully by Mr. Healy whose remarks drew from Mr. Cairns the comment that at least half a dozen of them were reputed to be poisonous!

Though tall Danthonia tussock comes in about 2000' the great part of the area discussed is essentially low tussock

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