

## George Simpson, F.L.S., F.R.S.N.Z.

By the sudden death of Mr. George Simpson on May 16, 1952, the Society lost an old and valued member. Though residing in Dunedin Mr. Simpson took an active part in the Society's doings. His illustrated lecture to us in February 1947 will be remembered by all lovers of mountain plants. A further instance of his help was the large consignment of carefully selected (and many of them rare) species contributed to the Native Flower Show at the Dominion Museum in the spring of 1951.

Memory carries me back to another occasion, some ten years earlier when, on the crowded platform of the Dunedin railway station, I met two compactly-built, neatly-dressed business men. They were slightly embarrassed to be seen carrying large and odd-shaped packages—packages to be taken by hand to Wellington for an earlier show at the Museum. These two men were Mr. Simpson and Mr. J. Scott Thompson, the "Firm", as Dr. Cockayne used to call these zealous, energetic, and able plant-hunters.

Sharing a strong interest in the growing of plants and recognizing the challenge offered by native species, these two friends ranged over the hills and mountains of the South Island, seeking and finding novelties and adding greatly to our knowledge of plant geography. Their records show how many odd corners they penetrated, in Marlborough and North-west Nelson, in Westland and in Fiordland, in parts of Canterbury and throughout Otago. Some of the results of these travels appear in a series of papers, "Notes on Some New Zealand Plants and Descriptions of New Species" (*Trans. Roy. Soc. N.Z.*, 1940, 1942, 1943, 1945, 1952, the first three under joint authorship, the last two by Mr. Simpson alone). A long list of Plant Records appeared in the *Transactions* in 1940, and a much earlier paper told of an excursion to the Rough Peaks Range (1926).

Both skilled growers and propagators of plants, the "Firm" established hundreds of species in their gardens for further study and comparison, so providing an unusually safe basis for their judgments on constancy and range of variability. Direct accounts of plant culture are a description of an artificial scree built in Dunedin and a long list of the species successfully grown on it. (*Jour. N.Z. Inst. Hort.*, 8 (1), 1938, Cockayne Memorial Number, 8-23) and two shorter papers on growth rates of some native cushion plants (*Trans. Roy. Soc. N.Z.*, 1936, 1940). This horticultural success with native plants was recognized in the award of the Loder Cup, jointly, in 1936.

Another tool used by the "Firm" was skilful plant photography. A beautifully illustrated account of some characteristic South Island mountain plants appeared in the *N.Z. Alpine Journal* (1938) and was copied in the *Quarterly Bulletin* of the Alpine Garden Society of Great Britain (1939). An even better record of their skill, this time

in photographing vegetation rather than individual plants, is seen in the German periodical "Vegetationsbilder", Dr. Cockayne being co-author; of twelve high quality full-plate illustrations nine are by Simpson and Scott Thomson. Another well-illustrated vegetation paper (Some N.Z. Indigenous-induced Weeds and Indigenous-induced Modified and Mixed Plant-communities) was published jointly with Dr. Cockayne in the Linnean Society's Journal (1932). The occurrence of silver beech near Dunedin, the Dunedin Botanical Sub-district, the effect on plants of severe winter conditions, and the hydrogen ion concentration of forest soils near Dunedin were the subjects of other papers published by the two friends.

Mr. Scott Thomson's death in 1942 deprived Mr. Simpson of an ideal field companion ("Words cannot adequately express the value of a long companionship in the field with the late Mr. J. Scott Thomson") but he did not allow the loss to break the continuity of botanical work. The series of "Notes" he carried on alone as stated above, the fifth and last appearing as recently as March 1952. Concurrently, as a personal labour of love, he worked on his monograph "A Revision of the Genus *Carmichaelia*" which was published in the *Transactions* in 1945 as the first Cockayne Memorial Paper. A feature of this work was that "the characters of the species have been studied with specimens of fresh materials collected in the field or from plants brought into cultivation for purposes of review". Most of the *Carmichaelia* species were grown from slips in the Roslyn garden.

Modesty was one of Mr. Simpson's strongest characteristics and he did not seek honours. The award of the Loder Cup has already been mentioned. In 1930 he was elected a Fellow of the Linnean Society of London and in 1949 he became a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand. There seems to have been only one species named in his honour, *Ranunculus simpsonii* Ckn. et Allan, and this he saw fit himself to reduce to a variety of *R. sericophyllus*. In the Otago branch of the Royal Society of New Zealand Mr. Simpson served in various offices over a great number of years. In the business world, as a master builder and contractor, he was highly respected, and held many public positions where he will not easily be replaced.

To speak of Mr. Simpson's personal attributes is not easy, but foremost amongst them came generosity. This could be vouched for by anyone who had ever made a request of him (and he had requests for plant materials in great numbers), or by any visitor to Dunedin who had been looked after by him. His love for the "everlasting hills", as he used to call them, and of all the great outdoors he justified by trying to interpret for us some of the treasures and puzzles he found there. To his services New Zealand Botany and botanists are greatly indebted. Because of his great capacity for making friends many mourn his passing as a personal loss.

LUCY B. MOORE.