



BENJAMIN STANLEY PLATT

Obituary Notice

BENJAMIN STANLEY PLATT

(5 June 1903 to 18 July 1969)

Anyone who came into real contact with Professor Platt found that the experience could not be ignored. Neutrality was impossible. Which side of the fence one was on depended more on emotional than rational factors and was largely a matter of mutual trust. This was because Professor Platt, although of real stature as a scientist, was first and foremost a man. In no way was this better shown than in his indomitable fight against physical disabilities during the last eighteen months of his life.

Professor Platt was essentially the champion of the world's peasants and he distrusted sophistication in men as much as he did in foodstuffs. His early years in China and Africa provided the incentive for the rest of his life—to help the world's victims of poverty, hunger, disease and ignorance. In 1944 he was given the two tools he needed for this work—a research base in the Medical Research Council Human Nutrition Research Unit, and a base for applied nutrition teaching at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Here he became the country's first Professor of Human Nutrition, in 1946. None of us in either of these two sections of his work was allowed to regard scientific research as a sacred end in itself. The hesitant student destined to be a lonely preacher of Professor Platt's gospel in Africa or Asia was more important to him than our precious research projects. The devotion with which these students regarded the Professor, and the work they are now doing all over the world, are proof that he was right.

In contrast, Professor Platt received meagre recognition as a research scientist in his own country. This did him less than justice for, as part of his scientific attitude to life, he had an instinct for asking the right, if uncomfortable, questions and the vision to see their solutions. The scientific 't's' and 'i's' of these solutions will be crossed and dotted for years to come. This would amuse Professor Platt.

C. R. C. HEARD