

ROBERT STENHOUSE WILLIAMS

AN APPRECIATION

THE world of agricultural research learned with very real regret of the sudden death of Dr Robert Stenhouse Williams, M.B., C.M., D.Sc., D.P.H., Director of the National Institute for Research in Dairying, which occurred on February 2, 1932.

The son of a medical man, Stenhouse Williams was born in 1871, and qualified in medicine at Edinburgh in 1896. He also held the Cambridge D.P.H. After qualifying, he studied at the Pasteur Institute in order to perfect his knowledge of bacteriology and immunology.

From the first he was interested in hygiene and public health, and he held several hospital appointments in Liverpool and district, as well as teaching posts in the University. In 1912 he was working in the Serum Department of the Liverpool Incorporated Institute of Comparative Pathology.

At this time the Ministry of Agriculture founded the Dairy Research Institute at Reading. Stenhouse Williams seized the opportunity of entering a field which, so far as this country was concerned, was almost unexplored, and accepted the position of Research Bacteriologist. He began at once to make a study of the condition of the milk supply from the bacteriological point of view, and quickly confirmed the general view that improvements were essential. He held, however, that, in order to convince the milk producer and retailer of their shortcomings, it was necessary to bring definite evidence before their eyes, and he started a long series of experiments which showed the various sources of contamination of milk. At the same time he devised practical methods of overcoming the difficulties. These were adopted by a small band of enthusiasts who, under Stenhouse Williams' guidance, followed the lead of Mr Wilfred Buckley—whose example and help in the early years were of the greatest value to the movement. The success of this small band of pioneers soon led to the adoption of clean milk methods by others.

In 1920 the first Clean Milk Competition was held in Essex with Stenhouse Williams and the writer as judges. The value of such competitions was quickly appreciated and the Ministry of Agriculture was persuaded to give its support to the County Clean Milk Competitions, which have since played so large a part in the general improvement of our milk supplies. The creation of these competitions led directly to the establishment of the Dairy Bacteriology Advisory Service, which has since proved to be invaluable.

It was largely due to Stenhouse Williams' early work at Reading that it became possible for the Ministry of Health to sanction and extend the grading of milk. The establishment of graded milk gave Stenhouse Williams the

liveliest satisfaction, not only because a bacteriological standard was imposed, but because, for the highest grades, the cows were required to pass the tuberculin test. Very soon many towns had a small but valuable supply of clean safe milk, and nuclei of healthy herds were created all over the country.

With this weapon in his hand, Stenhouse Williams entered enthusiastically into his campaign for the preservation of an open door for clean safe raw milk. It has frequently been said that Stenhouse Williams was an opponent of pasteurisation. This is not true. He recognised as clearly as those who did not agree with him that the larger towns could not be provided with a good milk supply without pasteurisation. But he held that, until we know what changes, if any, are brought about in the nutritive value of milk by pasteurisation, pasteurised milk ought not to be compulsorily imposed on the consumer. He emphasised the fact that, although these possible changes may be difficult to demonstrate, there is no good reason for stating that they do not exist to a significant extent. In adopting this attitude he was merely affirming his belief that the young and vulnerable part of the population ought not to be allowed to run the risk of general malnutrition, which might ultimately affect profoundly the health of the whole population.

Stenhouse Williams' propaganda for a clean milk supply so far succeeded that an increasing number of wholesale firms have recognised the value of clean milk—for whatever purpose it may be destined—and have instituted control schemes, to the benefit of their suppliers and themselves. He was, moreover, able to prove that it is perfectly feasible to market raw milk in large cities like London, and to deliver it to the consumer in an entirely satisfactory condition. His work was not confined to raw milk, but extended to large numbers of pasteurising and sterilising plants, where he was able to give valuable help in eliminating sources of contamination.

Stenhouse Williams was indefatigable in his work for the dairy industry. He was an active member of the Dairy Committee of the Royal Agricultural Society of England, and of the Council of the British Dairy Farmers' Association, whose journal he edited and raised to a high pitch of excellence. He founded the Society of Agricultural Bacteriologists, and took a keen interest in the People's League of Health.

One of the things which pleased him most was the founding, under the auspices of the Empire Marketing Board, of the *Journal of Dairy Research*, of which he was the first Editor. For years he had felt the need for a journal devoted to the very specialised work of the dairy industry, and forming a link between workers in all parts of the Empire, whose interests he had very much at heart. As the Chairman of the Dairy Research Committee of the Empire Marketing Board he had the latter object closely before him.

In spite of the fact that his time was so much occupied in raising funds for his Institute, and fulfilling his outside duties, he found time, before his appointment as Director, to do a good deal of fundamental research work. Several papers on "The viability of the bovine tubercle bacillus under natural

conditions," and on "The causes of discoloration in cheese," bear testimony to this aspect of his activities.

Stenhouse Williams' loyalty to his friends and his Institute was a by-word among those who knew him well. He always refused to accept credit for any work which was not his own, and his capacity for encouraging his fellow-workers, both in the Institute and outside it, was remarkable. His deeds of kindness were many, but were heard of only by accident. To those who did not agree with him he presented an uncompromising front, but his opponents always admired his steadfastness of purpose.

He was a sturdy individualist and insisted on playing his own hand. At bridge he would not allow dummy to play even the last card.

His name will endure in the memory as one who fought steadfastly for the great industry to which he devoted his life and as one who was ever jealous for its fair name. The National Institute for Research in Dairying which, very largely as a result of his untiring efforts, has reached its present proportions from very small beginnings, remains a monument to his energy and self-sacrifice.

A. T. R. M.