

Sir James J. Dobbie, D.Sc., LL.D., F.R.S. By **Dr Alexander Lauder.**

(Read December 8, 1924.)

JAMES JOHNSTON DOBBIE was born at Glasgow in 1852. He was educated at the High School and at the University of Glasgow, where he had a distinguished career. Later he continued his studies at Leipzig and at the University of Edinburgh, taking the degree of D.Sc. at the latter University.

On returning to Glasgow he was elected to a Clark Fellowship, and appointed to teach the class in Mineralogy. Here he started, in conjunction with William Ramsay, his first research work; they investigated the constitution of quinine and other alkaloids, and were the first to establish the connection between the alkaloids and the pyridine bases.

On Ramsay's election to the Chair of Chemistry at Bristol, Dobbie succeeded him as assistant in the Chemistry Department of the University. In 1884 he was elected to the Chair of Chemistry in the newly founded University College of North Wales at Bangor. Here he erected and equipped the new Chemistry Department, and took an active part in the development of the College, and later in the founding of the University of Wales. He continued his research work, and made a very complete investigation of the alkaloids of *corydalis cava*, working out the constitution of corydaline and investigating also the structure of the associated alkaloids. A little later he took up the study of the relation between the ultra-violet absorption spectra and the constitution of organic compounds, working at first with the late Professor Sir W. N. Hartley, and later with other workers. The results of these investigations provided a new physical method for determining the constitution of certain important classes of organic compounds.

The position of the College at Bangor aroused his interest in agricultural education. Due largely to his exertions, an Agricultural Department was inaugurated at Bangor in 1889; this was the first Agricultural Department to be founded in connection with a University College, and it is impossible to overrate the importance of Dobbie's pioneer work at Bangor in the development of agricultural education. Both the College and the University owed much in those early days to his sane judgment and great administrative skill.

In 1903 Dobbie came to Edinburgh as Director of the Royal Scottish Museum; his wide interests and scholarship combined with his administrative ability made him an excellent Director. He collected funds to acquire for the Museum the valuable Noël Paton collection of armour and antiquities,

and greatly extended the collection of Egyptian antiquities and the sections of natural history and engineering. Notwithstanding his many duties at the Museum, he continued his research work, and contributed a regular series of papers to the Chemical Society on absorption spectra and alkaloid work.

In 1909 he was appointed Principal of the Government Laboratory in succession to Sir T. E. Thorpe. His tenure of office covered the difficult years of the war, when the demands on his department were great. He carried on for several years beyond the normal age for retirement, and there can be no doubt that the strain of those years permanently impaired his health.

He also acted for fourteen years as Adviser on the research schemes in physics and chemistry to the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland.

In London he continued his research work, more particularly his work on absorption spectra, the results being communicated in a series of papers to the Royal Society and to the Chemical Society. He was elected a Fellow of this Society in 1904, and served on the Council from 1905 to 1908. In 1904 he was also elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of London, and in 1915 his services to science, both as an investigator and as an administrator, were recognised by the King, who conferred the honour of knighthood upon him. He received the degree of LL.D. from the University of Glasgow in 1908, and that of D.Sc. from the University of Wales in 1920. He was elected President of the Institute of Chemistry in 1915, and of the Chemical Society in 1919.

After retiring from the Government Laboratory he went to reside at Fairlie, Ayrshire, a village with which his family had long been connected. Here he died, after a short illness, on 19th June 1924. It is fitting that he should have been buried in the quiet hillside cemetery near Largs, overlooking the Clyde and the country that he loved so well.

He married in 1887 Miss Violet Chilton, the daughter of Mr Thomas Chilton, Gresford, Wrexham, and is survived by Lady Dobbie, one son, and two daughters. His elder son was killed in the war.

The foregoing account of Dobbie's life deals only with his scientific and administrative work, but there was another side to his interests known probably only to his more intimate friends. He was a man of refined and scholarly tastes, keenly interested in art and literature, and an excellent classical scholar. Those of us who were privileged to see this more intimate side of his character will always remember him as a man of the most accurate scholarship and wide reading, as a delightful conversationalist and companion, and as a man of the greatest modesty, courtesy, and sincerity. He was beloved by his students and fellow-workers, and in the lives of his intimate friends he leaves a blank which can never be filled.