

JOSEPH BURTT DAVY.

By M. D. Gunn.

Joseph Burtt Davy, M.A. (Oxon.), Dr. Phil. (Oxon.), Ph.D. (Cantab.), F.R.G.S., F.L.S., whose death occurred at Oxford on the 20th August, 1940, was born on the 17th March, 1870, at Findern in Derbyshire. His name will always be associated with the foundation of the Transvaal Colonial Herbarium that has since developed into the present National Herbarium.

During the year 1891-92 Burtt Davy was an assistant in the office of the Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, but resigned owing to ill-health and went to California. He worked at Berkeley University as a research student and held various botanical posts. For a short period he was assistant curator in the U.S. Department of Agriculture at Washington, D.C. During his stay in the States, Burtt Davy wrote several papers on the vegetation of various parts of the country. These included "The Stock Ranges of North-western California", "The Native Vegetation and Crops of the Colorado Delta in the Salton Basin". He wrote the section on the *Gramineae* for Jepson's "Flora of the Western Middle California".

His connection with South Africa began in May, 1903, when he was appointed Agrostologist and Botanist in the newly formed Transvaal Department of Agriculture. Under the South African Republic there was no Department of Agriculture, nor, with the exception of a few agricultural societies, was there any agricultural organization whatever, so that the establishment of a Department of Agriculture represented an entirely new venture in the history of the agriculture of the Colony. In his first annual report he records having placed over 3,300 species in the newly formed Herbarium during his year. Burtt Davy was very interested in the subject of plant introduction and devoted much time to the introduction of seed and plants from various parts of the world. These were tested out at the various experiment stations. An outstanding success was the introduction of teff as a forage crop. His interest in plants was wide and many of his publications deal with various branches of botany.

In 1905, His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor appointed Burtt Davy an expert member of the Committee of the Transvaal Museum and Zoological Gardens to assist in the development of the Herbarium in the Museum and to help with the laying out and planting of the Zoological Gardens.

In 1907 he took charge of the South African Productions Exhibition in London, and while overseas took the opportunity of visiting southern Europe and northern Africa to study methods of growing certain warm temperate crops and also to obtain seed of crops that he considered particularly adaptable to Transvaal conditions. He also paid a visit to America to study methods of plant breeding with particular reference to maize. While in England he spent some time at the herbarium of the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, studying the types and naming specimens of Transvaal trees. This resulted in the publication of his "Geographical Distribution of the Native Trees of the Transvaal". He gave an illustrated lecture on "The Agricultural and Pastoral possibilities of the Transvaal" at the Royal Colonial Institute. This lecture was published in the proceedings of the Society.

In 1908 he was instrumental in establishing a large maize breeding station at Vereeniging. His interest in maize resulted in a comprehensive work published in 1913 under the title "Maize, its History, Cultivation, Handling and Uses", which remained until recently the standard work in South Africa on this subject.

At the time of Union, the Transvaal was the only province that had an organised Division of Botany, and Burt Davy, as its Chief continued to hold office as Government Agrostologist and Chief of the Union's Division of Botany. He resigned this post in 1913 in order to engage in the breeding of farm seeds on his own account at Vereeniging.

After the last war he left South Africa for England and settled at Kew where he began his work on "The Flora of the Transvaal and Swaziland". Two volumes of this work have already been published and his loss will be felt the more by South African botanists as this work at the time of his death was still uncompleted. In 1925 he was appointed Lecturer in Tropical Forest Botany at the Imperial Forestry Institute, Oxford and retained the post up to his death.

During the tenure of his lectureship he was responsible for the training of many students who later filled forestry posts in the Colonial Service. With the help of these students he built up a large forestry herbarium at Oxford, comprising material from all over the British Empire. While at Oxford he was one of the co-editors of a series of publications entitled "The Forest Trees and Timbers of the British Empire", of which the following are of particular interest to South African botanists and foresters:—

Some East African *Coniferae* and *Leguminosae*.

Fifteen South African High Forest Trees.

Fifteen Uganda Timbers.

Burt Davy visited the Union in 1929 as a delegate of the Forestry Section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. On this occasion he took the opportunity by personal collection of enriching still further the Forest Herbarium at Oxford.

No account of Burt Davy's career would be complete without a reference to his wife, Mrs. Alice Burt Davy. This able and gifted American woman whom he married in California, illustrated many of his contributions and reports on botany.

Burt Davy was a Council Member of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science as far back as 1908; he was elected a Member of the Linnean Society in 1903, a Fellow of the Royal Society of South Africa in 1905, and a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

Dr. Burt Davy has without doubt left his mark on South African botany and agriculture, and during his residence in the country gave loyal and devoted service. A former Secretary for Agriculture in one of his annual reports, wrote:

"During the time he was in the Government Service, Mr. Burt Davy performed an immense amount of most valuable scientific and educational work, and the services he rendered the country, particularly in connection with the popularisation of teff grass, and the assistance and impetus he gave to mealie growing, will always be regarded as landmarks in the history of South African agriculture".