OBITUARY

EDWARD MURRAY EAST

PERHAPS it is merely trite to say that the announcement of the sudden death of Dr. East came as a severe shock to all who knew him well. But how else can it be said? The abrupt cessation of a brilliant career—at an age which those of us, who in years were his seniors, must believe is little more than the prime of life—the sudden ending of such a career could not affect us other than with strong emotion. And yet who among us can say that East has not lived more in less than three score years than we may, if spared so long, in four score?

Edward Murray East, who died on November 9, 1938, was born on November 4, 1879, at DuQuoin, Ill., son of William Harvey and Sarah Granger (Woodruff) East. His preparatory schooling was at the DuQuoin high school. He was a student at the Case School of Applied Science in Cleveland in 1897–98 and at the University of Illinois in 1898–1905, where he received the degrees of B.S. in chemistry in 1900, M.S. in 1904 and Ph.D. in 1907. He was given the degree of LL.D. by Kenyon College in 1926.

He was married on September 2, 1903, to Mary Lawrence Boggs, of Washington, D. C., and had three children, Elizabeth Woodruff, Margaret Lawrence and Edward Murray (deceased).

He was assistant chemist, 1900–03, and first assistant in plant breeding from 1903 to 1905, at the University of Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station; agronomist at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station from 1905 to 1909; assistant professor of experimental plant morphology from 1909 to 1914, and professor since 1914 at Harvard University. He was collaborator in tobacco investigations of the United States Department of Agriculture from 1908 to 1918; chairman of the botanical raw products committee and member of the botany and agriculture committee of the National Research Council in 1917–18; acting chief of the statistics division of the United States Food Administration in 1918. He was a member of the editorial board of *Genetics* since the beginning of that journal in 1916 and of the board of *Botanical Abstracts* from 1918 to 1922. He held the Harvard lectureship at Yale in 1924–25. He arranged the program of the Sixth International Congress of Genetics, held in Ithaca, N. Y., in 1932, and the success of this congress was due in no small measure to his efforts.

East was a member of numerous scientific societies: American Philosophical Society, American Society of Naturalists, of which he was president in 1918, American Genetic Association, National Academy of Sciences, New England Botanical Club, and others, and fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

A bibliography of East's scientific writings includes several books and over one hundred papers. Most of these papers present the results of his own researches in the field of genetics and its applications to plant breeding. His earliest papers, 1903–13, dealt in the main with the genetics and breeding of corn and potatoes. It was during this period that he rendered noteworthy service in the development of the method of corn breeding, crossing of inbred strains, which has revolutionized corn breeding throughout this country, a thoroughly worth-while practical method derived from theoretical genetic studies. During the latter part of this period, 1910–13, he more than any other geneticist showed the possibility of interpreting quantitative inheritance in Mendelian terms.

From about 1912 to 1929, numerous papers appeared on Nicotiana and particularly on self- and cross-sterility as exemplified in this genus. Although some, perhaps much, of this work was done by his students, his insight into this intricate problem was a guide throughout. The results of these combined and focused efforts will long stand as one of the brilliant genetic achievements of the period.

From about 1920 to the end, without abandoning his researches with plants, East turned to problems of more general interest. It was during this period that, undoubtedly as a result of judgment ripened through years of research and of wide reading, he turned more to the relations of genetics and of biology in general to human affairs. Even if, perchance, as some economists and sociologists have hinted, his economics was not wholly orthodox, it should not be overlooked that many writers have not even realized that biology has any place in discussions of human affairs.

It is not difficult to see how East's interests came to be wider than those of many geneticists. The brief outline of his student and professional career given above explains this at least in part. His early training in mathematics and physical science, particularly chemistry, progressing through agronomy and plant breeding to theoretical genetics and ultimately to more general biological problems, laid the foundation. This, coupled with wide reading, accurate observation, clear thinking and unusual clarity of expression, could not fail to give him a prominent place in the scientific developments of his generation.

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