

A. E. V. Richardson: 1883-1949

G. A. Cook

*Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization,
Melbourne, Australia*

ON DECEMBER 5, 1949, at the age of 66, Dr. A. E. V. Richardson died in Melbourne. For the last forty years he had given distinguished service to the agricultural and pastoral industries of Australia. Born in Adelaide, Dr. Richardson began his work in agriculture when he was a student at Roseworthy Agricultural College. He studied science at the University of Adelaide, where he graduated M.A., B.Sc. In 1909 he was appointed assistant director of agriculture in South Australia and in 1911 was transferred to the Victorian Department of Agriculture as superintendent of agriculture. The purpose of his appointment was to put the activities of the department on a scientific basis, and Richardson threw himself into his work with tremendous energy, changing the whole basis of departmental advice from "expert" opinion to the results of carefully planned experiments. He reviewed the scope of the state research farms and consolidated their work into three main stations—the Experiment Farm at Rutherglen, where work on the top dressing of pastures led to the establishment of subterranean clover throughout Victoria; the Central Research Farm at Werribee, working on cereal breeding; and Longerenong Agricultural College, which was responsible for the introduction of improved cultivation methods of wheat farming. As a result of his work new wheat varieties were developed and many improvements made in wheat-farming practice. Wheats developed from Werribee now represent 86 percent of the acreage sown to this crop in Victoria. His publication *Wheat and Its Cultivation* became a standard text on the subject in Australia, and for this work and research on the water requirements of farm crops he received in 1924 the first D.Sc. degree awarded in agriculture by the University of Melbourne.

In 1918 Richardson visited the United States and Canada for the Victorian Government to study agricultural education and research. As a result of his report on the visit, the School of Agriculture was established on its present basis at the University of Melbourne, and Richardson was appointed dean of the faculty and director of the school. He held these posts in addition to his position with the Department of Agriculture and thus ensured a close link between the educational and research activities of the university and the requirements of the department for research and extension workers.

In 1924 Peter Waite, a prominent South Australian

pastoralist, presented his estate on the outskirts of Adelaide, together with a considerable endowment, to the University of Adelaide, which, as a result, was able to establish the Waite Agricultural Research Institute and the Waite Chair of Agriculture. Richardson accepted an invitation to be first director of the institute and occupant of the chair. In his new post, he was responsible for the development and expansion of the activities of the Waite Institute to its present leading position among the agricultural research institutes of Australia. In 1927 Richardson was appointed a member of the Executive Committee of the newly formed Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, a position he held until his retirement in 1949, and there is no doubt that his skillful judgment and wide knowledge of Australian agricultural problems contributed largely to the early success of the council in selecting problems for research which yielded such valuable results for Australian primary industries. In 1938 he left the Waite Institute to become deputy chief executive officer of the C.S.I.R. and in 1946, on the retirement of Sir David Rivett, he was appointed chief executive officer, a post which he held till his retirement in 1949. In 1927 Richardson was a delegate to the first Imperial Agricultural Research Conference in London and in 1932 an official adviser to the Australian delegation to the Ottawa Conference. He was created C.M.G. in 1932. He was the first president of the Australian Institute of Agricultural Science in 1935 and in 1947 was president of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science. His presidential address, "Science in Relation to Australia's Development," is a brilliant survey of the possibilities of research in Australia.

Richardson was a big man in mind and stature, and his genial, unassuming manner won him warm friends in many walks of life. Apart from his work he had wide interests, especially in the arts and in various games, in which he possessed greater than average skill. He had an encyclopedic knowledge of agricultural matters and a prodigious memory for facts and figures, which made him a formidable opponent in argument. In addition to his ability as an experimenter and his unflinching judgment of the practical value of research, he possessed a capacity for solid work and careful attention to detail that made him a successful administrator.

He is survived by his wife and daughter.