

Sir William Somerville.

SIR WILLIAM SOMERVILLE, Professor Emeritus of Rural Economy in the University of Oxford, died on 17th February at the age of seventy-one. For the last six or seven years of his life he was in feeble health, and latterly was living in almost complete retirement; yet he will long be remembered as a man of quite exceptional vigour of mind and as one who made outstanding contributions to agricultural progress.

Somerville was a pupil of the Royal High School, Edinburgh, and studied agriculture under both Wilson and Wallace at Edinburgh University. He was Class Medallist in Agriculture in Wallace's first year as Professor (1885). Thereafter he worked at Munich, mainly on Forestry and Forest Botany, and graduated D.Æc. In 1889 he returned to Edinburgh as the first University Lecturer on Forestry, and two years later was appointed first Professor of Agriculture and Forestry at Armstrong College, Newcastle-on-Tyne. In 1899 he moved on to Cambridge as the first Drapers Professor of Agriculture, and two years later he went to London as Assistant Secretary to the Board of Agriculture. Official routine and confinement in a Government office, however, proved not much to his liking, so that when, in 1906, the old Sibthorpe Professorship at Oxford was made into a full-time appointment, he was glad to accept the invitation of the University to fill the Chair, which he held until his retirement in 1926.

Somerville was a man of extraordinary breadth of interest and knowledge. Nobody else in recent times has been an acknowledged authority, as Somerville was, on both agriculture and forestry. It would be difficult to say whether the woodland or the field of grass interested him the more, so completely conversant was he with both subjects. Moreover, he combined, in a very remarkable degree, a real scientific outlook with the most minute knowledge of practice. The result was that he won the complete confidence and trust both of the farmer and of the practical forester. No other scientific man—not even Sir John Lawes—did so much to inspire the farmer's confidence in education and research.

Somerville's best known work was done during his eight years at Newcastle. While there he started the Northumberland County Council's experimental farm at Cockle Park, and initiated a vast amount of field experimental work not only on the farm itself but on others throughout.

the north of England. The name of Cockle Park he made famous in a very few years, and the work which he began was so ably carried on by his successors (Sir Thomas Middleton and Professor Gilchrist) that it had far-reaching consequences in farm practice throughout the whole country. The most striking results were obtained in increasing the productivity of pastures, but much other valuable work is recorded in Reports which he wrote at this time and which run to some 800 pages.

Somerville had an immense capacity for work. Apart from his Reports, he wrote a good deal on both his subjects; he translated several German works on Forest Botany; lectured very often to farmers, and was a most popular and successful teacher. He was an unflinching source of encouragement and inspiration not only to his own pupils but to all and sundry young men who were working at either of his subjects.

To know Somerville and to see him at his best one had to spend a day with him in the open air. Whether he were shooting or fishing, botanising or farming, hill-climbing or bird-watching, his interest never flagged and his body never seemed to tire. Most remarkable of all was his never-failing kindness and geniality, which must have cheered on many a companion who was ready to drop with weariness before the end of the day. Not even in his last years (when he was condemned to comparative idleness and was able to see very few friends) did his cheery optimism desert him or interest in life fail.

He was elected a Fellow of the Society in 1889.

J. A. S. W.