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William Carlyle Etheridge (1885-1956)

by T. R. Stanton

Dr. William Carlyle Etheridge, formerly Professor of Agronomy and retired Chairman of the Field Crops Department, College of Agriculture, University of Missouri, died on January 7, 1956 in the Boone County Hospital, Columbia, Missouri, from a heart attack suffered the previous day.

Dr. Etheridge was born at Hanteo, North Carolina, June 30, 1885 and received the B.S. degree from North Carolina State College in 1906; and from Cornell University the M.S. degree in 1912; and the Ph.D. degree in 1915. He was an Assistant Agronomist at the Agricultural Experiment Station of North Carolina State College, 1906-1908; an Associate Agronomist in the same institution, 1908-1911; Assistant in Farm Crops, Cornell University, 1911-1915; Professor Agronomy, College of Agriculture, University of Florida, 1915-1916; and Professor Field Crops, College of Agriculture, University of Missouri, 1916-1955.

Aside from his outstanding accomplishments in the development of new crops and new crop varieties for Missouri and adjoining states and his nearly 40 years of research and teaching which brought him national recognition, this brief item is written primarily to give credit to him for his brilliant work on the classification of oats while a graduate student at Cornell University, the results of which were published in 1916 as Cornell Memoir No. 10, entitled "A Classification of the Varieties of Cultivated Oats," which constituted the first comprehensive report of this nature to appear in the United States. It antedated similar publications in both wheat and barley.

He studied 731 collections of oats and described 55 varieties grouped under the three species, or subspecies, Avena sterilis, A. sativa, and A. sativa orienthalis. Emphasis was placed on the purely botanical characters that made them varieties. Etheridge's work was a most valuable contribution to the botanical knowledge of oat varieties. In addition to this treatise, Dr. Etheridge has written numerous bulletins, circulars and journal articles on crops and related subjects and is the author of a textbook entitled "Field Crops," which has gone through several editions.

He was an active member and a Fellow of the American Society of Agronomy, a member of Alpha Zeta, Gamma Sigma Delta, Phi Kappa Phi, Sigma XI and the Botanical Society of America.

Dr. Etheridge is survived by his second wife, formerly Miss Helen Averitt, who had served as his secretary for many years, three sons and one daughter. His first wife who formerly was Miss Fanny Cassell, died shortly before his retirement. She deserves much credit as an artist for making the line drawings and color plates for Cornell Memoir No. 10.

Dr. Etheridge was a man of marked ability, sterling character, broad vision and a benefactor to mankind. On retiring from his long tenure as Chairman of the Department of Field Crops at the University of Missouri, he was the recipient of many fine tributes. Among these, the one he cherished the most was a resolution passed by the House of Representatives of the General Assembly of the State of Missouri commending him for his services and contributions to the agriculture of the state and nation.