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John Huntington Parker, a Former Oat Breeder
Answers the Call of the Grim Reaper

by T. R. Stanton

Dr. John Huntington Parker, Director of the Midwest Barley Improvement Association and a former oat breeder, died in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on October 27, 1956 after a lingering illness from cancer. He was born at St. Paul, Minnesota, August 13, 1891.

Dr. Parker received the B.S. degree from the University of Minnesota in 1913; the M.S. degree from Cornell University in 1916; and the Ph.D. degree (in agriculture) from Cambridge University, England where he was an International Education Board Scholar, 1925 to 1926.

He served as a Scientific Assistant in cereal investigations in the old Bureau of Plant Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture, from 1913 to 1917. He resigned from this position to become Professor of Crop Improvement at the Kansas State College, Manhattan, where from 1917 to 1939 he demonstrated great ability as a teacher and research worker in crop improvement. He gave up the role of teacher in 1939 to become Director of the Kansas Wheat Improvement Association and in 1945 he was called to the Directorship of the Midwest Barley Improvement Association with headquarters in Milwaukee. While at Kansas State College he also served from 1931 to 1932 as a Visiting Professor in the Department of Plant Breeding at Cornell University.

This item has been written for the 1956 National Oat Newsletter primarily because of his great interest in the breeding of better oats. He played a major part in the development and distribution of the famous Kanota variety as well as being the actual breeder of the Fulton oat. He pioneered in directing studies of variation in oats, specially in the notoriously variable Burt variety and likewise made a study of fatuoid, or so-called false wild oats. It also should be stated here that he was one of the first investigators to conduct systematic studies of the relative rust resistance of oat varieties. (see U.S.D.A. Bul. 629)

In all probability, however, his greatest contribution to agriculture and his fellowmen was made as one of the most efficient, highly informed, enthusiastic and inspiring teachers while a professor at Kansas State College from 1917 to 1939 in the training of many young agronomists in the genetics and breeding of wheat, oats, grain sorghum and barley. His great knowledge of the literature on plant genetics, crop breeding and improvement was the marvel of all his students and contemporaries.

After becoming Director of the Midwest Barley Improvement Association in 1945 he became an enthusiastic barley specialist and contributed much toward the development and distribution of superior brewing barley varieties during the last decade.

Dr. Parker was the author or joint author of many bulletins, circulars, and journal articles on various phases of the production, and improvement of the small grains and grain sorghum.

He was a member and Fellow of the American Society of Agronomy, also a member of the Society of Naturalists, American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Genetic Association, and the Association of Brewing Chemistry. He is survived by his wife, one son and one daughter. His genial personality, outstanding ability and broad interest in the welfare of his fellowmen made him a host of friends, who will mourn his rather untimely passing.