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MEMORIAL ADDRESS
George Henry Holford

JOHN M. RANSTEAD, Matangi.

WHEN giving the first Memorial Address at the 6th Annual Conference of this Society some five years ago, Dr. McMeekan said that it had been decided to devote half an hour of each Conference to an address on past workers who had made substantial contribution to animal production in New Zealand. He said that these half hours would not be wasted if they resulted merely in a permanent record in the annals of this Society of the efforts of the many great animal men whose work during the early years of development of New Zealand has never been adequately reported. He said:—"We owe this to them as a tribute. We owe it to ourselves and posterity so that in due course our own efforts may be judged with perspective."

In previous Memorial Addresses, tribute has been paid to the memory of three of New Zealand's most famous farmers and to two living scientists who devoted their life work to Agriculture. These were all rated as "successful" men; men who received during their own lifetime public recognition and financial reward for their good work. In that respect they were fortunate, for Ruskin has said:—"Generally, good, useful work, whether of the head or the hand, is either ill-paid, or not paid at all. I don't say it should be so, but it always is so. People, as a rule, only pay for being amused or being cheated, not for being served. None of the best head work in art, literature or science, is ever paid for. How much do you think Homer got for his Iliad? or Dante for his Paradise? only bitter tears and salt, and going up and down other people's stairs. In science the man who discovered the telescope, and first saw Heaven, was paid with a dungeon; the man who invented the microscope, and first saw earth, died of starvation, driven from home. It is indeed very clear that God means all good work to be done for nothing."

Ruskin's remarks aptly apply to the late George Henry Holford, whose name has been selected for this year's Memorial Address; and so it is with great pleasure that I welcome this opportunity of placing on record some small account of his valuable services to New Zealand Agriculture.

Early Days.

George Henry Holford was born in Christchurch in 1890 but received his early education in Auckland. During his youth he was in close touch with farming pursuits. After leaving High School and passing the Civil Service and Matriculation examinations, he spent two years in the Government Department of Tourists, Industries and Commerce. His first year was spent in the Dominion, where he went through a training to fit him for the position of information officer on the tourist resorts, and on the primary and secondary industries of New Zealand, going to Sydney in that capacity in 1908. Whilst there he took the Agricultural course at the Sydney Technical College as a preliminary training as a teacher in Agriculture. In 1909 he entered the Canterbury Agricultural College, Lincoln, the only Agricultural College, then, affiliated to the University of New Zealand, and there took the full course in Agriculture. In the annual examinations he gained the first place in farm work and in all the sciences bearing on Agriculture. He was also during this period awarded the only three available scholarships and the Haydn Gold Medal for stock judging. After his second year at Lincoln College he entered Auckland University College to prepare for the degree of Bachelor of Science in Agriculture. Whilst
there he passed the first section of the degree and returned to Lincoln College at the beginning of 1912 to complete his College course and to prepare further subjects for the B.A. degree. He secured the College Diploma at the end of 1912 and passed the second section of the B.Ag. degree in that year. Whilst at Lincoln College he acted as assistant to the biologist, Dr. Hilgendorf, in the work of selecting and breeding cereals, prepared notes on Materia Medica for the Veterinary Surgeon, and wrote the History of the Southdown breed of sheep. In 1913 he passed the final examination for the B.Ag. degree (one of the first two in New Zealand).

Commercial Career.

After declining an appointment as Agricultural Instructor to the Education Department, he entered the service of Messrs. Wright, Stephenson and Company Ltd., as agricultural and technical adviser on soils, manures, seeds and animal foodstuffs. In the course of his work he visited every district in the Dominion, making a close study of agricultural and pastoral conditions in each part. He introduced to New Zealand from England, new varieties of wheat and oats. He lectured and gave numerous lantern lectures on agricultural topics to farmers' organisations throughout the Dominion, and also conducted manural and variety trials with farm crops. In 1917 he joined the N.Z. Farmers' Co-operative Association of Canterbury, the largest of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere, as an executive officer in charge of the Fertiliser, Foodstuffs and Dairy Produce Departments, and besides the managerial duties mentioned, he carried out during his five years service considerable research work and also acted as adviser to the New Zealand Farmers Union on Agricultural and Economic questions.

Associate Editor, "N.Z. Farmer."

In order to devote himself entirely to the study of rural matters, agricultural, pastoral, educational and economic, he accepted early in 1923 an offer to join the Editorial Staff of the "New Zealand Farmer and Stock and Station Journal," the leading farm journal of this Dominion. His duties included the making of complete historical, agricultural and pastoral surveys of the principal farming districts of New Zealand. During six years in this post, he visited the main sheep, cattle, horse and pig studs in this country, and wrote extensively on live stock matters, also prepared articles on all the principal farm crops, on soils and manuring, on rural economics and on rural education.

During this period Holford acted as General Editor for Messrs. Whitcombe and Tombs, Ltd., of their well-known practical farm handbook series. He edited the following:—"Soils and Manures in New Zealand," by L. J. Wild; "Dairy-farming in New Zealand," by W. D. Powdrell; "Sheep-farming in New Zealand," by W. Perry; "The Culture of Lucerne," by W. S. Hill; "The Farm Crops of New Zealand," by A. H. Cockayne; he also wrote his "History of the Acclimatisation of Stock" for the "Natural History of Canterbury," issued by the Philosophical Institute of Canterbury. He probably wrote his well-known booklet "Wheat for Profit" about this time.

Agricultural Adviser in N.Z. to Imperial Chemical Industries, Ltd.

In 1929 he was chosen by Imperial Chemical Industries, Ltd., as their Agricultural Advisory Officer in New Zealand. During the seven years he was in this post he had a unique opportunity of studying the principal developments in Agricultural Research in this country. He maintained close contact with the research and educational activities of Lincoln and Massey Agricultural Colleges, the Cawthron Institute and Departments of Agriculture and Scientific and Industrial Research. He planned and supervised a considerable amount of experimental work in connection with the growing of farm crops and pastures; and
visited periodically the principal agricultural areas of the Dominion and lectured on numerous occasions to farmers' meetings and agricultural conferences.

Just prior to World War 1, the process of fixing atmospheric nitrogen had been developed on a commercial scale in Britain and on the Continent for the purpose of manufacturing explosives. After the war, British factories controlled by I.C.I. were capable of fixing nitrogen from the air, equivalent to 250,000 tons of sulphate of ammonia annually. German factories, however, were capable of producing eight times as much. The German experiments at Hohenheim on the intensive manuring of pastures were very successful and led to a great increase in the use of nitrogenous fertilisers in Germany and Holland. Britain also took a fresh interest in nitrogenous manures, now very much reduced in price. The I.C.I., so largely interested in the product, conducted many experiments in Britain with such satisfactory results that they decided to repeat them in New Zealand. Holford, among other duties, was given charge of this work. Trials on pasture plots at Marton, Ruakura and Nelson were made under the auspices of the Department of Agriculture and Cawthron Institute, but the reports on the whole were unfavourable. It was claimed that sulphate of ammonia was toxic to white clover, and that its beneficial effects on pasture were followed by periods of slump in production. Holford claimed that other trials, carried out on the properties of various progressive farmers, showed encouraging results. With considerable insight he claimed that the secret of its successful use lay in the management of the pasture. Though he denied that sulphate of ammonia had a toxic effect on white clover he admitted that by the encouragement of ryegrass the percentage of white clover might be reduced. He said:—"Of course, no one doubts the great value of white-clover in building up swards and the importance of a certain percentage, but what I have found is that in a great majority of cases a man judges his pasture by its clover content and by nothing else, that is an attitude that needs altering."

For several years there was great controversy over the matter—official circles claiming that the proprietary interests only saw good results because they wished to push the sale of their product. However, the slump settled the argument. Sales, which had risen from 900 tons to almost 9,000 tons, dwindled to under 3,000 tons per annum and at the end of 1935 the I.C.I. closed down on research in New Zealand and Holford found himself out of a job. Little was it thought that by 1951 a panel of experts from the Departments of Agriculture and D.S. and I.R., and the N.Z. Dairy Board would tell a Farmers' meeting at East Tamaki that "the good effects of nitrogen on a pasture, properly managed, far outweighed the bad ones," and that the proper management was essentially the same as George Holford had published in booklet form in 1934.

Services Recognised on Leaving Canterbury.

Holford's next employment took him to Auckland. On the eve of his departure, Lincoln College recognised his services to the agricultural community by awarding him the Bledisloe Medal, a distinction awarded at intervals to an ex-student, holding the College Diploma or Degree B.Ag., for conspicuous service which has resulted in material benefit to New Zealand. Hitherto, this award had only been made to Diploma holders who were practical farmers. Holford was the first student, not a farmer, to receive recognition. The following extracts from speeches at a complimentary luncheon held in Christchurch are taken from the Christchurch "Press" of December 7th, 1955:

Mr. S. G. Holland, M.P., a vice-president of the Canterbury Chamber of Commerce said the Chamber was happy to be associated in tributes to Mr. Holford's work. The Chamber and the Progress League worked in the closest harmony in any movement for the benefit of Canterbury, and Mr. Holford had given signal service as Chairman of
the combined irrigation committee of the two bodies. He also congratulated Mr. Holford on being awarded the Bledisloe Medal, and said that he would leave behind him a monument of good citizenship in Canterbury.

Mr. J. E. Strachan, said few men were so closely associated with the welfare of the community in so practical a way as Mr. Holford. Mr. Holford was a visionary, but his visions were based on a thorough knowledge of realities, which was one of the reasons why he had been so useful to the community.

Dr. F. W. Hilgendorf, said that even as a student Mr. Holford was a visionary, whose ideas far outran those of his contemporaries. If irrigation was a success in Canterbury, and there were great hopes that it would be so, then the Province would owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. Holford. His work in this direction had been outstanding, and the developments now going on were a monument to his enthusiasm. He had been responsible for outstanding services to the Province. Mr. Holford has been the focus from which all activities in the field of irrigation in Canterbury had radiated.

Irrigation was not the only matter Holford was interested in. During his lengthy stay in Canterbury he had taken a leading part in many progressive movements. As Chairman of the Agricultural and Educational Committee of the Canterbury Progress League he organised the first Boys' and Girls' Agricultural Clubs in Canterbury and was responsible for the scheme of grassland studies in schools adopted by the Education Department. To continue in his own words:—"Besides the research I carried out at Lincoln College on Wheat and Oats, and the soil, manure, and economic investigations made during my service with the commercial firms, I initiated and was chairman of the Canterbury Soils Improvement Committee, which working along the lines of a similar organisation in America, and acting in conjunction with the technical officers of the Agricultural Department, laid the foundation for the present scheme of manurial experiments being conducted by the Department of Agriculture. In 1926, I organised the Wheat Research Institute which conducts researches into the growing of wheat, the milling of flour, and the baking of bread. In 1930, I called the first meeting which led to the formation of the New Zealand Grassland Association, which is the organisation of all research workers and others interested in modern grassland problems. In 1931, I initiated and organised the New Zealand Board of Greenkeeping Research, which is now functioning effectively in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture in regard to modern turf culture."

That Holford's claim to have started the Wheat Research Institute was no idle boast the following letter will show. The letter is from Professor H. G. Denham, Chairman of the Wheat Research Institute Committee, and is dated September 28, 1928.

"At the meeting of the Wheat Research Institute Committee held to-day, your letter conveying your resignation as Local Honorary Secretary was read. In accepting your resignation, the Committee expressed a unanimous wish that I should tender you on their behalf their very keen appreciation of the devoted service which you rendered the Institute in its early days. All felt that, but for your pioneering labours, the Institute would never have come into being, and if success crowns the efforts of the Institute, you may justly feel that the credit lies in large measure with you, and that your vision has indeed come into reality. In conclusion, allow me once again to thank you for your loyal and devoted labours on behalf of the Institute.

Fertiliser Advisory Service.

Holford has been continually referred to as a visionary, and it was due to his vision that he obtained his next position. He had to create a job for himself. He persuaded the principal fertiliser interests in the
Dominion to combine in a "Fertiliser Advisory Service" and appoint him Director. But friction between the various interests developed and Holford soon found that his position was not likely to be a permanent one. Looking round for another opening he applied for the post of Director of Lincoln College, but in this he was unsuccessful. He attributed his failure to the fact that his experience had been confined to New Zealand conditions only. He felt that a tour of inspection of the research stations of America, Great Britain and the Continent, together with his present knowledge, would equip him to apply for the highest position. In 1937, the International Grassland Conference was to be held in Britain and Holford approached the Department of Agriculture and the D.S. & I.R. to be sent to represent New Zealand, but his application was turned down. He then offered to pay his own expenses if he were given official status as New Zealand representative. This was also turned down. Nothing daunted, Holford set sail, having, as he expressed it, "mortgaged his future" to raise money for the trip.

World Tour.

He attended fertiliser conferences in the United States, and the International Grassland Conference in Great Britain. He visited manufacturing plants on the Continent, and experimental stations where ever he went. He visited farms, he talked with specialists; he returned full of information and fresh inspiration. And then misfortune overtook him.

Out of Work in New Zealand.

Here are some extracts from letters that I received on his return to New Zealand:

November 18th, 1937.—"Just home a week or so after a wonderful trip including U.S.A., England, Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy and Australia. I can't attempt to tell you of it but look forward to a chat ere long. Unfortunately I have no car now not even a job really so I'm busy surveying the future and trying to keep out of gaol. If one has an ideal, and mine has been maintaining and improving fertility in New Zealand—it needs courage to maintain it in the face of severe urgent needs. I thought that plan for developing industry between Government and fertiliser people was practically fixed up with me getting a job, but it broke down last week and it might be in abeyance till next year."

May 15th, 1938.—"So far I've not got any prospects—have been six months back in New Zealand and matters don't get any easier as the weeks and months go by. However this is my problem and I must try to work out some solution."

Inspector of Fertilisers.

Holford was given the post of Inspector of Fertilisers, regarding it as a stepping-stone to something better. But all his efforts to better his position failed and he felt that his proposals were turned down before they reached the Minister. A feeling of frustration and despair filled him and he seemed to develop a persecution complex—perhaps not without some cause. In a letter dated October 24th, 1938, he says:—

"My besetting sin is loquaciousness, partly hereditary and partly borne of enthusiasm. Possibly one should be blamed had one red hair or an ugly countenance. Responsibility would tend to cure that weakness—surely not sufficient to outweigh all other considerations, as I've never been accused of talking too much nonsense. The strong silent man is always thought well of by others. He contradicts no one's pet convictions and is best exemplified in the morgue. The Director of Research job I have in mind, and which I'm sure needs doing, is akin to the one Fawcett had as Liaison Officer. Strangely enough this post after he left it was never filled . . . .

"I may be aiming too high in idea put before you. I hardly think so. In any case I want to get away from the present restricting influences which prevent me using my experience
for the good I think of the farmer and the country. I would appreciate
the Minister—even the two L.M. and D.G.S., meeting me in camera—
without even secretaries knowing it, and this only because if nothing
eventuates I will be crucified more than ever. You know how much I've
collected in cash for my work in the public interest—nil. Even if my
suggestion made re Research Director of Agriculture Department misses
I would like the Minister to sufficiently appreciate me so that I can
break the present bonds and get a post of Commissioner of Lime and
Fertilisers, as well as Inspector of Fertilisers, the last post being no
expense to the Government as it is paid for by fees collected by
fertiliser registration.

In another letter, dated November 16th, 1938, he says:—"No word
from Hon. Lee Martin and I see he goes to Waikato to-night for a few
days. I knew there was something wrong and to-day the Erosion
Committee meets and I'm not invited. In the meantime I feel I'm being
slowly crucified and that my family and future are being jeopardised
by a conspiracy induced by jealousy and fear from others who without
my experience fear that they may be shown up."

Holford's reference to the Erosion Committee is explained by the
fact that on his return from overseas he had addressed the Annual
Conference of the Royal Agricultural Society of New Zealand on Soil
Conservation and Soil Exploitation. This address had been published in
bulletin form by the Royal Society with an introduction by the
President, Mr. L. J. Wild. Mr. Wild said:—"Since Mr. Holford's address
was given and others in other parts of the country by request made to
the Minister by the Royal Agricultural Society, the Hon. Mr. Sullivan,
Minister of Scientific and Industrial Research, has set up a Committee
to investigate the problems of land deterioration and soil erosion in
New Zealand." "An obvious criticism of the personnel of this committee
is that a place has not been found for Mr. Holford, who has an
unrivalled knowledge of soil conditions in New Zealand and a back-
ground of experience of the problem in other countries derived from
his recent visit overseas."

Serpentine Super.

Failing to interest the powers that be in creating a post for himself
in the Direction of Agricultural Research and being left out of the
Soil Conservation Schemes which were being developed, Holford turned
his energies to Serpentine Super—a subject that was to occupy his
energies till the time of his death. Telling the story in the "New
Zealand Dairy Exporter" Holford said:—"The first intimation I had of
the possibilities of using Serpentine for agricultural purposes came
from a report of a meeting of the International Superphosphate Associa-
tion held in Hamburg in October, 1937. When I visited Hamburg in
August, 1937, I was invited to attend the meeting but left Europe
a month before it took place. This conference, attended by leading
fertiliser chemists of Great Britain, Europe and other parts of the
world, discussed Russian experiments carried out in 1936, in which
dunite, a mineral related to serpentine, was used in a mixture with
superphosphate on various soil types and on various crops. Mr. J. J.
Cornes of the Dominion Laboratory who had seen the references to the
Russian work, made laboratory tests with dunite, and he stimulated
my further interests in this class of material when mixed with super-
phosphate. Mr. R. E. R. Grimmett, then chief chemist to the Depart-
ment of Agriculture, whose knowledge of soils and fertilisers in New
Zealand extends back for many years, intimated that the proposal was
one worth trying out. His sound chemical knowledge and his advice
were very important factors in encouraging me to continue with the
laboratory tests and to make a quantity of serpentine superphosphate
mixture at a fertiliser works (Kempthorne Prosser & Co., Wanagnui)
and in a manner likely to be done in practice. This was in April, 1939."
In July-August, 1939, nineteen trials were laid down in various parts of New Zealand. In September, 1939, Holford arranged with the Challenge Phosphate Co. to make 20 tons of serpentine super and suggested large scale trials, but this proposal was turned down. A company, Asbestos Mines (N.Z.) Ltd., held a lease on D'Urville Island, prospecting for asbestos, which is extracted from serpentine rock. In January, 1940, Holford approached this company with a proposal that they should supply the serpentine rock from their lease on D'Urville Island. As Holford could not obtain sufficient support in the Department, Mr. Cowles of the Asbestos Mines Company, wrote a letter, dated February 26th, 1940, to the Minister of Finance, pointing out the importance of Holford's ideas. This caused enquiries to be made and the letter caused some annoyance in the Department, but it had the effect of action being taken, and large scale trials were laid down in March, 1940. There had been a good deal of petty jealousy in the Department. Holford's original written suggestions in 1938 were turned down and marked "no action." His request for experimental plot trials was declined; but despite this he proceeded and as the first trials indicated the value of his ideas he requested further action. A dispute arose over publication of an article and the general frustration of his ideas led to his resignation from the Department in March, 1940. Holford took out a provisional patent and had hopes of making something, at long last, for himself and family out of serpentine super; but to counter this the Department of Agriculture also took out a provisional patent and furthermore obtained a mineral lease on D'Urville Island in order to see that no one obtained a monopoly of supplies. The Asbestos Mines Company then paid Holford a salary to enable him to develop the use of serpentine and he launched out on a propaganda campaign with the following results:

May, 1940.—Council of primary production unanimously passed a resolution "That Government be asked to do all that is necessary to stimulate serpentine super mixture, and that Mr. Holford be appointed to supervise.''

June, 1940.—Holford published articles in "Exporter," "Point Blank," and "Farmers' Weekly," these stimulated farmers' interests.

July, 1940.—At Annual Conference of New Zealand Farmers' Union, a sub-committee was set up and waited on the Minister of Agriculture to make the mixture available and wanted 40,000 tons made.

August, 1940.—N.Z. Farmers' Union Executive passed a resolution recommending that the Government be asked to put Mr. Holford in charge of serpentine experiments and the request was conveyed to the Minister by a deputation, and was sympathetically received by him.

August, 1940.—National Council of Primary Production after full discussion of serpentine super position, passed a resolution, "That this Council expresses disappointment that so far no material result has followed from the resolution of May 9th urging the Government to take immediate steps to stimulate production of serpentine super, and that the council now asks that Mr. Holford be appointed by the Government to supervise.''

October, 1940.—Mr. Goodfellow (Challenge Company) suggested to Mr. Cockayne (Director-General of Agriculture) that a non-profit-earning company be formed by the three fertiliser companies to obtain supplies and to employ Mr. Holford, and that 2s per ton be added to the cost of the rock to pay his salary and he to conduct educational campaign with farmers. The national Council agreed to this levy, which was agreed to by the Minister of Agriculture.

Serpentine Supply Company.

The Serpentine Supply Company was formed, and Holford received word that the Company would not engage him until he surrendered his patent. He was, therefore, compelled to agree and lost any reward he
might have obtained from patent rights. In April, 1941, Holford left Wellington to take up his new duties and shortly after his arrival in Auckland (before he had even met his Company Directors) he met with a serious accident, falling down the lift-well at the Company’s office. He suffered a fractured ankle and an injury to his spine which necessitated his lying in plaster for five and a half months. Though he brought an action for damages against the owners of the building, on the grounds that they were responsible for the defective lift gate, he lost the case. He received no compensation for the accident. On returning to his home in Wellington for final treatment at the Wellington Hospital, he offered to write articles and address meetings, but was instructed by the Serpentine Company not to do so. In January, 1942, he received a letter dismissing him on the grounds of insufficient development. The action of the Company was unfortunate, as subsequent events showed the need for a lot of educational work and organisation to prepare the farmers to accept this new type of fertiliser; a lot of subsequent opposition might have been avoided.

Use of Serpentine Made Compulsory.

The rationing of phosphate and with that the necessity for the conservation and maximum utilisation of our limited supplies, focussed public attention on serpentine super with the result that in February, 1942, Holford was appointed Supervisor of Serpentine Development in the Department of Agriculture. In September, 1942, the use of serpentine was made compulsory for the North Island, with the approval of the National Council of Primary Production and the Farmers’ Union. But all was not plain sailing. There was a certain amount of resentment against compulsion by distributors and farmers. Facilities for grinding the serpentine rock were poor and complaints were frequent about the quality of the product. Even in May, 1944, Holford was writing:—

“You will note that my baby is getting hell in certain quarters. Boiled down it is mainly (1) Political—farmers hate the Government and think they have put road metal in their super to irritate them. (2) Poor quality of the serpentine super made by the works with much coarse serpentine. I just can’t get my heads to insist on works making a better article. I want a 4 to 1 mixture (super 4 serpentine 1), and made better I’ll wager that it becomes the only super in New Zealand. I’m fighting hard and somehow feel that I may lose the battle. Unfortunately the strain is affecting my health (heart mainly). I’ve had 8 years stress and strain, I’m due for hospital shortly.”

A month later Holford wrote:—“I’ve never met anyone more solid on merits of 4 to 1 serpentine super as a national fertiliser—post war, than Grimmett, whose all round chemistry etc. amazes me. If serpentine is saved it will be by L. J. Wild and Grimmett—no one else cares a damn. A sad commentary on the state of things. I went to hospital yesterday—heart examination, but won’t know the result for a few days.”

A year later Holford wrote from Wellington:—“I’ve not been away from here for 8 months. I feel it useless to go to factories without authority. After discussions with War Cabinet I hope this will change, and my growling habit, with need gone, at the same time.”

Shortly after this, the tragic death of his eldest son in an aircraft accident in New Zealand, after going through four years of combat flying from Dunkirk onwards, dealt Holford a blow from which he never fully recovered. He died suddenly and before his time on October 15th, 1946.

I would like to close with a quotation from “George Holford, The Man and His Work” an appreciation by his friend, Mr L. J. Wild:—“Serpentine super made its bow, the National Council of Primary Production made its use compulsory, and Holford was retained by the Department of Agriculture to develop its production and use. The long, and at times bitter, controversy on this matter is now history,
but recent enough to be in the minds of all interested. Undoubtedly, the difficulties and disappointments met with, following on his earlier accident, broke his health, but not his spirit. Out of serpentine Holford himself got nothing except a job hedged round with all sorts of difficulties, but the nation was undoubtedly assisted in maintaining the high level of production that marked its war effort. As had been his experience so often before, Holford was ahead of the time, and the farming community was not ready for his ideas; and as had so often happened before, time has completely justified him in this case also, as the current wide acceptance of serpentine superphosphate proves.

One of Holford's characteristics, from which so many of his friends and associates benefited, was his capacity for reading, and for conducting a voluminous correspondence with agricultural workers in various parts of the world. He could digest a book or a paper in record time, he had a keen eye for appropriate reference and quotation, and he could extract information from the most reserved correspondents. What he gathered, he most generously placed at the disposal of other friends and correspondents, and it is safe to say that there is hardly anyone working to-day in New Zealand in the field of agricultural science, who is not in some way in debt to George Holford. He was a big man in every sense."