Mark Alfred Carleton—The Trail’s End
Arthur F. Swanson

MARK Alfred Carleton was one of a small group of men who met on December 21, 1907, at the University of Chicago and formulated plans which led to the organization of the American Society of Agronomy. He had joined with others in signing the call for that meeting, and had a large share in determining the growth and development of the Society in the early years.

In 1908, Carleton served as the Society’s first president and in his presidential address made this prophetic statement, “Today we are assembled in the first annual meeting since the organization of the American Society of Agronomy—the first association of its kind in America and one that will have, without question, a tremendous influence on agricultural investigations and practices.” The Society which he and his associates organized in the pioneer days of agricultural research in the United States has grown in magnitude and influence, no doubt far beyond the fondest dreams of those who nurtured it in the early years.

The prophecy of Carleton was highly apparent at the Golden Jubilee Celebration meeting of the Society at Atlanta, Ga., November 18-22, 1957, when able leaders reviewed the tremendous progress that scientific agriculture has made during the Society’s 50 years of existence and in which many of its members have played an important part. It was also fitting that the few living charter members who served with Carleton were honored on this occasion.

Carleton’s leadership in cereal research from 1890 to 1918, when he left the United States Department of Agriculture, is well known and only the highlights of this period of his life will be touched upon in this paper. Rather, the purpose of this paper is to place on record facts concerning the last months of his career which ended in Peru.

Carleton’s Early Life and Service

Mark Alfred Carleton was born in Jerusalem, Ohio, March 7, 1866. His parents pioneered in Cloud County, Kansas, where he obtained his elementary education. He received the degree of Bachelor of Science at the Kansas Agricultural College in 1887, and Master of Science degree from the same institution in 1893. He was Professor of Natural History at Friends University, Wichita, Kansas, 1890-1892. In 1893 he was Assistant to the Kansas Agricultural Experiment Station where, in his time primarily to the study of cereal research, he became a recognized authority.

In 1901, on the organization of the Bureau of Plant Industry, Carleton was made Cerealist in Charge of Grain Investigations which soon became the Section of Cereal Crops and Diseases, in which position he continued until 1918. During this period new varieties were introduced into this country and efforts. He established and directed cereal research in the Great Plains, as well as suitable systems of dry-farming in this region and the determination of adapted varieties. Experiments under his supervision showed the importance of moisture supply in the quality of the wheat.

In 1898 and 1899, Carleton was sent by the United States Department of Agriculture, James Wilson, as agricultural commissioner to Russia and Siberia, to obtain rust-resisting and other varieties of cereals. He was in charge of the United States grain exhibits and a member of the jury of awards at the Paris Exposition in 1900, and chairman of the jury of awards for cereals at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904.

Carleton was a member of the Botanical Society of Washington, the American Phytopathological Society, the American Genetic Association, the Kansas Academy of Science, The Botanical Society of Washington, the Cosmos Club, the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He was decorated with the order of Merite Agricole by the French Government. He was made a member of the American Society of Agronomy in 1901.

Carleton Leaves for Foreign Service

In 1918, after leaving the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Carleton was employed by the United Fruit Corporation. In 1920, he went to Boco del Toro, Panama, to study diseases of bananas for the United Fruit Company. In the fall of 1924 he accepted the post of Director of the Laboratory of Cotton Insects for the United States Grain Corporation, in charge of the United States grain exhibit and a member of the Jury of Awards for cereals, Louisiana Purchase Exposition in 1904.

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