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DR. A. W. ROBERTS.

By GENERAL THE RT. HON. J. C. SMUTS.

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An extended notice in this issue attempts to do justice to the great services of the late Dr. Roberts to Science. I should like to add a brief reference to his outstanding human service. For in him the humanitarian and the scientist were happily blended together, and his name will be gratefully remembered in both respects. It is not only African skies that appealed to him, but also and equally that dark mass of African humanity which constitutes the major problem of this continent.

But first a word on his astronomical achievements. It is an intriguing thought that a schoolmaster, far away in the wilds of the native territories, should as an amateur have started a line of research which has contributed to the complete revolution of the science of astronomy, and even of our entire view of the physical nature and origin of this universe. Without specialist training, without equipment or apparatus, harassed and exhausted by the endless routine of teaching native children, without helpful stimulus from his fellows, and out of sheer love for his beloved hobby, he struck a vein which has proved the most fruitful in modern astronomical science, and pursued it with an insight and an ardour, and with a success, which have given him world-wide fame. It is truly an astonishing performance. After Roberts let no amateur despair, and let each cultivate his scientific hobby to the utmost limit of his powers and opportunities. Science in South Africa owes much to the amateur. Roberts was truly a prince among our scientific amateurs.

Astronomy was his hobby, native uplift was his work. He began as a teacher of native children, he ended a long career as a Senator for natives in the Union Parliament, as Chairman of the Native Affairs Commission, and as our foremost South African authority on all native questions. There was universal confidence in his impartiality, his sanity of outlook, his wide and wise sympathy in all matters of race and colour. Race and colour form perhaps the supreme human problem of the twentieth century. He specialised on that problem and became our greatest authority in that dangerous and difficult field. From teaching native children he rose to be the teacher of European South Africa in the biggest, most historic issue they have to face in this continent. And it was done all so quietly and modestly, with so much sympathy and tolerance for differing views, that his manifold activities provoked no resentment, and his voice was listened to with respect by all as that of a wise teacher and a great expert. Such men are rare in South Africa. They are rare anywhere. They are a priceless asset in a country where race issues tend to be pursued in a heated atmosphere. In the development of the native policies of this country his sage counsel and expert experience, at times his grave warnings, proved of inestimable value. And so one is justified in coming to the conclusion that his human service transcended his astronomical service and that he brought us nearer to the skies, not only in an astronomical, but even more so in a purely human humanitarian sense.

To me personally it will always be a pleasing recollection that when the opportunity came to me I took him from his exacting teaching duties and gave him wider scope of human service in the Senate, in the Native Affairs Commission, and in public life generally. Of the opportunities that thus came his way he made the fullest and best use, to the lasting benefit of the country.

Deeply rooted in religion, and in that love of God which is also love of man, he rendered a service to his country which we in gratitude shall never forget.

*Requiescat.*

