

(1) Percy Rolfe Sargood Kt.

born: Melbourne. September 1865

died: Dunedin. 5th November 1940



LOSS TO THE CITY

DEATH OF SIR PERCY SARGOOD

A PUBLIC-SPIRITED CITIZEN

Dunedin has suffered a severe loss in the passing of Sir Percy Rolfe Sargood, whose death occurred early this morning at his residence, "Marinote," Newington Avenue, Maori Hill, following a period of illness. The loss is all the more severe, perhaps, because it is impossible to calculate the full extent of good for which this kindly and public-spirited man was responsible. Much of what he did was known to all; far more was never known, and never will be known, for he was unostentatious in his actions, and never sought the limelight. Indirectly, through his many interests, he was also responsible for much splendid work. His support of music and art was well known, and not a few of the musical organisations of this city owe a great deal to the genuine interest displayed by Sir Percy and by Lady Sargood. Their mutual interest was revealed in many ways, apart from financial support, and included such widely divergent acts as the presentation by Lady Sargood of a trophy for the best acting in the Dunedin classes

of the British Drama League, and the recent lending of a Jacob Steiner violin—the property of their son who was killed in action during the war—to Alan Loveday, boy prodigy, who subsequently departed for England. As the lovers of music, so the lovers of art had much for which to be grateful to Sir Percy, and in many ways he fostered anything to do with painting and with photography. His most notable gesture in this respect was the presentation, in conjunction with his wife, of the Logan Park Art Gallery to the city. The Art Gallery serves as a memorial to their son, Cedric Rolfe Sargood, who enlisted with the Otago infantry at the age of 21. The son was killed during the attack on Suva Bay, Gallipoli, on August 8, 1915. Perhaps Sir Percy's greatest contribution to art as a whole was the part he played in founding the Empire Art Loan Collection Society, a body which has enabled people throughout the Empire to see for themselves the works of great artists, some of the best of private collections being obtained for display. His love of art enabled him to build up a private collection of rare quality. He presented notable works to the Dunedin and Wellington art galleries, and he was responsible for introducing to New Zealand the virile brush of Quinquella Martin, a young Argentine painter.

His interest in the well-being of young people was well known. He gave freely to the Y.M.C.A., assisting it to a considerable extent. All his life he displayed remarkable enthusiasm in the Boy Scout movement, and one of his proudest moments was when, as Chief Scout in the Dominion, the Governor-General, in June, 1937, handed him the "Silver Wolf," the highest distinction which any person in the Scout movement can receive from the World Chief, Lord Baden-Powell. The "Silver Wolf" is bestowed only upon those who have given outstanding service in the movement, and Sir Percy was only the third recipient of the distinction in New Zealand.

That such a busy man could find time to indulge in sport speaks volumes for his amazing vitality and virility. He was a keen golfer and horseman for many years, and nearly all his days he was interested in fishing. He was also a "pioneer" motorist, and as far back as 1906 he created a sensation when he became owner-driver of a one-cylinder Cadillac motor car. Later he purchased a four-cylinder car, which must have won the prize for "back-firing."

COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES.

In entirely different fields Sir Percy was associated with the commercial life of the city for well over 50 years, being at the time of his death governing director of the firm of Messrs Sargood, Son, and Ewen Ltd., a position he had held since 1907. He was connected with various movements for the development of the province, notably in respect to Central Otago irrigation. He was actively associated with several welfare societies. In 1935 he earned one reward for his lifetime of unselfish service, and in the New Year honours his name figured, a knighthood being conferred upon him.

Born at Melbourne in September, 1865, Sir Percy was the son of Senator the Hon. Sir Frederick Thomas Sargood, K.C.M.G. His earliest tuition was of a private nature, but later he studied at St. Kilda's Scotch College, and from there went to The Cedars, at Rickmanworth, England, finishing up at the Hawthorne Grammar School. The name of Sargood has always been identified with the wholesale warehousemen's business, his grandfather, Frederick James Sargood, having founded the present business in Melbourne in 1851, the name at that time being F. J. Sargood. It was only to be expected that Sir Percy would eventually enter the business, and in 1883

he did so, the firm being known as Messrs Sargood, Butler, and Nichol. Later the business was extended to New South Wales, and the firm became that of Messrs Sargood, Butler, Nichol, and Ewen Company. When two of the Sargood brothers purchased the Australian business the firm name was again changed, this time to Messrs Sargood Bros., which (together with the New Zealand house, established in 1861) became recognised as one of the largest wholesale houses in the Southern Hemisphere.

Sir Percy remained as an apprentice in the Melbourne house for six years. In 1889 he journeyed to London, where he gained further experience with Bradbury, Greatorex, and Company Ltd. for 12 months. He was also attached to the London office of Messrs Sargood Bros. for 12 months, all the time gaining buying experience. In 1891 he came to New Zealand as manager of the Christchurch and Dunedin warehouses and boat factory. In 1892 he became junior partner, and on the death of his father and Mr Ewen, in 1902, he took over full control. He formed the present limited company in 1907, under the firm name of Messrs Sargood, Son, and Ewen Ltd., and became governing director. In his own words, uttered as recently as September of this year, he said, "I have had 53 years' association with the firm, from post boy to governing director." Up to the time of his death he took a keen interest in the firm's operations and watched its progress with a fatherly eye. It is interesting to note that, through him, the firm was one of the first to found a staff provident fund.

The formation of that fund was only one indication of the very keen interest he displayed in his staff, and he always had at heart the welfare of the many workers connected with the firm. As recently as September 6 he wrote to his staff in these words: "Do not allow present war conditions to damp your enthusiasm or distract you from your duties—business, civil, or military. In all three areas of activity fight on till victory is won and a lasting peace amongst mankind is assured through the assertion of truth, the unveiling of illusion, the dissipation of hate, the enlargement and instruction of men's hearts and minds." In his relations with the staff and with the business community as a whole Sir Percy strictly adhered to the motto laid down by the founders, "Fair trading and fair dealing."

WANAKA STATION.

Apart from the world of commerce, Sir Percy was keenly interested in the development of Central Otago. In 1912 he purchased Wanaka Station, and there considerable attention was devoted to the irrigation of the low levels. He was really one of the pioneers of irrigation in the Central, and as president of the Cromwell Development Company he had a large share in the schemes for irrigation of land on the Cromwell Flat. Apart from its importance as an irrigation base, Wanaka Station was noted for the quality of its sheep and Friesian cattle. Moreover, the station became a "dispensing house" of hospitality to overseas visitors. Sir Percy was also interested in Empire migration, especially in connection with settling boys on the land.

In other realms Sir Percy Sargood's record of activities was lengthy. Apart from connections with other businesses, he was an ex-vice-chairman of the Dunedin Chamber of Commerce and an ex-member of the executive of the Manufacturers' Association. He represented New Zealand at the International Conference of the Chambers of Commerce at London in 1926, and three years later represented the Dunedin Chamber at the Empire Conference, also at London. During the war he was chairman of the Expeditionary Forces Committee. Other interests took in the Victoria League, British Empire Cancer Research Fund, and the Otago Expansion League. He took a leading part in the work of the Dunedin Unemployment Committee, and was the originator of the district scheme for the relief of distress. From its beginning he was a member of the Finance Committee of the mayor's relief of distress fund. Finally, he was a past president of the Rotary Club. In all his many spheres he kept clear of politics and of contentious party matters.

ASSOCIATION WITH PATRIOTIC WORK.

His work on the Patriotic Association founded during the Great War was of inestimable value, and it followed as a matter of course that he would become a member of the Otago Provincial Patriotic Council formed at the outbreak of the present war. He was a most active man in the council, his knowledge gained during the years in which a heavy drain was made on the 1914-18 association being invaluable. He was particularly active in endeavouring to bring together the Soldiers and Dependents' Welfare Committee (the present name of the former association) and the Otago Provincial Patriotic Council. It was his keen desire that co-ordination be effected, and the bodies be administered conjointly, so that the needs of soldiers of the last war and men of this war could be met from the one organisation. The proposals, which had entailed a considerable amount of work, had gone so far as to arrange for an early meeting of representatives of the two bodies. It is not likely that the work already done will be lost, and Sir Percy's hopes are almost certain to be fulfilled. As in the Great War, Sir Percy made available to the Provincial Patriotic Council the sum of £5,000, use of which is to be spread over a period of years.

In 1893 Sir Percy married Lucy Constance, a daughter of Dr Frederick Francis Ormond, of Hawke's Bay. Lady Sargood herself has been a prominent social worker, and was one of the founders of the Women's Club. Sir Percy is survived by Lady Sargood and by his two daughters, Mrs S. D. MacPherson (of Dunedin) and Mrs Mackillop (England). Mrs Mackillop's husband is a lieutenant-engineer, and he was actively engaged in planning the Singapore naval base.