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- A “Gleanings” Product -
**Obituary of a Noted Anthropologist (Dr.
A. F. Chamberlain).**

Original published by: Ontario Historical Society, Toronto, Ontario

CAG067

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An appreciation of Dr. Chamberlain's life's work.

XX.

A NOTED ANTHROPOLOGIST (DR. A. F. CHAMBERLAIN).

The death occurred on April 8, 1914, of Alexander Francis Chamberlain, professor of anthropology in Clark University, Worcester, Mass. Prof. Chamberlain was a son of the late George and Maria Chamberlain, of Toronto, and was born at Kenninghall, Norfolk, England, January 12, 1865. He came with his parents to Canada in early youth, and received in Peterborough, Ont., his primary school education, as well as a training in the Collegiate Institute of that city. He took an Arts course in the University of Toronto, where he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts, 1886, and Master of Arts, 1889. During his college course he showed a rare capacity for the rapid mastery of languages. Immediately after taking his bachelor degree in 1886, he was appointed to the fellowship in modern languages, in his alma mater, and in 1890-92 held the fellowship in anthropology in Clark University, Worcester, Mass., where he received his Ph.D. degree in the last named year. He was then appointed to a lectureship in the same university, and afterwards to an assistant professorship, which position he held up to the time of his death. In 1898 he married Miss Mary Isabel Cushman of Worcester.

The Toronto Globe, after reciting the main facts of his life, referred to his distinguished career in the following terms: His rapid mastery of foreign languages was a form of ability that stood him in good stead when later in life he had to pick up as best he could under serious difficulties the languages of the Indian tribes whose characteristics he had under observation.

Early in his academic career Prof. Chamberlain began in his own neighborhood his observations on the languages, manners, customs, and folklore of the Indians on the reserves in Ontario. The publication of the results of his researches brought him and his work to the attention of anthropologists, generally, in Canada, the United States, Great Britain and other countries. In 1891, for a Committee of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, he conducted protracted investigations of the tribal peculiarities of the Kootenay Indians in British Columbia.

He edited, from 1901 onward, the *Journal of American Folklore*, and, in addition to many papers contributed to scientific periodicals, he prepared articles for several encyclopædias, including the new *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

He leaves behind him (the *Globe* added editorially) at his untimely passing a high reputation as an original investigator of anthropological phenomena. By sheer force of ability and untiring work he made his way into the front rank of research toilers in the field of anthropology, where he was ultimately recognized as an authority. His observations of the customs and languages of Indian tribes involved long journeys and much physical hardship, but for this he was amply repaid by his interest in the natives and their regard for him. He was the recipient of many honors that came to him absolutely unsought, and left him as shy and unaffected as if he had never earned such distinctions. His death has created a blank in the republic of science which it will not be easy to fill, and in his dual academic environment which cannot be filled at all. He was pre-eminently an altruistic and lovable man.

In recent years, Prof. Chamberlain has devoted much attention to the Indian languages of South America, and had just completed, a short time prior to his death, a survey of the languages of that continent, in which he reckoned eighty-three distinct families or language-stocks, each of which was subdivided into different branches which were related to each other like English and German, and yet were quite as unintelligible to those using them.

The brief article by him, on the Indians of Ontario, which appears on earlier pages of this volume, and which was contributed to the *Society* at its Annual Meeting in Chatham, September, 1913, accordingly has a pathetic interest, inasmuch as his death occurred while the book was passing through the press.