

Captain William Noble.

It is with the deepest regret that we record the death on the 9th of this month, at the age of 75, of our late vice-President, one of the founders and the first president, of the British Astronomical Association. Although he had been seriously ill for some time, his death comes as a painful shock to those who had known him for so many years as a warm and true friend, and it is difficult to realise that so genial and striking a personality has been removed from our midst. He was, when on the council of the Association, a most regular attendant, and his cheerful voice and striking figure will not soon be forgotten by those members who were able to attend our meetings. From the first he was deeply interested in the success of the Association, and when, at the first general meeting, he was unanimously elected president, it was felt by all that our choice had fallen upon the best man to fill the office. The Association is pre-eminently one of amateurs, and no truer example of an amateur astronomer ever existed than Captain William Noble.

He was born at Berwick on-Tweed in November 1828, being the eldest son of William Noble, of that town. He was privately educated, and afterwards entered the army and served in India in the Rifle Brigade, from which he retired with the rank of captain.

In 1851 he married Emily Charlotte, only child of Edward Irving, of H.M. 61st Regiment. After his retirement from military service he settled in Sussex, where he lived the life of a country squire, giving a large amount of his time to the performance of public duties, for which his vigorous and active disposition and the sturdy independence of his character eminently fitted him. He was a Justice of the Peace for Sussex, chairman of the Uckfield Bench, of the Uckfield Board of Guardians, and of the Rural District Council, and in every office was known for his strength of will and uprightness of disposition. He was resolute in the performance of every duty he took upon himself,

and was the strenuous opponent of everything that seemed to savour of corruption or extravagance.

He became a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1855, and was a member of the council from 1866 to 1879, and from 1886, with two short intervals, until the time of his death. He always strongly opposed to what he considered jobbery or self-seeking in matters connected with science, and in conjunction with the late Mr. Ranyard he contended against Government endowment of scientific research, and especially opposed the establishment of a physical observatory at the public expense. But if he might be considered "a good hater," it was always on public grounds; if he did not cultivate the *suaviter in modo*, his honesty of purpose was so evident that he made few real enemies, since those who thought him most mistaken fully recognised his courage and sincerity and his entire freedom from all self-seeking.

Capt. Noble had an observatory with a good 3½-in. equatorial and other instruments, and was a pretty constant observer; his numerous published papers, however, were mostly short notes on occasional observations. He published in 1886 a popular little work, "Hours with a 3-in. Telescope." Perhaps his most considerable contribution to the literature of astronomy was the long series of articles which he wrote, almost every fortnight for nearly 40 years, in the "English Mechanic," over the signature, "A Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society." In these letters he not only consistently maintained his views on government endowment of science, but answered with unwearied patience the questions of innumerable correspondents upon matters chiefly, but by no means exclusively, relating to astronomy. These letters, written in his well-known clear and racy style, show the wideness of his knowledge and versatility of his mind, while it is not too much to say that he encouraged and advised more than one generation of amateurs, and exercised probably more influence than any man of his time in encouraging and promoting the study of astronomy.

Those who knew his invariable cheerfulness of manner, and listened to his inexhaustible fund of humorous stories, could scarcely realise the heavy domestic afflictions he had to endure. In 1883 one of his three sons was killed by an accident in India, and in 1887 his youngest son also met with a fatal accident in Rangoon while on the way to join his regiment during the Burmese War. In 1899 Capt. Noble lost his wife, after a married life of 48 years. His youngest son left a widow, Mrs. Irving-Noble, who has kindly supplied particulars for this brief sketch of his life, and two daughters.

He was buried on the 13th of this month at the village church at Nutley, in Sussex.

W. H. W.