

Miss Agnes Mary Clerke.

This distinguished scientific writer, whose name is now a household word wherever astronomy is studied, was born in Ireland on the 10th of February 1842, so that she was not quite 65 years of age when her lamented death took place on the 20th of January last. Her father was the late John William Clerke; the family resided in Italy from the year 1870 to 1877, and afterwards came to London (Kensington). Her first great work, "A Popular History of Astronomy during the Nineteenth Century," appeared in 1885. About three years afterwards she made a prolonged stay at the Royal Observatory, Cape of Good Hope, and acquired there a knowledge of practical astronomy under the guidance of Dr. (now Sir David) Gill, and in 1900 had the opportunity of taking a voyage in the yacht "Palatine," visiting several of the northern capitals of Europe. Her second great work, "The System of the Stars," was published in 1890, dedicated to the memory of her father; and a second edition, revised and considerably enlarged, appeared in 1905. Meantime, the publication in 1892 of a smaller but very interesting treatise, "Familiar Studies in Homer," showed that this gifted lady did not confine her attention to astronomy, on which she wrote so wisely and so well. This is not the place to review a work on that subject; suffice it to say that it proves the author's knowledge of Greek to have been by no means superficial, and she also throws some additional light on several special points, particularly the later date of the Odyssey than of the Iliad. As her "History" practically began with Sir William Herschel, the production of "The Herschels and Modern Astronomy" (containing biographies of Sir William,

Caroline, and Sir John), which appeared in 1895, must have been specially congenial to her. Her last great work, "Problems in Astrophysics," was published in 1903, and was written, she tells us, at the suggestion, and aided in its production by the encouragement, of Sir David Gill, to whom it is dedicated. The value of the three great works is too well and widely known to make it necessary for us to do more than name them. A fourth edition of the "History" appeared in 1902; the hope entertained by many of us that we should welcome a fifth in the course of this year is, alas, not to be realised. We should like, however, to point out to all those who, without being able to follow the details of astronomy, take an intelligent interest in the progress of science generally and its indications with regard to life, that they will find a smaller work by Miss Clerke, entitled "Modern Cosmogonies," which appeared in 1906, exceedingly helpful and suggestive, besides giving a concise account of the theories regarding the changes which brought the universe of stars, as we are able to observe it, into its present condition.

But these works, many as they are, do not exhaust the author's activity as a writer. Not only did she write many of the astronomical biographies in the "Encyclopædia Britannica" and most of those in the "Dictionary of National Biography," but she contributed many articles to the "Observatory," "Knowledge," and other periodicals, besides being a joint author of the astronomy in the "Concise Knowledge" series.

Miss Clerke was awarded the Actonian prize of one hundred guineas in 1893 for her works in astronomy. She was an original Member of our Association, and sat for several years on its council, and was elected an honorary member of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1903.

W. T. L.