

Sir Robert Stawell Ball.

Robert Stawell Ball was born in Dublin on July 1, 1840. He was sent to school in England, and became a student of Trinity College, Dublin, in 1857. His university career was one of exceptional brilliancy, and he graduated as gold medallist both in Mathematics and in Experimental Physics. He subsequently worked for some years at Lord Rosse's Observatory at Birr, King's County, where he studied the configurations of nebulae with the great 6-ft. telescope. In 1867 he became Professor of Applied Mathematics at the Royal College of Science, Dublin, and in 1874 was appointed Andrews Professor of Astronomy in the University of Dublin and Royal Astronomer of Ireland. This appointment carried with it the Directorship of the Dunsink Observatory, and Ball utilised his opportunities for contributing to the needs of practical astronomy by determinations of stellar parallax (by visual methods of measurement, of course, in those days) on a somewhat extensive scale. He also published a series

of memoirs on the "Theory of Screws," which brought him a considerable reputation as a mathematician. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1873, and was knighted by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1886. In 1892 he was selected to succeed Adams as Lowdean Professor of Astronomy and Director of the Observatory at Cambridge. On taking up his residence at Cambridge he joined King's College, where he was given a Professorial Fellowship. He applied himself with diligence to his professorial duties, and to the organization of the astronomical researches which have been so successfully carried on at the Observatory. But Sir Robert Ball is best known to "the man in the street" as a popular lecturer on astronomy, and as a writer of popular books. He was quite one of the pioneers of popular lecturing, and, even before the days of lantern slides, was able to interest and amuse his audience by the extraordinary charm of his manner and the attractiveness of his wit. His popular books—such as "The Story of the Heavens" and companion volumes—were remarkably successful, and brought him into touch with people of varying grades of intellectual culture. The versatility of the man was one of his great charms. Whether he was officiating as President of the Royal Astronomical Society (which office he held during the years 1897-99) or was presiding over a dinner of the "T.C.D." Dining Club, he appeared to be equally the right man in the right place. In the same way his formal text-book on "Spherical Astronomy" was as successful in one direction as his "In Starry Realms" was in another. All who knew him (and who did not, either directly or indirectly?) will feel that they have lost a genial friend, and that by his death a remarkable personality has been withdrawn from our midst. He died at Cambridge on 25th November after a lingering illness.

This Association (of which the deceased had been a member since 1892) was represented at the funeral by Mr. E. B. Knobel.