

We regret to record the death, which occurred at his residence in Leeds on 26th April at the age of 70, of Mr. William Donald Barbour. Born in Glasgow in 1832, he came to Leeds in 1840. Mr. Barbour, when quite a youth was secretary to Mr. Edward Baines. He afterwards entered a mercantile office in the city, and in later life set up in business for himself as a Colonial agent. During the past few years he had gradually given up business, but until the last was the representative of a New Zealand firm.

Mr. Barbour was necessarily a familiar figure in Leeds commercial circles, but will be best remembered for his long connection with the Leeds Astronomical Society, of which he was for many years the honorary secretary, resigning office only in January 1903. He read several papers at the Society's meetings, which are printed in the Transactions. He brought to the study of his favourite science a reverent and well-stored mind, and in glancing again at these contributions one cannot but be impressed by the thoroughness with which he kept himself abreast of modern scientific thought. One branch of astronomy which had for him an enduring fascination was that of the evolution of planetary life. Various aspects of this inspiring theme he treated in several papers and discussions. Dr. A. R. Wallace's modern theory that this earth is the centre of the Universe did not commend itself to Mr. Barbour's mind. Take, by way of illustration, this brief extract from his paper read before the Leeds Society a few years ago:—

“Are we wrong in claiming for our sister Earths and Planets a purpose and an end similar to those of our own Planet? Our minds, with Divinely implanted instinct, recoil from the thought that, while Suns and Planets (millions in number) are rotating, condensing, solidifying subject to laws which differentiate their surfaces, bringing order out of chaos, and beauty out of confusion, they have yet no higher destiny than to traverse for ever their lonely paths, untenanted and unrecognised. Let imagination clothe these giant globes with the loveliness of summer, let mountains tower in solemn grandeur, and oceans ripple on peaceful strands, let rivers fertilise, cloudland radiate, and hills and valleys blend; let vegetation flourish and animal life abound, in all their wondrous varieties; yet what avails it all, if there be not present the intelligent eye, the responsive mind, and the grateful heart to recognise the Author and Giver of All?”

Other papers contributed by Mr. Barbour to the Transactions of the Leeds Society were on “Time, Space, and Invisible Worlds,” “The Planet Mars—Is it Inhabited?” “Light and Ether: Their Relation to the Universe,” “The Astronomical Question of Life,” “Traditions of ‘Creation’ from an Astronomical Point of View,” and “Relation of Man to the Universe.”

Mr. Barbour's services to the Leeds Astronomical Society have been invaluable. Without his fostering care the society would not now exist.

But it is to his singularly beautiful personal character that I wish to bear witness. A man of lofty motives, of unflinching courtesy, utterly unselfish and unworldly, he was beloved by all privileged to know him. Whilst fearlessly accepting the conclusions of science, he was one of those to whom increasing knowledge brings increasing reverence. Two things filled him with awe—the starry heavens above, the moral law within.

His valued contributions to the Society reveal clearly his spiritual nature, his profound faith in

That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element ;
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves.

For many of the details above mentioned, I am indebted to Mr. Washington Teasdale, a former President of the Leeds Astronomical Society, and a life-long friend of Mr. Barbour. Mr. Barbour was elected a Member of the British Astronomical Association on 29th March 1893.

Leeds, 1st May 1903.

C. T. WHITMELL,
Past President, Leeds Astronomical
Society.