

OBITUARY

HERBERT DINGLE: 1890-1978

Professor Herbert Dingle died in Hull on 1978 September 4 at the age of 88. He had been a member of the Association for 48 years.

Born in London on 1890 August 2, he was taken to Devon after the death of his father and educated there. At 14 he left school and obtained a job as a clerk, studying in what little spare time he had until in 1915, at the age of 25, he won a Royal Scholarship for Physics at Imperial College, London. There he graduated three years later with honours and, a strong admirer of Alfred Fowler, who was a pioneer in astronomical spectroscopy, Dingle carried out research in the same field and in 1924 wrote an excellent overview of the subject in his *Modern Astrophysics*. In 1932 he was Rockefeller Foundation Scholar at the California Institute of Technology, and in 1937 was appointed to the Chair of Astrophysics at Imperial College.

In 1946, a year after the end of the Second World War, Dingle moved to University College London to become Professor of the History and Philosophy of Science. At University College he led a notable team of historians of science, and the post also allowed him new scope to pursue his very strong interests in philosophy and, in particular, the philosophy of science. Dingle always believed that the world of the physicist and the world of 'common sense' were not incompatible—they were alternative approaches to the rational correlation of phenomena. As early as 1922, when he wrote *Relativity for All*, he presented the theory with great clarity and showed it to be a straightforward development of Newtonian mechanics, and in 1923 his explanations in volume II of *Splendour of the Heavens* were also brilliantly simple—but then Dingle was a superb teacher and always had the facility for clear expression in beautiful prose. Later, in 1931, he discussed further the question of the rational correlation of evidence of the natural world in his *Science and Human Experience*, and in 1937 with his stimulating *Through Science to Philosophy*. Dingle's philosophical and scientific achievements did not go unrecognized: he was elected the first President of the British Society for the Philosophy of Science, and in 1950 he took the bold step founding the *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*; the next year he was elected President of the Royal Astronomical Society for the usual two-year period; from 1953 to 1956 he was a Vice-President of the International Union of the History of Science, and from 1955 to 1957 President of the British Society for the

History of Science. On his retirement from University College he was granted the title of Professor Emeritus.

It was in 1957 that Dingle publicized some of his doubts about the Special Theory of Relativity, initiating a controversy over the 'twins paradox' (where one twin travelling in a spacecraft ages more slowly than the one remaining back on Earth) in *Nature* and, subsequently, in the *Listener*. Later he attacked the whole concept of relativistic time. The controversy raged, on occasions with some heat, and Dingle became convinced he was fighting a relativistic establishment which he believed epitomized the severe danger of dogmatism present in modern science, and he expanded these views in 1972 in his *Science at the Crossroads*. A strong advocate for those views with which he agreed and a stern critic of those with which he did not, and possessing a caustic wit, Dingle could be a formidable opponent, as his criticisms of the Steady State theory and of Eddington's philosophy made clear. Yet he never failed to respect his opponents, and strongly admired Einstein though disagreeing with his ideas. As he once said to some of his postgraduate students, "If you cannot criticize a man's opinions and still have a respect for him, you might as well leave science and go in for politics".

Dingle, like Eddington, was a Quaker; he was also a lover of music and especially of poetry. In 1949 he wrote *Science and Literary Criticism*, while his last published book, which came out in 1974, was on a literary subject, *The Mind of Emily Bronte*. Although never holding office in the Association, he became a member on 1930 December 31 and always took an interest in the Association's affairs, writing in the *Journal* as recently as 1977, a long and detailed critique of a book on the ballistic theory of light, the basic theory of which he had long advocated.

C.A.R.