

The death after a long illness of M. B. B. Heath on 1963 November 21 came as a very sad blow to his many friends and correspondents, to the British Astronomical Association, and particularly to its Saturn Section of which he was Director for  $12\frac{1}{2}$  years from 1951 to the end of his life. He had all the qualities of an outstanding Director: thorough knowledge of the planet, skill and persistence as an observer, organising ability, critical judgment, promptitude as a correspondent, facility in writing interesting and complete but concise reports of the observations, and the energy to produce the reports as soon as he could collect enough data from the observers. Through the close touch he maintained with observers in Australia, South Africa and elsewhere in the Southern Hemisphere, he succeeded in doing what no previous director had achieved—the production of good reports on a whole series of oppositions for those years (1956–62) when Saturn was barely observable in northern stations. He rightly took especial pride in his Section reports (or miniature memoirs) on *eleven* successive oppositions of Saturn. As they form the finest memorial to his work for astronomy, the *Journal* reference to each is given in the following list: 1951–52, **63**, 34; 1952–53, **64**, 23; 1953–54, **65**, 156; 1955, **66**, 312; 1956, **67**, 239; 1957, **68**, 57; 1958, **70**, 29; 1959, **71**, 105; 1960, **71**, 375; 1961, **73**, 62; 1962, **73**, 334.

Among his other valuable papers in the *Journal* were: 'Latitude of the S.E.B. of Saturn 1946–47' (**62**, 202); 'Drawing the planet Saturn' (**63**, 342); on the oppositions of planets 1956–2000 (**66**, 166); 'Visibility and brightness of Mercury' (**61**, 43). Though he did not write a book he made to several books very useful contributions, including a clear and ingenious demonstration by diagrams of the phenomena of the Earth's passages through Saturn's ring-plane.

M. B. B. Heath was a Devon man with great pride in his county, born at Totnes on 1889 October 9, and educated at King Edward's Grammar School there, qualifying high in the order of candidates from all over England for a scholarship to Oxford. Unfortunately prevented from taking up the scholarship, he then passed the qualifying examinations for his father's profession of Inspector of Weights and Measures. In 1909–10 he spent a few months in Australia, making astronomical observations there and on the voyages, and visiting Adelaide and Perth Observatories. Self-reliant and enterprising, he did various kinds of work, even including gold prospecting in the outback. After his return to England he was for a time works inspector in an engineering firm at Birmingham, and afterwards experimental investigator at a scientific instrument and optical works in London. Astronomy had been his hobby

from the age of 17 and his practical experience enabled him to design his own observatory and build or improve telescopes, including 8½-inch and 9¼-inch reflectors. His observatory was in his garden at Kingsteignton, only a few miles from his birthplace, since from 1925 until his retirement in 1954 he was a Local Government Officer—Inspector of Weights and Measures for S.W. Devon.

Heath was elected a member of the B.A.A. in 1926, a Fellow of the R.A.S. in 1937, and a member of the I.A.U. and of its Commission for the physical observation of planets, in 1952. He took part in the joint B.A.A.—R.A.S. expedition to Sweden in 1954 and saw the total eclipse of the Sun at Strömstad. In 1955 he attended the I.A.U. Dublin Congress and was appointed to the Sub-Commission to simplify the nomenclature of Mars.

With a good knowledge of languages, especially Spanish, Latin and German, he was equipped to study ancient and mediaeval astronomy in which he took great interest. He reviewed German astronomy books for the *Journal*. But the foreign country and language he was fondest of were Spain and Spanish. He went there several times, making the first brief visit when en route to Australia, had leading Spanish astronomers among his friends, and made observations from their observatories. His knowledge of the Spanish language was remarkable: he often quoted Spanish proverbs in his clear, well-written letters, and he even wrote papers on astronomical subjects in Spanish for the journal 'Urania'.

Though not interested in mathematics when at school, Heath later studied mathematical astronomy intensively and came to love it; solving mathematical problems became an engrossing pastime. He liked to devise his own shortened but always quite rigorous methods of solution, and detested inaccurate and over-hasty work of any sort.

Some years ago he gave some very successful popular courses of adult education lectures in astronomical subjects.

Probably his greatest delight was in observing planets, Mercury and Venus especially, and also Saturn, Mars and Uranus. He was proud of the fact that his observatory had such a good horizon that from Kingsteignton he could detect stars as far south as Gamma Gruis (Decl. about  $-38^{\circ}$ ). He was one of those sturdy astronomers who de-ice the dome to get an early morning view of Venus. He even attempted this at least once during his last years but his physical condition forced him to give up, and this enforced abandonment of observing during his last years must have been a real deprivation. He had made observations constantly 1905–15 and 1920–59, the last being of the occultation of Regulus by Venus in 1959.

He had long been threatened with heart trouble and in about 1957 first became seriously ill. For the last six years of his life, under constant medical treatment, he struggled bravely against an illness that gradually grew worse. During each interval of weeks or months of partial recovery before the next attack he determinedly resumed his work on reports, reviews and correspondence, but realizing that each time recovery was slower and more limited. At last in 1963 October he had to be admitted to hospital and though during

the following month he appeared to be progressing well, a fatal coronary thrombosis brought the end on November 21.

In 1915 he had married Miss Annie Harrington. Mrs. Heath died in 1947, and since then their daughter, Mrs. Byron, has managed the home, caring for him during his years of illness.

Mark Heath was a very loyal and helpful friend. He was tenacious in standing up for what he considered right. He practised and admired industry and honest hard work and had no use for 'layabouts'. Jovial and kindly by nature, he delighted in conversation and correspondence, and had a keen sense of humour.

A.F.O'D.A.