

## Herbert Gerard Tomkins.

The death, on July 17 last, of Herbert Gerard Tomkins at the age of 65 deprives the Association of an old and much-esteemed member, for he was elected to membership so far back as 1899, had served on the Council and in the offices of Secretary and Vice-President, and had regularly attended the meetings for many years. The eldest son of the Reverend Gerard W. Tomkins, vicar of Gorleston, near Yarmouth, where his boyhood was spent, he went as a young man to India with his parents and at the age of 22 entered the service of the Financial Department of the Indian Government. There he served successively in the Punjab, the United Provinces and Bengal, where, at the time of his retirement some twelve years ago he occupied the position of Accountant-General of the Province. His services had already been recognized by the award of a Companionship of the Order of the Indian Empire.

Next to his official duties astronomy had been for him, during practically the whole of his adult life, the chief pre-occupation. His introduction to it was due to friends at the Allahabad University Observatory, where some of the wonders of the sky as seen through a telescope were first revealed to him. The reaction to this experience was an immediate enthusiasm; he continued his explorations with instruments put at his disposal by the same friends, and from then onwards the subject never relaxed its complete hold of him.

Possessed as he was of a decided mechanical bent and much dexterity in handicraft it was natural that he should quickly address himself to the task of devising and making his own apparatus. It was characteristic of him, too, that he should select one particular field for observation and devote his whole attention to it; for the moon, and particularly the surface features of the moon, became thenceforward the end and aim of his astronomical work. In furtherance of this inquiry he enlisted at a very early stage the resources of photography. His first essay in that direction was the attachment of a camera to the eye-end of a small hand-guided refractor, and some members will recall an interesting account he gave, at one of the meetings a few years ago, of his experiences with that equipment. But, by 1898 or thereabouts, he was already using a 9-inch reflector with which he began a systematic study, by photographic and visual observations, of the bright lunar rays, especially those in the region of the crater Copernicus.

The earliest communications from him on the subject are to be found in Vol. 9 of the *Journal*, and there is in Vol. 16, pages 359 *et seq.*, an abstract of a paper, dated Lahore, 1906, received from him. In that paper he reviewed a long series of his observations and put forward for discussion the probability that the bright rays of the moon had a similar origin to that of the crystalline deposits of saltpetre which he had encountered in the course of his extensive journeys in Northern India. The paper

was read at the meeting at Sion College, on 1906 June 20, and the discussion that followed is recorded in the *Journal* (Vol. 16, pp. 333 *et seq.*).

The theories advanced in it were ingenious; they aroused much interest at the time, and the way this useful piece of original investigation had been carried through was justly commended. They still retain a place in the history of lunar study, and to-day no discussion of that history would be complete without mention of them.

The fact that fuller consideration led the author to modify his earlier conclusions did not hinder him from a steady pursuit of the problems along similar lines but in other directions.

It should be noted, too, that among his other activities he founded and became the first President of the Astronomical Society of India.

On settling at Dedham, near Colchester, after his retirement, he set to work at once to complete the grinding and polishing of a 24-inch glass mirror and the construction of the mechanical details of the mounting for it, the work having been begun before he left India. This task successfully accomplished he resumed his attack on the old problems with the aid of the new and more powerful equipment. During the last ten years he rarely missed an opportunity of making exposures on the moon when the weather and atmosphere favoured it. In this way he accumulated a valuable series of large-scale negatives, taken at all phases, and showing sufficient detail to permit of a close systematic study of the surface markings. The results of this study were submitted from time to time for discussion to the Royal Astronomical Society and the Association. Among such papers to the former, that in *Monthly Notices*, Vol. 88, p. 158, includes a description of the 24-inch reflector mentioned above; whilst frequent communications to the latter, and references to the work done at Dedham, will be found in Vols. 40, 41 and 42 of this *Journal*. He always took the keenest interest in the welfare of the Association and, with characteristic generosity, he presented to it less than three years ago a fine 8½-inch With reflector equatorially mounted and clock driven.

He had been a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society since 1907.

By disposition he was zealous, eager, and untiring in the pursuit of everything he undertook. Moved by an enthusiasm that was almost boyish he was impatient of half measures, insisting always on the best of which he felt himself or the occasion to be capable. There was at times in his manner and speech a note of challenge, a forthrightness of address, which might at first have been misunderstood by a stranger. But it was soon discovered to be no more than a mannerism that never availed to disguise the natural warmth and sincerity of the man. He was by nature essentially genial and companionable. His had been the good fortune to enjoy a long and happy married life. Mrs. Tomkins, who survives him, always shared her husband's interest in his work and was a real helpmeet in that as in all the other concerns of his life. To her, as well as to their two sons who are in the Indian Army, the respectful sympathy of

his many friends is assured, and by none more deeply will that sympathy be felt than by his old friends and colleagues in the British Astronomical Association.

Many doubtless will be glad to recall their experience of a happy visit to the pleasant country home at Dedham. It was there that he died, of the heart affection which for over a year had hindered his usual activity. He was buried in the pretty village churchyard, set in the quiet landscape of the Stour valley, made familiar by the pictures of Constable.

The region is well worth a visit for the natural beauty of the surroundings. For some, such an excursion will also provide the opportunity to pay a tribute to the memory of a deeply regretted and much respected friend.—A. F. B.