

Obituary.

Herbert Hall Turner.

By the death of Professor Turner British astronomy loses one of its outstanding figures, and our Association an original member and a valued friend.

Herbert Hall Turner was born at Leeds in 1861. He received his early education at Leeds Modern School. Hence he passed to Clifton College, where he was a contemporary of the late Earl Haig. Entering Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1879, he graduated as Second Wrangler in 1882, and was elected Smith's prizeman in 1883. In the same year he was also elected a Fellow of Trinity, but left Cambridge in 1884 to become chief assistant at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich. Here he remained until 1893, when he was appointed to succeed the Rev. Charles Pritchard as Savilian Professor of Astronomy and Director of the University Observatory, Oxford. He subsequently served as Secretary, and later as President of the Royal Astronomical Society, of which he was Foreign Secretary from 1919. He died at Stockholm on 1930 August 20.

With the manifold achievements of Turner's busy life it is impossible to deal adequately in this brief notice. It must suffice to recall those activities with which it seems probable that his name will be permanently associated. Foremost among these was the part which he took in helping forward the work of the International Astrographic Chart and Catalogue. His own observatory at Oxford was, with one exception, the first to complete its share of the undertaking; but it might almost be said that this scarcely marked more than the beginning of his active interest in the scheme, for he immediately threw himself into the task of helping some of those observatories which had not been able to make such rapid progress with the work. Moreover, in a series of statistical papers communicated to the Royal Astronomical Society over a considerable period of years, he demonstrated some of the uses to which the material already accumulated could be put. Most important of all, it was he who originated the system of measurement and reduction of the plates which has been adopted by all the participating observatories. At the time of his death he had for many years been chairman of the Astrographic Committee of the International Astronomical Union. It may also be recalled that in his little book, "The Great Star Map," we have the best popular description of the whole scheme that has yet been published.

Probably it is in connection with this phase of his activities that Turner's name will more especially be remembered among astronomers in the years to come. But he was very far from being simply a specialist; and some idea of the catholicity of his astronomical interests may be obtained by a glance through the list of his many contributions to the publications of the Royal Astronomical Society. These include papers on such diverse subjects as the R-D discordance, the Zodiacal Light, Lunar



HERBERT HALL TURNER.

(1861-1930.)

Nomenclature, Stationary Meteor Radiants, and the Sun's Axis of Rotation.

Variable stars, and the problems connected therewith, were always a source of the greatest interest to Turner's versatile mind. He edited many hitherto unpublished observations of variables, including those of Baxendell, Knott, and Grover, and made many attempts, by means of harmonic analysis, to supply some physical interpretation of the light-curves thus made available. It was naturally in connection with this subject of variable stars that our activities as an Association made a special appeal to him. That his interest took a practical form may be seen from the Introductions to our last two Variable Star Memoirs, written by him; and those who were present at the Association's Annual General Meeting in 1916 will remember the delight with which he hailed the discovery, by Mr. Phillips, of the two groups into which the long-period variables may be divided, according to the shapes of their light-curves.

Turner took part in several eclipse expeditions, and it was chiefly due to his advocacy that the coelostat came to be generally adopted for use on such occasions.

As a popular exponent of astronomy Turner was in a class by himself. He wrote some very readable books, and those who were privileged to hear him lecture will always remember the lucidity of his style, and the striking originality of the illustrations, pictorial and otherwise, with which he enlivened even the most formal of his discourses.

During the last twenty years of his life a great proportion of his time and thoughts was given to the subject of seismology, and it has been truly said of him that, by his personal efforts and interest, he made Oxford the seismological centre of the entire world. He was chairman of the Seismological Section of the International Geophysical Union, and it was while he was presiding at one of the Section's meetings, on August 16 last, that he was seized with an attack of cerebral hæmorrhage. He died four days later, without regaining consciousness.

Apart altogether from his scientific attainments, Turner was possessed of a most charming personality, and it is chiefly on this account that he will be remembered and regretted by his many friends. For a man of such marked ability and professional distinction he had a singularly unaffected and simple manner. Nothing seemed too trivial to arouse his interest, and he would often seize upon some apparently small point in a speech or paper, and proceed to endow it with a new significance by means of some apt and often humorous remark. Indeed, his keen appreciation of the humours of life was one of his most marked characteristics, and this is nowhere better shown than in those delightful pages "From an Oxford Note-book," which he contributed for nearly forty years to the *Observatory* magazine. In his speech and actions he was simple and direct, and was wont to be influenced by common sense rather than convention. While others were pretending to understand some abstruse paper, Turner would rise to ask what it all meant, simply because he wanted to know. While others sweltered

in the heat of a summer's day, Turner would take off his coat, simply because it made him more comfortable to do so.

Above all, his nature was one of great kindness. Quietly and unobtrusively he seemed to be always doing somebody a good turn. In his judgment of the work of others he was generous to a fault, especially where the younger and less experienced workers were concerned; and those who knew him often felt that he would sacrifice much of his better judgment rather than run the risk of discouraging a new recruit to the ranks of Science. He had a particularly warm place in his heart for the amateur astronomer, and more than one member of this Association will remember him with gratitude for the help he was always so ready to give.

He died, as he would have wished to die, in harness; and how glad we all are that he was spared the trial of a long illness. He went from amongst us, vigorous, jovial, rejoicing in his work—and so we shall always remember him.