OBITUARIES

Sir Henry Miers, F.R.S.

SIR HENRY MIERS passed peacefully away on December 10 in his eighty-fifth year at his home in West Hampstead after a fortnight's illness. A man of unusual versatility, he gained eminence as a mineralogist and crystallographer, as a university administrator, and as a museum authority. Having had the advantage of what was commoner in his day than now, a classical education, before taking to mathematics and science, he had the gift of a fluent and lucid style of writing, as is evident in his numerous publications. Despite the partial failure of eyesight which afflicted him in his closing years and restricted his activity, he maintained up to the end his interest in all the matters that had formerly occupied his attention. When reading became difficult, he took up as a hobby the study of plants.

Henry Alexander Miers came of a family that had already shown some proclivity towards science. John Miers, F.R.S., well known as a civil engineer and in his later years as a botanist, who accompanied the great seaman, Lord Cochrane, at his invitation to South America in 1818, in order to develop the mineral resources of Chile, and in the course of his travels made an extensive collection of South American plants, now in the British Museum, was his grandfather, and Edward John Miers, who was on the staff of the Zoological Department of the British Museum from 1872 until 1885, when ill-health compelled his retirement, and was an authority on Crustacea, was his elder brother. He himself was born at Rio de Janeiro on May 25, 1885, his father, Francis Charles Miers, being at that time in business there as a civil engineer.

Miers was educated at Eton College, where he was a King's Scholar, from 1872 until 1877, and at Trinity College, Oxford, where he held a classical scholarship, from 1877 until 1881. He transferred his studies to mathematics, however, and graduated with second-class honours in mathematical moderations in 1879 and finals in 1881. In 1900 he proceeded to the newly instituted degree of D.Sc.

On going down from Oxford, Miers joined the staff of the Mineral Department of the British Museum on the inducement of Mr. (afterwards Sir Lazarus) Fletcher, who was keeper, in 1882, very soon after the removal of the collection from Bloomsbury to the new building at South Kensington. He assisted in the arrangement of the specimens in the Mineral Gallery and in the preparation of the crystallographic catalogue which had been projected. As the result of his studies he published numerous articles and memoirs on the morphology of various minerals. With his museum duties he combined the post of instructor in crystallography at the Central College, South Kensington, from 1886 until 1895. He was editor of the *Mineralogical Magazine* from 1891 until 1900.

In 1895, when N. Story-Maskelyne retired from the chair of mineralogy at Oxford and the opportunity was taken to revise the post, Miers was appointed to fill the vacancy and became the first Waynflete professor, the post having been combined with a fellowship at Magdalen College. Hitherto only courses of lectures had been given, so that Miers had as his first task to effect teaching arrangements and organize laboratory work as well as improve the mineral exhibition in the University Museum. Among his earliest pupils was H. L. Bowman, who

became so fascinated with the subject that he remained to assist him, and eventually succeeded him in the chair. Miers took up a task which he had in his mind for some time, namely, the preparation of a comprehensive treatise on mineralogy; it was published in 1902 (*"Mineralogy: An Introduction to the Scientific Study of Minerals"*, Macmillan). The second edition, which appeared in 1929, was undertaken by Bowman. During this period Miers carried on the research, upon which he had been privately engaged in London, on the conditions which determined the kind of crystals formed in a saturated solution, and cleared up many obscure points.

While at Oxford, Miers soon acquired a reputation for administrative ability, and consequently, when in 1908 a successor to Sir Arthur Rücker was sought in the difficult and onerous office of Principal of the University of London, he was chosen. Although no great changes occurred during his period of office, it was in the following year that a Royal Commission was appointed under Lord Haldane's chairmanship to investigate the whole question of university education in London. It reported in 1913, but owing to the outbreak of war in the following year, nothing was then done to carry out any of the recommendations in the report. Soon after, in 1915, Miers was translated to Manchester as vice-chancellor of the University, and such success did he achieve in this office that he was pressed to remain after reaching the normal age for retirement, and did not vacate the post until 1926. It was a great pleasure to him to return to teaching by acting as professor of crystallography.

When he had finished at Manchester, Miers returned to London to live, and settled down at West Hampstead for the rest of his life. He was by no means idle: he was promptly elected a trustee of the British Museum, thereby creating a precedent, for never before had a former member of the staff become a trustee, and was also appointed a member of the Royal Commission on National Museums and Galleries, which issued its interim report in 1928 and its final report in two parts in 1929 and 1930, and in 1931 of the newly created Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries. Simultaneously, he was invited by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust to report on the museums, other than national, in the British Isles, and with the help of S. F. Markham did so in 1928. Almost immediately afterwards, the Carnegie Corporation of New York asked him to make a similar survey of the museums in British territory overseas. With the aid of S. F. Markham, C. Squire, and D. W. Herdman he reported on the museums in Canada and British Africa in 1932; he himself visited both countries. It was an obvious consequence of this work that in 1928 he was elected president of the Museums Association, and once again he proved so successful that he prevailed upon to continue in office for an unprecedented length of time, and did not vacate it until 1933.

During 1904-9 Miers was president of the Mineralogical Society, and during 1932-37 of the Gemmological Association. In 1941, owing to his defective sight, he was compelled to resign from the trusteeship of the British Museum and membership of the Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries. He was knighted in 1912, elected a fellow of the Royal Society in 1896, and awarded the Wollaston Medal by the Geological Society of London in 1934. Numerous other distinctions, including honorary degrees, were conferred upon him.

G. F. HERBERT SMITH.