OBITUARIES

Dr. G. P. Bidder

GEORGE PARKER BIDDER died on December 31, 1953, in his ninety-first year—for many years president of the Marine Biological Association, sometime president of Section D (Zoology) of the British Association, secretary of the Linnean Society during 1928–31 and vice-president in 1924 and 1932, a founder of the Association of British Zoologists, and a distinguished authority on the sponges. He was a man to whom more than one generation of biologists were indebted for counsel and for help. At no time a professional scientist, he was perhaps the last of his kind—that of the great amateur biologists of the past century.

He was the grandson of his namesake, the famous 'calculating boy', and had something of the same remarkable quality of memory. At the first council of the newly formed Society for Experimental Biology in 1923, the secretary disclosed that the blackboard on which was written the constitution had been wiped clean without any record in writing. Dr. Bidder adjourned the meeting for fifteen minutes: he then wrote out from memory the entire constitution; and the secretary then read the minutes.

Bidder had his first taste of biology as a boy at Harrow, a taste confirmed when in 1881 he spent a year under Ray Lankester at University College, London. He then went up to Trinity College, Cambridge. This was just after the tragic death of Francis Maitland Balfour at the height of his power as comparative anatomist and embryologist: as Bidder once said, "a great and exciting laboratory—ruled by a ghost". On leaving Cambridge in 1886 he occupied the University Table at the Stazione Zoologica, at Naples. So began his long association with marine biology.

In 1899 he married Miss Marion Greenwood, a biologist who had already done elegant work on the physiology of *Hydra*. Many Cambridge biologists remember with fresh regret her death in 1932. For a few years they lived at Plymouth, while he worked at the Plymouth Laboratory in close touch with Dr. E. J. Allen. They settled in 1902 at Cavendish Corner, Cambridge. Unfortunately, he soon became seriously ill and was a semi-invalid for more than ten years. But he was not a man to be put down by circumstance, and after his illness he returned to assume the active position in biological affairs which he retained for the rest of his long life.

He did this in his own way. By present standards he was unconventional—or it were better to say that he had the patrician ability to make his own system of conventions. Few young biologists to-day would suddenly decide to buy a Neapolitan hotel—'Parker's'—as he did in 1889; and to run it successfully and for some time. Also few to-day could happily and successfully organize a life in which the active day started towards evening, and one did not retire until the early hours of the next morning. But unlike the Watertons and the Frank Bucklands of the past century, he used his freedom from convention and his independent and disinterested position to seize the moment to do things essential for biological advance—things that could not be done by the professional scientist, and which can never be done simply and in time by official bodies. In the early days of the Plymouth Laboratory it was scientifically necessary to buy a vessel for fishery work. There

were official difficulties about doing this. Bidder himself borrowed the money to buy a ship, hired it to the Association for the work, and ultimately arranged for it to be sold at a profit—characteristically using the proceeds to found the Ray Lankester Investigatorship. Such long-sighted and timely action was characteristic of his life. It was action of this sort by him that perhaps more than any other single factor helped the Stazione Zoologica at Naples to survive two world wars and to regain its present great position in international science.

Two major scientific periodicals, the *Quarterly Journal of Microscopical Science* (of which he became for long the owner) and the *Journal of Experimental Biology*, owe their continued existence to his help and wise advice. These were only some of his many-sided activities. He was no narrow specialist, but a man of culture with major interests spreading far outside biology. For many years he was managing director of the Cannock Chase Colliery.

Bidder enjoyed conversation and scientific speculation; but his interest was in real phenomena rather than ideas alone. For that reason, his scientific contributions were not just the elegant speculations of a dilettante, but a real influence on current biological thought; particularly those concerned with the form of organisms. Though, to the regret of many of his friends, he was never elected into the Royal Society, he will, I believe, prove to have been one of the most interesting figures of early twentieth-century science. He was a lasting example of how much good can be done by the individual action of a shrewd, kind, disinterested and able man. More than one generation of biologists learnt from him the value of approaching research, not in a spirit of narrow specialization but in one which is best summed up in a characteristic opening phrase of his own—"It has often occurred to me to wonder . . .".

C. F. A. PANTIN

Mr. S. F. Ashby

SYDNEY FRANCIS ASHBY was born on December 31, 1874, at Rockferry, Cheshire. His father was a gifted artist and his mother the daughter of a naval officer. He studied first at the University of Liverpool, then at Edinburgh, where he graduated. Afterwards he proceeded to the Universities of Halle and Göttingen and spent some time in Denmark studying the bacteriology of water. He returned to England and worked at the Rothamsted Experimental Station as Carnegie Research Fellow under Sir Daniel Hall. While there he was offered the post of microbiologist to the Government of Jamaica, which he accepted in 1906. He married in January 1910 Miss Cork, daughter of Mr. William Cork, supervisor of revenue, and returned to England in June 1910. He studied in London until 1912, when he went back to Jamaica, specifically to see what could be done about the dreaded Panama disease of bananas, caused by the fungus *Fusarium oxysporum* var. *cubense*, which had been introduced into the Island in 1911. He remained in Jamaica until February 1921, when he was appointed professor of mycology at the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture, Trinidad. He occupied the chair for a little over five years and returned to England in April 1926 as senior mycologist at the then Imperial Bureau of Mycology. On the resignation of the late Sir Edwin Butler in 1935 he was appointed director of the Imperial Mycological Institute, as it was then known. He relinquished this post in 1939 on retire-

ment. Early in the Second World War he suffered the grievous loss of his son, who was killed in his first operational flight as an observer in the Royal Air Force.

Throughout his scientific career Ashby was thorough and reliable in his work. His first research concerned the assimilation of nitrogen by a soil bacterium. In Jamaica he studied banana diseases and within six months published a valuable account of the work in the *Bulletin of the Department* in 1912, including a section on Panama disease. For the control of the disease he recommended the isolation of all infected areas, the boundary being set one chain distant from the nearest diseased plant. This treatment was immediately successful and no diseased plants were found outside the boundary line seven to nine months after treatment. Every diseased tree within the affected area was cut down, the stool dug up, and the whole burnt. There is no question but that Ashby's prompt and sound action saved the Jamaica banana industry from ruin and allowed the farmer a means of keeping the disease in check. Unhappily, in the course of years farmers became impatient at having to leave so much land out of cultivation and ultimately Ashby's policy had to be moderated and finally abandoned as the disease gradually got out of control. If his method had been consistently followed the progress of Panama disease would have been impeded much more than it actually was; but in any event, the slowing up of the spread of the disease allowed planters valuable time to consider alternative crops. While in Jamaica, Ashby also published in 1920 notes on a disease of coconut caused by *P. palmivora* and another by *P. parasitica*, and in 1921 an account of sugar-cane mosaic.

Throughout his life he maintained his interest in the important genus *Phytophthora*. In 1925 he became interested in *Stilbum flavidum* on coffee and succeeded in isolating and growing the fungus in culture, proving conclusively that the *Stilbum* is a state of the perfect form *Omphalia flavida*. In 1926 he published with W. Nowell a joint study on the fungi of Stigmatomycoses, a classic paper on a peculiar group of fungi attacking cotton bolls, one of which, since named *Eremothecium asbyi*, proved during the War to be a producer of riboflavin. His next important contribution was on bacterial wilt of

bananas, which he showed was due to *Bacterium solanacearum* (*Kew Bull.*, 14; 1927). In 1929 Mr. Ashby visited Dominica in connexion with the outbreak of red rot disease of limes and was able to assure the authorities that the prevalent fungus *Sphaerostilbe repens* had been present in the island since 1911 and was not a virulent pathogen. On his return he concluded an important paper on leaf scald of sugar-cane, naming the causal organism *Bacterium albilineans*. Two papers on *Phytophthora* followed, concerned with the production of sexual organs, and one on *Gloeosporium* strains isolated from bananas. When Mr. Ashby retired in 1939 he had accumulated on behalf of correspondents a vast amount of knowledge about the genus *Phytophthora*; but he did not put this information in print. He died on March 6 after a prolonged period of illness and is survived by his widow and one son. S. P. WILTSHIRE

Mr. J. G. R. Elbo

JOHN GREGERS ROSENSTAND ELBO died on March 11 at Carlton, near Cambridge, at the early age of thirty-one. He joined the staff of the Scott Polar Research Institute in 1946 as part-time assistant in Scandinavian studies, and specialized in the problems of northern Scandinavia, Svalbard and Greenland. He took his degree in modern languages at Cambridge in 1950, and then decided to study for a research degree in Eskimo philology. Meanwhile, the first sign of serious illness had become evident as early as 1948; despite apparently successful treatment his health slowly deteriorated, until in September 1953 the last illness began.

WE regret to announce the following deaths:

Mr. Roland Austin, during 1927-48 joint editor of *Antiquity*, aged seventy-nine years.

Mr. E. Graham Clark, C.B.E., secretary of the Institution of Civil Engineers, a post from which he was due to retire this year (see *Nature*, March 6, p. 427), on April 23, aged sixty-four.

Prof. Methodi Popov, director of the Institute of Biology, University of Sofia, on April 20, aged seventy-three.

NEWS and VIEWS

The Australian Academy of Science

THE Australian Academy of Science was founded in 1952 (*Nature*, 170, 549; 1952); on February 16, H.M. the Queen, during her visit to Australia, presented a Royal Charter to the officers and Council-elect of the Academy. This is the first time in nearly 300 years that a reigning British sovereign has founded a scientific society, the only previous occasion being the founding of the Royal Society of London by Charles II. The names of the Council-elect are announced in the *Australian Journal of Science* for February; these have to be ratified at the first general meeting of the Academy during April 6-7 when twenty-seven new Fellows will be elected. Also to be ratified at the meeting are the nominations of the following officers: *President*, Prof. M. L. Oliphant; *Treasurer*, H. R. Marston; *Secretary (Physical Sciences)*, Dr. D. F. Martyn; *Secretary (Biological Sciences)*, Dr. A. J. Nicholson.

New Zealand Science Review

To commemorate the recent visit of H.M. the Queen and H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh, the January issue of the *New Zealand Science Review* is a "Royalty and Science" number (12, 1; 1954). After a brief editorial article welcoming the Royal couple, the address entitled "Science and the Scientific Worker" given by the Duke before New Zealand scientists on January 13 is reported in full. This meeting was organized by the Royal Society of New Zealand, with its president, Dr. W. R. B. Oliver, in the chair. During his speech, the Duke conveyed greetings to the Royal Society of New Zealand from the Royal Society of London and the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Then follows an informative article reviewing the history of the interest shown by royalty in science. I. D. Dick contributes a more specialized article on "Royalty and Science in New Zealand". It was also a happy