

Obituary.

SIR AUBREY STRAHAN, K.B.E., F.R.S.

ON Mar. 4 Sir Aubrey Strahan died at the age of seventy-five at his house, Fairfield, Goring, Berks, which had been his residence since his retirement from the directorship of the Geological Survey of Great Britain and the Museum of Practical Geology in July 1920. He had been in fairly good health up to within a few days of his death, and took an active interest in local public affairs, and was a member of the Court of the University of Reading.

Sir Aubrey Strahan was the son of Mr. William Strahan of Blackmore Hall, Sidmouth, and was born on April 20, 1852. He was educated at Eton, where he went in 1865 to the Rev. Herbert Snow's house. In 1870 he entered St. John's College, Cambridge, and took his honours degree in natural science in 1874. His experience at Cambridge moulded the course of his future life, for he was associated with a group of students under Sedgwick, McKenny Hughes, and Bonney, destined to attain great distinction as geologists. Among his friends of those years may be mentioned Teall, Marr, Sollas, and Clough. In 1875 he joined the Geological Survey of Great Britain as an assistant geologist, and in that service he continued for the rest of his active life, ascending through every grade until he became director in 1914. His early work was done in the coalfields of North Wales and in the Isle of Wight, and his interests were principally in Secondary and Carboniferous rocks: all his work was done with painstaking thoroughness and has well stood the test of time.

Strahan was a geologist of sound judgment, little disposed to speculation or hypothesis. His great merits as an authority on coalfield geology received recognition in 1903, when he was appointed a member of the Royal Commission on Coal Supplies. He was one of the most valuable members of that Commission, which produced a report of the greatest permanent value, such as no other country than Great Britain possesses. Since 1897 Strahan had been in charge of the revision of the maps of the South Wales coalfield, which were old and unsatisfactory. This work occupied his attention for nearly twenty years and resulted in the production of a complete series of memoirs, one-inch and six-inch maps of that coalfield, which are recognised as being of a very high standard. With Dr. William Pollard he also produced a memoir on the coals of South Wales, discussing the causes of anthracitisation, which has attracted much attention.

In January 1914, on the retirement of Sir Jethro Teall, Strahan was appointed director of the Geological Survey. Very soon thereafter the country became involved in the War, and the whole of his energies were absorbed in the task of supplying geological information for civil and military purposes. He prepared and issued maps of the Belgian war zone, and undertook a great

variety of tasks, both personally and through his staff, in connexion with active operations on all the fronts. In addition to this, the demands for home sources of minerals for industry became very urgent. The staff was greatly depleted by the departure of geologists on active service, but Strahan organised a bureau of information which gradually increased its activities until it took in every part of the field of British economic geology and extended also to many of the Dominions and allied countries. The result of this work afterwards appeared in a series of special reports on the mineral resources of Great Britain, which now comprises thirty volumes and contains accurate descriptions of practically every useful source of economic minerals in Great Britain.

During and after the War, Strahan served on many departmental committees and was much consulted in reference to problems of reconstruction and the development of research in connexion with industry. He aided in the re-organisation of the Geological Survey which resulted from its transference to the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research in 1919, and placed the institution on a much more satisfactory basis.

The maps and memoirs which Strahan prepared in collaboration with his colleagues are far too numerous to mention individually. Among the more important may be cited the memoirs on Chester, Rhyl, Flint, Isle of Purbeck and Weymouth, and the series on the South Wales Coalfield. He was very specially interested in the problem of buried or concealed coalfields in the south-east of England. Several important papers from his pen have appeared in the *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society of London*.

Among the honours conferred on Strahan were the fellowship of the Royal Society (1903), president of the geological section of the British Association (1904), vice-president of the International Geological Congress (1913), president of the Geological Society of London (1913-14), and the Wollaston medal (1919). He took the degree of Sc.D. at Cambridge in 1907 and was created K.B.E. in 1919.

The distinguishing characteristics of Strahan's personality were his thoroughness and his trustworthiness. His opinions on all questions of geology were given with caution and were very highly valued. The conclusions he arrived at were always founded on very elaborate investigation. Although he did not shun speculation, he was averse to brilliant and elusive hypotheses. He had great charm of manner, and his friendship was much prized. In addition to this he had a shrewd judgment of men and excellent business capacity; these qualities made him a Civil Servant of outstanding distinction, and coupled with an intense love of geological work and a wide knowledge of British geology, they raised him to the highest position in the Geological Survey.

J. S. F.