

## OBITUARIES

## The Right Hon. H. A. L. Fisher, O.M., F.R.S.

DEATH has been taking a heavy toll of eminent Oxford men within the last few months. First, Prof. Joachim died about a year ago; then his intimate friend Prof. J. A. Smith; then Prof. Samuel Alexander, who had made his name at Lincoln College before he went to Manchester. Then, on April 18, came the death of Mr. H. A. L. Fisher, who was, of course, much the best-known public man of the group. In one way he must surely have been unique, in giving many years of service as a Minister of the Crown and then having a long tenure of the wardenship of New College, Oxford.

Fisher was taken into the war cabinet as Minister of Education by Mr. Lloyd George—to whom he was always much attached—in the year 1916 when the great changes were made which displaced Lord Asquith. He remained as Minister of Education until 1926 and used his position to make the most vigorous efforts to raise the standard of national education by raising the age for leaving school and in other ways improving the chances of education for young people when they came to leave. In these efforts he gained the hearty support of the whole teaching profession, whose status he considerably improved by raising the salaries of masters and mistresses in secondary schools.

No one perhaps has ever deserved so much of the whole body of teachers and scholars as did Mr. Fisher. It will be remembered that it was found impracticable to carry out at once the raising of the age which his Act proposed. The matter was left in abeyance and in constant dispute until the present Government took it up again two years ago and—with certain reservations—at last made the Fisher Act a living thing. How it will work remains to be seen when the modifying Act is at last to be put in operation.

On leaving the Ministry in 1926, Fisher went back to his old College, this time as head, for he had been by education a Winchester and New College man. He remained as warden of New College until his death, and was one of the best-known and respected figures in Oxford.

In the world of letters he became best known by his "History of Europe", which quickly rose to the distinction of a best-seller. It was published in 1936 after intense labour which reduced Fisher to a chronic state of weak health for the last three or four years of his life. He tells us in the preface that his subject is "Man from the neolithic age to Stalin and Mustapha Kemal, Mussolini and Hitler". But he damps the hopes of believers in progress by saying that "one intellectual excitement has been denied me. Men wiser and more learned than I have discerned in history a plot, a rhythm, a predetermined pattern. These harmonies are concealed from me.

I can only see one emergency following upon another as wave follows upon wave. There can be no generalization, only one safe rule for the historian; that he should recognize in the development of human destinies the play of the unforeseen and the contingent". It was true indeed in the course of his own life, for who could have foreseen that the best-known historian in England and the leading figure in Oxford academic life would have been struck down at last by a lorry on Millbank. His friends had been anxious for his health for some years. They thought that he would yield to the strain of excessive and prolonged intellectual work. But no! It was the contingent, a passing lorry, which might have carried away any insignificant citizen of London, which ended one of the most active and distinguished lives of our day.

F. S. MARVIN.

## Prof. S. M. Dixon, O.B.E.

PROF. STEPHEN MITCHELL DIXON, who died on March 25 at Nice at the age of seventy-four, was a leader in civil engineering education. Born in Dublin, he studied experimental physics and carried out research under Fitzgerald at Trinity College, and then qualified in civil engineering. After experience as contractor's engineer on railway works in England he was appointed to a newly established chair of civil engineering at Fredricton, New Brunswick, in 1892. Ten years later he moved to Dalhousie University, Nova Scotia, and in 1905 was called to Birmingham to organize the Department of Civil Engineering. When, in the general re-organization following the formation of the Imperial College of Science and Technology, the Mechanical and Civil Department of the City and Guilds (Engineering) College was divided into two autonomous departments in 1912, Dixon was called to the chair of civil engineering there.

Dixon was a great teacher who had the gift of infecting those around him with some of his own unlimited enthusiasm and of getting the best out of his students and staff without apparent effort. He had the probably unique record of having started four university departments of civil engineering. Dixon's approach to his subject was practical rather than theoretical, and he combined a sound foundation of the mechanical principles with a deep distrust of complicated theories and involved calculations. His fertile and active mind led him to devise many new ways of tackling well-known problems—a typical example was the use of a sand core for moulding pre-cast hollow concrete blocks. Old students will remember how he built a house, almost unaided, to prove the practicability of this pre-cast block.

In his earlier years, Dixon carried out research on terrestrial magnetism and on surveying instruments,

but the ample resources at Birmingham enabled him to begin the large-scale experiments on structural members which were perhaps his most important contribution to engineering science. This method of investigation was first applied to reinforced concrete beams, slabs and arches, and afterwards, at the Imperial College, to mine supports—steel and concrete arches for roadway lining, and cogs, chocks and packs for face support.

At Birmingham, Dixon carried out investigations on wire ropes and on supports for the coal mining industry, and this work was resumed when he was appointed to the Safety in Mines Research Board in 1923. He acted as chairman of the Wire Ropes Research Committee, and organized international co-operation in these investigations. Dixon was also a member and sometime secretary of the Institution of Civil Engineers Committee on the Deterioration of Structures in Sea Water, and carried out a long series of investigations on the preservation of Empire timbers from attack by Teredo. He served on the British Standards Committees dealing with wire ropes and steel arches for mines, and also on the testing of timber and the rating of rivers. In the large hydraulic laboratory at the Imperial College various investigations on current meters, syphons, and river models were carried out under his direction. For his work describing the measurements of the flow of the River Severn in 1921–36 he was awarded a Telford Premium of the Institution of Civil Engineers.

No record of Dixon's life would be complete without a reference to his outstanding services during 1914–18. In the very early days of the Ministry of Munitions he became personal assistant to Sir Henry Fowler, director of production, and was actively engaged in the organization of the great department until relatively stable conditions were reached in 1917, when he resigned to join the Royal Engineers. After ten days training he went to France on railway construction, and was demobilized as a captain in 1919. Dixon retired from his chair at the Imperial College in 1933. M. A. HOGAN.

#### Prof. Jan Włodek and Adam Róžański

PROF. JAN WŁODEK was one of the seventeen Cracow professors who recently died as a result of ill-treatment by the Germans in the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen, near Berlin. This was a disused brewery, had no accommodation for human beings and, although not quite as bad as the notorious Dachau and Buchenwald camps, was utterly unfit for human habitation. Along with 149 of his colleagues, he was arrested by the Gestapo, the accusation being, to quote the official Polish report:

“(1) vu que les professeurs ont essayé de reprendre les cours de l'Université sans que les autorités allemandes en aient connaissance ;

“(2) vue qu'ils ont continué leurs travaux dans les institutions et séminaires dont ils étaient à la tête et

faisaient passer des examens sans en demander l'autorisation ;

“(3) vue que, pendant 5 siècles, l'Université de Cracovie a été un bastion de l'esprit polonais. . . .”

He was by no means a robust man and as soon as his friends heard that he had been arrested it was feared he could not survive the cruelties to which he would be exposed, nor did he.

Prof. Włodek belonged to the old Polish nobility, had studied in Poland and in Switzerland, working especially on plant nutrition and soil problems and also on plant breeding. When the new Polish State was set up he, as one of the followers of Pilsudski, was appointed to consular work in Holland, but soon returned to the University of Cracow as professor of agriculture. Here he set up a large laboratory and was put in charge of the University Experimental Farm of Mydlniki. He was an excellent teacher and attracted many pupils, two of whom had already become professors at other Polish universities. Almost from the outset he was attracted to Willstätter's investigations on chlorophyll and was especially interested in the ratio of chlorophyll *A* to chlorophyll *B*, which he considered played an important part in the development of plants. He studied the relation between this ratio and the environmental conditions, particularly variations in the amount of nitrogen and of potassium supply. The other branch of his work was ecological and dealt with the distribution of plants in the Tatra Mountains in relation to the humus and calcium conditions of the soils and their *pH* values.

He had travelled widely in Europe and was a remarkably good linguist, speaking and writing English perfectly. He was a delightful host and those who have been privileged to visit him in his attractive ancestral home at Dabrowica will not easily forget his wide culture, good taste and charming personality.

Another victim has been Prof. A. Róžański who, before the War of 1914–18 had held an important post in the Government in connexion with land surveying and improvement. After the War he was appointed professor of agricultural engineering and surveying in the University of Cracow and did a good deal of work on land drainage, particularly important for the development of agriculture in many parts of Poland. He showed considerable ingenuity in designing inexpensive and efficient methods of draining. He rendered great service to Poland in a quiet and unobtrusive way and was much liked by his students. E. J. RUSSELL.

We regret to announce the following deaths:

Dr. Carl Bosch, president of the I. G. Farbenindustrie, the German dye trust, on April 27, aged sixty-six years.

Dr. Charles Davison, the authority on earthquakes, on April 28, aged eighty-one years.

Sir William Meade-King, the well-known civil engineer, on April 10, aged eighty-one years.