

## OBITUARIES

Dr. Walcot Gibson, F.R.S.

tioner service is not sufficient to cope with this extra work. Dr. R. O. Stanford supported this suggestion, quoting from his own experience as a medical officer at a large factory. He sketched a plan for mass-radiography of workers in order to diagnose the early stages of tuberculosis, a disease which is on the increase. Dr. D. McClean, of the Lister Institute, stressed in this connexion that all milk sold to the public should be *safe* (that is, not infected) milk.

The Oxford vaporizer, a simple apparatus for administering anaesthetics under battle conditions, was described by Dr. K. Mendelssohn, of the Clarendon Laboratory, Oxford. This vaporizer is now being mass-produced at a cost four times lower than that if bench-produced. He stressed the need for closer contact between medical men and men of science, between clinical and laboratory workers.

Dr. S. E. Hollingworth, of the Geological Survey, illustrated how geologists are often not called in when sites for factories, camps and air-raid shelters are decided upon. This has led to considerable waste when the site is badly chosen in relation to drainage and water-supply. Dr. N. F. M. Henry, of the Department of Mineralogy, Cambridge, asked for a larger place in the war effort for geologists, stating that the British Army has only two geologists. He also discussed the Malayan situation and the consequent need for using the other mineral resources of the Allied countries.

There were many other speakers in the discussions, and they represented between them a considerable cross-section of industry. Mr. F. M. H. Markham, of the Central Register, answered some of their points regarding the utilization of personnel. Although he mentioned some cases where action is being taken or being considered, the Conference seemed quite definitely to show the need on the part of official committees for consulting the junior scientific worker.

The Conference was summed up most ably by Prof. J. D. Bernal. Starting on a note of urgency, he appealed for an absence of complacency on the part of men of science with regard to what Great Britain is doing. The suggestions which were put forward at the Conference would be taken up with the Ministries of Supply and Labour, but this would not be done without opposition. This opposition would come from industry and from the Government. The first is due to the prevalence of pre-war competitive ideas, while the second is purely conservative opposition to new ideas. However, the scientific way of doing things is forcing its way against that opposition, although the attitude in many of the departments is equivalent to sabotage. Dealing with the proper utilization of our man-power, he emphasized that the only consideration in the selection and posting of personnel should be ability. We should be blinding ourselves to facts if we thought this was so at present. He referred to the contributions in the Conference which had shown a widespread feeling that these scientific workers are not fully occupied, not doing the work they can most usefully do. The mechanism that exists at present is certainly not adequate if this situation holds. The Conference is not passing any resolutions; it is instead going to take appropriate action. The Association of Scientific Workers will collate the information and suggestions, and send delegations to appropriate Ministries. Scientific workers are at last co-operatively conscious of the job they have to do in industry, and they will do it, and not stop doing it, when the War is won.

THE death of Walcot Gibson will recall to many the memory of a many-sided, alert and virile personality. Born in 1864, he went from Bromsgrove School to Mason College (now the University of Birmingham) at a time when Lapworth, fresh from his triumphs in the south of Scotland, had been appointed to the chair of geology. Young Gibson, his first student, fell under the master's spell and his admiration for Lapworth remained with him as an inspiration throughout his career.

Following on a course of study at the Royal College of Science, Walcot Gibson undertook private geological work in South Africa during 1889-91 and in East Africa during 1891-93. The rest of his active life was spent in Great Britain in the service of the Geological Survey. Appointed temporary assistant geologist in 1893, he became geologist in 1901, district geologist in 1913, and in 1920 assistant director in charge of the Survey work in Scotland. In 1925 he retired and elected to live at Hythe, where he found leisure and opportunity to indulge in his love of gardening and painting. One of his chief pleasures was to welcome his old friends and former colleagues to his new home, and none who visited him but left with an increased regard for his sanity of outlook and balanced judgment on scientific matters. Soon after the outbreak of war he had to leave Hythe, and he died in Cambridge on November 28.

Walcot Gibson was part author of numerous Geological Survey memoirs dealing with the structure, succession and economic resources of many important coalfield areas in the Midlands and in South Wales: for example, Stoke-on-Trent (1902, with second editions in 1905 and 1925), North Staffordshire (1905), South Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire (1908), North Derbyshire (1913), South Staffordshire and Warwick (1919), Abergavenny (1902), Pontypridd (1903 and 1917), and Merthyr Tydfil (1904). He had learnt from Lapworth the necessity for careful and exact mapping and the value of what his exemplar termed the "zonal method of stratigraphy". He applied these lessons with scrupulous care to his studies of the detailed stratigraphy and palaeontology of the Midland coalfields, and through his published works and the many personal contacts he made in the mining world he played an important part in guiding their economic development. A notable achievement in this direction was his study of the "Concealed Coalfield of Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire" (1913).

While much the greater part of Gibson's work was of an intensive, detailed character which perhaps only the specialist can fully appreciate, he won for himself many warm admirers among a wider public by the publication in 1920 of his book on "Coal in Great Britain". In this volume he brought together in a compact and attractive form the essential information regarding the British coalfields, and its success in filling a long-felt want may be gauged by the fact that a revised and enlarged edition appeared in 1925.

Walcot Gibson's services to science, particularly in the field of economic geology, were recognized by the award in 1924 of the Murchison Medal of the Geological Society and in 1925 by his election to the fellowship of the Royal Society.

M. MACGREGOR.