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-