

## OBITUARIES

## Engineer-Captain Edgar C. Smith, O.B.E., R.N.

To readers of *Nature*, the name of Engineer-Captain Edgar C. Smith has been familiar for more than thirty years as that of a scientific biographer and a historian of engineering who combined to an unusual degree a love of precise detail and the ability to present it in arresting perspective with a notable economy of words. In this, however, his writing did no more than reflect his own vivid and forceful personality, and did it so effectively that, even to those who knew him only as a name in print, the news of his death, on March 13, must have brought a sense of individual loss. Those whose good fortune it was to enjoy his friendship are acutely conscious that they have lost something very precious.

No man is indispensable, though every man is in some way unique—a thesis to which Smith was always ready to subscribe; but few historians have laboured to such good purpose as he did in collating and recording the engineering history of the Royal Navy, and assuredly few men forged more numerous ties of real affection in pursuing their researches. His father, a schoolmaster who was living in Newport Pagnell when Edgar Charles was born on May 5, 1872, was keenly interested in science for its own sake, and the school at Gravesend to which he transferred in the following year soon established a reputation for the teaching of elementary natural philosophy. Smith grew up, therefore, in an atmosphere of scientific experiment and inquiry, and was further stimulated by a year spent at Finsbury Technical College under John Perry and Silvanus Thompson—though, as he admitted in later years, he did not feel that stimulus at the time, finding the curriculum rather beyond his power to absorb.

He entered the Navy as a temporary assistant engineer in 1895, having previously acquired a good knowledge of engineering practice in various engineering works, mainly in the West of England, and something of the theory, by attending classes in the Merchant Venturers' College at Bristol. He spent twenty-seven years in the Royal Navy, serving in battleships, cruisers and destroyers, in H.M.S. *Britannia* as an instructor, and in several of the Royal dockyards, retiring in 1922 on reaching the age of fifty. Nearly twenty years earlier he had begun to collect biographical material about eminent scientists and engineers of all nationalities and, on retirement, he set himself to collate it systematically and to fill the gaps that the process revealed. At the same time, he embarked on the prodigious task of establishing personal contact with the whole of the retired engineer officers of the Royal Navy, obtaining their personal reminiscences, and checking the details by direct references to Admiralty records, many of which were wholly unexplored by historians. By this means he was able, after several years of laborious work, to build up a fairly complete picture of the origins and growth of the Engineering Branch of the Royal Navy and to present it in a valuable series of papers to the Newcomen Society (of which he was president in 1937–38), in various articles in the technical and scientific press, and in his book, "A Short History of Naval and Marine Engineering", published in 1938.

Concurrently, he was maintaining a steady flow of contributions to *Nature*, including an annual article on scientific centenaries and other anniversaries,

which culminated in a series of articles on "Britain's Scientific Shrines", published in Festival of Britain Year (1951). It was not his last contribution; but it was the most important connected series that he compiled in the biographical field, and stands as a monument to his remarkable industry in collating data and verifying facts. More recently, increasing infirmity prevented him from undertaking anything in the nature of field-work or other physical exertion; but his mind remained as vigorous and his letters as crisp as ever, and his contributions to the deliberations of the Newcomen Society's Council, of which he had been a member since the Society was formed in 1920, were frequent and invariably to the point. Others, no doubt, will continue the historical work that he began; but, so far as the Engineering Branch of the Royal Navy is concerned, it is improbable that they will be able to add materially to the foundation that he laid.

J. FOSTER PETREE

## Prof. D. Y. Solandt

THE death occurred on March 30, at the age of forty-eight, of Donald Young Solandt, professor and head of the Department of Physiological Hygiene and professor of physiology in the University of Toronto.

Dr. Solandt was born in Ottawa, Canada, the elder son of Mrs. Solandt and the late Rev. Donald McKillop Solandt. Following his secondary schooling, he entered the University of Toronto, with which he was associated, first as a student and then as a member of the staff, until the time of his death. After graduating in medicine in 1933, Dr. Solandt carried on outstanding postgraduate work in the University of Pennsylvania under the direction of Dr. D. W. Bronk. Later he continued his graduate work in Britain in Prof. A. V. Hill's laboratory at University College, London, and obtained his Ph.D. degree from the University of London in 1936. In 1944 he received his diploma of public health from the University of Toronto.

During the Second World War, Dr. Solandt served for three years in the Naval Medical Research Division of the Royal Canadian Navy. His outstanding work, particularly in connexion with protection of night vision, was acknowledged by the award of the Medal of Freedom with Bronze Palm by the Government of the United States. Dr. Solandt's rank was that of surgeon commander.

Dr. Solandt was an outstanding authority on the physiology of muscle and made many significant contributions in diverse fields of research. He was mainly interested, in recent years, in the field of biophysics as applied to physiology and public health. His publications were numerous and appeared in medical and biophysical journals in Britain, Canada, the United States and elsewhere.

Dr. Solandt was a valued member of many committees of the National Research Council of Canada. He also served on the Advisory Committee of the Department of National Health of Canada and the American Public Health Association. He was an honorary Fellow of the American Medical Association, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada, and a member of many other scientific bodies.

Dr. Solandt was an exceptionally talented and versatile person. His reading covered a very wide field, and his fund of knowledge outside the realms of science never ceased to amaze his colleagues. His