OBITUARIES

Dr. Antonín Bečvář

WITH the death of Dr. Antonín Bečvář on January 10 the Czechoslovak astronomers lost one of their most distinguished colleagues, and the world community the principal contributor to astronomical cartography within our lifetime.

Dr. Bečvář was born on June 10, 1901, in Brandýs nad Labem (some twenty miles north-east of Prague) and was educated at the Charles University originally as a meteorologist. Fragile health delayed the commencement of his professional career until well into his thirties, when he accepted a post as Government climatologist at the region of High Tatra Mountains. The turbulent events of 1938–39 caught Bečvář in Slovakia, and when, as an aftermath of the Munich Agreement, the Czechoslovak Astrophysical Observatory at Stará Dala had to be evacuated, Bečvář succeeded in persuading the Slovak Government to remove its 24-in. Zeiss reflector to a new location at Skalnaté Pleso (that is, Rocky Lake) in the eastern part of the High Tatra Mountains—1,634 m above sea-level. He thus became the founder and and first director of the only high-altitude observatory in Czechoslovakia.

In May 1945, at the risk of his life, Bečvář managed to ward off the dynamite squads of the retreating German army ordered to blow up his institution as a part of Hitler's scorched-earth policy, and he guided the destinies of the Observatory until 1950, when differences with the regional Government led to his premature retirement. He then left Slovakia to return to his native Brandýs, where he spent the rest of his life.

Within its regrettably brief span, and in spite of troubled times and infirm health, Bečvář succeeded in compressing a remarkable range of achievements into his life. When the Observatory site at Skalnaté Pleso proved to be more favoured by sky transparency than steady seeing, Bečvář inaugurated a systematic programme of comet discovery which has since made it famous. Bečvář himself discovered the comet 1947*c*, and the number of those discovered since by his collaborators (Pajdušáková, Mrkos, Kresâk, Antal, etc.) attained almost two dozen in twenty years—making Skalnaté Pleso the most active centre of work of this kind in the world. Meteor photography and variable star observations have also been systematically inaugurated, and are being carried on by the new generation of Slovak astronomers.

However, the greatest contributions which science owes to Dr. Bečvář are in the field of astronomical cartography. Early in post-war years Bečvář conceived the idea of a modern star atlas, encompassing the whole sky and appropriately stressing all its physical features. Its realization, in the form of an *Atlas Coeli Skalnaté Pleso* (published in the English-speaking world under the title of *Atlas of the Heavens* by the Sky Publishing Corporation in Cambridge, Massachusetts), published first in 1948, became an instant success (for its review by Sir Harold Spencer Jones, the late Astronomer Royal, see *Nature*, 164, 635; 1949). It has since gone through several editions, and it is no exaggeration to say that there is scarcely any active observatory in the world to-day where several copies of this atlas are not in daily use. A detailed catalogue of all objects listed in the atlas appeared in book form in 1950.

Encouraged by its success, after his premature retirement in 1950, Bečvář embarked (with the support of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences) on a still more ambitious mapping programme, which in 1958 resulted in the publication of his monumental *Atlas Eclipticalis* (containing all stars within ± 30° declination down to approximately 9th apparent magnitude, with indication of their spectral types in six colours), followed by the *Atlas Borealis* (1960) covering in the same manner the northern declinations 30°–90°; its southern counterpart *Atlas Australis* appeared in 1964.

After the completion of this series, Bečvář commenced another large project—that of an *Atlas Galacticus*—which should represent the sky with all its stars to the 10th magnitude, clusters, and nebulae, in galactic rather than equatorial co-ordinates. Unfortunately, the enthusiasm with which Běcvář embarked on this work undermined further his always frail health, and a repeated attack of pneumonia (which he tried to cure by working even harder) prematurely terminated his life at an age of less than sixty-four years. It is understood that a group of Czechoslovak astronomers intend to complete this work, in accordance with Bečvář's original plan, as a memorial to their departed colleague.

Bečvář was a man of wide interests and many parts: side by side with his interests in astronomy (which became dominant in the latter part of his life) he never abandoned his earlier meteorological pursuits, and these, combined with his skill as a photographer, resulted in the publication of his *Atlas Nubium Skalnaté Pleso* by the Slovak Academy of Sciences in 1953. A striking collection of his photographs of the High Tatra Mountains was published by the Matice Slovenská in 1948, and he ventured even into the domain of belles lettres with a novel, *Last Summer*, which appeared during the War.

Personally, Bečvář combined true idealism of a dedicated soul with indefatigable zeal and modesty which endeared him to his friends, now greatly saddened by his passing—the circle of whom was never very wide owing to his shy and retiring nature. Although he never travelled abroad and was not personally known to many, the renown of his cartographic work spans the seven seas and has made his name a by-word among practising astronomers of the world to-day.

ZDENĚK KOPAL

Dr. H. E. Dadswell

THE death of Herbert Eric Dadswell on December 19, 1964, came with tragic suddenness and will be deeply regretted throughout scientific and industrial circles in Australia.

Whatever commitments Dadswell accepted were undertaken with great enthusiasm. His major lifework lay in the Australian forests and the products from them, but he found time for several other interests, all of which he adopted with zest.

Dadswell gained an M.Sc. degree at the University of Sydney, and then went, in December 1926, with a post-graduate studentship of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (forerunner of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization) to the Forest Products Research Laboratory of the U.S. Department of Agriculture at Madison, Wisconsin. It was a tied studentship, which entailed his joining the Division of Forest Products of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research two years later. Few would have then seen in him the qualities that led to his appointment 31 years later as the chief of this same Division, for Dadswell had not yet had the opportunity to demonstrate his outstanding research and organizing abilities.

Dadswell was intended to be the Division's specialist in the chemistry of wood. However, he had the perspicacity to realize that, while chemistry was a key to the properties