

# Obituaries

Professor S. I. Tomkeieff

SERGEI IVANOVITCH TOMKEIEFF died in hospital at Newcastle upon Tyne on October 27, having been seriously injured when knocked down by a motor-cycle. His death ends forty-eight years of association with the Department of Geology at Newcastle, which he had so well served, ornamented and enlivened. He was born on October 21, 1892, at Vilna, the son of a Russian army officer, later a general. His early education was chiefly at Tiflis, and in 1909 he entered the Polytechnic Institute at St Petersburg. His teachers and colleagues included such famous petrologists and mineralogists as Loewinsson-Lessing, Fersman and Federov. During the First World War he saw service with the Russian Red Cross, was "blown up", shell-shocked and invalided, and later became a member of a buying mission in England, where he stayed after the October revolution. Meanwhile he had been a witness to the arrival of Lenin in Petrograd, and heard his first major speech.

He first worked in the Victoria University of Manchester, but in 1920 he followed the late George Hickling to Newcastle, where he became lecturer in geology; the tardy pattern of promotion of those times ensured that his readership in mineralogy (1948) and professorship of petrology (1957) were long overdue to a man of his attainments. Serge (as he was known to all) was a deep scholar with an all embracing width of outlook beyond his principal interests, and an unquenchable curiosity. He had a kind of vision, common to some children and very few adults (often artists), of seeing something new and significant beneath the dust that covers familiar things and ideas, and often a touch of inspired naïveté that profitably provoked and stimulated others; and on top of this a sincere kindness and total absence of personal pretension.

His contributions, in many original papers, were chiefly to petrology (particularly the British-Carboniferous-Permian and Tertiary provinces), mineralogy and geochemistry; in the last he made a highly individual use of a spiral form of the periodic table of the elements to show geochemical relationships. These would have been enough in themselves to make a deep and lasting mark. But for decades he worked tirelessly, and purely as a service to science, to write innumerable abstracts and reviews of literature on petrology and mineralogy, particularly from Russian sources, for *Nature*, the *Mineralogical Abstracts* and so on, and was responsible for some notable translations into English of Russian books. He also found time, sometimes in collaboration with others, to compile dictionaries of terms used in geology, mineralogy and petrology, the last of which was all but completed when he was struck down.

In his prime, Tomkeieff was a tough and patient field worker, and his knowledge of many areas, particularly of Arran, was remarkably detailed. It was in Arran, in 1947, that he suffered a perforated appendix, and the results of this somewhat curtailed his field activities afterwards. But although his physical prowess naturally diminished in his later years, he remained busy and occupied to the end with his writing.

Tomkeieff was a good linguist, much in demand at conferences as an interpreter. English was a language he learned later than others, and his style and highly individual fluency gave much delight, for he was both good natured and witty. He was a member of many scientific societies, and had served on the councils and committees of several. His closest connexions were perhaps with the

Mineralogical and the Geological Societies of London; he was elected FRSE in 1948. In 1966 the Geological Society of London awarded him the Lyell Medal; he deeply appreciated this, since Lyell's key position in the foundation of modern geology was so apt to Tomkeieff's deep interest in the history of his science—indeed, this became one of his major preoccupations.

# Correspondence

## One New President

SIR.—Your account of the nomination of Dr Phillip Handler to become president of the National Academy of Sciences in the issue of November 2 (*Nature*, 220, 422; 1968) leaves the implication that the membership of the academy was called on to approve this nomination at the California Institute of Technology meeting.

According to present procedures, the choice of the nominating committee is approved by the council of the Academy (which took place on October 4) and thereupon the membership as a whole is invited to make additional nominations, requiring the signatures of fifty members. The deadline for such nominations is December 1. On December 15, a ballot containing the name of the council nominee, together with the names of any additional nominees so validated, will be sent to the membership for a vote. Ballots are due January 15. Election to the presidency requires a majority vote.

Yours faithfully,

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## Kites in the Everglades

SIR.—Being directly concerned with the Florida population of the everglade kite, *Rostrhamus sociabilis plumbeus*, we were delighted at the attention you gave it in a recent number (*Nature*, 218, 1006; 1968), but we wish to correct several points and add additional information based on more recent work. The present situation is somewhat more encouraging than your readers may judge. In late October 1967, Sykes found forty-seven kites in a survey of part of the known habitat and we believe fifty to sixty is a reasonable estimate of the population at that time. In the breeding season just past, seventeen young kites (three broods of three and four of two) fledged from twenty-four eggs laid in nine nests. A marsh fire destroyed one nest and frequent disturbance probably caused the failure of another that was built near a trail heavily used by airboats. These observations appear to be in conflict with the reported low hatching success of the Florida everglade kite. The prognosis for the everglade kite in Florida will improve if more dependable freshwater levels are provided for the marshes of the Everglades National Park and in the marshes of Lake Okeechobee and the three conservation areas. The park is secure from invasion by airboats, canals, roads and pipelines which potentially threaten most other parts of the range except Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge. Kites have not nested in the park in recent years, but they feed there on occasions and may reclaim former breeding range given more favourable year round water levels. The correct name of the snail on