

The late Captain William Noble, F.R.A.S.

[The original of the following has only recently been discovered among the late Captain Noble's papers. Though an obituary notice of our first President appeared in the last volume of the "Journal," we think it will be a satisfaction to many of his friends to read his *ipsissima verba*, for which we are indebted to the kindness of Mrs. Irving-Noble.—EDITOR.]

In case my biography should be applied for by the secretaries of the Royal Astronomical Society after my death, I wish it merely to take this form.

Capt. Wm. Noble came of an ancient Scottish family, and through his grandmother, Anne Armstrong, was the eighth lineal descendant of that Laird of Gilnochie who was executed by James I. His father, a younger son of a younger son, was a merchant in London, in (what was then) a northern suburb, in which the subject of our memoir was born on November 27th, 1828. His father intended him for the Bar, but his own predilections were always for a military life, from which the earnest entreaty of an invalid mother only kept him. His life up to the age of 20 was then a somewhat desultory one, but the death of his father before he came of age placed him in possession of means which rendered him independent of any necessity for permanently adopting a profession. He, however, speedily obtained a commission in what was then the Queen's Own Light Infantry Militia (now the 5th Battalion Prince Consort's Own Rifle Brigade); and subsequently, when this regiment was embodied at the time of the Crimean war (having meantime got his company), served with it continuously. It was quartered for two years in the Royal Artillery barracks at Woolwich, and it was while doing garrison duty there that Capt. Noble was elected to our Fellowship. The address "Royal Artillery Barracks" was converted in the "Monthly Notices" simply into R.A., and on receipt of his first number of the Notices Capt. Noble was astonished to find himself described as an artilleryman. He wrote forthwith to Prof. Grant, the then editor of the Notices, and often expressed surprise that no correction of the mistake was ever made, or his letter even acknowledged. From a lad he had had strong mathematical tastes, and as a boy actually used to take Euclid to bed with him to read when he woke in the morning. The loan of a $2\frac{3}{4}$ -in. Dollond telescope by a friend when he was about fourteen years old, seems first to have aroused that interest in astronomy which ultimately developed almost into a passion with him. He used, even at that age, to study lunar and planetary details (notably at this time those of Saturn) from a table in the garden or from his bedroom window. The first telescope of his own that he acquired was, however, the 6·8-in. achromatic of 12-foot focal length, formerly in the possession of our Treasurer, Dr. Pearson. This was purchased from his widow. Upon the breaking out of the Russian war, however, when the greater part of the militia regiments were embodied and were despatched to the Mediterranean and elsewhere, Captain Noble, being called upon to leave home for an indefinite period, disposed of the Pearson telescope to Mr. C. Leeson Prince, of Uckfield, another of our Fellows. At the conclusion of peace with Russia, Captain

Noble found it impossible to do without a telescope, and he therefore commissioned the late Andrew Ross, the famous optician, to construct one for him, which that eminent man did in the shape of a 4.2-in. achromatic of unsurpassed excellence, completely mounted equatorially, driven by clockwork, and furnished with a micrometer and other apparatus. For the reception of this fine instrument, a wooden observatory with a zinc-covered rotating dome was erected, and this was also furnished with a 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. transit instrument by Simms, and a sidereal clock by Hislop. Contributions of various sorts from him will be found scattered through our Proceedings. He married in 1851, Emily Charlotte, the only child of Mr. Edward Irving, of Her Majesty's 61st Regiment, and Hadriana Cornelia, Baroness van Lijnden, by whom he had three sons, one in the Royal Artillery, who was killed in India, another in the Gloucester Regiment, and the third in Burmah. He was a magistrate for the County of Sussex, and, prior to the disestablishment of the Irish Church, patron of the great living of Donyhmore in the County of Donegal. He took a very active part in local affairs in his own county, of nearly every committee in which he was a member. He was Chairman of the Uckfield Bench of Magistrates, of the Board of Guardians of the Uckfield Union, of the Rural District Council, &c., and a Commissioner of Inland Revenue. He served upon our Council uninterruptedly from 1866 to the date of the February election in 1880, and from—[The MS. here ends abruptly.—EDITOR.]

Reports of the Branches.

WEST OF SCOTLAND BRANCH (GLASGOW).

The Sixth Meeting of the Eleventh Session was held in the Athenæum on Thursday, 16th March, Mr. Robert Robertson, B.Sc., President, in the chair. Mr. John Dansken, F.R.A.S., Vice-President, gave a historical sketch of "The Astronomy of the Earliest Civilisations." In the annals of Chinese history we find, after the 11th century B.C., numerous records of solar eclipses and of planetary conjunctions, in addition to an interesting research regarding the position of the winter solstice among the stars. Ancient Indian astronomy is closely associated with nature-worship, a fact illustrated in the Vedas, a set of hymns dating back to 1500 B.C. Not only do the Indian records give, with great precision, the length of the sidereal year, but there is a passing reference to the earth's axial rotation. Recent extensive investigations relating to ancient Chaldæa show that mathematics and astronomy were studied there as early as 2700 B.C. The Chaldæans were acquainted with the effects of precession and with the form of the orbits of