

O B I T U A R Y.

Dr. A. C. D. Crommelin.

WITH the death of Dr. A. C. D. Crommelin which occurred on 1939 September 20 astronomy has lost one who had made for himself a particular *niche* in the work of his choice. To think of Crommelin was to be reminded of Comets and Minor Planets ; for it was to the computation of the orbits of these that Crommelin had devoted his attention during his leisure hours.

Andrew Claude de la Cherois Crommelin was born at Cushendun, Co. Antrim, on 1865 February 6, being the third son of Mr. Nicholas de la Cherois Crommelin, a descendant of Louis Crommelin, founder of the linen industry in northern Ireland. Educated at Marlborough College, Crommelin went to Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1884 and graduated twenty-seventh wrangler in 1886.

On leaving Cambridge, Crommelin became, for a time, an assistant master at Lancing College. But his real interest lay in Astronomy and even in his undergraduate days he had acquired a reputation for his knowledge of the subject. His opportunity came in 1891 when the appointment of an additional assistant at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, was approved, and he was the successful candidate.

When he joined the staff on 1891 May 11, Crommelin was given charge of the altazimuth instrument and of the reduction of the observations made with it. He was also responsible for the reduction of the observations of occultations and of comets made with the Sheepshanks equatorial. Not many years after his appointment the older Altazimuth instrument was replaced by a newer and more elaborate one. Throughout the whole of his service at Greenwich he remained in charge of this work. When Crommelin came to Greenwich he was already a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, having been elected in 1888. Quite early in his career he became interested in the computation of orbits, and, as time went on, his name became well known as a computer of the orbits of newly discovered comets and minor planets. It is, however, in connection with the return of Halley's comet in 1910 that Crommelin's name will remain associated. In a note published in the *Monthly Notices* of the

R. A. S. in December 1906 he called attention to the desirability of making a close investigation of the circumstances of the path of the comet since its return in 1835 in order to predict its exact position. With this object in view he approached Dr. Cowell, then Chief Assistant at Greenwich, and together they undertook to carry out the work. The results of their investigations are to be found in a series of papers published in the *Monthly Notices* in 1907 and 1908. In these they not only predicted the date of perihelion passage at the following return, but investigated the motion of the comet from B.C. 240 to A.D. 1910 and satisfactorily identified it at its previous returns.

Their brilliant solution of the problem of predicting the position of the Comet on its return to perihelion in 1910 gained for them the Lindemann Prize offered by the *Astronomische Gesellschaft*, their prize essay being submitted under the motto "Isti Mirantur Stellam". Their predicted date of perihelion passage proved to be within three days of that actually observed, and in connection with this the note added by the authors at the end of their essay is worth quoting, viz.: "It now appears from the observations that the predicted T (1910 April 16.61) is 3.03 days too early. At least two days of this error must be attributed to causes other than errors of calculation or errors in the adopted positions and masses of the planets".

In recognition of this splendid piece of work, both Cowell and Crommelin were awarded the degree of D.Sc. (honoris causa) by the University of Oxford.

Crommelin contributed many papers of a similar nature to the *Monthly Notices*. For more than forty years he wrote the notes on Minor Planets which appeared each year in the Annual Report. For a number of years he computed and published ephemerides for the physical observation of Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and the Moon, until this work was taken over by the *Nautical Almanac*.

To the *Observatory* he contributed, over a long period of years, the monthly *Comet Notes*.

In his private capacity Crommelin went on several eclipse expeditions and he also had the great satisfaction of being chosen to go on the official expedition sent to observe the eclipse of 1919 May 29 in Brazil, on which

occasion the results obtained verified the predicted deflection of light when passing through a gravitational field.

Crommelin was Secretary of the Royal Astronomical Society from 1917 to 1923 and served as President in 1929-31. For many years he was a member of the Council of the British Astronomical Association, being also Director of the Comet Section, and he was President of the Association in 1904-06. Besides being author of a useful book, addressed to the general reader, entitled 'The Star World', Crommelin was part author of 'The Splendour of the Heavens'. For many years he contributed astronomical notes and articles to *Nature*.

Crommelin was a born astronomer ; a student immersed in his work. He was extraordinarily well read and a very mine of information. It was characteristic of him that his knowledge was at the disposal of all who sought it and when asked for the explanation of some question no trouble seemed too great for him to take. Many will mourn the loss of a respected and kind-hearted personality and not least those who were amongst his astronomical colleagues and friends. He married, in 1897, Letitia, daughter of the Rev. Robert Noble. Mrs. Crommelin died in 1921, and he lost his elder son and a younger daughter in a mountaineering accident in 1933. He is survived by one son and a daughter.

P. J. M.

C O R R E S P O N D E N C E.

To the Editors of 'The Observatory'.

Egyptian Astronomy.

GENTLEMEN,—

On page 100 of your volume for 1939, H. Chatley stated that my book, 'L'Astronomie égyptienne', is "quite antiquated in its data". Now, when writing that work, I naturally sought to give the superior science of the Egyptian priests, rather than the badly understood and grovelling superstitions of the mob ; and this could be done *only* by a study of the Greek philosophers and historians.

"The accuracy of the descriptions of the Greek travellers", says Sir Flinders Petrie, "deserves notice, as they