



LEONARD JAMES SPENCER (1870–1959)

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Leonard James Spencer.

By W. CAMPBELL SMITH.

ON rare occasions the Mineralogical Society has published obituary notices, with a full-page portrait, of its more distinguished officers on their decease. Such notices were written for Henry Clifton Sorby, first President of the Society, Nevil Story-Maskelyne, Sir Lazarus Fletcher, Sir Henry Miers, and Frederick Noel Ashcroft.

These were very special tributes to men who had devoted themselves to the work of the Society and to the study of our science. No one, surely, has so highly deserved such a tribute as Leonard James Spencer, editor of the 'Mineralogical Magazine' from 1901 to 1955 and of 'Mineralogical Abstracts' from its beginning in 1920 to 1955. He was President of the Society from 1936 to 1939, and Foreign Secretary from 1949 until his death on 14 April 1959 at the age of eighty-eight.

Two other tributes to Dr. Spencer have appeared recently in the 'Mineralogical Magazine'. One is an account of his work at the British Museum (Natural History), published in the Jubilee Volume issued in 1950 to mark the fiftieth year of his editorship (vol. 29, p. 256); the other, 'An Appreciation' written by Dr. James Phemister, appears in the first number of the Magazine after Spencer's retirement in 1955 (Min. Mag., vol. 31, p. 1). It is difficult to add anything to these accounts unless one attempts to write a little more intimately of his work at home.

Spencer was born at Worcester on 7th July 1870, the eldest son of James Spencer, who was for many years headmaster of the School department of Bradford Technical College. He and his brothers were brought up to work seriously and to spend little. His father presented Leonard James with a geological hammer at the age of seven, and at once the boy seems to have started to make a collection of minerals, rocks, and fossils. This collection by 1892 contained some 3000 labelled and catalogued specimens, and was offered to, and gratefully accepted by, Bradford Technical College for the use of their students.

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By this time Spencer was in his third year at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge. When only sixteen he obtained a Royal Exhibition, which took him to the Royal College of Science for Ireland in Dublin, where he gained first-class honours in chemistry in 1889. His geology professor in Dublin was J. P. O'Reilly, who was succeeded by Grenville Cole in the year after Spencer left.

Spencer went on to Cambridge with a scholarship to Sidney Sussex and was there four years, taking a first in both parts of the Tripos and winning the Harkness Scholarship for Geology in 1893. He was the first Sidney Sussex man to win this high award, but he set a fashion in his College, for no fewer than six Sidney men have won it since.

Funds were very short for Spencer at College, and he lived quietly and kept very much to himself. Already, at Cambridge, he was abstracting papers for the Patents Office, and so set out, perhaps from necessity, on a work that was later to become a labour of love.

It was fortunate for British Mineralogy that a vacancy in the Department of Mineralogy at the British Museum was being advertised just at the end of Spencer's fourth year at Cambridge. It was fortunate also that Spencer defeated the other three candidates in the examination. The recollection that one of these was the late Sir William J. Pope was a source of amused satisfaction to Spencer in later years.

Before taking up his post at the Museum Spencer went, at Fletcher's suggestion but at his own expense, to Munich to study crystallography under Paul Groth. He arrived in Munich on 30 September 1893; lectures did not begin until November, but he spent the intervening month in the laboratories and in learning German from a teacher, an hour and a half each day. When term began he attended Groth's lectures, and also Weinschenk's on petrology. Leaving Munich on 18 December he travelled back via Heidelberg, arriving home for Christmas Day, and reported for duty at the Museum on New Year's Day, 1894.

His work at the Museum has been fully described, and Dr. Phemister has told how he began at once contributing abstracts to the 'Mineralogical Magazine', and voluntarily prepared an index to the first ten volumes. Gradually he did more and more for the Society, but this did not interfere with his Museum work. He worked long hours at home. He rarely took a holiday, and when he did it would usually be for a collecting trip to some English mines.

Spencer made three long trips abroad primarily for the purpose of collecting specimens and when possible of visiting museums and private collections. One of these trips was to Canada and the U.S.A. in 1924 for

the British Association Toronto meeting; the second to South Africa and South-West Africa in 1929 for the British Association and International Geological Congress; and the third, a real adventure, was to the Libyan desert. On this occasion he accompanied the expedition organized by P. A. Clayton and the late O. H. Little to investigate the mysterious silica-glass *in situ*. Spencer was already sixty-four, but he had no qualms about the desert journey, and the only stipulation he made was that he should have a tent to himself at night.

In 1899 Spencer married Edith Mary, daughter of Islip J. Close of Mortimer, Berkshire. Mrs. Spencer was a very gifted woman, able in the early years of their married life to help with the translation of Max Bauer's great quarto 'Edelsteinkunde'. They had a son and two daughters, and it must have been with some slight surprise, and certainly with pride, that Spencer saw his son creating a flourishing engineering business and his two daughters, both very talented, rising to the front ranks of their profession, each in her own special line, one in ballet and the other in orchestral music. Spencer was very fond of little children and he took great pleasure in his numerous grandchildren and his three great-grandchildren, and he never forgot a birthday.

Spencer had few hobbies other than collecting minerals and writing abstracts. He was, however, a keen gardener and spared a little time for this, cultivating the small garden at his house in London and brightening the view in front for the passer-by with gay flowers, or, on occasions and by way of a joke, with great gourds. For some years he had a cottage at Chobham where the family went for week-ends, and Spencer worked energetically cultivating flowers and vegetables in the narrow quarter-mile-long garden. The products of the garden were conveyed to London in heavy sacks, Spencer making the first part of the journey to Woking station with a bag on each handlebar of his strongly-built bicycle. For a time also he possessed a motor launch, which was moored near his house at Albert Bridge. This he had bought primarily for the amusement of his son, but it afforded Spencer plenty of occupation too, and on occasions, when the engine gave out, exercise as well.

During the two wars he continued doggedly with his work at home and at the Museum, and in 1914 to 1918 he added to his other duties those of a Special Constable in his home district. In the Second World War, refusing to leave the house, he slept at nights under the table in his dining room. It was only under compulsion that he consented to move for a few nights to a neighbouring underground shelter while an unexploded bomb was removed from the garden of his house. He

suffered much anxiety at that time for the safety of his indexes and library.

As the family grew up, married, and left home, the 'Mineralogical Magazine' and 'Abstracts' and the vast collection of reprints encroached on more and more rooms in the four-storey house by Albert Bridge. The triennial indexes to the 'Abstracts' were compiled as the abstracts were printed off, countless slips being housed in home-made but quite efficient cabinets, made partly from wood salvaged off the beach by Albert Bridge. When the moment came to sort the slips and prepare them for the printer, more of the house and some of the family, if available, would become involved in the work. A daughter might be prevailed upon to sort the slips alphabetically and then, when duplicates had been eliminated, the edited slips were pasted on strips cut from issues of 'The Times' and laid out on the stairs to dry. All this, like so much of Spencer's editing, was planned to save the Society expense. It may have appeared make-shift, but it was efficiently organized and it was not time-wasting.

Most of those who had papers through his hands knew him as a most meticulous and persistent editor. He had a remarkable capacity for attention to every detail of a paper, and he had a sufficiently good knowledge of many languages and a good enough memory to enable him to detect every flaw in the spelling or printing of titles or text. At meetings he usually spoke on some point of detail of nomenclature or locality, and he seldom did himself justice when reading a paper or speaking in public. No one who worked with him could fail to appreciate the depth of his knowledge, his limitless industry and power of concentration, and, beneath a somewhat brusque manner, a saving sense of humour and a truly kind heart.
