

DAVID GIBB

DAVID GIBB, M.A., B.Sc., Reader in Mathematics and a member of the Senatus of the University of Edinburgh, died suddenly at his home on March 28th, 1946. Former students of his, visiting their teacher and friend during occasional leave from the armed Forces and after an absence of two or three years from Edinburgh, had observed that the heavy increase of responsibilities and actual physical exertion caused by the War were imposing a strain. Yet he seemed to have made a good recovery from the serious illness that had attacked him in the late autumn of 1942, so that his death came as a grievous shock to his colleagues and his closer acquaintances.

Gibb was elected to our Society in 1910, becoming at the same time a member of the Library Committee. In that capacity and later as Librarian he gave devoted service for twenty-six years, and was also President of the Society during the session 1920-21. He was a graduate of Edinburgh University, which he entered in 1900, and was also a postgraduate scholar, his subject of research being the motion of the satellite of Neptune. After a few years of school-teaching experience, he was appointed in 1909, on the nomination of Professor George Chrystal, to a lectureship in mathematics at the University, and during Chrystal's last illness and for some time after his death Gibb had the chief responsibility. He was thus one of the two lecturers on the staff when E. T. Whittaker came to the Chair of Mathematics in January 1912, and Sir Edmund has on many occasions given testimony to his own "debt beyond expression" for an unswerving loyalty and service extending over thirty-four years.

In the first World War Gibb was in the Ballistics Department of the Ordnance Committee at the Royal Arsenal, Woolwich, engaged in computing range tables for guns in the Navy and in the Army. One has heard that the high-angle tables required for firing over Gallipoli Peninsula from the Aegean Sea to the Narrows were in part computed by him.

In his earlier years as a lecturer Gibb continued to take an active interest in research. This is attested by published papers on the hypergeometric function, by extensive but unpublished work on Fourier analysis of pulsations from variable stars and, in quite another field, on the theory of Pfaffians, while his interest in computational and statistical mathematics is evidenced by a tract, "Interpolation and Numerical Integration," No. 2 of the Edinburgh Mathematical Tracts,

1915. However, his main task as a mathematician was destined to be in the shaping of the future generation, in lecturing, examining and administration; and fortunate indeed was the University of Edinburgh in that David Gibb devoted the energies of his life to its large mathematical classes. He gave his due share of lecturing to the advanced and intermediate grades, but most of his activity was devoted to first-year elementary classes, the members of which possessed no outstanding aptitude for mathematics. In this connexion Gibb's teaching experience, his knowledge of the background and the conditions of the Scottish educational system, his sympathetic understanding of the difficulties of students in these classes and later, his further experience as an Inspector of mathematics in schools, all stood him in good stead.

As an examiner he was particularly expert. He examined regularly for the Preliminary examinations and the Entrance Bursaries. He was also for many years an examiner for The Faculty of Actuaries, and was highly valued by the Faculty and by the University as a liaison officer between them. It would be impossible to imagine anyone more painstaking in the scrutiny and verification of first drafts of examination questions, not only his own but those of everyone else on the staff. Such unobtrusive, self-denying and efficient work must have occupied many thousands of hours.

As Director of Studies and adviser to students Gibb was at his best. His knowledge of the University Calendar, of time tables, of the ins and outs of rules and regulations, and the intricate connexions and possible collisions between them, was proverbial among his colleagues. Also, being himself an Edinburgh student, he could draw on his own experience. These qualities, added to a rigorous and tireless conscientiousness, made him an ideal adviser. Constantly one could observe to what endless trouble he would go to map out the best course for any student, with what unsparing exertions he would try to alleviate the pressure of any conflict of regulations. Doubtless it is true that some students felt at first that Gibb's recommendations left them less latitude than they might have wished; few could persist in this impression for long. Certainly none was ever left in any doubt as to what the advice actually was; it was given in the forthright voice and manner of the kingdom of Fife, of which Gibb was a loyal and worthy son. Students have invariably recalled, however, that their first feelings of awe and fear changed, with time and deeper knowledge, to respect and affection.

It is difficult to put into words that combination of severity and sympathy that enabled Gibb, from a serious experience of life, to give counsel or unobtrusive help to his colleagues. They for their part accorded to him, instinctively, a *patria potestas*. He is remembered as a notable teacher of mathematics in Scotland, but even more as a man of complete and uncompromising integrity, of unstinted devotion to service, grave and severe when necessary but also full of human sympathy and, on occasion, humour. These elements were mingled in him. His death has brought a very great loss to our Society.

RECORD OF MEETINGS OF THE EDINBURGH MATHEMATICAL SOCIETY

Sixty-fourth Session, 1945-46.

2nd November.

Presidential lecture, "Sylvester's sythematic totals and Maschke's quartic forms," by W. L. EDGE. *Read by title*:—"The place of Dirac's equation in five-dimensional Riemann geometry," by H. W. HASKEY; "On the limits of oscillation of a function and its Cesàro means," by C. T. RAJAGOPAL; "The configuration determined by five generators of a quadric threefold," by L. M. BROWN.

8th December.

"Some remarks on iteration," by A. C. AITKEN; "A note on bi-forms," by H. W. TURNBULL. *Read by title*:—"On isoptic families of curves," by H. W. RICHMOND; "On gamma matrices," by P. VERMER; "On the problem of the electrified disc," by E. T. COPSON.

18th January.

"Discussion on "School examination questions in mathematics," held jointly with the Mathematics Section of the Educational Institute of Scotland (Edinburgh District), led by A. F. BUCHAN and T. ELDER.

1st February.

"Symbolic representation of the Laplace transform," A. ERDELYI; " x to the power of x to the power of x etc. *ad. inf.*," by A. J. MACINTYRE. *Read by title*:—"On compound permutation matrices," by A. C. AITKEN.

1st March.

"The classical and real fluids," by E. G. RICHARDSON. *Read by title*:—"On inverse central factorial series," by A. C. AITKEN; "Asymptotic representations of Laplace transforms with an application to inverse factorial series," by A. ERDELYI.

3rd May.

Discussion on "Mathematics—what it is, and what it is for," led by Rev A. D. STEELE and Sir EDMUND WHITTAKER.

1st June, at St Andrews.

"Difference-differential equations," by E. MAITLAND WRIGHT.

Informal meeting in Greyfriars Churchyard, 13th June.

A laurel wreath was laid on the grave of Colin Maclaurin (died 14th June, 1746).