



ARTHUR JAMES SMITH

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A PERSONAL TRIBUTE BY E. J. ALLEN

Those who have known the Plymouth Marine Biological Laboratory at any period during the last forty-five years will have learned with regret that our Chief Laboratory Attendant, Arthur James Smith, died on 29 January, after a trying illness which had lasted for more than a year. He took up the post which he held so successfully for so long in April 1895, about six months after my own appointment as Director. Trained at the Cambridge Zoological Laboratory, largely under the special care of Adam Sedgwick who always took a close and friendly interest in him, he owed much to the help he received from Brockett, the head attendant at Cambridge, to whom so many men in Zoological and other University Departments throughout the country were in the same way indebted.

When Smith arrived at Plymouth he already knew the Laboratory, having spent some weeks there the year before collecting and preserving material for use in Cambridge, and it was then, when I was working on the nervous system of embryonic lobsters, that I first met him.

From the beginning his work at the Laboratory was most successful and as the years passed he undertook the oversight of more and more of the routine activities of the whole establishment. He gradually acquired an extensive knowledge of the marine fauna and flora of the district and he was always eager to increase it and bring it up to date. For this he had many opportunities, since specialists in the systematics of particular groups, both visitors to the Laboratory and members of the scientific staff, were only too glad to repay the trouble he took to keep them supplied with material for their work by discussing with him the recent advances in their subjects. He had a very keen eye for discriminating species and was an excellent collector, especially on the shore and when examining material brought in from the daily work of our fishermen.

A group in which he took special interest was the Coelenterata, and the Ray Society Monograph on Anemones by Stephenson owes a good deal to his keenness and help. He made it, too, a regular practice to keep in touch day by day with the local fish market and with the fishermen and other workers there.

Smith brought with him from Cambridge a high degree of technical skill in dissection combined with considerable knowledge of the methods of preservation of animal tissues for section cutting or for museum purposes. This was greatly developed as his experience grew at Plymouth in the department for the sale of specimens, which was in his charge. It was well shown also by the ability he displayed in preserving and mounting specimens for exhibitions. An exhibit prepared largely by him attracted much attention at

the St Louis Exhibition in 1903. This was subsequently purchased and remained in the United States. Other exhibits arranged under his supervision were shown at the Yachting and Fisheries Exhibition at South Kensington in 1897 and the Oceanographical Exhibition at Marseilles in 1906. In the latter case he travelled with the exhibits to France and himself set them up there. He also took a great part in preparing and setting up the exhibits of marine animals which have been a popular feature for so many years at the Annual Soirees of the Royal Society at Burlington House. His work in all these directions was remarkable for his great care over details: nothing short of the best would ever satisfy him.

Amongst other assets was a good share of business ability, and for some years, in addition to his other duties, he had charge of the office, and himself kept the detailed accounts called for by the varied activities of the Marine Biological Association. His work in this direction always met with the full approval of the professional auditors.

Smith was essentially a man of action—a man who could do things. There was in him a fundamental honesty of mind and character which permeated his whole life, and it was this, added to a general desire to help the scientific work of the Laboratory, that made him of such great value in the post he held. He gave of his best to a long and varied succession of biologists from all parts of the world by whom he will always be remembered with gratitude, and this feeling will be shared in a very special way by those who have been fellow workers with him at the Laboratory.

Nothing I can say can express my own personal debt for his life's work and the help and kindness I have received from him. Always reliable, always willing to undertake new responsibilities, there were few things connected with the details of administration that could not safely be left in his hands.