

The final chapter "What was—what is to be" gives a short resume of various hypotheses as to the origin of nebulae, stars and planets, with speculations as to the future course of events. The author wisely refrains from hard and fast conclusions. Apart from this chapter the book largely deals with direct deductions from observation.

The book is well produced in large clear type with reproductions of a few typical astronomical photographs and a few diagrams. General ignorance of astronomy may be traced to lack of knowledge on the part of school teachers. This book can be recommended to them.

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## OBITUARIES.

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### Major George C. Fox.

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The Astronomical Society regrets to have to record the death of one of its Members, Major George C. Fox, who passed out of space and time on the 9th October, 1935. He was born in 1864 at Bournemouth in England of South English yeoman stock. Both his grandfathers fought in the battle of Waterloo and both died in England at the advanced ages of 93 and 98 respectively.

Young Fox after leaving school went to sea, and spent two years battling round the world in wind-jammers, after which he was apprenticed and indentured, according to the custom of the times, with a firm of engineers in London. After qualifying himself as an engineer he came to South Africa in 1880, settled his family (for he had married early in his apprenticeship) at Durban and busied himself in the early mining endeavours of Zululand, Swaziland and Barberton. Later, the discovery of the auriferous conglomerates of the Witwatersrand drew him, like many other adventurous spirits, to settle in the South Transvaal where he began a very successful career as mining engineer, first in the service of Messrs. Goertz & Co. (now the Union Corporation) and later with Messrs. Lewis and Marks, whose consulting engineer he was during the greater part of the spectacular rise of that firm to importance in the world of mining finance. The late Mr. Samuel Marks for many years relied largely on Fox's acumen and advice in regard to new mining ventures submitted to him for approval or condemnation.

After the close of the Great War Major Fox decided to retire from mining and settled in Cape Town. In the native wars and Transvaal war which followed close on his arrival at Durban Fox had seen some military service, and in the events leading up to the Jamieson Raid and the Boer War, a few years later, he had

also played a part in accordance with his English up-bringing and mental inheritance. During the Boer War he served as a commissioned officer in the Royal Engineers, along with his life-long friend the Scottish poet-engineer Charles Murray, under Col. Swinton ("Ole Lukoie") who was later to become the inventor of the military tank, and is to-day Professor of Military History in Oxford University. Fox issued from the Boer War with the rank of Captain, and retained the warm friendship of Professor Swinton to the end of his life. At the outbreak of the Great War in 1914 Fox offered his services as soldier and engineer to General Botha, saw active service in German South-West with the temporary rank of Colonel, and emerged with the permanent rank of Major.

After his arrival in Cape Town he joined the Astronomical Society, and having purchased from the estate of the late Mr. C. J. Taylor the 10½ in. reflector which in Mr. Taylor's competent hands had done so much for astronomy at the Cape, proceeded to erect in his garden at Sea Point a small observatory with the expert aid of the late Mr. James Hudson. Fox now applied himself vigorously to the study of astronomy, and under the inspiration and guidance of Dr. Spencer Jones, the Astronomer Royal, became one of the most active workers in the team which studied intensively the planet Mars during the opposition of 1923-4. Some account of his work appeared in the "English Mechanic," and a perusal of the drawings of Mars by Dr. James Moir in Vol. 1, No. 6, pages 200-203 of the Journal of the Astronomical Society of South Africa shows that of the sixty drawings there published no fewer than eighteen were the work of Major Fox, and the high quality of Fox's observations is duly recorded by Dr. Moir, the Director of the team.

In all matters Fox was a man of stern unswerving devotion to duty, keeping his mind firmly fixed on observable facts. Brilliant theorisings whether in astronomy or geology, though interesting him keenly, were little liable to sweep him off his feet. He did not suffer fools gladly, and was at times capable of action of a short-tempered nature. He hated high-placed incompetence and pretentious folly with an utter loathing which at times found very forcible and picturesque expression. His great friend Charles Murray has recorded as a remarkable fact that he and Fox for three years of the Boer War shared the prolonged intimacy of a bell tent without ever having heard from each other a harsh word or seen an unkindly look. Fox admitted few to his complete confidence, but the present writer, who knew and understood him well, and in fact during the last six years of his life (Charles Murray having retired to Scotland) succeeded to the privilege of being his most intimate male friend, has the duty and pleasure of putting on record Fox's unconscious honesty and scorn of all meanness, his

keen intellectual alertness and mental activity combined with unusual dexterity of hand and eye, and the lovable nature of his stately personality patent to all who were admitted to his confidence and friendship. In accordance with his last directions, all that was mortal of him was cremated and the ashes, carried out to sea, were scattered on the saline wastes he had learned to love in his boyish sailor days.

ANDREW YOUNG.

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### Hugh Churchill Mason, 1873-1936.

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The late Hugh Churchill Mason joined the Cape Centre of the Society in 1922 and from the first was an active and stimulating member. He early became a member of the Cape Centre Committee and was Chairman of the Centre for the 1929-1930 Session. He also served on the Council of the Society and on the Journal Committee.

Mr. Mason, the son of a Wesleyan Missionary, was born in Truro, England, while his father was enjoying a temporary transfer overseas. The family returned to South Africa in 1876, and for a while young Mason was educated in Natal, and later at Gill College, Somerset East. A protracted breakdown in health however cut short what promised to be a distinguished scholastic career.

Some years on a farm and a visit to England followed. In 1897 he returned to South Africa and joined the staff of the Natal Observatory at Durban.

Outside its routine work, this Observatory, associated as it was with the name of Neisen, specialised in lunar research. In after years, when his career as a professional astronomer was long over, Mr. Mason's interest in lunar problems remained. A full account of his theory of the origin of the lunar craters was printed in the Society's Journal, Vol. II., No. 3, page 101. This account was amplified in a paper he read to the British Association on its visit to South Africa in 1929 (Journal, S.A.A.S., Vol. II., No. 4). In the following year he linked up his theory of the origin of lunar craters with a theory that meteorites are of lunar origin (S.A. Journal of Science, Vol. XXVII., page 139 *et seq.*).

Mr. Mason's theories deserve more attention than they have received. He wrote with considerable literary charm, but perhaps an unfortunate didactic mode of expression has discouraged expert

criticism. To say, without qualification, that the active source of meteorites "is obviously not the sun itself" (S.A. Journal of Science, Vol. XXVII., page 139), is in such direct conflict with the researches of Olivier and others that it is hardly likely to pre-dispose astronomers to a theory of the lunar origin of meteorites.

Mr. Mason's writing was not limited to scientific papers. He was the author of "The Golden Mean," a book embodying his philosophical and religious ideas; "The Inner Court," a series of meditative essays, and a novel, "The Devil's Christmas Box," a book in which much science is pleasantly blended with imagination and romance.

Besides astronomy, Mr. Mason was interested in a wide variety of subjects. He wrote, as has been said, on philosophy and religion. He was keenly interested in every branch of physics. His interest in modern social problems took him to Russia shortly after his retirement from the Cape Town City Engineer's Department in 1933. While planning a second visit to that country, he was struck down by the disease from which he died early in February, 1936.

A quiet yet forceful and courteous debater, his presence is much missed at meetings of the Cape Town Centre, where he would talk with equal facility about Du Toit's conception of "Gondwanaland" or Science in the Soviet.

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## ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA.

Session 1935-1936.

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### Annual Report of the Council.

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The roll of the Society now includes 111 members and associates, 5 honorary members and 2 members emeriti.

The Council has met three times during the year, those members who are eligible under Article VI. (iii.) of the Constitution being represented by alternates.

The Council regrets to record the loss through death of two Cape members, Major G. C. Fox and Mr. H. C. Mason.

During the year Vol. IV. No. 1 of the Society's Journal has been published. This number was printed on a better quality paper of slightly larger dimensions than its predecessors.