

MAJOR LEONARD DARWIN, R.E.

Council 1890-93. Hon. Sec. 1893-1908. President R.G.S. 1908-11. Vice-President 1911-18

MAJOR LEONARD DARWIN was the fourth and last surviving son of Charles Darwin. He was born in 1850, educated at the Royal Military College, Woolwich, and commissioned in the Royal Engineers in 1871. From 1877 to 1882 he was an Instructor at the School of Military Engineering at Chatham, and on the staff of the Intelligence Division at the War Office from 1885 to 1890, when he retired with the rank of Major. During his military service he was a member of important scientific expeditions, notably those to observe the Transits of Venus in 1874 and 1882. In 1874 he observed at a station in New Zealand. In 1882 he and Captain Morris, R.E., were the official observers at Brisbane, but dense cloud and rain forbade any observation. But at that time the longitudes of all the Australian stations were doubtful. So

Captain Darwin returned *via* Singapore and made the necessary interchange of telegraphic signals with Port Darwin, thus completing the chain and making one of the most valuable indirect results of the whole enterprise. In 1886 he and Arthur Schuster observed the total solar eclipse of August 29 at Prickly Point, Grenada, B.W.I., photographing the corona, and the solar prominences with a prismatic camera. His long report published in the *Philosophical Transactions*, R.S., gives an interesting account of their pioneer efforts.

Having joined the Society in 1887, he was elected to the Council in 1890, was one of the Honorary Secretaries from 1893 to 1908, during the whole Presidency of Sir Clements Markham (1893-1905). Major Darwin was, in the words of the 'Record of the R.G.S.,' endowed with a large share of the wisdom and capacity which had distinguished his family for generations, but "his greatest qualities were his balanced judgement and his instinctive knowledge of the right moment to intervene in the settlement of disputed points. . . . He commanded the respect and confidence of all sections of the Society, and on the Council he exercised a moderating influence which did much to smooth the transition from the régime of two energetic and reforming Secretaries to that of the masterful and impulsive President."

The new Honorary Secretary was soon deeply engaged as Chairman of the Executive Committee for the Sixth International Geographical Congress to be organized by the Society in 1895, and the official report of that Congress shows how important a part he played when colleagues broke down from overwork.

Major Darwin was elected President of the Society at the Annual General Meeting of 25 May 1908, the retiring President, Sir George Goldie, commending him to the Meeting for his exceptional knowledge of the Society's working and his especial fitness for election at that time because the next year was the Darwin centenary. In accordance with the then custom the new President took the chair at the Anniversary Dinner on the same evening and at the remaining meetings of the Session on June 15 and June 29. At the latter he presented the Patron's Medal to H.S.H. the Prince of Monaco, who had been unable to attend the Annual Meeting in May.

In the first year of his Presidency it was his good fortune to preside at a whole series of very important meetings. On 28 January 1909, at the Albert Hall, Shackleton received the Special Gold Medal awarded him for the expedition in which he had attained in the Antarctic the highest latitude up to that time reached by man. Also on February 8 at a meeting in the Queen's Hall Sven Hedin described his journeys in Tibet of 1906-8, and at a subsequent Afternoon Meeting on Tuesday February 23 there was the celebrated discussion on the ranges of Southern Tibet and the name Trans-Himalaya proposed by Hedin (see *Geogr. J.* 33, 396, where however it is not made clear that the paper entitled "Discoveries in Southern Tibet" was read at this additional meeting outside the ordinary programme). "With regard to the name of this range," said the President in summing up, "I intend to say but little. He has told us that his proposal has been approved by the Viceroy. Possibly he will think I am prejudiced when I tell him that my belief is that this question will be settled in a way I have been taught to believe an immense number of questions have been always settled, and that is on the principle of the survival of the fittest." It was perhaps at an informal dinner following this Afternoon Meeting that the President had Sven Hedin and Aurel Stein seated on either hand and Stein produced a tape measure that had been lost north of Lop-nor by Hedin six

years before; which being then restored to him, was handed to the President for the Society's Museum. A fortnight later on March 8 Dr. Aurel Stein read his paper on "Explorations in Central Asia 1906-8," and in his closing remarks Major Darwin referred to the tape incident when "I happened to be sitting between Dr. Stein and Dr. Hedin at a dinner" (*Geogr. J.* 34, 266).

In his first Presidential Address to the Society at the Anniversary Meeting of 24 May 1909, Major Darwin was thus able to refer to the past year as a red-letter year for geographers. But he thought it necessary to depart from the old custom of a brief summary of the main geographical events of the year, partly because the *Journal* appeared with perfect punctuality every month, but more especially because the time had come to consider how to house the Society in premises more suitable than those it then occupied in Savile Row, which had become inadequate for the ordinary needs of the Society. There was insufficient room for its collections of books and maps; there was no room for Fellows to work or to meet their friends; and the hall in which the meetings were held, the old lecture theatre in Burlington Gardens, was used by the courtesy and consideration of the Civil Service Commissioners and might at any time be unavailable, while "as to its acoustic properties and as to the comfort of the seats, all that I can say is that we must not look a gift horse in the mouth." He proposed then as an aim of the Society to erect an Explorers' Hall to commemorate the deeds of great British geographers, and at a Special General Meeting, which immediately followed, he submitted on behalf of the Council a resolution "that it is desirable to build or purchase elsewhere or to rebuild the existing House, to include in either scheme an Explorers' Hall for the meetings of the Society, and to create a Building Fund for such purposes." These resolutions, unanimously adopted, were a first step towards the movement which Lord Curzon completed three years later.

During Major Darwin's second year of office Peary returned from the North Pole, and on 4 May 1910 received at another Meeting in the Albert Hall the Special Gold Medal awarded him "for Arctic exploration 1886-1909." These words on the medal have been held by the ill-disposed to imply that it was not a clear recognition by the Society that Peary had reached the Pole. It may be well, then, to quote from the President's introductory speech: "I stand here to-night as the representative of the Royal Geographical Society, and, armed with the full authority of its Council, to welcome you, Commander Peary, as the first and only human being who has ever led a party of his fellow-creatures to a pole of the Earth." And in presenting the medal the President said: "On the very day on which we heard of Commander Peary's safe return, I sent him a telegram of warmest congratulation in the name of this Society."

A few days before Dr. Cook had, in the words of the 'Record,' "returned from the Arctic regions announcing that he had travelled to the North Pole over the frozen sea accompanied only by two Eskimo. Some polar authorities were disposed to accept the claim and urged the President to telegraph the congratulations of the Society; but he felt doubtful, so conferring with other experts, who held that more definite proofs would be required before the claim could be admitted, he refrained. . . . Darwin consulted everyone who had a right to be heard; but he did so privately, weighed one opinion against another, and without haste or undue delay he acted as his own strong commonsense directed." When controversy ran high and attempts were made to induce the Society to adjudicate on the rival claims, he held that any critical inquiry that was necessary should be made by the authorities of the country to which the explorers belonged.

In his second Presidential Address Major Darwin had to deplore the death

of King Edward VII who had, both as Prince of Wales and as King, honoured the Society so often by his presence at its most distinguished meetings and by receiving explorers both British and foreign upon their return. Turning then to exploration, he remarked that "Although the majority of Arctic explorers have declared that to reach the pole was not their main object, yet as a fact their lines of advance have generally been as nearly due north as circumstances would permit, and in their heart of hearts the hope of some day standing on that particular spot on the earth's surface has always been as a loadstone dragging them northwards. At last this feat has been accomplished, and the year 1909 will be known in geographical history as the year of the North Pole. Commander Peary never concealed his ambition in this respect, and we may perhaps draw the moral that when any circumstance does in fact exist which affects our actions, it had better be made known to the world." He looked forward to the year 1911 being known in like manner as the year of the South Pole and discussed the analogies between the methods of war and of science in the conduct of an attack. Finally he dealt further with the progress of the Building Fund and with the project of a Memorial Hall in which to record the names of great explorers.

During his three eventful years of office, then, Major Darwin had presided at two Albert Hall Meetings, of which there have been in all only seven, and presented two Special Gold Medals, the last two of the five which have been designed and struck in the life of the Society. His third Presidential Address, on the last day of his office, took a philosophical turn. "We must sooner or later face the fact that the work by which this Society has become best known in the past represents an almost finished chapter in geographical history, and we should sometimes, in preparation for the future, ask ourselves what ought to be our role when the last leaf in that chapter has actually been turned. . . . All great changes take place gradually, the process of evolution being as a rule an advance made by a great number of small steps; and no sudden geographical revolution need be feared. To move with the times ought not to be very difficult therefore, and to do so it is mainly necessary to look to the immediate future, or to take 'short view of things,' to use the words of that wise man, Sydney Smith. If this policy be steadily pursued, there need be no cause for alarm for many years to come at all events. . . . We ought to direct our efforts with more persistence than heretofore in encouraging travellers to make systematic and detailed examinations of comparatively small areas, and not merely to cover long distances with the result of doing little more than confirm the impressions of previous explorers. . . . The more closely this army of workers in detail succeed in covering the ground, and the more completely their foundations are built over with a superstructure of theory, the less will become the probability of any of those great leaps in advance which in the past have done so much by their dramatic suddenness to arouse the interest of the unscientific world. The impediments to further progress . . . will be more felt as time goes on, and it is but natural that geography, which is one of the oldest of all the branches of learning, should encounter such troubles at an earlier date than some of her neighbours. . . . Many attempts have no doubt been made by our Presidents and others to mark out the boundaries of our province by defining the word 'geography'; but the effect of these pronouncements does not appear to have been very marked. It is questionable whether as much is not lost as gained by rigid definitions."

The three Presidential Addresses to the Society, and one on Africa, delivered as President of the Geographical Section of the British Association,

meeting at Liverpool in 1896, make his principal published contributions to geography. After his three years of Presidency, he served, as is usual, as Vice-President for a few years, but in the meanwhile had become President of the Eugenics Society, to which he gave for many years his principal scientific attention, and he had not been seen at the House of our Society for many years though he wrote occasionally on matters of the Society's business. In his home at Cripps Corner, Forest Row, he lived to the great age of ninety-three. He was able to walk round his garden on the Monday, developed bronchitis on the following day, and died peacefully on Friday, March 26.

To this outline of our Past-President's great services to the Society two of those who served with him wish to add their personal appreciations.

Major Leonard Darwin was President of our Society during the three years 1908-11, and during those years I was one of the Honorary Secretaries, so that I saw a good deal of him and of his methods of work. In the office of President he had succeeded Goldie, who had himself followed Clements Markham, whose reign had lasted for twelve years. Keltie was still Secretary of the Society.

Darwin impressed us all by his patience and fairness. His patience was exemplified by the fact that he suffered in silence the loquacity of one of the members of the Council, who would persist, during Council meetings, in talking of extraneous matters to his next-door neighbour, whoever that might be. His fairness was shown by his attitude to the Trans-Himalaya controversy during Sven Hedin's visit to this country in 1909.

His Presidential speeches were useful and to the point. He told me that whilst he remembered the heads and subject divisions of his intended speech, he purposely tried to avoid committing to memory the actual words to be used—a valuable hint.

Darwin, who had been commissioned in the R.E. in 1871, some years later passed through the Staff College, and afterwards became a Staff Captain in the Intelligence Division of the War Office. Whilst in this appointment he published, in 1890, by War Office authority, a useful memorandum on the projection of maps for military purposes, in which he made use of O'Farrell's elegant construction. This small piece of work still remains of value. However, when our Society wrote to congratulate him on reaching the great age of ninety, he said in his answer that he had little pretension to being a geographer. But the field of geography is not limited to mathematical technicalities, and Leonard Darwin had the breadth of view and the keen interest in the human side of the subject that specially befit a leader of the Society, and he can be reckoned as one of our most able and successful Presidents.

C. F. ARDEN-CLOSE.

Leonard Darwin and I became friends just fifty years ago, when he was one of the Secretaries and I Librarian of the Royal Geographical Society, then bounding forward under the enthusiastic leadership of Mr. Clements Markham as President and the skilled guidance of Mr. John S. Keltie as Assistant Secretary. It was a time of planning and reconstruction, of new ideals in education and exploration, new methods of organization and equipment. The 'Record of the Royal Geographical Society' contains a full statement of Major Darwin's services to the Society, and the great qualities of caution, firmness, and wisdom which inspired them. Here I should like to express my appreciation of the personality of the man.

I have had glimpses of his home life, both at Egerton Place, in London, in the

earlier days, and at Cripps Corner in Sussex, during the later years, when I saw a good deal of him, especially during my compilation of the 'Record' of the Society. At all times he was the same calm, quiet, and kindly soul, and his profound wisdom impressed me more and more as he grew older. He never spoke without full consideration, and his views, though wide in their tolerance, were always clear-cut, based on the solid foundation of principle. He was the only man I ever knew whose advice when asked for I could accept unhesitatingly even if I did not like it.

I was struck by his business ability when he was the Chairman and I one of the Secretaries of the Executive Committee of the Sixth International Geographical Congress, which after two years of preparation met in London in 1895.

He always took scrupulous care not only to ensure accuracy as to facts, but to state his arguments so that no one could misunderstand them. He once asked me if I knew anything of Bimetallism, and on my saying "No," he went on: "Then you are exactly the man I want to read the proofs of my book critically, and tell me if it is intelligible." I undertook the task, and we had many interesting discussions upon it.

In his later years Darwin's conversation turned more and more on the days of his childhood at Downe, and on his father, for whom he entertained a profound veneration. He resented the opinion often put forward that the great naturalist, absorbed in his scientific studies, had lost touch with the more gracious things of life; and he wrote an article in *The Nineteenth Century* emphatically denying that Charles Darwin had ceased to be moved by beauty in Nature. I brought to his notice the description of Charles Darwin in Noyes's great poem, 'The Torchbearers,' and we had several talks and some correspondence on the subject. He pointed out some minor errors in fact, but approved the general treatment, wondering how the poet had divined elements of character rarely shown beyond the home circle.

Major Darwin talked much to me also of his learned and eccentric great-grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, the far-sighted thinker who wrote before the close of the eighteenth century:

Soon shall thy arm unconquered steam afar,
 Drag the slow barge, or drive the rapid car,
 Or on wide waving wings expanded bear
 The flying chariot through the fields of air.

Leonard Darwin suffered many disappointments in his career, but took all with philosophic calm. Latterly he concentrated his attention on eugenics, which he followed with an almost religious fervour, for he told me that his religion was summed up in doing what he could with all his power to ameliorate the lot of his fellow-men, and in eugenics he saw the best hope for the future of humanity. After we had been some considerable time without meeting, he wrote in one of his last letters: "I have now grown a long white beard. Come and see it." Most unexpectedly the beard altered the balance of his features so as to bring out the close resemblance of his massive forehead to that in the portraits of his famous father.

HUGH ROBERT MILL.