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Obituary

W.S. Bruck LL.D.

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OBITUARY

W. S. BRUCE, LL.D.

SCOTLAND has lost her foremost polar explorer and oceanographer by the death of Dr. W. S. Bruce, which we regret to record occurred in Edinburgh on October 28, 1921. Not only did Bruce hold a remarkable record in the number of polar expeditions he had led or accompanied during the last thirty years, but he was also acknowledged to be the highest authority on polar exploration of his time. It was only his intense dislike of publicity and his natural shyness that prevented him becoming one of the outstanding personalities of his generation. In 1892, at the age of twenty-five, he abandoned his medical studies in Edinburgh to join the expedition of the Dundee whalers to the Antarctic, sailing as surgeon in the *Balaena* with his friend, Mr. W. G. Burn Murdoch. Although short in duration and limited in opportunity, this expedition, through Bruce's energy, had important results, among which a fine set of meteorological observations, taken under great difficulties, was the most complete Antarctic series up to that date, and clearly indicated the probability of the Antarctic anticyclone. The following year Bruce planned an expedition to explore South Georgia. The Government of the Falkland Islands was keenly interested, but the modest £400 required could not be found. A chance to join a whaling cruise to the Ross Sea also failed because Bruce could not reach Melbourne before the sailing of the *Antarctic*. After some experience in the *Challenger* office and a year in charge of the observatory on the summit of Ben Nevis—since closed in 1904 by a parsimonious Government—Bruce sailed in the *Windward* for Franz Josef Land, and in 1896-97 was engaged with Mr. F. G. Jackson in survey work. He was present at the historic meeting with Nansen.

The following year Major Andrew Coats invited Bruce to accompany him in his yacht *Blencathra* for an oceanographical cruise to the Barents Sea, Novaya Zemlya, and the Wiche Islands. On his return to Tromsø, Bruce sailed north with the Prince of Monaco, who was bound for Bear Island and Spitsbergen in the *Princesse Alice*. An important landing was made on Hope Island (*cf.* this *Magazine*, March 1899). This voyage was in the nature of a reconnaissance for the next year's cruise, which Bruce again accompanied, taking part in oceanographical work off the coasts of Spitsbergen and the detailed hydrographical survey of Red Bay (*cf.* this *Magazine*, September 1900).

On his return from the *Balaena* expedition Bruce had at once begun to reawaken interest in the Antarctic, in which he was supported by Dr. (later Sir) John Murray, Dr. H. R. Mill, and others. The story of his organisation of the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition is the record of dauntless perseverance and tireless enthusiasm in the face of great difficulties. The plans, first published in 1900 (*cf.* this *Magazine*,

June 1900 and November 1901), eventually materialised, the necessary funds being raised by public subscription in Scotland, aided by encouragement of this Society. The two chief subscribers were Mr. James Coats, Junior, and Major Andrew Coats. The *Scotia* sailed in 1902 for the Weddell Sea, Bruce having selected a sphere of work between the Swedish expedition to the west and the German expedition to the east. Two summers were spent in the Weddell Sea and one winter at the South Orkneys. Vast areas of uncharted ocean were hydrographically surveyed, the "Ross deep" was obliterated from the map, 2660 fathoms replacing Ross's 4000 fathoms, no bottom, and a new section of the coast-line of Antarctica, Coats' Land, was discovered in lat. 72° 25' S., long. 17° 27' W., and traced for 150 miles to the south-west. On the return voyage oceanographical survey was continued northward more or less on the meridian of long. 10° W., and a long southern extension of the mid-Atlantic ridge was found. A landing was made on Gough Island. The *Scotia* obtained extensive biological collections, down to depths of 3000 fathoms, which in variety and extent have probably never been equalled except by the *Challenger*. This strikingly successful expedition cost only some £35,000. The Meteorological Observatory (Omond House) founded at Scotia Bay, South Orkneys, was taken over, and has been since maintained, by the Argentine Government. The preliminary reports of the *Scotia* expedition appeared in this *Magazine* (February and March 1904; January and August 1905). Bruce proposed a second expedition in 1910, which included the first suggestion of a traverse of Antarctica from Coats' Land to the Ross Sea, but the funds did not reach the requisite amount for a start to be made.

Bruce returned to his Spitsbergen explorations in 1906, devoting his attention in that year, 1907, and 1909 to Prince Charles Foreland which, with the help of various assistants, he mapped on a large scale (*cf.* this *Magazine*, March 1907, and Map, on scale of 1 : 140,000, published by the Prince of Monaco, 1913). Bruce's work in Spitsbergen, which was continued in visits in 1912, 1914, 1919, and 1920, touched most parts of the archipelago. He took many soundings on the west coast and in Stor Fjord, and devoted much attention to the natural history and the economic development of the country. He was a strenuous advocate of British sovereignty in Spitsbergen in view of its strategic and economic importance. Bruce's knowledge of the navigation of Spitsbergen coasts and waters was extraordinarily wide and detailed and fully equal to that of Norwegian pilots.

One of Bruce's great ambitions was to see an Oceanographical Institute in Edinburgh. In his Scottish Oceanographical Laboratory, opened by the Prince of Monaco in 1907, he made a beginning. For twelve years it functioned as a centre of polar research and, with its store of oceanographical apparatus, helped to equip several expeditions. But the burden of its upkeep fell entirely on Bruce's shoulders, and when his strength failed in 1920 he had to disperse his laboratory. The library is now in the University of Edinburgh, the rich collections

in the Royal Scottish Museum, and the maps in this Society's rooms. It should be recorded that on his return from the Antarctic in 1904 Bruce offered the *Scotia* to the Scottish Universities for training students in oceanography and biology, but his offer was refused. Another project of Bruce's at which he worked for years was that of a zoological garden and aquarium in Edinburgh. The success of the Scottish Zoological Park, of which he was one of the founders, is now assured. Among Bruce's other activities was a period (1914-15) in charge of a whaling station in the Seychelles, but he never found tropical climates congenial. For a time he was lecturer in geography in the Heriot-Watt College, and in 1919 delivered the Thomson Lectures in Aberdeen. His work was recognised by the gold medals awarded him by this Society (1904), the Royal Geographical Society (1910), the Royal Society of Edinburgh (1911), and the American Geographical Society (1920). In 1907 the University of Aberdeen made him an honorary LL.D., and he was nominated by the Prince of Monaco a member of the international committee of the Oceanographical Institute, Paris. He was an honorary fellow of the New Zealand Institute and the Berlin Geographical Society and for many years a member of the Council of this Society.

Besides editing the *Scotia* results, Bruce wrote *Polar Exploration* (1911) and "Falkland Islands and Dependencies" in the *Orford Survey of the British Empire* (1914). Latterly he made much patient research into the early history of sealers around Graham Land, some of which was published in "The Weddell Sea: an historical retrospect" (*cf.* this *Magazine*, June 1917); in the Report of the Committee on the Development of the Falkland Islands Dependencies, 1920; and in the new Antarctic Sailing Directions. He had intended, when time permitted, to write a general account of his polar voyages, but that is now left for others to do as his memorial. His life was packed with adventures, but until his scientific work was done he would not give the time to recount them.

By his untimely death polar exploration has lost an ardent advocate and leader, and science a devoted worker, while his many friends are the poorer because a true, generous, and unselfish man has gone from among us. To the end polar exploration occupied his thoughts. In his will, written a few months ago, he directed that after cremation his ashes were, if possible, to be scattered on the Southern Ocean between long. 10° and 15° E. in a high southern latitude where oceanographical work is much needed. It is hoped to carry out at least the spirit of his wishes.

R. N. R. B.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

EUROPE.

The Drought in 1921.—A short note in the *Annales de Géographie* for September 15 last gives a brief summary of the facts then available in regard to the drought which prevailed over much of Europe during