

OBITUARY

THE RT. HON. LORD AVEBURY, F.R.S., D.C.L., LL.D.

By the death of Lord Avebury on May 28th at the advanced age of seventy-nine our African Society loses its second President, and one who served as a Vice-President till the day of his death. The deceased peer was a man of the most versatile and gifted nature, to whose kindness and influence in its infant days the Society was not a little indebted. Of Lord Avebury it may be truly said that he combined in one personality the lives of at least three men—banker, scientist, and man of letters—and fulfilled each part with extraordinary ability and distinction. In addition, he gave twenty years to parliamentary life, and a score or so of useful measures are due to his initiation. One of the first was the Bank Holiday Act; and amongst the last was the Ancient Monuments Act. All that come between carry on their face the same two dominant aspirations of Lord Avebury's life: the good of the people, and the encouragement of all that would promote the advance of science.

Born on April 30th, 1834, he passed from a private school into Eton College, only to leave at the age of fourteen for his father's bank. There his remarkable ability at once declared itself, and at the age of twenty-two he became a partner. On the death of his father nine years later, he became head of the firm; and such was the high estimation in which he was held that he was almost immediately chosen honorary secretary of the Association of London Bankers, subsequently becoming first President of the Institute of Bankers, as well as President of the London Chamber of Commerce, 1883-93. He was member for Maidstone from 1870 to 1880, and for the University of London from 1880 to 1900; during the latter period

he obtained a peerage, and exchanged the then familiar name of Sir John Lubbock for that of Baron Avebury. He was also associated with several special Commissions on coinage and currency questions, besides three on educational matters.

Equally remarkable has been the success of his books; his famous *Ants, Bees and Wasps* passed through no less than seventeen editions. To carry on these investigations he had himself kept for purposes of observation about one-half of the known 700 species of ants; it is said that at one time he had as many as thirty nests of different ants in his grounds. He read deeply, and his books are all characterised by much research; he gave lectures from time to time, and it was in the course of one of these in 1887 that his famous list of "the hundred best books" was first propounded. Besides all this he was both an antiquarian and a student of folklore. In fact, one of his earliest books was on *Prehistoric Times*. It was followed in 1870 by *The Origin of Civilisation*, a work which, like its predecessor, passed through several editions, and was translated into more than one foreign language. Nor must his gifts as a literary student be forgotten. Over one-quarter of a million copies of *The Pleasures of Life* were readily taken; and a supplement found an almost equal demand. Of the interest and value of his books one need only remark that over fifty foreign editions of his works in different languages are known to exist. Space forbids mention of the numerous honours of which Lord Avebury was the recipient; but it is only fair to add that there is scarcely any scientific society which has not benefited by Lord Avebury's work; and our African Society may indeed be proud to be reckoned in that number.

Lord Avebury was twice married, first in 1856 and secondly in 1884. Lady Avebury survives him; besides his widow, he leaves five sons and four daughters. He is succeeded in the Peerage by his eldest son, the Hon. John Birkbeck Lubbock, born in 1853, and a partner in his father's banking firm.