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1903.

THE LATE PRESIDENT.

BRIEF SKETCH OF THE CAREER OF SIR GEORGE GABRIEL STOKES,
Bart., 'F.R.S., D.C.L., LL.D., late President of the Victoria
Institute.

It is fitting that a brief sketch of the career of our late President should appear in this volume of the *Transactions*, and to those of our members who were only acquainted with this accomplished man by reputation the following biographical record will not fail to be acceptable. Sir G. G. Stokes came of a family which has produced several men of high reputation in various departments of literature, science, and art, amongst whom may be specially mentioned the late Dr. William Stokes, Regius Professor of Medicine in Dublin University, whose statue adorns the hall of the Royal College of Physicians in that city,* and his son Dr. Whitley Stokes, C.S.I., formerly Secretary to the Government of India in the Legislative Department, and subsequently law adviser to the Council of the Indian Government, happily still surviving amongst us. Nor ought we to omit to mention his sister, the late Miss Margaret Stokes, well known for her researches into the Celtic history of her own country, Ireland, and that of the Continent.

The late President was the son of an Irish clergyman, and was born at Skreen, co. Sligo, on August 13th, 1819. He was educated at Dr. Wall's school, in Dublin, and afterwards at the Bristol College. Having graduated at Pembroke College, Cambridge, taking his B.A. in 1841, as Senior Wrangler, he was elected to a Fellowship. Cambridge University henceforth became the scene of his future labours, which were chiefly in the field of high mathematics and physics; and he was a frequent contributor of papers to the *Cambridge Philosophical Transactions*. In 1851 he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, of which he was chosen in 1854 one of the Secretaries, and afterwards its President, on the retirement of Professor Huxley; thus attaining to the highest position open to

* The statue is life size in marble, by Foley.

men of science in this country. At the meeting of the British Association at Exeter in 1869 he was elected its President, and during this period of his career he was elected an honorary member of several foreign academies, and received the Prussian order *Pour le Mérite*. He also was awarded honorary degrees from the Universities of Oxford, Dublin, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. On the death of Mr. Beresford-Hope in 1887, he was returned as one of the representatives in Parliament of Cambridge University, and sat till the session of 1892, but from his retiring disposition seldom took part in debates in the house, though generally voting with the Conservative party. In 1886 he accepted, with the hearty approval of the members, the position of President of the Victoria Institute, in succession to the Earl of Shaftesbury. Nor was this a purely honorary office, for he took a warm interest in the affairs of the Society, and when his engagements at Cambridge permitted, was a regular attendant at the meetings of the Council and of the Institute; coming up to town in all weathers—sometimes at much personal inconvenience—until increasing years and infirmity made it impossible. To his wise counsel and conciliatory bearing the Institute largely owes its present prosperous position; and on several occasions he contributed to its proceedings. Those who were present at the Annual Meeting in 1898, will not soon forget his lucid exposition of the action of light on the organs of the eye, and the marvellous arrangements for the perception of colour.* It was on this occasion that Lord Kelvin gave expression to his admiration for his friend and fellow-worker in the domain of physical investigation when he exclaimed in reference to previous experience, "Whenever we found ourselves in difficulties we said, 'send for Stokes,' " or words to that effect.

Within a year of his decease Stokes was elected Master of Pembroke College, the highest honour it was in the power of the College to confer, and on Sunday, January 4th, 1903, Stokes entered into that "Rest, which remaineth for the people of God," at the good old age of 84 years, having by his great talents and unfailing industry

* Delivered July 18th, 1898.

raised himself from the position of a son of a country clergyman in a remote part of Ireland to the very highest position in the World of Science. That he had an unblemished reputation, and that he was a sincere Christian need not be said. His character was known and read of all men, and of him we may use the words of Longfellow :—

“Lives of great men all remind us
 We can make our lives sublime,
 And, departing, leave behind us
 Footprints on the sands of time ;
 Footprints that, perhaps, another
 Sailing o'er life's solemn main ;
 Some forlorn and shipwrecked brother
 Seeing, shall take heart again.”

A Psalm of Life.

The following are the more important communications read before the Institute by its late President :—

Special Address to the Institute. June 18th, 1885.

Annual Address. *Trans. Vict. Inst.*, vol. xx. *Ibid.*, vol. xxii.

“On the Perception of Light,” the Annual Address for 1895. *Ibid.*, vol. xxix.

“On the Röntgen Rays,” Annual Address for 1896. *Ibid.*, vol. xxx.

“On the Perception of Colour,” Annual Address for 1898. *Ibid.*, vol. xxxi.

E. H.