

MEMOIR

AMÉDÉE BÉGAULT

WITH the death of Amédée Bégault a great figure has disappeared from the actuarial world. Members of the Association Royale des Actuaire belges and actuaries in every land mourn his death in Brussels on 2 July 1949.

Amédée Bégault was born in Tournai, Belgium, on 26 February 1859. He intended to devote his life to the Army and, having brilliantly completed his studies at the École Militaire, he was commissioned in the Artillery, but a few years later other fields were opened to him. His mathematical culture and his knowledge of the theory of probability led him to perfect himself in a branch which was as yet unpractised in Belgium, though that country was proud to acknowledge the pioneer work of Quetelet. By the time that Bégault had served a term of probation with the Société d'Assurances le Phénix in Paris he was recognized as the foremost Belgian mathematician, having made a complete study, both theoretical and practical, of the science of life contingencies.

In June 1894 Bégault joined, as Actuary, the Compagnie Belge d'Assurances Générales sur la Vie and was soon appointed sub-manager. A few years later his activities were to change their direction once again, but meanwhile he exercised a most beneficial influence on the affairs of the company where he founded a truly actuarial department in which young elements were taught and shaped under his direction. Such, for instance, was Louis Maingie, who later acquired for himself a world-wide reputation through his books, articles and teaching, as well as by the part he played in the drafting of the provisions of the Belgian Life Assurance Act, of social legislation and of the law regulating the control of mortgages.

Amédée Bégault was well acquainted with the works published under the auspices of the Institute of Actuaries. As an assiduous reader of the *Journal* he was struck by the British actuaries' mastership of their subject, by the variety of topics with which they dealt and by the remarkably practical system of notation which they had evolved. After a meeting with Léon Mahillon and Charles Le Jeune, Bégault conceived the idea of translating into French the *Institute of Actuaries Text-book*, Part II (George King's *Life Contingencies*). The Institute gave him the necessary authority and the work was published in November 1894 under the patronage of the Institut des Actuaire Français. This classic work was thereby put within the reach of all French readers who had the mathematical knowledge required for the study of actuarial science. It was most appreciated in Belgium and France, and through it Bégault's name became familiar to all those interested in actuarial work.

On 8 January 1895, an important date for the history of actuarial science in Belgium, Amédée Bégault, together with Adan, Duboisdenghien, Lepreux and Mahillon, founded the Association des Actuaire Belges. The Association came into existence at a most opportune moment, because the Belgian Minister of Finance, in an interview with MM. Mahillon and Bégault, had expressed the wish to submit for the opinion of actuaries a draft Bill on professional associations. The statutes of the new Association were adopted on 24 June 1896. Its objects were defined in the first article as:

- (1) to create a link between Belgian actuaries as well as between Belgian and foreign actuaries;

- (2) to create, in Belgium, a group adhering to scientific principles as the basis of all provident funds;
- (3) to strive for the adoption of scientific methods in the organization and the functioning of provident institutions;
- (4) to assist the government authorities and the provident associations in the examination of technical questions on actuarial science.

In 1920 on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of its foundation, the Association became by royal consent the Association *Royale* des Actuaire Belges. Throughout its history the Association has maintained a strict programme of recruitment and it expects from its members a high standard of attainments, from both the theoretical and the practical point of view.

It was at the suggestion of the Belgian actuaries that the First International Congress of Actuaries was organized in Brussels in the summer of 1895. Credit for the idea belongs both to Mahillon and to Bégault. The objects of the Congress were to enable people of different nationalities to discuss questions of general interest in actuarial science and to foster progress in the actuarial field by the establishment of friendly relationships between actuaries. Bégault was secretary of the Congress and reported on the first question, on *the need for an universal actuarial notation*, a subject in which he had always shown a deep interest. On the conclusion of the debate the Congress adopted resolutions which recommended the use of the Institute of Actuaries notation together with the examination of modifications to it at future International Congresses. Bégault's work during the Congress was most appreciated by members, especially the dictionary of the more important notations which he had prepared with great care.

As a result of the Congress, the Comité Permanent des Congrès Internationaux d'Actuaires was founded with its headquarters in Brussels. The Committee was to be responsible for the organization of future Congresses. Bégault was President of the Permanent Committee from 1909 to 1946.

The Second International Congress of Actuaries took place in London in 1898. The question of a universal notation figured once again on the agenda. Both Amédée Bégault and George King prepared papers on the subject and the Congress decided to ask the Council of the Permanent Committee to supervise the compilation and publishing of an international dictionary of actuarial and commercial terms.

Space will not allow us to trace the history of subsequent Congresses but the activity showed by Bégault on all occasions, and the important part occupied by him from that time onwards, will be remembered. His influence was deeply felt in Belgium, especially his defence of the lofty ideals of provident institutions and his struggles for the advancement of actuarial science.

On 30 January 1937, at the age of 78 years, Amédée Bégault expressed his wish to be relieved from his duties as President of the Association Royale des Actuaires Belges; he consented, however, to become the Honorary President of the Association. During his retirement, after a full and laborious life, he never ceased to follow with close interest the activity of the Association and he showed a particular interest in all questions that called for the actuary's attention. He kept up his many friendships and connexions all over the world and his name was everywhere evoked with sympathy. For instance, in Paris on 22 June 1949, at the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the Institut des Actuaires Français, its President M. Auterbe was recalling the names of the pioneers of those international gatherings and a special cheer went up at the mention of Bégault's name.

Foreign Associations were proud to count him as a Corresponding Member; he was a Corresponding Member of the

Institute of Actuaries;
Institut des Actuaire Français;
Association des Actuaire Suisses;
Actuarial Society of America.

In his own country Bégault was a member of the Commission Permanente des Sociétés Mutualistes and of the Commission des Assurances Privées.

The published works of Amédée Bégault include:

1. *Caisse des Veuves et Orphelins*, published in *La Belgique Judiciaire*, Brussels, 1894.
2. *On life contingencies including life annuities and assurances*, by George King, Institute of Actuaries Text-book, Part II. French translation published by Bruylant et Christophe et Cie., Brussels, 1894.
3. *De la nécessité d'une notation universelle; proposition de vœu*, *Trans. First Int. Congr. Act.* 2nd. ed., p. 31, 1895.
4. *De la notation universelle*, *Trans. Second Int. Cong. Act.*, p. 582, 1898.
5. *Fractionnement des périodes de capitalisation dans les questions d'intérêt et d'escompte*, *Bulletin de l'Association des Actuaire Belges*, No. 8, March 1900.

We may also mention the opening speeches which he made at several of the International Congresses of Actuaries and the memoir of Omer Lepreux for which he was largely responsible (*J.I.A.* Vol. LVIII, p. 114).

Bégault's friends and colleagues will remember him as a man full of energy, animated by a powerful vitality, upright, good, a man of ideals who yet tenaciously pursued practical ends.

Among the members of the Association Royale des Actuaire Belges the loss of their last surviving foundation member is particularly keenly felt. Amédée Bégault personified a whole era. His memory will be evoked with gratitude because by trying to strengthen the ties of international relationships he has thereby served his country well. The story of his life should be a worthy inspiration to the young actuaries of today.

H. VERMEULEN

Few of the present generation of British actuaries had personal acquaintance with Amédée Bégault before 1927. In that year I and others first came in contact with him in London when the triennial Congresses were revived after the 1914-18 War. At that London Congress Bégault loomed as a great and vivid personality, dominating our other visitors, indeed rather dominating the Congress. He must have then been at the zenith of his career. I can picture him now as he spoke at the Guildhall banquet, thick-set, shaggy of eyebrow, somewhat Napoleonic of mien and with a resonant voice that enunciated a French which an Englishman could understand. While he himself understood and read English he spoke it with difficulty and in his reply on behalf of the Permanent Committee, after a few words in English, he lapsed into his native language.

As a member of the Council of the Permanent Committee and correspondent for Great Britain I was to meet him on a number of subsequent occasions. The Council met annually in July in Brussels where Bégault always took the chair. The British and American representatives, I believe, felt somewhat remote and perhaps a little cliquish among those swift-speaking foreigners. I always felt that Bégault recognized this isolation as he scanned those sitting round the large

oval table and he appealed with eyes, gestures and words to us to become assimilated to the continental body. If at the formal council meeting he did not achieve that homogeneity he hoped for, he certainly did when he entertained us all to dinner in the evening. I particularly remember the occasion or occasions when we dined at his club. Some lady members of his family were present as a softening or harmonizing influence, and after cocktails there was a coalescing of elements, German and French, British and Italian, Swedes and Swiss; all seemed to make themselves understood in some polyglot muddle which buzzed around the table. As a host he was unsurpassed.

When we met in Brussels in July 1939 the war clouds were already gathering and Bégault was expressing concern about the safety of some of his family in Paris. Though I had been in Paris in the spring of that year and had found that business men had already made preparations for a German invasion, it was Bégault who brought home to me the imminence of the coming catastrophe; he was drawing on his experiences in the 1914-18 War. In 1945 Bégault was the first to whom I wrote after the expulsion of the Germans. I well recall his reply in which he addressed me as an old colleague. 'Had he written' he said 'a month earlier he would have been able to tell me that his family had suffered no loss to their numbers, but now as a result of German persecution a dear son who had taken an active part in the underground resistance movement had died within the last few weeks'.

Bégault may have been an actuary rusty in the infinitesimal calculus, but as a man of affairs, one with a keen appreciation of human worth, a knowledge of the art of living, a concern for his family, he will be remembered by all who knew him as a lovable and a very human being.

H. E. R.

One of the privileges of life is to remember those who won our affection or our admiration and among many actuaries in various countries of whom it is a joy to think Amédée Bégault stands out. His translation of King's *Life Contingencies*, his share in the international notation and above all his interest in International Congresses are the things that made him known everywhere, but those of us who attended Congresses or meetings of the Permanent Committee will remember the personal welcome, the pleasant talk in our own language, the friendly atmosphere conveyed, not only by himself, but by his wife and by members of his family. We were given the impression that he wanted us to be something nearer in friendship than members of the same profession. Two invasions of his country and family losses resulting from the tragedies of war brought sorrows, but his courage never failed. The last time I saw him was 29 September 1947 when I was attending a meeting of the Permanent Committee, went out to his home to see him and was given a warm welcome. I carried away the feeling that I had seen, possibly—as indeed it was—for the last time, a wonderful, a dear old man.

W. P. E.