

MEMOIR

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE LORD MAY

By the death of Lord May the Institute has lost one of its most illustrious members, although his greatest achievements were not directly connected with its work. He entered the service of the Prudential Assurance Company in 1887 as a junior clerk, and passed the actuarial examinations in a very short time with the absolute minimum of study; this was the forerunner to his long list of promotions in the office and successes in a wider field.

May was the type of man who was capable of succeeding in any task to which he thoroughly applied himself. Being of splendid physique and exceptionally lissom—even in late middle life—he could have been a first-class exponent of almost any sport, but he just could not give his whole attention to one particular thing for any length of time. This was even evident in his work, for he attacked any new problem or idea with the utmost zest for a few days, never allowing himself the slightest rest, until, with the fundamentals of the subject mastered, his interest would cool and he would hand it on to someone else to complete or revise.

His outstanding faculties were exceptional quickness of mind and a commanding personality. In whatever company he found himself, it was not long before he became the dominating influence in the room, and what he said was usually accepted, not so much because it was the better of opposing views as for the manner in which he expressed himself. He was, curiously enough, a poor public speaker and realized it, and also avoided as far as possible attending formal meetings held for the discussion of insurance or financial affairs. On one occasion when present at such a function, he remained silent and was apparently taking no interest in the subject under review. When an agreement had been practically reached he was asked by the chairman for his opinion. Quite oblivious of what had been decided upon, May put forward an entirely opposite view which within a few minutes was accepted by the whole meeting. This is merely one of many illustrations that might be given of the extraordinary influence he exerted on those around him.

Soon after the end of the first world war he was threatened by blindness and underwent a series of operations; for quite a considerable period he was unable to read anything, or even to find his way about his own office building. The effect on him was quite startling: he developed his memory in the most remarkable manner and was able to submit to his Directors financial problems, repeating with unerring accuracy the figures which had been previously read out to him. It is no exaggeration to say that he proved himself to be a more efficient Secretary than ever before. The character of the man is indicated by the fact that those nearest him never heard a word of complaint on his hard luck, and the only record of what he really felt was his remark, made to a very close friend, to the effect that he was thankful it wasn't deafness.

In 1912 he submitted a paper to the Institute entitled *The Investment of Life Assurance Funds*, which attracted a great deal of attention at the time and was the subject of very little criticism. The passing years and the effects of the second

world war have, however, not altogether borne out all the conclusions to which he came.

His most spectacular successes were achieved as Manager to the American Dollar Securities Committee in 1916, for which he received the Knighthood of the Order of the British Empire, and subsequently as Deputy Quartermaster-General of the Navy and Army Canteens Board. On his retirement from the Prudential in March 1931 he was appointed Chairman of the Economy Committee and his report had a considerable bearing on the formation of a National Government shortly afterwards. In 1932 he became Chairman of the Import Duty Advisory Committee, a position which he held for several years. For these further services he was created a Baronet in 1931 and a Baron in 1935.

In his work at the Prudential one characteristic stood out more than all others to his subordinates: he never attempted to find a scapegoat and always took full responsibility for any error or oversight made by a member of his staff.

P. C. C.

Deaths on Active Service

BARON EDMUND PLATTS, Student, Second Lieutenant, R.A. Killed in action at Hong Kong, 19 December 1941.

HOWARD BRIAN CURRALL, Student, Pilot Officer, R.A.F. Missing, presumed killed 31 March 1943, whilst on U-boat patrol.

ERNEST GEORGE REDMAN, Student, Flying Officer, R.A.F. Reported missing after a raid on Germany and presumed to have been killed on 4 July 1943.

KENNETH NOEL DRUMMOND, Student, Flight Lieutenant, R.A.A.F. Died of illness while on active service in September 1944.

HAROLD PERCY DOWSETT, Student. Died in 1945 whilst a prisoner of war.

NEALE MCKISSOCK THEWLIS, Student, Flying Officer, R.A.A.F. Killed on active service, 29 January 1945.

JOHN COLIN REID MCCALLUM, Student. Died on service with the R.A.F. over Holland, February 1945.

FRANK WILLIAM PRICE, Student, Flight Lieutenant, R.A.F. Reported missing 12 February 1945 while on operational flying, now officially presumed killed.

MAURICE ROBERT CLARK, Student. Killed during air operations on 24 March 1945.

DAVID ROLAND LEE, Student. Died on active service in Egypt on 20 August 1945, while serving with the R.A.F.

ERIC AUSTIN BERGAN, Student. Died on 18 January 1946 as a result of an accident whilst a member of the Australian Defence Forces.