



A. D. THACKERAY (1910-1978)

IN MEMORIAM

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On 21 February, 1978, Andrew David Thackeray, former Director of the Radcliffe Observatory, Pretoria, was tragically killed in a car accident. He was returning from an observing run at the Sutherland station of the South African Astronomical Observatory. As he had served on the Editorial Board of *Astrophysics and Space Science* since its beginning, it is appropriate that a tribute should be paid to him in this place.

David Thackeray was born in 1910 and educated at Eton and at King's College, Cambridge. From 1934 to 1935 he held a Commonwealth Fund Fellowship in Astrophysics and worked at the Mount Wilson Observatory. There he was stimulated by the work of Ira S. Bowen on the effects of fluorescence in the spectra of planetary nebulae and he applied the same principles to provide the long sought explanation for peculiar relative intensities of some emission lines in T Tau and Mira variable stars.

On returning to Cambridge, he was appointed Chief Assistant at the Solar Physics Observatory, a position that he held until 1948. In June of that year, he was appointed Chief Assistant at the Radcliffe Observatory, Pretoria, under H. Knox-Shaw. Two years later, Knox-Shaw retired and Thackeray was promoted to Director. He remained in charge until prematurely retired by the closure of the observatory in 1974. He was then appointed Radcliffe Visiting Professor at the University of Cape Town, from which he retired at the end of 1977 intending to remain active in research.

Although primarily a spectroscopist, it was in stellar photometry that Thackeray first made an impact at the Radcliffe Observatory. His discovery, made jointly with A. J. Wesselink, of RR Lyrae variables in the Magellanic Clouds, was announced at the Rome meeting of the I.A.U. in 1952. This independently, and more accurately, established the doubled distance scale proposed by W. Baade at the same conference.

In astronomical spectroscopy, Thackeray's contributions were widespread. His many thousands of measurements of radial velocities established him as an authority and (in collaboration with Wesselink and M. W. Feast) contributed greatly to studies of the rotation of the Galaxy. However, it was in unraveling the complexities of stellar spectra that Thackeray was most interested and in which he made most of his contributions. His knowledge in this area was encyclopedic, and his perception and insight phenomenal. The studies that he made of the emission spectra of Eta Carinae and RR Telescopii are well known; it is fortunate that after retiring from the directorship of the Radcliffe Observatory he found time to prepare his large Memoir based on nearly 30 years on observation of the slow changes in RR Telescopii.

Thackeray's other work covers the range from comets to spectroscopic binaries and from variable stars to spectra of stars in the Magellanic Clouds. He also published numerous notes on interesting terrestrial phenomena. Not the least of his contributions

was the stimulation he gave, and the example he set, to young astronomers who visited the Radcliffe Observatory.

David Thackeray will be remembered not only for his science. His humility, sense of humour, love and practice of music and his happy family life all made everlasting impressions on all that knew him.

BRIAN WARNER