

OBITUARY

THE EARL OF CRAWFORD AND BALCARRES

WE regret to announce the death on 31st January of the Right Hon. the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, K.T., F.R.S., aged 65. He was a life member of the Society and served on the Council for some years.

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL F. C. TROLLOPE

A pioneer of military ballooning passed away in Lieut.-Col. Trollope, who died suddenly of pneumonia on 28th January, aged 55.

In 1877 he was gazetted to the Grenadier Guards. In 1884 he went to Bechuanaland (with Sir Charles Warren) with a balloon detachment, and was in close touch with aeronautics until his death. He was concerned with the construction of the first British military dirigible, assisted in founding the Aero Club, joined the Aeronautical Society in 1902 and served on the Council for several years, was a Vice-President of the Society and past-President of the Kite and Model Aeroplane Association, and was always ready to assist aeronautics by all means in his power. He rendered invaluable services to the Society and his loss will be keenly felt.

PERCIVAL SPENCER

Percival Spencer died on Friday, 11th April, aged 49. His connection with the Aeronautical Society goes back to the year 1897.

He was a man of sound judgment and cool in the presence of danger. His sense of proportion and of justice were admirable also.

When I first met him, he had returned from a tour of India, China, and Japan, where he had been astounding the inhabitants by jumping into space from a balloon from a height of many thousand feet. In those days this feat appeared nothing short of miraculous, to be classed with walking on water or passing unburnt through a fiery furnace, and it is small wonder that those who saw the sight of a man coming down from the sky with nothing but an umbrella without its frame to hold to, attributed to him divine powers. His coolness on several trying occasions brought him safely through many adventures, and in the spring of 1891 he arrived home in London and took charge of the balloon ascents at the Naval Exhibition at Chelsea. It was there that I first learnt to appreciate his many sterling qualities.

The first ascent I made with him stands out in my memory as illustrating much of his character. Mr. Patrick Y. Alexander was my fellow passenger on that occasion, and the day was rainy, with a rough westerly wind. The balloon, soaked with water and loaded with its three occupants, would lift but one spare bag of ballast in addition to a bag of valuable instruments. The clouds scudding to the eastward towards the mouth of the Thames were so low that the ground was lost sight of almost immediately on leaving the Exhibition. We passengers were raw novices then and Mr. Spencer had to judge the

risks entirely alone, and when the roar of London faded into the distance he opened the valve and we came into sight of the ground bowling along at the rate of thirty or forty miles an hour. The solitary bag was poured out to avoid striking the spire of Bexley Heath Church, we crossed over High Street, threw the grapnel in the back garden of a shop, thus lightening the car sufficiently to enable it to clear the wall and demolish a pigsty on the other side. The balloon then rolled round, taking off tiles and chimney pots from the adjoining houses, and ultimately became piled up on the muddy ground. When we rolled it up we found a man lying beneath the balloon overcome with the gas, and I immediately drew a knife in order to release him by cutting the net.

Mr. Spencer stopped me doing this, and drawing back the net he released the man through the doubles without cutting it. The man revived in a few minutes and was none the worse for his experience of being gassed.

This is a typical example of Mr. Spencer's appreciation of proportion. He might have thrown Mr. Alexander's bag of instruments away as ballast and so secured a more suitable landing place, and by cutting the net the man could have been released a few seconds earlier. But after-events proved that neither of these sacrifices were necessary, and his cool judgment secured safety without unnecessary loss.

Percival Spencer possessed great patience and could bear misfortune with fortitude. Unfortunately, his business methods were not in harmony with many of his old ballooning friends, but although this caused him some pecuniary loss, he bore no resentment on that account. It is therefore with the greatest sense of loss that his old ballooning friends and pupils heard of the death of the pioneer of modern ballooning.

GRIFFITH BREWER

