

## OBITUARY

### H. M. VERNON M.A., M.D.

WE REGRET TO record the death on February 11, 1951, of Dr. H. M. Vernon at the age of 80 years.

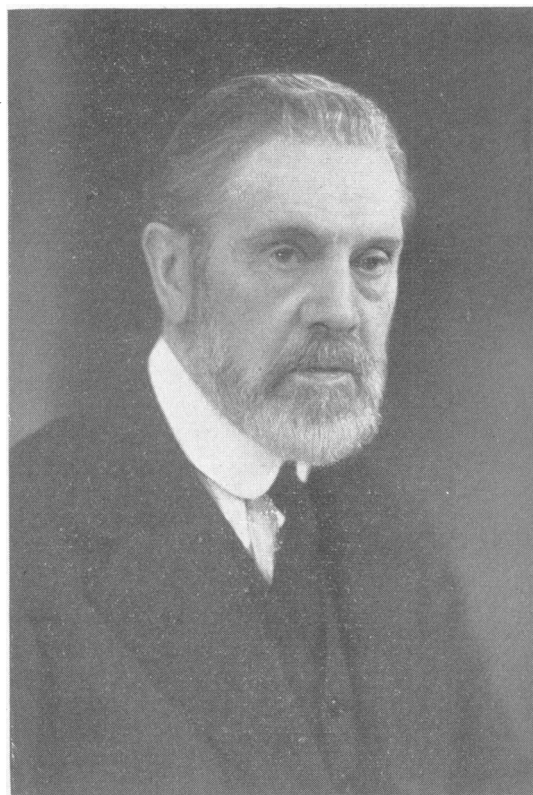
Born on October 3, 1870, Horace Middleton Vernon was educated at Dulwich College. Thence, in 1888, he proceeded to Merton College, Oxford, where for five years he studied chemistry and physiology. At that time he was interested in general biology, and after 1893 he spent much time doing biological research at Naples. Between spells at Naples he studied medicine at St. George's Hospital, and he qualified in 1896.

From 1898 to 1920 he was a Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, and he was also University Lecturer in chemical physiology.

Up to the first world war he continued with teaching and research in physiology against the quiet background of Oxford. His interest in industrial conditions was aroused in the summer of 1915 when he volunteered for work at the bench in a Birmingham factory. A vacation spent in gauging shells, with a nominal working week of  $74\frac{1}{2}$  hours and much overtime, introduced him to a field of experience of which he had previously been ignorant.

When, later in 1915, the Health of Munition Workers Committee was set up, mainly because of the toll that work for inordinately long hours was exacting in the form of reduced output and increased sickness, Vernon offered his services. He still had his teaching obligations, but, as they permitted, for the rest of the war he carried out his investigations in munition factories. His extensive studies of the effects of hours of work and arrangement of shifts on output, safety, and sickness yielded results of the utmost economic as well as scientific value. During these investigations he showed the important effects of temperature on accident liability. At this time he was also persuaded to study the influence of alcohol on working efficiency.

In 1918 the Industrial Fatigue (now Health) Research Board was created to continue the work of the wartime Committee, and Vernon was invited to take up a full-time appointment. At the cost of



relinquishing his Oxford appointments he did so, for he was much attracted by the opportunity for social service that industrial health research offered. Towards the end of his life he wrote that he had never regretted this decision.

His researches since the first world war will be familiar to many readers of this journal. In the early years he carried out researches on fatigue and efficiency in the tinsplate and iron and steel industries and in the potteries. Then, after studies of the effects of rest pauses and hours of work he turned his attention to studies of heating and ventilation and the effects of the thermal environment on efficiency and well-being. There was an interlude in which laboratory studies of static effort were made.

He retired from active work in 1932, but for several years thereafter he occupied himself in writing books on some of the subjects on which he had earlier done active research. He was keenly disappointed when in 1940, in the second world war, the lessons of the earlier war concerning the evils of excessive hours of work were almost ignored, and he did what lay in his power to draw attention to the mistake. He produced a book on

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the health of munition workers, and wrote several articles for periodicals.

Vernon was one of the outstanding pioneers in industrial medicine. During the 17 years or so for which he was engaged in active research he made many major contributions to our knowledge of man's reactions to his hours and conditions of

work which will be of lasting value. His earlier papers, published as memoranda of the Health of Munition Workers Committee or as reports of the Industrial Fatigue Research Board, contain masses of data from which students in future years will profit.

THOMAS BEDFORD



## H. M. Vernon, M.A., M.D

Thomas Bedford

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