

OBITUARY NOTICE.

MARGARET LE PLA

1885—1953.

By the death of Margaret Le Pla the Chemical Society has been deprived of the services of a loyal and valued member of its staff; friends have lost a cheery companion; and the science of chemistry has lost an expert indexer of chemical literature. She had been at work until the end of 1952, and was in excellent spirits, although expecting an operation for which she had been receiving preliminary treatment. The operation was most successful, and she insisted on having some indexing material nearby to occupy her time during her recovery. All appeared to be going well, and she was bright and cheerful and talking of return to work. On the morning of January 26th, however, she collapsed, and passed away within a few hours.

Margaret Le Pla was born in Hampstead, on April 17th, 1885, her father, the Rev. Henry Le Pla, being at the time the Minister of Gospel Oak Congregational Church, a post which he held for thirty years.

Her early education was gained at South Hampstead High School; in 1902 she went to Bedford College for Women where she studied chemistry. In 1906 she took her B.Sc. General Degree and was soon appointed a demonstrator. Here she became associated with J. F. Spencer who was also a demonstrator. In collaboration with him she published two papers: "Qualitative separation of thallium from silver" (*J.*, 1908, **93**, 858) and "Eine Elektrode zur Messung der Konzentration der CO_3^{--} -Ionen und der Zustand des Silbercarbonats in Lösung" (*Z. anorg. Chem.*, 1909, **65**, 10). One who was a student at Bedford College at that time states that Margaret Le Pla was most generous with her help and was well liked, but, when it was deserved, she did not hesitate to express, with vigour, her unfavourable opinion of the work and behaviour of the students.

Her association with the Chemical Society began in 1910, when J. C. Cain, who was then Editor of its *Journal*, appointed her as his assistant to index the *Journal*, the *Proceedings*, and the *Annual Reports*. During the remainder of Dr. Cain's life she also prepared indexes for other work in which he was interested. When he died in 1921 her position was placed on a more regular footing by the Chemical Society's appointing her as Indexer. As the editing of the *Journal* was at that time done at the Editor's home, Miss Le Pla occupied a room adjoining the Reading Room of the Chemical Society's Library. In 1919 the Library hours were extended to eleven hours daily, and the Librarian was permitted to employ her in the Library on one evening weekly and also on certain Saturday afternoons. Her talents were employed here in keeping the subject catalogue up to date and she was well fitted to ensure that the subject headings used were similar to those used in the *Journal Index*. This was an interest which she retained for the rest of her life and gave her great pleasure. She enjoyed meeting the readers, by whom she was well liked, and her assistance was always willingly given when they approached her for help in obtaining information.

When the Fellowship of the Chemical Society was extended to women, Margaret Le Pla was an early applicant, being elected a Fellow on May 5th, 1921, and she became a Life Fellow.

With the formation of the Bureau of Chemical Abstracts in 1924, she became Indexer to its Abstracts and, when the Bureau had obtained premises large enough to house all its staff, she moved from Burlington House, although she could still be found there quite frequently working on the *Journal index* or doing duty in the Library. A few years ago she retired from the service of the Bureau, but retained her post as Indexer of the Chemical Society's publications, and also, after the death of J. N. Goldsmith, undertook the indexing of Thorpe's "Chemical Dictionary." From time to time throughout her career, authors took advantage of her skill to ensure that a book they published had an adequate index.

Her vigorous mind, however, was not content to be only partly employed, and she was delighted when she was invited to re-organize the Research Library of Messrs. C. C. Wakefield & Co. This gave such satisfaction that she was asked to undertake the care of this Library and two or three days weekly were spent on this task, in which she took considerable pleasure.

She was interested in music, and particularly fond of opera. She had a good contralto voice, and studied singing with the late Francis Barrett, then musical critic of the "Morning Post" and through him she heard much of the best of opera and concerts. About 1910 she became a regular member of the Old Vic Opera Company, with whom she sang through the

difficult years, 1914—18, and for some years afterwards, until the increasing demands made on her by her work compelled her to give it up. She used also to arrange amateur concerts, and during World War I she took her party to sing to the sick and wounded.

On her father's retirement, she moved with him to Acton, and when a bomb caused severe damage to the house in 1943 they moved to her brother's home at Ealing, where she spent the rest of her life.

In her later years she was an enthusiastic member of the Women Chemists' Dining Club where she made some good friends, and participation in its functions was one of her greatest pleasures.

Despite the scarcity of her leisure in recent years she greatly enjoyed life; her kindly, generous nature won her many friends who greatly regret her passing but feel that the suddenness with which it came accorded with her wishes, as she never relished the idea of retiring from work.

A. E. CUMMINS.
