

NAPIER'S DESCRIPTIO AND CONSTRUCTIO.

John Napier and the Invention of Logarithms, 1614. A lecture by E. W. HOBSON. Cambridge, University Press, 1914. 48 pp. Cloth, price 1s. 6d.

Napier and the Invention of Logarithms. By G. A. GIBSON. Glasgow, 1914.* 24 pp. Paper.

SOME reference has been already made in this BULLETIN† to the celebration in 1914, under the auspices of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, of the tercentenary of one of the greatest events in the history of science, namely the publication of John Napier's *Mirifici Logarithmorum Canonis Descriptio*. According to Professor Hobson this work "embodies one of the very greatest scientific discoveries that the world has seen." J. W. L. Glaisher's judgment, which seems to be also that of Professor Gibson (page 13), is, that "with the exception of the *Principia* of Newton, there is no mathematical work published in the country which has produced such important consequences, or to which so much interest attaches as to Napier's *Descriptio*."‡

Nor was marked enthusiasm with regard to this work lacking among Napier's contemporaries of eminence. This was especially true of Kepler and Henry Briggs (1556-1630), professor of mathematics in London. In his *Ephemeris* for 1620 Kepler published as the dedication a letter addressed to Napier, congratulating him warmly on his invention and on the benefit he had conferred upon astronomy. Kepler explains how he verified the canon and found no essential errors in it, beyond a few inaccuracies near the beginning of the quadrant. The letter was written July 28, 1619, about two years after Napier's death, of which Kepler had not heard.

And as to Briggs, he wrote thus to Archbishop Ussher in the year 1615:§ "Napper, lord of Markinston, hath set my

* This pamphlet is a reprint, with separate title-page, of an article in the *Proceedings of the Royal Philosophical Society in Glasgow*. This article is also reprinted in the very interesting and useful volume: *Modern Instruments and Methods of Calculation. A Handbook of the Napier Tercentenary Exhibition*, edited by E. M. Horsburgh, London [1914], pp. 1-16. For a review of this work by Professor D. E. Smith, see *Science*, n. s., vol. 42, July 23, 1915, pp. 128-129.

† Vol. 21, Dec., 1914, pp. 123-127.

‡ Article "Logarithms" in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11th edition, 1911.

§ Ussher's *Letters*, 1686, p. 36.