

in the mind of the student and that of the teacher 'the idea of the oneness of knowledge'

and to emphasize that 'scholarly work is service to civilization'.

Sir Richard Gregory, Bt., F.R.S.

THE tidings that Sir Richard Gregory, editor of *Nature*, has been elected a fellow of the Royal Society will have given wide-spread satisfaction among those who enjoyed the privilege of meeting him and Lady Gregory during their visit to this country in January and February of the current year.

Among the statutes of the Royal Society is one, seldom brought into operation, enabling election of a personage who, in the opinion of the Council, has rendered conspicuous service to the cause of science, or whose election is deemed to bring signal benefit to the Society. It has been customary to elect successive Prime Ministers under this statute, but we do not recall its application to other persons of eminence. Thus a special interest attaches to the election of Sir Richard Gregory, whose service to the cause of science is indeed conspicuous. During an association with *Nature* extending

over forty years, and particularly under his long continued editorship, the publication has become unique. Its wealth of information in all branches of science, the courageous and broad-minded survey of such current affairs as relate to the progress of science, the cultivated and informative reviews of books, and the diverse correspondence columns, are features now so familiar to the scientific world that we can appreciate them at their true value only by considering for a moment the blank in our lives that would ensue were *Nature* to vanish.

On behalf of our readers we offer Sir Richard Gregory the warmest congratulations of *Current Science*. Since his return to England Sir Richard has been gravely ill, but the mail announcing his new distinction announces also his convalescence, and the hope that his health may be soon restored to its original vigour will be universal.

Joseph Priestley, 1733-1804.

THE bicentenary of Priestley's birth on 13th March, 1733, received special recognition by the Chemical Society at its meeting on 6th April, 1933, when addresses on his life and work were delivered by Professor A. N. Meldrum, Sir Philip Hartog and Sir Harold Hartley. These emphasized his remarkable personality, his nobility of character and the novel contribution to chemical practice arising from his facility in handling gases.

The life of Priestley merits attentive study by all students of science, old and young. He was a genuine philosopher inasmuch as he loved wisdom in all the branches then accessible, and his command of languages was extraordinary. His piety and rectitude were so pronounced and so commingled with curiosity regarding natural phenomena that they invited the persecution of an intolerant age; and it is one of life's ironies that he narrowly escaped destruction on account of his revolutionary sympathies when Lavoisier was beheaded for his counter-revolutionary proclivities.

Probably the only years of peace he knew were the concluding decade of his life, spent with his family in Pennsylvania.

Scientific experiments were for him a hobby early adopted and faithfully pursued. His admission that he was "not a practical chemist" in part explains his outstanding success, because, as we are reminded by Dr. Meldrum, he declared that "if I had been accustomed to the usual chemical processes, I should not so easily have thought of any other; and without new modes of operation I should hardly have discovered anything new". His work on gases began in 1767, but he was nearly forty before the experiments with air, and the exact date of his discovering oxygen remains obscure: in fact, the careful survey of correspondence submitted by Sir Philip Hartog to *Nature* (1st July, 1933, p. 25) indicates "before the month of November, 1771" as being probable, the experiments of 1st August, 1774, in Wiltshire and of 1st March 1775, in London, being confirmatory and extensory.