OBITUARIES

Dr. C. H. Merz

OUR deepest sympathy goes out to Mrs. Merz on the tragic death of her husband, Dr. C. H. Merz, and their son and daughter who were victims of recent enemy action; a maid and chauffeur, who had been their devoted servants and loyal friends, died also in this attack.

Charles Hesterman Merz was born at Gateshead-on-Tyne in 1874. He was the son of the late Dr. J. Theodore Merz, the learned author of the "History of European Thought in the Nineteenth Century". His mother was Alice Mary, daughter of Mr. Edward Richardson, of Newcastle-on-Tyne, who belonged to a well-known Quaker family. He was educated at Bootham, York, and received his technical training at Armstrong College. Electric power and railway traction schemes all over the world bear witness to his work. In 1898, after training and experience at Newcastle, Lincoln, London, in Ireland and other places, Merz acted as engineer for the promotion of a Bill for supplying electric power to works and shipyards on Tyneside. This was the first of the 'power bills'. Afterwards he acted as engineer for the first company to use three-phase distribution in England at the then high pressure of 6,000 volts. In 1900 the company amalgamated with the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Electric Supply Company, and the combined undertaking (now the North Eastern Electric Supply Co., Ltd.) expanded during the succeeding eight years, until it covered Northumberland and Durham and parts of Yorkshire. This involved the first large-scale use of 20,000-volt underground cables, and the first extensive use of high-voltage overhead lines in Great Britain. Neptune Bank Power Station, which Merz designed, was commissioned in 1900, and was the first to use large Parsons turbo-alternators. About this time Merz took into partnership William McLellan, who had been associated with him in all his work at Tyneside; this partnership continued until McLellan's death in 1934.

In 1907 Merz visited Australia to advise the Victorian Government on the introduction of electric traction. He laid down the basis of the legislation and organization adopted for the control of the power industry in Victoria. In 1909 he visited the Argentine and reported on the adoption of electric traction in the neighbourhood of Buenos Aires. In 1913 he visited India on the invitation of the Government of Bombay and reported on the electrification of the suburban railways. He was retained in an advisory capacity by the Commonwealth Edison Co. of Chicago, and was responsible for large railway electrification schemes, including the conversion of the South African railways and the Great Indian Peninsular Railway. He compiled the technical report for the Weir Committee which investigated the question of main line electrification in Great Britain.

During the War of 1914–18, Dr. Merz was director of Experiment and Research to the Admiralty, and within the same period served on the Haldane and Williamson Committees, which recommended the appointment of the Electricity Commissioners. In 1925 Merz put before these Commissioners a memorandum which resulted in the appointment of the Weir Committee, the report of which led to the Act of 1926 setting up the Central Electricity Board and to the construction of the Grid. At Sir Andrew Duncan's request, Dr. Merz was to have placed gratuitously his great and varied experience at the service of the Ministry of Supply from October 28 of this year.

In 1913, Merz married Stella A. P. Byrne, daughter of Mr. Edmund de Satur, of Dublin, and had one son and one daughter. He was a vice-president of the Institution of Electrical Engineers during 1912–15, and was awarded the Faraday Medal in 1931. In 1932 he received an honorary D.Sc. from the University of Durham. He was a member of the Institution of Civil Engineers and various other technical societies and was also a fellow of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers. All who knew him feel that one of Britain's great men has been taken from us, and those who knew him best feel it most.

ALEXANDER RUSSELL.

Dr. M. Mathisson

THE death of Dr. Myron Mathisson on September 13 at the early age of forty-three has cut short an interesting line of research. Mathisson had been engaged for many years in studying the general dynamical laws governing the motion of a particle, with possibly a spin or a moment, in a gravitational or electromagnetic field, and had developed a powerful method of his own for passing from field equations to particle equations. The subject is of particular interest at the present time, as it has now become clear that quantum mechanics cannot solve the difficulties that arise in connexion with the interaction of point particles with fields, and a deeper classical analysis of the problem is needed. It is much to be regretted that Mathisson's death has occurred before the relations between his method and those of other workers on the subject have been completely elucidated.

Mathisson carried out his work at the Universities of Warsaw and Kazan and at an institute which he started in Cracow, and, since the spring of 1939, at Cambridge.

P. A. M. DIRAC.

WE regret to announce the following deaths:

The Rev. W. G. Ivens, an authority on Melanesian languages.

Sir Herbert Wright, treasurer of the Imperial College of Science and Technology, an authority on tropical agriculture, especially rubber, on October 28, aged sixty-six.