PROF. W. ESSON, F.R.S.

IN William Esson, Savilian professor of geometry since 1897, Oxford loses one who has done much for it. A Scot whose family came South in his boyhood, there was the air of a viking about him, and few who looked upon his magnificent beard during most of the sixty-one years of his university life were not conscious of a radiation of vigour as from the North. Born at Dundee in 1838, he was educated first at Inverness, and then at Cheltenham Grammar School. In 1855 he became Bible clerk of St. John's College, Oxford. Here he obtained two second classes (1856, 1858) in classics, and in mathematics carried all before him, gaining first classes in 1856 and 1859, and the junior and senior mathematical scholarships in 1857 and 1860. In 1860 he became Fellow of Merton and mathematical tutor. He was also tutor or lecturer for various periods at Magdalen, Corpus, Worcester, and Hertford. Enormous as have been his services to Merton and to the university as financier and man of business, and real as have been his achievements in geometrical and mathematico-chemical investigation, the writer and others put first his leadership in college mathematical teaching. In the 'sixties and 'seventies there were two classes of mathematical students in Oxford—those who blessed the Providence which had put them under him, and those who envied the others.

When Prof. Sylvester's health began to fail in 1894 Esson became deputy Savilian professor of geometry, and after three years he succeeded Sylvester in the chair. He lectured most on the comparison of synthetic and analytic methods in geometry. With such subjects his not very numerous publications in pure mathematics have been concerned. They are above all things incisive. Probably he was prouder of his only semi-mathematical work on chemical—or, as he was always very careful to say, *chymical*—change. This was done largely in concert with Mr. A. G. Vernon Harcourt, and expounded in the Philosophical Transactions for 1864, 1866, and 1895. The work secured him the Fellowship of the Royal Society as early as 1869. Among the little jokes in which he delighted was one that in 1897 the Savilian professorship of *geometry* passed from a poet to a *chymist*.

Though as professor he became Fellow of New College, he was bursar of Merton till he died. For very many years he served the university as a curator of the university chest; and here his loss will be keenly felt. His great administrative powers were used for the good of the university in matters directly associated with university studies, and not in finance only. For about fifteen years, ending in 1913, he was chairman of the Board of the Faculty of Natural Science. He was a visitor (and secretary) of the university observatory.

Until a few months ago his natural force seemed in no wise abated. But his last surviving son went down with H.M.S. *Russell*, and his strength then began to fail.

PROF. S. B. MCLAREN.

LIEUT. S. B. McLAREN, professor of mathematics in University College, Reading, met his death on August 14 on the Western front, where he was serving with a signalling company of the Royal Engineers.

McLaren was of Scottish parentage. A son of the late Rev. W. D. McLaren, of Melbourne, he was born in Japan, but most of his early life was spent in Australia. After a distinguished career at the University of Melbourne, he proceeded to Trinity College, Cambridge, of which he became a major scholar. He was third wrangler in 1899, gained a first class in Part II. of the Mathematical Tripos in 1900 and the Isaac Newton studentship in 1901. He continued in residence at Cambridge until 1903, when he accepted a position at Bristol University College, whence in 1906 he proceeded to Birmingham University as assistant-lecturer in mathematics. Shortly before his appointment to the professorship of mathematics in University College, Reading, he had shared with Prof. Nicholson the Adams prize at Cambridge.

The outbreak of war found McLaren in Australia with the British Association, acting as a secretary of Section A, and back with his parents and among his earlier friends. During the return voyage he was fired with an enthusiasm to offer his services to his country, and he employed his time on board in learning signalling, and on arrival joined the signalling company organised by a colleague, Major Pearson, of University College, Reading. He saw several months of active service before receiving the wound which only a few days later proved fatal. He was fearless and intrepid on the field, and carried out his duties tirelessly and with a disregard for his personal safety which was at once an inspiration to his men and the concern of his brother officers.

McLaren's published work, which was characterised by originality and a fine boldness of conception, related particularly to the mathematical treatment of the phenomena of radiation and of gravity. Shortly before he gave up his academic work he was engaged in writing upon the magneton, and he considered that he had obtained results of value. But his interest in mathematical physics is not adequately gauged by his published work. He was a diligent worker and thinker, contrary, perhaps, to the impression of the casual acquaintance, and he sought strenuously for a basis upon which to build. His interest in philosophy was part and parcel of his regard for the fundamental things. All who have been associated with him will regret the cutting short of a promising career and the loss of a simple, sincere, and genial friend. W. G. D.

NOTES.

THE terms of reference, and the constitution, of the two committees appointed by the Prime Minister to inquire into the position of science and modern languages respectively in the system of education in Great Britain have now been announced. The membership of the committees suggests that the Govern-