

### MEMORIAL TO THE LATE SIR WILLIAM RAMSAY.

ON Tuesday, October 31, a public meeting was held at University College, London, to consider the steps to be taken to raise a memorial to the late Sir William Ramsay. The assembly included the Ministers of Belgium, Roumania, Serbia, Chile, China, a representative of the American Embassy, and various officials and members of scientific and academic bodies, many of whom took part in the proceedings.

The Rt. Hon. Lord Rayleigh presided, and, in the course of his introductory speech, made brief references to his work with Sir William Ramsay. We heard, he said, a great deal of the research which was needed in connection with industry, but there seemed to be no thought of the difficulty of getting the right kind of people to do it. Among every six people who were able to understand, form intelligible opinions, and explain scientific matters, there was probably not one who had the gift of scientific initiative. This Sir William Ramsay had to an extraordinary degree. Lord Rayleigh paid a tribute to his thoroughness of method and his indifference to criticism which did not rest on cogent argument. Ramsay's discovery of helium he described as one of the most romantic pages of science, and his further discovery that helium appeared during the breakdown of radium was most important. Sir William's gifts were not only scientific; he was a master of several languages, and this faculty placed him in touch with the scientific genius of the world; combined with his extraordinary experimental skill and rapidity, it went a long way to explain his success. In conclusion, Lord Rayleigh spoke of Sir William's unusual power of influencing people, as the result of which many things had been done since the war began that but for him would not have been done at all.

The following was the main resolution of the meeting:—"That steps be taken to raise a substantial fund as a memorial to Prof. Sir William Ramsay, K.C.B., F.R.S., such fund to be utilised for the purposes of promoting chemical teaching and research under a scheme to be approved hereafter by the subscribers."

The resolution was moved by the Rt. Hon. J. A. Pease, Postmaster-General, formerly President of the Board of Education. He laid stress on the importance of discoveries such as those of Sir William Ramsay, because they widened the horizon of all educated people, irrespective of country or of race; they enforced an essential unity of knowledge among civilised people, just as we were struggling for a similar unity of standard in conduct among the civilised States. One of the lessons of the war has been that we have learnt as a State to respect and be guided by scientific method and scientific men to a degree which nothing but a great necessity could have achieved. The work of Ramsay illustrates not only the necessary co-operation of sciences, but the necessary co-operation of nations. Was it therefore too much to ask that his memorial should be an international as well as a national one? A magnificent response has been made to an appeal for funds for the memorial to a great figure in the field of war, Lord Kitchener; cannot a similar response be made to an appeal for the memorial to a great figure in the field of science? To a people who could raise five millions a day for the purposes of the war, surely it is possible to raise this memorial to show their belief in Ramsay's work and what it stood for? The form in which that belief shall be clothed can be determined later.

The President of the Royal Society (Sir Joseph J. Thomson), in seconding the resolution, dwelt on the more scientific aspect and importance of Ramsay's work and influence.

His Excellency the Belgian Minister (a vice-president

of the University of Brussels) paid a graceful tribute to the memory of Ramsay, recalling a visit he paid to Brussels and the part he played in connection with the foundation by Solvay of the Institut International de Chimie; Ramsay did not merely belong to his own country; he belonged to humanity. Mr. W. H. Buckler, representing the American Ambassador, recorded the veneration in which Ramsay and his work were held in the United States.

In moving "That this meeting resolve itself into a General Committee for the purpose of raising the fund for the memorial to Prof. Sir William Ramsay," Sir Hugh Bell, Bart., referred to a suggestion made to him by Ramsay some time ago as to the possibility of distilling small seams of coal *in situ*. Probably no person other than Ramsay would have been able to persuade him that the experiment was at all possible, but, like others, he fell under the glamour of an entrancing personality, and arrangements were made for trying the experiment under extremely favourable conditions. These were nearly complete on the outbreak of war; the place was ready, and, if there were anyone found bold enough to pursue Sir William's suggestion, he would gladly put the preparations at the disposal of such person.

Prof. J. Norman Collie, the chairman of Convocation of the University of London and vice-chairman of the University College Committee (Sir Edward Busk),\* the president of the Chemical Society (Dr. Alexander Scott), Sir William A. Tilden, Dr. Morris Travers, Sir Joseph Larmor, and Prof. E. C. C. Baly also spoke.

The following were appointed an Executive Committee to make such arrangements as they deem desirable for furthering the memorial:—The Rt. Hon. Lord Rayleigh, the Rt. Hon. Lord Parmoor, Sir Hugh Bell, Bart., the Rt. Hon. Sir John Brunner, Bart., Sir Ralph C. Forster, Bart., Sir Charles Bedford, Sir G. T. Beilby, Sir James Dobbie, Sir Robert Hadfield, Sir Alexander Kennedy, Sir William Tilden, the President of the Royal Society, the President of the Chemical Society, the President of the British Science Guild, the President of the Society of Chemical Industry, Prof. Baly, Mr. Chaston Chapman, Prof. J. Norman Collie (hon. treasurer), Prof. F. G. Donnan, Mr. Alex. Duckham, Dr. T. Gregory Foster, Prof. F. Francis, Mr. Gathorne-Young, Mr. J. Gretton, Dr. R. Messel, Dr. Robert Mond, Dr. H. F. Parshall, Dr. Walter Seton, Dr. Samuel Smiles (hon. secretary), Lieut.-Col. Smithells, Dr. Morris Travers, and Prof. James Walker.

The proceedings terminated with a vote of thanks to Lord Rayleigh for presiding, moved by the Vice-Chancellor of the University of London (Sir Alfred Pearce Gould, K.C.V.O.), and seconded by Prof. F. G. Donnan, Sir William Ramsay's successor in the chair of general chemistry at University College, London.

After the meeting, Prof. J. Norman Collie delivered a memorial lecture on "The Scientific Work of Sir William Ramsay."

### THE SWISS SOCIETY OF NATURAL SCIENCES.

THE yearly meeting of the Société Helvétique des Sciences Naturelles was held in August at Schuls-Tarasp, in the Engadine. The chief object was an excursion into the National Park of Switzerland, which, though officially opened a year or two ago, had not yet been visited by the great society which has been primarily interested in its foundation.

We would recall to our readers the history of this institution. A large portion of the country in a mountainous region has been obtained from the communes-