OBITUARIES

Sir David Rivett, K.C.M.G., F.R.S.

WITH the death of Sir (Albert Cherbury) David Rivett in Sydney on April 1, there passed from the Australian scene a man who had contributed perhaps more than any other to the present healthy state of Australian science. Entrusted as Chief Executive Officer in 1927 with the management of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Rivett and his colleagues contrived, in a country woefully weak in research, to create an atmosphere in which it could flourish.

The men they appointed and supported wholeheartedly did much to inspire the confidence of the people of Australia in the economic value of research. Rivett saw clearly from the outset that his scientists had to be free to tackle their problems on as fundamental a basis as was necessary for their solution. So the men who solved some of the outstanding problems of the farmer and the pastoralist also contributed to the development of science. Nowadays, basic research is a recognized prerogative of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, which continues to be known almost as well overseas through its contributions to science as it is within Australia for its long run of outstanding practical successes. To Rivett, first and foremost, should go the credit for this.

Rivett, while chairman of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research during 1946-49, saw more clearly, and at an earlier date than most scientific leaders throughout the world, the troubles that come to a scientific research body from secrecy. He was persecuted by minor politicians for his belief that security and secrecy are not synonymous terms. But he never ceased to fight for the principle that scientific research needs freedom, and I believe that he thereby saved his beloved Council for Scientific and Industrial Research from lethal restrictive controls.

What sort of background produced this man for whom Australia had so great a need? David Rivett was born in Tasmania in 1885, the son of a Congregationalist minister of large family and slender means. His secondary and tertiary education, mainly in the State of Victoria, had to be self-supporting. It culminated in a Rhodes scholarship which took him to Oxford for work under Sidgwick. In Stockholm, with Arrhenius, he became recognized as a physical chemist of great talent; his own notable contributions were mainly in phase rule studies and heterogeneous equilibria.

After munitions work in England he returned as a lecturer to the University of Melbourne. There he rejoined Sir David Orme Masson, who from their first meeting had had a boundless admiration for his abilities. It was inevitable that when Orme Masson resigned in 1924 Rivett should be invited to succeed his mentor. He filled the chair with distinction, but after only three years the call came to wider responsibilities with the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research; this he accepted.

Rivett was acknowledged a leader wherever he went. He was general president of the Royal Australian Chemical Institute in 1940 and 1949, president

of the Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science 1937-39, and president of the Society of Chemical Industry of Victoria in 1930 and 1931. A foundation member of the Australian Academy of Science, he was one of its first vice-presidents. The Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy made him an honorary member in December 1943 for his services to the mining industry of Australia.

Well known abroad, he was president of the Society of Chemical Industry of London in 1949, and was a Fellow of the Royal Society from 1941. He was created K.C.M.G. in 1935, and held the honorary degrees of D.Sc.(Oxon.), D.Sc.(Manchester), and LL.D.(Australian National University).

Despite all his honours and distinctions, Rivett's greatest love was to visit one of his laboratories and to hear at first hand what the young research officers were doing. He was proud of the staff he had gathered, trusted its scientific ability implicitly, and fought for its freedom. No believer in the planning of science, he had the acumen to sense and oppose any impending restraint before it was openly formulated. Once one had gained his confidence he was a magnificent friend and backer; he believed in delegating responsibility and with it any credit that accrued, but in times of adversity he it was who wished to shoulder the blame.

Rivett married, in 1911, Stella Deakin, the daughter of a distinguished Australian statesman. She and their two sons survive him.

His friends throughout the world will deeply mourn his death. Their final thought of David Rivett will be of a man who gave magnificent service to the joint causes of science and humanity.

I. W. WARK

Prof. K. Koshtoyants

PROF. KACHATUR KOSHTOYANTS, whose death occurred on April 2, was a well-known figure among the physiologists of Moscow, the director of an active research institute and a stimulating and popular teacher in the University. Kachatur Sergeyevitch Koshtoyants graduated in medicine in 1926, but his interests always lay in the field of comparative physiology, particularly that of the nervous system. During 1930-31 he had been to Holland to work in Prof. Jordan's laboratory, and five years later he was made head of the Department of Evolutionary Physiology in the Institute of Animal Morphology of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow. From 1943 onwards he was also professor of animal physiology in the University of Moscow. His more recent research dealt with neuro-muscular transmission from a comparative biochemical point of view, and he was the author of a comprehensive treatise on comparative physiology as well as of several monographs on the history of physiology in Russia. Physiologists who have visited his laboratory in Moscow will recall his kind hospitality as well as the range of his research interests, and will wish to express their sympathy to his colleagues in the University and the Academy.

ADRIAN