

## OBITUARIES

## Dr. D. D. Pratt, C.B.E.

ALL who at different stages of his scientific career knew Dr. D. D. Pratt will learn with regret of his death on May 5. As recently as 1959 he retired from the post of director of the National Chemical Laboratory after 34 years spent in the scientific service of the State.

David Doig Pratt, born at Anstruther in Fife in 1894, was educated at Waid Academy and the University of St. Andrews, which he entered in 1912. However, he joined the Army when war broke out in 1914, received a commission and served with the Highland Light Infantry. Wounded on the Somme, he was mentioned in dispatches and promoted to captain. After the First World War he returned to St. Andrews, graduated M.A., B.Sc. with honours in chemistry in 1921 and was awarded a Carnegie Scholarship. This enabled him to start research under Prof. (now Sir Robert) Robinson. He took his Ph.D., became a Carnegie Fellow and continued his work at the University of Manchester, still in association with Prof. Robinson. Pratt was one of the first of many in Robinson's school who found the naturally occurring flower pigments a rewarding study.

In 1925 Dr. Pratt made the move which was to determine the course of his future career. The Department of Scientific and Industrial Research was on the point of setting up at Teddington in a very small way a laboratory to be known as the Chemical Research Laboratory. The sponsors of this scheme were Sir Richard Threlfall and H. T. (later Sir Henry) Tizard; Prof. G. T. (later Sir Gilbert) Morgan was persuaded to take charge of what was avowedly an experiment. Pratt accepted a post in the unit when its staff numbered less than a dozen and was Morgan's stoutest supporter in the task of building the prestige of the laboratory and establishing its role as a national institution. In 1958 the embryo of 1925 officially became the National Chemical Laboratory with a staff of more than 200. Pratt had been its director for some seven years, and as officer-in-charge or superintendent he had been its effective head at other difficult periods during and after the Second World War when the post of director had been vacant.

The project which Morgan assigned to Pratt was an investigation of coal tars and liquors, very different in character from the synthetic organic chemistry in which he had made his mark, but equally one which gave scope to his ability as a chemist. Backed by Morgan and aided by a small group which he inspired with his own enthusiasm, Pratt set about nothing less than the complete revivification of coal tar research in Britain. Attention was first directed to tars from the low-temperature carbonization of coal. This method of making smokeless solid fuel was then undergoing development, and it was clear that no process could succeed unless the by-product tars could find profitable application. The extension of precise knowledge in regard to the constitution of these new materials must proceed *pari passu* with utilitarian aims. Aware of the very reactive nature of these tars, Pratt systematized the use of extraction by solvents and vacuum distillation in their

rational analysis. But this was no more than a beginning.

The Teddington work, new in pattern, caught the attention of influential leaders in the industry and created a new climate of opinion as to what might be achieved by research well directed. When in 1934 the Association of Tar Distillers gave financial support to the Laboratory for work on one of the industry's most troublesome problems—the disastrously rapid corrosion of tar stills caused by certain types of tar—it had taken the first step on what turned out to be a long road. The industry formed its own Research Association in 1948, and in 1950 the ministerial head of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (Sir John Anderson), in the presence of its secretary (Sir Ben Lockspeiser), gave the blessing of the Department to the newly established Coal Tar Research Station at Gomersal. Pratt witnessed with amused satisfaction the lighting of a symbolical Bunsen burner by Sir John, although for him the ceremony was valedictory rather than inaugural.

After 1938 Pratt was fully engaged in the administration of the Laboratory's total research effort. His concern now was to maintain an environment in which good scientific work could be done by his colleagues.

One quality which fitted him for the responsibilities he held so long Pratt possessed in full measure. He had an understanding of human nature and was on easy terms with all members of his staff regardless of status or rank. He was shrewd in judging issues in which policy and personalities were mixed with matters purely scientific.

Dr. Pratt shared most of the simple pleasures of the ordinary man. He had an interest in every form of sport; he particularly liked to be among the crowd at a football match. He grew flowers in his garden; regularly sought relaxation at a variety theatre or cinema; and he could always be persuaded to attend a staff social and play cards, billiards or snooker, or join in a dance.

The effort to make the Laboratory the national institution he thought it should become was steadily pursued, and the distinctions bestowed on Dr. Pratt, C.B.E. and an honorary LL.D. of the University of St. Andrews, were recognition of the merit of his service to the Department and his success in securing for the Laboratory the esteem of the scientific world.

E. A. COULSON

## Dr. G. I. Patel

DR. GOVINDBHAI ISHWERBHAI PATEL, who died on March 10, was born at Savli, District Baroda of the Gujarat State, on June 21, 1921. He was the second son of the late Ishwerbhai Kesurbhai Patel, an industrious farmer, having 5,000 acres of land under cultivation, who took great interest in the proper education of his sons. Young Govinddas, as he was addressed by his kinsmen, was different from the rest of his brothers and cousins, studying at Baroda. During his school days at Baroda, he showed average progress, but his zeal for knowledge