News and Views

Pilgrim Trust Lecture

THE first Pilgrim Trust Lecture was delivered on December 8 before the Royal Society, meeting in the historic lecture theatre of the Royal Institution, by Dr. Irving Langmuir, of the Research Laboratories of the General Electric Company, Schenectady, N.Y. A brief account of the substance of the lecture appears on p. 1085. It will be recalled that the announcement of the institution of this lecture was made by Sir William Bragg in his presidential address last year to the Royal Society. The scheme for the lectures was drawn up by the Royal Society and the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, and the Pilgrim Trust very generously agreed to provide an honorarium of 250 guineas a year for six years. The lectures are to be delivered in alternate years in London and Washington by an American and a British man of science respectively. Sir William Bragg suggested, when referring to the lectures, that they might be used to transmit new ideas which have begun to bear useful fruit and give promise of wide expansion, rather than to record past achievements, and Dr. Langmuir's choice of subject and his method of handling it must have been gratifying to Sir William. Dr. Langmuir himself must be congratulated on giving a most inspiring lecture on a difficult subject, and on the fact that he had the courage to begin with the very elementary facts. Thus the first link in another chain binding together the peoples of Great Britain and the United States has been well forged, and it should not be impossible to find means to make the lecture a permanent institution. Such international contacts are of vital importance in these days of strife and world unrest, and every effort should be made to promote active co-operation between the scientific workers of different countries. It is much to be hoped that the approach made by Dr. Bosch, president of the Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft, to the Royal Society, which was referred to by Sir William Bragg in his presidential address on November 30 last, may be the beginning of yet another of these international bonds.

Prof. J. W. Cobb, C.B.E.

PROF. J. W. COBB retired recently from the Livesey professorship of coal gas and fuel industries in the University of Leeds—a chair which he had held since 1912, shortly after its foundation, when it was the only university chair in fuel technology in Great Britain. In response to a circular of appeal, a sum of about £850 has been contributed to signalize his services to the University and to industry, notably the British gas industry. Of this sum £583 was contributed through the Institution of Gas Engineers. On December 9, at the University of Leeds, with Major G. H. Kitson in the chair, certain presentations were made and the balance—£750—was presented to the University of Leeds. In accordance with the wishes of Prof. Cobb, it is proposed that the income from it be used to assist students of the Department of Coal Gas and Fuel Industries with Metallurgy to meet the cost of maintenance while at the University or to cover other expenditure necessary for their studies or researches. Mr. R. Robertson, president of the Institution of Gas Engineers, said Prof. Cobb is held in the highest esteem by everyone in the gas industry. He is already an honorary member of the Institution of Gas Engineers, but from now on he can regard himself as an honorary member of the gas industry at large. Mr. H. J. Hodsman, speaking for the Department, said that nowadays fuel research is a comparatively fashionable branch of science; but when Prof. Cobb arrived in 1912 the Department was the only one of its kind in the country and it had very few students. Its present position was therefore a measure of Prof. Cobb's achievements. Prof. J. H. Priestley and the Vice-Chancellor also added their praises of Prof. Cobb and his work for the University.

Wladimir Markownikoff (1838–1904)

ON December 22 occurs the centenary of the birth of the Russian chemist Wladimir Markownikoff, whose investigations in the latter part of last century were of great importance to the petroleum industry. He was born in the neighbourhood of Nijni-Novgorod and was a student at the University of Kasan, where he came into contact with Alexander Mikhaïlovitch Butlerow (1828–1886), whom he succeeded in 1869 when the latter had been transferred to the chair of chemistry in the University of St. Petersburg. Meanwhile, Markownikoff had been sent to Germany, where he worked under Kopp, Baeyer and Kolbe. After his return to Kasan he published his memoir "Ueber die reciproke Beeinflussung der Atomie im Molecule". In 1871, with five colleagues, he resigned his post for political reasons, but received an invitation to the chair of chemistry at Odessa, whence he was transferred to Moscow in 1873. Here he began his long and arduous investigations of Caucasian petroleum. In 1893, without any reason being assigned, he was deprived of his chair, his emoluments, and his official residence, but nevertheless he continued to carry on his researches in his own house, assisted by his faithful servant Mikhailo. He died suddenly on February 11, 1904. He wrote some sixty memoirs relating to petroleum, army disinfection practice, the plague and the chemical industry in Russia. In 1898 he was elected a foreign member of the Chemical Society, in the *Proceedings* of which E. J. Mills wrote of him as a conscientious man of science of unremitting industry, and in political affairs an outspoken patriot.