

A Great Popularizer of Science . . .

DR. EDWIN E. SLOSSON, Director of Science Service, died October 15, 1929, at 6:55 p. m.

As a great popularizer of science millions of readers knew Dr. Edwin E. Slosson. He was the man who made chemistry famous for the general public. As leader and inspirer of science's effort to hand on to the general non-technical reader the fruit of scientific research and knowledge, Dr. Slosson, director of Science Service, inaugurated a new relationship between the man in the laboratory and the man in the street.

Not quite a decade ago when far-seeing scientists and a great newspaperman, the late E. W. Scripps, joined in founding Science Service, the institution for the popularization of science, Dr. Slosson was chosen its editor. Already his book "Creative Chemistry" was selling like a novel. It gave the ordinary person the romance and facts of this great science that had played an important part in the war. Dr. Slosson's great energy and ability were thrown into his new task of relating to newspaper readers the facts and implications of all science in such a way that all might understand. And Science Service grew until now millions read its dispatches and articles in newspapers, magazines and books.

From Dr. Slosson's pen there came such books as "Chats on Science", "Snapshots of Science," "Keeping Up With Science" and "Plots and Personalities" written in collaboration with Prof. June Downey. His lay sermons

relating science with religion were published as "Sermons of a Chemist". Sir Oliver Lodge recommended his "Easy Lessons in Einstein" as the best book to convey some idea of the theory of relativity to the general reader. Thomas A. Edison wrote of him in a personal letter: "Slosson is a 'Star' in lucidity". His lectures were heard by thousands and they have been printed in textbooks, magazines and scientific proceedings alike. The most recent Smithsonian Institution report contains a recent address on "The Coming of the Coal Age". For several years he had been a regular contributor to *Collier's*.

Even during his last illness from organic heart trouble, he characteristically insisted upon knowing the complex structural chemical formula of one of the medicines that had been prescribed. This desire to know was coupled with an extraordinary ability to tell the ordinary person what he had found out about what scientists were doing.

Thirteen years as professor in the chemical laboratory at the University of Wyoming and the Wyoming Agricultural Experiment Station gave Dr. Slosson recognition and experience as a chemist. But mixed with his love of science was his feeling and ability in literature. Both Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi, rival literary and scientific honorary societies, had claimed and initiated him when he was graduated from the University of Kansas, his native state. So when he was offered a position on the *Independent* magazine in New York

after he had worked on its staff in lieu of his vacation from university duties, he moved to New York and became a literary editor. Editor though he was in title and function, he remained a scientist and chemist, injecting into his magazine his explanations of science that found their full flower in his writings for Science Service.

As soon as Slosson, the young chemist, got a job he married May Preston, the first woman to receive a Ph. D. from Cornell University. In order to get even with his wife, as Dr. Slosson once put it, he had to secure a Ph. D. of his own which he did from the University of Chicago by working summers.

Dr. Slosson was born of old colonial, New England stock on both sides, coming from England or Scotland. He once wrote in a biography of himself: "He can boast (although he never does) of three Mayflower ancestors: Miles Standish, Elder Brewster and John Tilley." His father was one of the earliest of Kansas settlers who came from New York to help make Kansas territory a free state. Dr. Slosson said he derived his love of books from his mother, who was a New York school-ma'am.

His great part in the gigantic and never ending work of science popularization was the climax to Dr. Slosson's life and the most effective tribute of his associates in science and journalism will be to carry it on.

Science News-Letter, October 26, 1929

Each Science Shall Have Its Slosson . . .

Memorial services for Dr. Slosson were held by the Mount Pleasant Congregational Church on Sunday, October 20. On behalf of Science Service, Dr. William E. Ritter, honorary president, delivered one of the four short addresses. His tribute to Dr. Slosson's scientific work is printed below:

The closing event of a unique human career very noble from having made the most of its remarkable innate endowment and all the influences of the outer world which, from beginning to end, acted upon it. Thus may be characterized the life

of our dear friend and fellow-worker who has gone from among us.

In the few words that I can speak at this time I wish I might express something of my estimate of the value for human welfare of Edwin Emery Slosson's scientific work.

That Slosson was primarily a popularizer rather than an investigator is too well known to need insisting upon. But that he never for a moment lost sight of the fact that popularization is utterly futile—even dangerous—except on the basis of the most rigorous and conscientious research, is less generally

known and appreciated than it should be.

It is also too generally known to need saying in so many words that chemistry was the realm of nature in which he was technically trained, in which he had earlier done research, and in which he was later preeminent as a popularizer. His wide-reaching imagination, his penetrating reason and his facile command of language enabled him to speak of phenomena from many realms of nature with charming simplicity. But it was in the chemical domain that his success was transcendent. Nothing (*Turn to next page*)

Each Science Shall Have Its Slosson—*Continued*

quite comparable to it has ever been achieved in any natural science, so far as I know. It is hardly overstating the case to say that through his work almost the whole rank and file of a great nation is becoming not only chemically minded but chemically spirited. Becoming, I say, for his many writings headed by *Creative Chemistry*, are a national heritage the influence of which will go on for years to come.

A fact about his work that merits special attention is the way it is calculated to bring home to every one that almost every minutest contact of us moderns with the external world involves in one way or another the results of chemical science. Hardly a move do we make, from our awaking in the morning of one day till our awaking in the morning of the next, that is not somehow beset with something done by the chemist in his role of either researcher or engineer.

We live in an environment today a large, unescapable, and vital portion of which is made by the sciences of chemistry and physics.

Vast as is the economic, the sociologic, the political and other meaning of this for our physical life, of much greater significance is it, I am quite sure, for our spiritual life.

No one, I think, has perceived more of this meaning of chemistry for human welfare than has Slosson.

The point I am desirous of making in connection with Slosson's conjoined work as a popularizer of chemistry and as director of Science Service is this: I am convinced that every one of the natural sciences has, in its own peculiar way, just as profound a meaning for man's spiritual life as has chemistry.

Only in these very last decades has psychology begun to reveal the intricate and wholly inseparable way in which our rational and our emotional lives are interpenetrated. The incomparable sublimity and grandeur of the sidereal system being revealed by modern astronomy, and the transporting beauty of autumnal foliage on display at this hour all over our broad continent as revealed to reasoned observation, are but part and parcel of our intelligently emotional response in these realms. This is an order of truth the great significance of which for human life we are only beginning to grasp.

Hence it is that when each of the

sciences shall have had its Slosson, that is to say, an investigator as to rationality and training and a poet as to heart and life work, the entire life of cultured mankind, scholar and commoner alike, will have assumed an attitude toward themselves and the whole limitless scheme of things that will be greatly different from anything the life of man has hitherto known.

May I hint my meaning further by an illustration? A dear fourteen-year-old girl friend of mine has just written as follows of her religious experiences: "Two years ago I was confirmed. About a month after that I began to wonder just what I had let myself in for. . . . Then I went to mother and asked her all my questions. . . . When I asked her about the Universe she told me something, I can't remember what, but suddenly for an instant I felt as if I understood everything and all was made clear. Only an instant but a most precious one."

"The earlier generations saw God face to face. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation with the Universe?" This a long remembered but unreviewed passage from somewhere in Emerson's writings.

Thus would I intimate my interpretation of the meaning for human good of the life work of the noble fellow-workman in science to whom at this hour we bid a long and affectionate goodbye but in an abounding faith in the Infinite Goodness.

Evident Humanism . . .

An appreciation prepared by Dr. Vernon Kellogg, vice-president and chairman of the executive committee of Science Service and permanent secretary of the National Research Council, upon the occasion of the memorial service to Dr. Slosson:

Edwin Emery Slosson was one of those rare, outstanding combinations of scientific man, literary man, and humanist, who are occasionally produced for our good. His scientific knowledge was sound, his vivacious literary style was unique, and his humanism was clearly evident in all his writing, lecturing, and contacts with his fellow men. His science never made him less a human being. His deep religious instinct never made him hesitate to accept the fundamental truths of science. Science, poetry, and religion all resided peaceably together in him and the com-

bination made him the exceptional personality that he was. In all his activities as professor of chemistry, magazine editor, author of books, and director of a large scientific news service, he revealed this personality. He had always a sweet philosophy and led always a full and happy life.

We shall not see another Slosson soon. His kind comes only occasionally and each example differs in some ways from the others. Our Slosson will never be crowded from our memory, however conspicuous any of his successors may become.

Adventurous Worship . . .

Excerpts from an address by Rev. Moses R. Lovell, minister of the Mount Pleasant Congregational Church, at the memorial service, October 20:

It seems to me he made certain very definite contributions to the modern approach to, and understanding of religion. His lifetime spanned a period when it was true that an arid, dogmatic, scientific naturalism was pitted over against an equally dogmatic and assured religious fundamentalism. He took sides with neither but was among the first of any prominence to take issue with them both, conscious that the little island of man's knowledge is fringed by a vast sea of mystery and that dogmatism is entirely out of place where one can only walk humbled and reverent in the presence of the eternities and infinities. Literalism he saw whether it be of scientific formula or scripture text—is here equally incompetent to express the full reality of life. They are only vague and dusty symbols—man-made—to be outgrown by the onward march of Time and antiquated by spontaneously fresh experience. To lead men out of their dogmatisms of any kind—humbled and reverently to walk in the light of the contemporary world—to get them to see that Truth is a process always in the making, never finished; to inspire them to its discovery and exploration—to join the hands of those in the laboratories with those in the high places of free and adventurous worship—and to lead each to the shrines of the other—that was his chosen mission as I see it. And he truly was one of the earliest, yes, and one of the most successful mediators among us in attempting to (*Turn to next page*)

Inimitable Sense of Humor . . .

Excerpts from the address of Dr. Arthur Deering Call, secretary of the American Peace Society, at the memorial services to Dr. Slosson, October 20:

As with most really great men, he had an abiding, individual, and inimitable sense of humor, with never anything of the guffaw. As I strive to repicture him in my mind, I see first those great eyes of his; not seeming to see me at first, quick-moving eyes capable of royal good humor, of irritation maybe, but reflecting the poise and reality within. He could laugh heartily; but when finishing one of his rich whimsical turns of phrase, there was seldom anything about him save a solemnity which contributed mightily to the fun in those eyes. I remember riding with him from Washington to Briarcliff Manor, New York, where we were for days together in a scholarly conference. I recall how he delivered an address which stood out among all the other learned papers as the first human note of the program. . . .

There was a classic something to

his humor. Among his writings, such for example as "The Art of Keeping Cool and Comfortable," are some of the most deliciously humorous passages ever written in any language. There is the clarity, rich vocabulary and the genius for the apt word, with none of the extravagance, sometimes discovered in Mark Twain. We find this in portions of "Creative Chemistry," indeed throughout most of his works.

I remember how once it fell to my lot to stand in this pulpit and to plead for some thousands of dollars with which to pay off a burdensome debt of this church. We had pledge envelopes and little—they were very little—pencils circulated through the congregation, with the view of getting promises where the money was not at the moment available. After my rather domineering performance, the money being raised, I shall never forget how, at the close, an usher came to the platform with a little scrap of paper upon which Slosson had written these words: "Can we please keep the pencils?" When I read aloud that question, the very

solemn services collapsed in laughter.

Edwin E. Slosson was a gentle man. On a number of occasions he was kind enough to invite me to lunch with him at the Club, when some man from out of town had arrived; mayhap interested in the problem of international peace, with which I have some connections. When the discussion between the visitor and me tended to become a bit involved or controversial, Slosson, with sagacious gentleness and tact, seemed always able to keep the ship of discourse on an even keel.

He was able to stand firmly for his opinions, without any hint of strut. His culture may be phrased as a creative appreciation of the non-economic values of life. One day in his Journal, Emerson scribbled some words on "Natural Aristocracy," winding up with the thought that a gentleman "is the truth's man." It was in that high sense that Edwin E. Slosson was a gentleman.

Science News-Letter, October 26, 1929

A Pioneer Advocate . . .

Excerpts from the address by John J. Esch at the memorial service to Dr. Slosson, October 20:

In these days when we are wont to believe that the scientist is not a believer, let us point to Dr. Slosson as a noteworthy example of the man who learned his science acknowledging the over-ruling providence guiding the destiny of mankind. Dr. Slosson was not a politician. He never sought public office, but that is not to say that he did not take a deep interest in all the currents that swept through American life. On the contrary he became an advocate in some of the great moral issues that have been before the public for consideration and determination. He was an advocate of these when advocates were few. He believed in the soundness of prohibition as a public policy. In editorials, on platforms of the Chautauqua, he acknowledged a faith in that policy. He was a pioneer in advocating woman suffrage at a time when advocates of that doctrine were jeered and laughed at. But Dr. Slosson

was not to be deterred from his purpose. He felt that it was an injustice that his wife, a graduate of Cornell University with a degree of Ph. D., should be deprived of the right to vote when millions of the illiterate and criminal classes enjoyed that privilege. He lived to see the amendments of the constitution adopted providing for both prohibition and woman suffrage.

Science News-Letter, October 26, 1929

Worship—Cont'd

bridge the gap between yesterday and today and supplement on the one hand a growing scientific understanding with the legitimate idealism of spiritual experience—and on the other, a stagnant religious outlook with the realistic spirit of the scientific method.

But Dr. Slosson went, I believe, farther than this. To stand reverent in the presence of the mystery—with that he was not content. For him out of the welter of life's experience—out of the scientific melee of theories from Darwin's to Einstein's—and all between them—cer-

tain definite convictions had taken shape in his mind as to the nature of the Fundamental Reality in and behind the World. It was this that set him apart from so many of his colleagues—made him the idol of student and faculty groups who hung upon his words—so understanding of their academic confusion—yet so definitely reassuring that there was a meaning in their maze of life. It was this element in him that had run the gamut of life's quest and still pursued the far off goals—yet in its course had overtaken something real and something vital that made him for so many the accepted guide he was. Whether his conviction began to take shape for him in the scientific formula of Energy—electronic laws—evolutionary processes—we know that however it began—it ended in a sublime confidence in an unseen world—of Intelligence and Law and Purpose—and in the dedication of his life in cooperation with that Reality to the advancement of human aims and hopes.

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