PEOPLE still believe in miracles. They may say that they believe in magicians only while attending a vaudeville performance. But their actions, governed by ingrown nursery tales and atmospheric half-truths, are often stronger indications of the real guiding factors of their lives.

Perhaps people should still believe in miracles. Benjamin Franklin, eminent investigator of electricity that he was, would have been astonished if he could have flooded a room with light by snapping a switch. What would he have said to radio or television? Even Jules Verne's scientific fiction has come true in part.

To those who exist without the benefit of historical background, the scientist is a miracle man. He is an oracle capable of answering questions on demand. His store of knowledge is inexhaustible. Want a new discovery? Hire a chemist or a physicist or a biologist. A snap of the highly trained fingers! The muttering of a few abstruse formulae! Presto! Here it is.

In one sense the public is oversold on science. The scientist can not produce the white rabbit of profitable accomplishment from under his hat without a considerable period of gestation. And so often plans and ideas are infertile. It is upon the failures of science that successes are built. The foundation is larger than the pinnacle upon the heights that shines in the spotlight and wins the plaudits of the multitude. In common with the rest of the humanity, the scientist does not like to talk about his failures, educative though they may be.

Because the scientist can not always deliver promptly, the charlatan or ill-equipped enthusiast steps in. Their arguments may sound plausible. "Banting cures diabetes, I cure cancer." Perpetual motion, atmospheric electricity (see page 153) and a thousand other inviting ideas fill the patent offices of the world.

If this means that the world is becoming more tolerant to new and true ideas, then praises be! But let the world be critical as well as considerate.

Editorial
Science News-Letter, March 10, 1928

Hendrik Antoon Lorentz

Physics-Biography

Leadership in world intellectual activities was a crowning climax to the career of Prof. Lorentz, one of that small group of physicists which has given us a new picture of the universe in which we live. As chairman of the Committee on International Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations, a body that includes in its membership Einstein, Mme. Curie, Millikan and other such leaders, he held the highest official position in the intellectual world. His death on February 4 at the age of 75 at his home in the Dutch town of Haarlem called forth from a multitude of sources appreciations of his services to the world.

"The funeral was one of the most moving occasions in which I have ever taken part," Dr. Alfred Zimmern, deputy director of the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, Paris, wrote in a letter to an American colleague. "The whole of Holland seemed to be in mourning and when the procession passed through the town of Haarlem from one end to another the whole population seemed to be in the streets. The ceremony itself was very simple, one speaker in Dutch, followed by Rutherford, Langevin and Einstein, and next day Einstein gave a lecture on his work at the University of Leiden which was closed on the day of the funeral. I never had such a strong sense of the power of science as an international force or of what a perfect union between intellect and character can achieve in commanding respect and affection."

Lorentz was a scientific brother to Lord Rayleigh, Einstein, Bragg, Rutherford, Aston, (*See last column*)

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Science News-Letter, March 10, 1928

Lorentz—*Continued*

Bohr, Arrhenius, Zeeman, Millikan and the other exponents of the new physics. Atomic theory, reflection and refraction and many phases of the theory of radiation especially in its electrical aspects were investigated by him. One of his most notable contributions was the explanation of the Zeeman effect, discovered by one of his former pupils. Lorentz introduced the vibrating electrons in the atom as a mechanism explaining the Zeeman effect, a conception that led to the American discoveries of the true character of sunspots and other solar phenomena. Einstein's theory of relativity is built in part upon the "Lorentz transformation." The highest honors in science were conferred upon Lorentz. Jointly with Zeeman, he was awarded, in 1902, the second Nobel Prize for Physics. American scientists had a chance to know him through his lectures at several of this country's leading universities.

Prof. Lorentz was lecturing at Cornell University when J. P. Troy, the Cornell photographer, made the cover portrait.

Science News-Letter, March 10, 1928