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ALBERT A. MICHELSON

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1852-1931

Professor Albert A. Michelson, head of the Department of Physics at the University of Chicago since 1892, died May 8, 1931.

He was born in Strenlo, Germany, December 19, 1852, and was brought to the United States when about two years old. He entered the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis in 1869, was graduated in 1873, served as midshipman in the navy for two years and instructor in physics and chemistry in the Naval Academy from 1875 to 1879. The next year was spent in the Nautical Almanac Office in Washington, followed by two years of study at the Collège de France and the universities of Heidelberg and Berlin. For three years he was professor of physics at Case University and became professor and head of the Department of Physics at the University of Chicago in 1892.

Professor Michelson's great contributions to physics were in the field of experimental optics. He began work on the determination of the velocity of light while at the Naval Academy, continued it at Cleveland, and took up the problem again in 1924 at the Mount Wilson Observatory as research associate of the Carnegie Institute of Washington. There he was last engaged on a measurement of the velocity of light in a vacuum tube three feet in diameter and a mile long. The success of the experiment was assured at the time of his death.

Professor Michelson developed a special form of the interferometer which he used in measuring the diameter of celestial bodies, and with Professor Morley of Cleveland he attempted to measure the speed of the earth through space. The negative result of this experiment gave rise to the Einstein theory of relativity.

Professor Michelson published about seventy-five scientific papers. He received most of the honors which come to a scientific man—membership in scientific societies, honorary degrees, and medals for scientific work—yet his interests were varied as shown by his proficiency in tennis, billiards, bridge, chess, sketching, and with the violin.

It is not always that a man of Professor Michelson's genius is granted so liberal a span of life; for this his friends and the scientific world must feel profound gratitude. New theories in physics will come and go, but his contributions of exact quantitative measurements have become a part of the science and will be an example and an inspiration to future generations of physicists.

HENRY G. GALE.