Sylvester.

On Monday, March 15, 1897, in London, where, September 3, 1814, he was born, died the most extraordinary personage for half a century in the mathematical world.

James Joseph Sylvester was second wrangler at Cambridge in 1837. When we recall that Sylvester, Wm. Thomson, Maxwell, Clifford, J. J. Thomson were all second wranglers, we involuntarily wonder if any senior wrangler except Cayley can be ranked with them.

Yet it was characteristic of Sylvester that not to have been first was always better to him.

The man who beat him, Wm. N. Griffin, also a Johnian, afterwards a modest clergyman, was tremendously impressed by Sylvester, and honored him in a treatise on optics where he used Sylvester’s first published paper, ‘Analytical development of Fresnel’s optical theory of crystals,’ Philosophical Magazine, 1837.

Sylvester could not be equally generous, and explicitly rated above Griffin the fourth wrangler George Green, justly celebrated, who died in 1841.

Sylvester’s second paper, ‘On the motion and rest of fluids,’ Phil. Mag., 1838 and 1839, also seemed to point to physics.

In 1838 he succeeded the Rev. Wm. Ritchie as professor of natural philosophy in University College, London.

His unwillingness to submit to the re-
5 (120)

Science 5 (120), 597-632.