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SCIENCE AND THE NATION

By Sir WILLIAM BRAGG

Many events conspire to make the past year notable in the history of our society. Reference has been made to the majority of them in the Annual Report of Council, usefully supplemented by the Notes and Records which we continue to owe to our past treasurer, Sir Henry Lyons. I do not propose to speak of them in detail, but on this occasion it does seem fitting to give further attention to one or two general matters of lasting interest.

One of these is personal. Fellows will have noted the long list of those whom we have lost, and the great names which the list contains. I have felt as I have been reading it that I have turned over the last leaves of a chapter that stands by itself. The present generation is quick to honor the names of J. J. Thomson and Oliver Lodge, but they can not remember, as we older men can, the brilliant years when these men and their contemporaries were writing the chapter's first pages. What they wrote was eagerly read, their lectures were rapt attention; they were the pioneers, and the scientists of that time, nearly half a century ago, streamed after them. All that is now a memory. The years have slipped away since their work was done, and we now look back on it and see it as a separate entity, a noble event in the history of science, and of British science in particular.

There is no vestige of sadness in such a retrospect, nor any trace of feeling that our pride must be founded only on what has passed. I am sure that all those who like myself can recall the long years, and compare those that have gone by with those that are still ours, will say happily and proudly that our young men of to-day are maintaining in full force the tradition that they have received. They are writing a new chapter;

1 Address of the president of the Royal Society at the Anniversary Meeting, November 30, 1940.