THE RÖNTGEN CELEBRATIONS, NOVEMBER 1945

To celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of X-rays by William Conrad Röntgen, which was made on 8 November 1895, a series of meetings were held in London during November 1945, twelve Societies participating. The inaugural meeting was held under the auspices of the Royal Society at Burlington House on 8 November, and was opened by the reigning President, Sir Henry Dale. He referred to the early history of the discharge in vacuo and gave a lively account of the impact of the discovery on men of science at Cambridge, where he was an undergraduate at the time.

The discussion, devoted to various aspects of Röntgen’s great discovery and to its influence, was opened by Sir Lawrence Bragg, who gave an account of the contents of the two chemical papers in which Röntgen announced his findings to the world, one dated December 1895 and the other March 1896. Sir Lawrence drew attention to the wide range of this pioneer work and also to an important early letter of Schuster’s on the rays, published in Nature on 23 January 1896, with a full translation of Röntgen’s first paper.

Various other speeches dealt with different aspects of the great discovery. Sir William Dampier, Sir John Townsend and Sir Richard Gregory spoke of the first reception of the discovery, Sir Richard referring in particular to the early publication in Nature. Sir Owen Richardson and Professor R. Whiddington gave their reminiscences of certain pieces of classical work on the X-rays. Mlle. Cauchois described some of the French work, and showed some most interesting slides. Professor Max Born described the reception of Röntgen’s work in Germany and referred to the early attempts of Haga and Wind and of Walter and Pohl to find out if X-rays had a wave nature. Professor M. Siegbahn spoke of the early work on the wave nature of the rays and of the classical work on X-ray spectra. Professor E. N. da C. Andrade discussed briefly the variety of excellent work that Röntgen had carried out in physics before he made the great discovery.
Sir Charles Darwin, who took the chair at the afternoon session, spoke of how his elders had discussed Röntgen's work in his young days, and Mr A. W. Isenthal gave an account of a personal meeting with Röntgen in his home. Professor Kramers, Professor J. D. Bernal, Professor P. Ewald, Dr W. T. Astbury and Mrs K. Lonsdale spoke of various modern developments of X-ray research and of their implications. Taking the discussion as a whole, all aspects of Röntgen's epoch-making discovery, personal, historical and scientific, came in for some mention.

It is hoped to publish a full account of the contributions of the various speakers here mentioned in a commemorative volume which is now in active preparation. This volume will also contain an account of the various other meetings held in the course of the celebrations and of the addresses delivered.

E. N. da C. A.