

## Obituary.

Prof. Willem de Sitter (1872-1934).

WE regret to record the death of Prof. Willem de Sitter, one of the leading astronomers of the present time. He was born on the 6th May 1872, prosecuted his University studies at Groningen and worked in the astronomical laboratory there till 1896. Later he was appointed Professor of Astronomy at Leyden, a famous place for its old astronomical laboratory and then became the director of the laboratory in the year 1918. In the years 1917-1918 he contributed three papers to the *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society* expounding the then new theory of gravitation and introducing his conception of the Universe, the "de

Sitter Universe". His researches were the nuclei of further work in cosmology but "he was the man who discovered a universe and forgot about it". For about ten years after, he devoted himself to the reorganisation of the laboratory at Leyden. In 1931, he was invited to deliver the Lowell lectures on "Cosmology" at Boston.

His last paper was "On the foundations of the theory of relativity, with special reference to the expanding universe" published in the last November issue of *Proc. Kon. Akad. Wet.* He died on November 19 and in him the astronomical world has lost an eminent scientist.

## Science and Crime.

THE prospect of a reorganisation of the police force lends point to the necessity, emphasised by Mr. H. T. F. Rhodes in a recent paper before the International Faculty of Sciences, for a strengthening of the scientific branch of the criminal investigation department. Criminals are becoming more and more trained scientists, with a knowledge of many of the things that can be or have been discovered by research, and crime detection therefore tends to become increasingly a matter of chemical and physical analysis. There is no reason why a body of chemists and physicists attached to the police and permanently engaged in police work should not become so expert as to rival the legendary Sherlock Holmes in the ingenuity of their methods. In the provinces as well as the Metropolis there is an increasing recognition of the need for scientific methods; for example, since Mr. Rhodes read his paper, we notice that the latest scientific appliances for the prevention and detection of crime have been included in the equipment of the new police headquarters at Newcastle-on-Tyne.

The chemist is a professional detective in his daily work, and in the realm of crime detection he may be relied upon to apply himself to his investigations with the same impartiality as he displays in his own laboratory. There is no need to divide the "technical police" into two departments, one for the prosecution and one for the defence, as has been suggested in some quarters, for the whole department, like the police force itself, should be quite capable of sifting the evidence without fear or favour and submitting it to the tribunal which has to decide the issue. All that is necessary is to ensure that the scientific police are recruited with the utmost care. The personnel must not be chosen from the young and inexperienced but from those who have achieved some eminence in scientific investigation. We commend this aspect of the matter to the attention of the official bodies, the Institute of Chemistry, the Institute of Physics and the British Association of Chemists.