George Barger, M.A., D.Sc., Hon. D.Sc., Hon. M.D., LL.D., F.R.S.

PROFESSOR BARGER came to Edinburgh in 1919 and was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1922. He served on the Council from 1925 to 1928.

When he joined the University of Edinburgh he already was recognised as one of the leading organic chemists in the country and his professional reputation increased steadily during his occupancy of the Chair of Chemistry in relation to Medicine which he held for nearly twenty years. He attracted around him a group of active research workers, and his school became one of the most important centres in the country of research in organic chemistry.

The best known piece of work produced in this school was the establishment of the correct structural formula of thyroxine and its subsequent synthesis. Another important synthesis, that of vitamin B, was also achieved, but in this case an alternative method discovered elsewhere had priority in publication.

The Department was particularly concerned with the structure of alkaloids and produced a large mass of important work on this subject. A separate and important line of work was that of Stedman on the structure of physostigmine and on choline esterase. These examples suffice to indicate the wide range of activity of the school which Professor Barger founded and inspired.

He received many degrees from foreign universities and was member of a number of foreign academies. He gave the Dohme Lectures in Baltimore in 1928, and these were published in the form of a masterly monograph on "Ergot and Ergotism." Two awards of particular distinction were the Longstaff Medal of the Chemical Society in 1936 and the Davy Medal of the Royal Society in 1938.

Any account of his work would be incomplete without reference to his wide international interests. These were favoured by exceptional linguistic abilities; indeed it was said that he could deliver a lecture in most of the important European languages. He performed a notable service to the cause of international science on the occasion of the holding in Edinburgh of the International Congress of Physiology in 1923. Professor Barger was secretary and Sir Edward Sharpey Schafer was

president, and together they succeeded, against a certain opposition, in making the Congress truly international by issuing invitations to the Germans and Austrians. This was the first important scientific congress after the war at which full international relations were resumed, and it is pleasant to remember that our city had this honour. Professor Barger travelled widely and was in close touch with all the important Continental laboratories. One always felt that he represented in an outstanding manner the old tradition of the international scholar who was at home everywhere where learning was held in esteem. His premature death came as the greater shock to his friends because his activity in mind and body always made him appear younger than his years.

In 1937 he left Edinburgh to take the Chair of Chemistry at the University of Glasgow. He was nearly sixty, and his willingness to make a change of such importance at this age indicates his unusual mental energy. During his short tenure of office at Glasgow he was kept very busy by the work consequent on the reconstruction of the Department.

The Royal Society of Edinburgh has lost one of its most distinguished figures, for in Britain Professor Barger was recognised as one of the most distinguished organic chemists in the country and abroad he was one of the best known of our men of science. His intellectual gifts were allied with an outstanding character. The qualities which his colleagues associate with his memory are high intellectual distinction, an exceptionally clear and critical intelligence and a unique simplicity and directness of thought and purpose. These qualities not only endeared him to his colleagues but also made him one whose opinion always commanded respect.

He died on January 5, 1939.

See also *Obituary Notices of the Fellows of The Royal Society*, vol. iii, No. 8, 1940, pp. 63–85.

A. J. C.