A TRIBUTE TO THE MEMORY OF PROFESSOR WENDELL MITCHELL LATIMER (1893–1955)

When, shortly after the creation of the International Committee of Electrochemical Thermodynamics and Kinetics in 1949, our Secretary General M. Pourbaix called on Professor W. M. Latimer at the University of California in Berkeley and discussed with him our aims and our scientific programme, the eminent author of 'The Oxidation States of the Elements and their Potentials in Aqueous Solutions' expressed his great interest and gave us his valuable encouragement. The project of establishing an atlas of potential–pH diagrams appealed particularly to Professor Latimer, whose systematic work on oxidation states and potentials constitutes the very basis of this most important phase of C.I.T.C.E. activities.

A few months before the C.I.T.C.E. meeting of 1953 in Stockholm Professor Latimer joined our organization as an active member. He attended part of this meeting and presented a most interesting paper dealing with his well-known work on ionic entropies. He also participated in the sessions of the Commission on Electrochemistry of the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry and voted with the majority of the members of this Commission in favour of the Stockholm conventions concerning the signs of electromotive forces and electrode potentials.

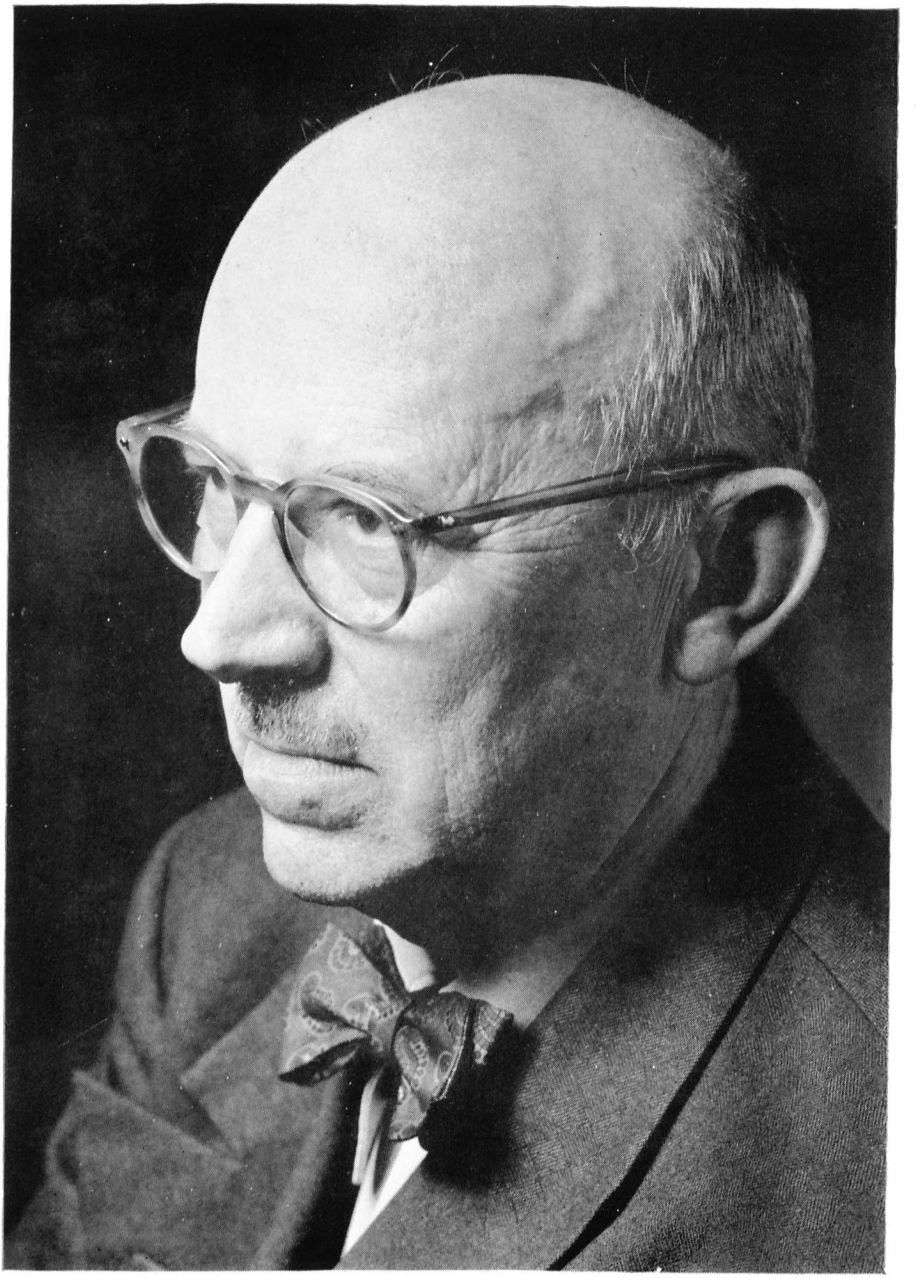
Professor Latimer had made plans to attend the July 1955 meetings of I.U.P.A.C. in Zurich and of C.I.T.C.E. in Lindau. He had sent a note on the signs of electrode potentials for presentation at the latter meeting, showing once more his spirit of cooperation. However, the end came a few weeks before these meetings.

This untimely death constitutes a severe loss for science and for the innumerable organizations and activities to which Professor Latimer contributed so much with such very great distinction. Our C.I.T.C.E. group in particular has lost a most valuable collaborator and friend.

Wendell Mitchell Latimer was born in Garnett, Kansas, in 1893. He graduated from the University of Kansas in 1915 and taught at that University for two years. He then went to the University of California in Berkeley where he obtained the doctorate and remained, for the rest of his career, as a member of the staff assembled by the illustrious G. N. Lewis. His fundamental contributions to thermodynamics, electrochemistry, inorganic chemistry, etc., are too well known to need enumeration here. During the war years he worked on several important governmental assignments and, among other contributions, carried out much of the pioneering work which led to the discovery of the transuranium elements. His familiarity with oxidation-reduction potentials enabled him to work out the uranium-plutonium separation.

Professor Latimer received numerous honours, among which we shall mention only two: membership in the National Academy of Sciences and, a few months before his death, the coveted Nichols Medal of the New York Section of the American Chemical Society.

P. van R.



Prof. W. M. Latimer