



Hemachi-Casotype, London.

"Chemistry."

(Sir William Ramsay.)

# VANITY FAIR.

London, December 2, 1908

## MEN OF THE DAY. No. 1147.

### SIR WILLIAM RAMSAY, K.C.B.

**S**IR WILLIAM RAMSAY is an apostle of the great modern Religion of the Established

Fact. His work has been almost exclusively concerned with the forces which are imponderable, and that in the world of forces is the hall-mark of greatness. Light, electricity, love—all these are swift-impalpable, and of two at least of these subjects Sir William Ramsay confesses that he knows only the fringe. That, in turn, is the distinctive sign of the learned man who has learned enough to discover how much larger the realm of ignorance is than that of human knowledge.

So far as this world goes, Sir William has had his rewards. He is a K.C.B., LL.D., D.Sc., M.D., Ph.D., F.R.S., F.C.S., and has honours from about fifty Societies and Institutes, in England and abroad, presumably able to discriminate between worth and wind. He is himself our leading authority on the latter subject, and has delivered himself of a text hook on the Discovery of the Constituents of the Air. Argon, Neon, Krypton, and Xenon are words for which first-year students revile him, for are they not written in the New Book of Revelation as new constituents of our complicated air?

Sir William Ramsay was born in Glasgow in 1852, the son of a civil engineer, and in due course studied at Glasgow Academy and University, and subsequently at Tuebingen university. In 1872 he became Assistant at the "Young" Laboratory of Technical Chemistry, and two years later was appointed Tutorial Assistant of Chemistry at Glasgow University. Here he remained until 1880, when he went to Bristol University College, first as a Professor of Chemistry, and later as Principal. Since 1887 he has been Professor of Chemistry at University College, London, where he is affectionately spoken of as "the Chief."

He is, like most of us, fond of relaxation. When teaching has wearied him he indulges in a little light research work; perhaps a little investigation into the Molecular Surface-Energy of Liquids. Alternately he may amuse himself with a little organisation, and if *very* much exhausted may give himself a special treat by going and helping other people to teach, or investigate, or organise.

He much enjoys a holiday because he can get so much work done, and as a matter of duty he gives a fortnight in Switzerland to winter sports.

Personally he is urbane and charming in a high degree, and does not seem to find his many honours or great learning an intolerable burden. He adds to the essential simplicity of high endeavour the courtesy which adds distinction even to merit.

He has hordes of friends, but his real loves are fountain pens and cigarettes.