

SCIENCE

FRIDAY, JULY 1, 1921

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF RADIUM¹

WE are met to-night to honor a discovery and the discoverer, and we are doing it in a way which I am sure delights her soul as much as it does mine. The custom of mankind, when it would do honor to one who has had the good fortune to be of service to his fellows, is to make a hundred thousand dollar parade, or to fire a hundred thousand dollar salute, or, in rarer instances of sounder judgment, to build a hundred thousand dollar monument. Compare that sort of an expenditure of the fruits of human toil with the glad donation which you are making to-night of a hundred thousand dollars, not merely for the alleviation of suffering and the arrest of disease—that is important—but for something which is vastly more important and more fundamental than that, namely, for the purpose of making it possible to peer farther into the secrets of matter, for upon that vision and the control of nature which that vision must precede depends the weal or woe of our children and our children's children for countless generations.

I wish to add a second element of uniqueness to this occasion. Knowing Madame Curie, as I have had the good fortune to do, I am sure that she would not wish me to speak a word of fulsome praise or to picture her as a superman; she is that because she is a woman, but not because she has had the capacity and the good fortune to make discoveries of the first importance. It is a common and a pathetic spectacle to see military, political, and social leaders who come conspicuously into the public gaze, lose their sense of perspective and begin to regard themselves as holding a commission from the Al-

¹ An address delivered at the National Museum, Washington, D. C., on the evening of May 25, in connection with the presentation of a gram of radium to Madame Curie.

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