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LIFE AND WORK OF JOHN ULRIC NEF  
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On August 13 the Academy suffered the loss of one of its most eminent members through the death, in the prime of his life, of John Ulric Nef, head of the department of chemistry of the University of Chicago. Professor Nef's life was marked by its simplicity, the simplicity which is characteristic of real greatness—it stood for but a few things—but each was

a great purpose in itself. He will be remembered by many in this generation as a man of wonderful intensity of purpose, of unswerving honesty of mind and unselfish devotion to his friends. He will be remembered by hundreds of his students as a great teacher, one who stimulated them to think for themselves and to test their thoughts in the crucible of critical experimentation. But in this generation and far beyond it, his name will stand longest as that of a great investigator, who contributed his share to the foundation stones of the science of chemistry. From the earliest years of his career, as professor of chemistry at Purdue University and then at Clark University, and during the twenty-three years of his connection with the University of Chicago, his devotion to research was unique for the intensity and the single-hearted ardor with which he gave almost every ounce of his strength, almost every thought to his problems. Perhaps his greatest work—the work which secured immediate recognition—was that of overthrowing the belief that the carbon atom must always have a valence of four—a belief which had become practically an article of faith through the work and ideas of Kékulé and his followers. Nef's proof that isocyanides and fulminates show all the properties which one could postulate for a bivalent carbon atom opened a new field of thought, a new interpretation to many chemical reactions, the effect of which will always be felt in the development of the science. In his own hands, it opened the way for an attack on the problem of the chemistry of the sugars that promises much for our progress on the path toward explaining the use of carbohydrates in life phenomena.

The seeds of his thoughts have already found productive soil in the minds of other able workers and his immediate problems will undoubtedly be carried on by a number of his younger collaborators; but the world has lost the courageous mind, the intense driving power and the critical imagination which together made John Ulric Nef a genius in his field of work.