

cover. They heard a report and when they dared to look Nobel was standing unharmed. He put a match to a pool of the liquid, and, though it burned, there was no explosion. Nobel showed that nitroglycerine could be used in many ways, and after two hours the spectators were convinced. Numerous orders were received by Nobel's factories, but his troubles were not yet ended. Some countries banned the product and ship-owners refused to carry it.

There was an element of luck in Nobel's invention of a "safer" explosive in 1866. An absorbent earth called *kieselguhr* is found in northern Germany. Because the supply of sawdust was short some of the earth was used in packing nitroglycerine cans. One of the cans leaked and Nobel saw that the *kieselguhr* soaked up the liquid readily. He found that when nitroglycerine was mixed with an absorbent, inert substance it became easier to manipulate and was safer in transit. He called it Dynamite.

Nobel moved to Paris in 1873 and continued with the study of explosives. He combined nitroglycerine with gun-cotton and obtained a transparent jelly-like substance which he patented in 1876 under the name of gelignite. About thirteen years later Nobel produced ballistite, one of the earliest of the smokeless powders. It preceded cordite, and Nobel's claim that his patent covered that product was the subject of unsuccessful lawsuits against the British Government in the early 'nineties.

Because Nobel sold his smokeless powder to Italy, the French Government placed restrictions on his work in Paris. The ageing chemist went to San Remo, on the Italian Riviera, where he lived quietly, experimenting with synthetic rubber and artificial silk. When his elder brother died, the

French papers thought it was Alfred. He "enjoyed" the rare experience of reading his own obituary notices. They were not complimentary.

Alfred Nobel in middle-age was a lonely and exhausted man with few friends or interests outside his work. When he went to Paris he bought a comfortable home and became an avid reader, particularly of philosophy and verse. Shelley was his favourite. He wrote many letters in which he discussed the latest novels, plays and poems. Nobel developed literary ambitions and started two novels which he never finished. In later years he wrote a play and it was about to be published when he died. It is said that his executors destroyed all but three copies of the edition. In his writings, Nobel's greatest difficulty was



*"Alfred Nobel is the name"*

to make up his mind which language to use. He had a thorough knowledge of six, and even in conversation he changed from one to another, altering the language to suit the topic of the moment.

The death of a Parisian girl, with whom he was in love as a young man, affected Nobel's life deeply. He remained single, covering sorrow and shyness with cynicism. But it was the influence of a woman that led to the establishment of the Peace Prize.