

## NEWS AND VIEWS

## Two Eminent Swedish Chemists

THE year 1840 saw the birth of the two Swedish chemists, Per Theodor Cleve and Lars Fredrik Nilson, the former of whom was born at Stockholm on February 10. Cleve was the son of a merchant, Nilson the son of a farmer of Ostergothland. Both of them became students at the University of Uppsala, where they came under the influence of L. F. Svanberg, who had been the friend of Berzelius. After graduating, and teaching chemistry at Uppsala, Cleve worked in Wurtz's laboratory in Paris, and in the mineralogical laboratory at Stockholm; he then made a geological excursion to the West Indies. After his return home, in 1870 he was given a post at the Stockholm Technical Institute, but on Svanberg's retirement became professor of chemistry at Uppsala and held this position until shortly before his death. Like his contemporary Nilson, he did valuable work on the rare earths, and he showed that scandium, the element discovered by Nilson, was identical with the eka-boron of Mendeléeff. It was partly for his work on the rare earths that he was in 1894 awarded the Davy Medal of the Royal Society. Towards the end of his life he became absorbed in biological studies. For the Chemical Society, of which he was a foreign member, he wrote the memorial lecture on the Swiss chemist J. C. G. de Marignac (1817-94). He died at Uppsala on June 18, 1905.

While Nilson was also known for his investigations on the rare earths, he rendered great service to his country as an agricultural chemist. Farming was in his veins, and he always retained an interest in the prosperity of his native district. After holding the chair of analytical chemistry at Uppsala from 1878 until 1883, he was called to Stockholm as professor of chemistry in the Royal Academy of Agriculture. In the next sixteen years, while engaged, on his official duties, he published nearly sixty papers on soils, manures, etc., and his inquiries led to the draining and cultivation of the swamps of Gothland, and to the introduction of the sugar beet. He was elected a foreign member of the Chemical Society in 1888. He died on May 14, 1899, in his fifty-ninth year.

## The Parliamentary and Scientific Committee

A MEETING of the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee was held at the House of Commons on January 31. In the absence of the chairman, Captain D. F. Plugge, M.P., the chair was taken by Major H. A. Procter, M.P. The Secretary announced that the following bodies have now definitely agreed to support the new Committee: Association of Scientific Workers, Institute of Chemistry, British Association of Chemists, National Veterinary Medical Association, Institution of Structural Engineers, Institution of

Marine Engineers, British Association for the Advancement of Science, Institution of Mechanical Engineers, Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, Institute of Fuel, Institute of Gas Engineers, Thames Barrage Association, Oil and Colour Chemists Association, Institution of the Rubber Industry, Association of Applied Biologists, Universities Federation for Animal Welfare.

The Secretary also reported that the following Members of Parliament had agreed to become members of the Committee: Captain Plugge, Colonel Baldwin-Webb, Mr. Markham, Mr. E. W. Salt, Mr. Alan Chorlton, Dr. Haden-Guest, Sir John Graham Kerr, Mr. R. R. Stokes, Sir Murray Sueter, Mr. David Adams, Mr. Henry Haslam, Sir Ernest Graham-Little, Major Procter, Mr. Kenneth Pickthorn, Mr. W. Higgs, Mr. R. H. Morgan, Mr. W. R. Duckworth, and Mr. I. C. Hannah. It was agreed to give all possible support to affiliated scientific and technical bodies in ensuring fair treatment for scientific and technical workers in connexion with military service, not only so far as the list of reserved occupations is concerned, but also with the view of ensuring that the special qualifications of scientific and technical workers enrolled in the Fighting Services should be properly appreciated and developed. Discussion also took place on the report of the sub-committee which has been investigating the question of the nutritive value of bread, having regard to the importance of bread as an article of diet in war-time.

## Venereal Diseases in War-time

AT an extraordinary general meeting of the British Social Hygiene Council, held on January 29, attention was concentrated upon the circular letter recently dispatched by the Ministry of Health to local government authorities relating to the control of venereal disease in war-time. During the War of 1914-18, some 400,000 members of the armed forces were treated for venereal disease, necessitating the withdrawal of the majority of the patients from active service for periods varying between five and six weeks. To-day, the Ministry is anxious that the great reduction in the numbers of people suffering from venereal disease since 1918 should be at least maintained during the social upheavals that are caused by war conditions. The movements of population from towns to the vicinity of munition factories, military camps and aerodromes in the country districts bring grave problems.

In the circular the Ministry of Health emphasizes the need for the maintenance of existing measures for the treatment of the diseases, while, in areas where the services provided are deficient, it is suggested that clinics and personnel should be adequately augmented. The introduction of fully

equipped mobile clinical units is suggested for increased efficiency. It was pointed out at the meeting that no financial assistance is provided, and the burdens now borne by local authorities are such that without assistance from the national exchequer little can be done. Further, it is felt that the Ministry's circular pays insufficient attention to the enlightenment of the public as a preventive measure and makes no mention of the needed increase in the number of trained venereal disease almoners. The omission of any reference as to the means whereby local authorities are to be financially re-imbursed for providing these services has caused considerable dissatisfaction. A strongly worded resolution to that effect was adopted.

#### Development of International Health Organizations

In a recent paper (*Ann. Med. Hist.*, 3 ser., 1, 519; 1939), Dr. Robert A. Lyon, of Cincinnati, points out that before the nineteenth century individual nations or cities tried to check the entrance of disease by the application of quarantine laws at ports and land frontiers. It was not, however, until the early decades of the nineteenth century that international co-operation in health matters was first sought by countries on the Mediterranean. In 1839, Turkey invited representatives of other nations to meet a Sanitary Commission at Constantinople for better co-operation in the enforcement of quarantine regulations. A few years later, Egypt made a similar request, and in 1869 the Egyptian Council at Alexandria undertook the medical supervision of traffic through the Suez Canal. In 1851 the first International Health Convention met in Paris, and since then thirteen similar conventions have been held in different European cities and at Washington for the purpose of formulating regulations concerning the notification of cholera and plague and arrangement of medical inspection of crews and passengers as well as the inspection and disinfection of cargoes.

In 1909 there was established in Paris an International Hygiene Office, the function of which has been to collect and unify the many national laws of sanitation and quarantine, to supervise the health laws applicable to pilgrims, to establish medical facilities for the treatment of venereal disease in ports in all parts of the world, to investigate the transmission of disease by aerial navigation, to publish public health information, and to carry out specific investigations. The organization of a Health Section of the League of Nations began in 1920, and in 1921 it became part of the permanent secretariat of the League, with offices in Geneva. The Section consists of three divisions, namely, a directing committee, a consulting committee of experts consisting of the directors of the International Health Office, and an executive staff composed of public health experts, statisticians and clerks who devote their whole time to the work. The Section has done valuable work in the control of epidemics, the standardization of medical procedures, and the collection and publication of medical information.

#### Black-Headed Gull Survey

THE survey of the black-headed gull (*Larus ribibundus*) carried out by P. D. Hollom, with the help of 160 other observers for the British Trust for Ornithology (*British Birds*, Jan. 1939), gives a total number of 70,000 breeding pairs in 124 gulleries in England in 1938 and 6,000 in 34 gulleries in Wales. There were 145 gulleries in Scotland and 39 in Ireland; but it is believed that more birds exist in these two countries, which were not fully surveyed. The larger part of the gull population is in the north of Britain, and although there has been a great increase at many places this century, there were probably larger numbers of gulls in the country a century ago, and at many northern gulleries there has been a decline in recent years. The largest British gullery, at Ravenglass, Cumberland, has 50,000 birds—five times that of the next largest and two thirds of the total gull population of England. There are no gulleries of this species in the Isle of Man, and strikingly few in the counties bordering the Bristol Channel.

Nearly forty per cent of the colonies are twenty miles or more inland from the sea and the highest at 1,925 ft. above sea-level at Greensett Moss, Great Whernside, Yorkshire, formed in 1921, where 200 pairs nested in 1938. The total number of colonies in the British Isles is given as 488, but there is also a very lengthy list of deserted colonies. Some of the gulleries, as the Delamere Forest of Cheshire, date back to the early seventeenth century. There seems to be no truth in the belief that use of these eggs for food during the War of 1914–18 depleted many of the present gulleries and tended to disperse the gulls over a wider area, as this started before 1914 in many instances. Cumberland and Yorkshire are very rich in these gulleries, the former county having 19, many of them on the Solway marshes, and the latter county having 29.

#### Marriage-Rate in War-time

THE November issue of the *Statistical Bulletin* of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company of New York contains a review of the course of the marriage-rate during the War of 1914–18 in the countries immediately concerned. With the outbreak of hostilities in 1914 the marriage-rate of all the belligerent countries fell precipitously. In France, for example, the rate dropped from a level of about 8 per 1,000 during the period 1851–1913 to a minimum of 2.3 in 1915. In Germany the pre-war average rate of about 8 per 1,000 sank to 4.1 in 1915 and 1916. In Italy the rate fell to 2.7 in 1917. In England and Wales the rate, which for a long time had been about 8 per 1,000, showed a transient rise to 9.7 in 1915 and then fell to 6.9 in 1917. In the United States the minimum reached in 1918 was not far below an average of 10.4 for 1914–16, the years preceding the entrance of the United States into the war. The end of the War was followed by a prompt rebound to unusually high figures. Thus in France the rate rose from 5.5 per 1,000 in 1918 to 14.0 in 1919 and 16.0 in 1920; and similar though less