

## NEWS AND VIEWS

**Phillippe de La Hire (1640-1718)**

ON March 18 the tercentenary occurs of the birth of Phillippe de La Hire, one of the most versatile of French men of science of the later half of the seventeenth century. The son of Laurent de La Hire, a famous painter, who died in 1656, he was instructed in art, but he also learnt mathematics from Gaspard Desargues, the friend of Pascal and Descartes. When twenty years of age, he went to Italy, where he spent four years. On returning to Paris, he resumed his mathematical studies and, during the next forty years, published many papers and books on geometry, conic sections, epicycloids, magic squares, and other subjects. His work on magic squares was based on the treatise of the fifteenth century Italian mathematician Emmanuel Moschopolus.

La Hire also, from 1683 onwards, made astronomical observations at the Paris Observatory, where the elder Cassini and Picard were similarly engaged, and with them, too, he carried out geodetical work for the map of France planned by Colbert. His physical work included researches on the variation of the compass, on refraction and barometric and thermometric measurements. He was elected a member of the Royal Academy of Sciences in 1678, and for a number of years held a chair in the Collège Royale de France. "Astronomer, mechanician, geometer, hydrographer," said Fontenelle, "he was an academy of sciences in one man". He was twice married and had eight children, of whom two, Gabriel-Phillippe (1677-1719) and Jean-Nicolas (1685-1727), were also members of the Academy of Sciences. La Hire died in Paris on April 21, 1718.

**Jules Christian (1840-1907)**

DR. JULES CHRISTIAN, an eminent French alienist, was born at Bischwiller in Alsace on March 16, 1840. He studied medicine at Strassburg, and for three years before graduating became a resident in the Stephansfeld Asylum (Bas-Rhin), which provided him with a rich field of psychiatric study. In 1863 he obtained the Esquirol Prize offered by the Société Médico-psychologique with an essay on the dura mater in the insane, and in the following year qualified with a thesis on hæmorrhagic pachymeningitis. During the Franco-Prussian War he took an active part in looking after the wounded, and after the peace of Frankfort in 1871 left his practice in Alsace and joined the staff of the Montevertgues Asylum in the Vaucluse Department, where he remained for nearly four years and made numerous contributions to the *Annales médico-psychologiques* and *Archives générales de médecine*, of which the most important were those on injuries in the insane, insanity following acute disease, and sensory changes in melancholia.

In 1876 Christian was appointed physician to the Maréville Asylum near Nancy, where he made a special study of general paralysis and epilepsy, and won the

Falret Prize awarded by the Académie de Médecine by a work on epilepsy in relation to insanity. He also delivered a course of lectures at the time on mental disease, at the Nancy medical faculty, and would probably have been appointed professor in this subject, but in 1879 he was made physician to the asylum of Charenton, where he remained until his retirement in 1904. During this long period he made many more valuable contributions to the literature of mental disease, of which the chief were those on epilepsy and epileptic insanity, for which he gained a prize awarded by the Belgian Royal Academy of Medicine, and on dementia præcox. He died on July 11, 1907.

**Countering the Magnetic Mine**

ACCORDING to the naval correspondent of *The Times*, a conspicuous feature of the *Queen Elizabeth* on her arrival at New York after her secret maiden voyage from the Clyde was a 'girdle' around her hull. This girdle is apparently the means of protection adopted against the magnetic mine. The girdle, supplied with electric current of the necessary strength and characteristics, sets up a magnetic field which, in association with the steel hull and other magnetic material of the ship, is such that magnetic mines laid at sea are not set off by the passage over them of a vessel so equipped. The apparatus is said to have been devised and developed by officers of one of H.M. naval establishments, with the advice and assistance of scientific men consulted for the purpose. It has been given the expressive name 'de-gaussing girdle', the aptness of which will be recognized by all with an elementary knowledge of magnetism.

Mr. Winston Churchill paid a tribute to this piece of work in his review of the war at sea when introducing the Navy Estimates in the House of Commons on February 27. He said, "We see our way to mastering the magnetic mine and other variants of the same idea. How this has been done is a detective story written in a language of its own . . . we do not feel at all outdone in science in this country by the Nazis." This is all the thanks which can be given at present for the work of some few of the men of science who have given up their investigations to put their special knowledge and skill at the service of the country. It is an achievement of high order to have devised protection against a relatively novel form of attack in so short a time, and should encourage the further use by the Government of scientific talent.

**Blood Groups and Racial Diagnosis**

IN view of the stress laid by many anthropologists on the significance of the blood groups in the racial classification of man, attention may be directed to the results of certain investigations of the weak A reaction found in some cases of the group AB by G. L. Taylor,