

## NEWS AND VIEWS

**The Right Hon. Winston Churchill, F.R.S.**

UNDER a statute of the Royal Society which provides for the election of persons who either have rendered conspicuous service to the cause of science or are such that their election would be of signal benefit to the Society, the Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill was elected a fellow of the Royal Society on May 29.

The admission of the Prime Minister to the Royal Society, although to some extent in accordance with precedent, is in Mr. Churchill's case thoroughly justified by his interest in, and appreciation of, scientific developments. Time and again, in speeches in the House of Commons and in broadcast addresses, he has stressed the importance of making the fullest possible use of science to combat the "perverted science", as he has rightly termed it, of Nazism, which has been nurtured for the purpose of destroying life and property and enslaving the souls of men. He was quick to appreciate the use which was being made by our enemies of scientific developments, and equally swift to realize that scientific men in Great Britain have the knowledge and skill to counter their attacks. Moreover, he has not hesitated to pay public tribute to their work, as witness his statement in the House of Commons when he proclaimed the defeat of the magnetic mine, which for a few weeks had taken a heavy toll of our ships. This awareness of the significance of scientific developments culminated in the appointment last October of the Scientific Advisory Committee, to which reference has frequently been made in these columns, whereby the leading research institutions of the country are enabled to maintain direct contact with the Cabinet itself. Mr. Churchill's election to the fellowship of the Royal Society is a timely recognition by the world of science of his services to the British Empire, to the cause of democracy and not least to the cause of science itself.

**The Royal Society: New Foreign Members**

PROF. J. B. CONANT and Dr. K. Landsteiner have recently been elected foreign members of the Royal Society.

**Prof. J. B. Conant, For. Mem. R.S.**

PROF. JAMES BRYANT CONANT held the position of professor of chemistry and head of the Chemical Faculty at Harvard up to 1933, when he was elected to the high office of president of the University. In relinquishing his post in the Department of Chemistry, although the University as a whole gained, American science lost to a large extent one of its most distinguished investigators. Nevertheless, Prof. Conant never abandoned chemical research, and has published original work continuously up to the present time. His researches cover an impressive range of subjects, and are especially noteworthy by the novelty of the physical chemical approach and the skill with which this has been employed in the field

of organic chemistry. Although it is impossible adequately to indicate the scope of his work in a short summary, some idea of his versatility can be gained by mention of some of the major themes. These include: (a) A comprehensive study of the addition of phosphorus halides to organic compounds in the course of which entirely novel reactions were brought to light; (b) Numerous publications dealing with the study of oxidation-reduction potentials of organic compounds, including hæmin and related substances; (c) Investigations of free radicals and the kinetics of their formation; (d) The application of physical methods to structural problems of organic chemistry; (e) The study of reaction mechanism as applied both to substitution displacements and keto-enol tautomerism; (f) Researches on the constitution of chlorophyll and the related porphyrin groups; (g) Biological-chemical applications of induced radioactive indicators.

In all his numerous publications one is struck with the freshness of outlook with which Prof. Conant approaches the subject. His intuitive faculty and deep insight into the fundamentals are matched by notable experimental skill. The work with which his name is most clearly associated is that relating to the constitution of chlorophyll. In this field his contributions have been outstanding; he cleared up many of the more obscure points in the structural relationship of the chlorophyll group, and contributed matter of the highest originality. His work is entirely independent of that of Hans Fischer and, although not so extensive in scope, certainly of equal merit. To specify a few major examples of his chlorophyll work one might cite the fact that he was the first to provide conclusive evidence of the close connexion between the green derivatives of chlorophyll and porphyrins. Similarly, his work on the 'allomerization' of chlorophyll is peculiarly fascinating; he was the first to recognize it as an oxidation, a discovery which led directly to a complete understanding of this complex phenomenon. He initiated with Prof. Kistiakowski the important series of exact measurements of the heats of organic reactions which the latter has been carrying on up to the present time. Since his appointment to his present office he has devoted his energies and talents to raising the standard of teaching and research in universities, and to promoting liberty of thought and expression. Prof. Conant has also had a considerable influence on the development of the organic chemical industry in the United States, and in this connexion it is worthy of note that his scientific initiative as a consultant was an important factor in the success of Carothers's work on new polymers. Finally, during the past three years he has devoted as much of his time as his many duties would permit to educating public opinion in the United States to appreciate the full value of maintaining a true democratic outlook, and his present appointment by President Roosevelt testifies to the success of his efforts and the confidence the latter has in him.