

research group working on the analysis of coal and coke. His bomb combustion method for the determination of both sulphur and chlorine in coal is well known to fuel scientists, and is to become an international standard method. With the building

of the new Coke Research Centre at Chesterfield in 1958 he transferred his home to Derbyshire and took up new work for the British Coke Research Association dealing with the problems of air and water pollution.

## NEWS and VIEWS

### Physiology at Oxford :

Prof. E. G. T. Liddell, F.R.S.

THE near prospect of Prof. E. G. T. Liddell's retirement from Oxford's Waynflete professorship of physiology has aroused a widespread interest among physiologists everywhere and, indeed, among all those who are concerned for the advancement by experimental research of knowledge in the medical range of the sciences. For there can be no doubt that the Waynflete chair, during the tenures of a succession of distinguished occupants, has achieved and maintained a reputation second to that of no other chair of physiology, anywhere in the world. Sir John Burdon-Sanderson and his pupil and successor, Prof. Francis Gotch, made contributions of fundamental importance to knowledge of the nature of nervous impulses, as excited and propagated in the continuity of nerve fibres. Under Sir Charles Sherrington the reputation of the Waynflete chair, and of the Oxford School of Physiology attached to it, attained additional eminence, through the discoveries which he and a series of distinguished associates made concerning the intricate phenomena of the central nervous system, involving the transmission of nervous excitations across systems of synaptic junctions of varying complexity; discoveries which have provided a large component of the foundation for modern neurological theory and practice. It is in this field of research, on the physiological processes of the brain and the spinal cord, that Prof. Liddell, as an intimate pupil of and collaborator with his great predecessor, has maintained that distinguished tradition.

Sir Lindor Brown, C.B.E., F.R.S.

UNDER Sir George Lindor Brown, Jodrell professor of physiology in University College, London, whose appointment to succeed Prof. Liddell in the Waynflete chair has recently been announced, it may be confidently expected that the tradition will be further maintained. After a distinguished student career in physiology at Manchester, Brown held a lectureship at Leeds, where the late B. A. McSwiney was then the professor. Work there, with McSwiney and others, gave early evidence of Brown's interest in the special physiology of the autonomic nervous system, and in the then recent evidence for a chemical mechanism of excitatory transmission at its ganglionic and peripheral junctions. With a grant from the Medical Research Council, he also worked for a period in Sherrington's Oxford department with J. C. Eccles. He then, in 1934, accepted an invitation to join Sir Henry Dale's team at the National Institute for Medical Research, and played a prominent part in extending the evidence for a cholinergic mechanism, to the transmission from motor nerve endings to the end-plates of voluntary muscle. Brown continued investigations in this general field with a series of distinguished colleagues and visiting experts after

Sir Henry's retirement in 1942, having meanwhile become engaged in important war-time researches and responsibilities. In 1949 he became professor of physiology in University College, London, where another famous chair of physiology will be vacated by his removal to Oxford; and since 1955 he has been the biological secretary of the Royal Society. The chief focus of research-interest in the Oxford School of Physiology may, perhaps, move for a time from the central towards the peripheral nervous system; but there need be no fear of a lowering of its standard.

### Astronomy at Oxford : Prof. H. H. Plaskett, F.R.S.

ON September 30, Prof. H. H. Plaskett retires under the age limit, after twenty-eight years as Savilian professor of astronomy and director of the University Observatory at Oxford. His tenure of office has been notable for the building up of a school of solar physics, now well known for the thoroughness of its methods, the clarity of exposition in its lectures, and its avoidance of popular publicity. With only modest resources, two new solar telescopes and large spectrographs have been built and operated successfully. Prof. Plaskett's own work has been both observational and theoretical. He has studied models of the solar atmosphere, the formation of Fraunhofer lines, the structure of the solar granulation and problems of the chromosphere. Under his inspiration and guidance his colleagues and pupils have also made important contributions to solar physics. Among them they have discovered the strengthening of weak Fraunhofer lines from centre to limb, they have invented elegant interferometric methods for measurement of Fraunhofer and chromospheric lines, developed improvements in the mathematics of stellar atmosphere theory, and made long series of precision measurements to try to find whether the Einstein red-shift can be detected in the solar spectrum. Finding that the red-shift is obscured by spectrum line displacements arising from other causes, they have been led on one hand to study velocity fields in the solar photosphere, and on the other to make laboratory measurements of pressure shifts in atomic spectra of astronomical importance. Astronomy could well do with more of the devotion to careful measurement and the restraint on speculation which have characterized Oxford work under Prof. Plaskett.

Prof. D. E. Blackwell

DR. D. E. BLACKWELL, who is to succeed Prof. Plaskett, has been assistant director of the Solar Physics Observatory, Cambridge, since 1948. He entered Sidney Sussex College in 1943 as a major scholar, from the Merchant Taylors' School, took first-class honours in both parts of the Natural Sciences Tripos, was an Isaac Newton Student in 1946 and Stokes Student at Pembroke College in 1947. His astronomical work has dealt chiefly with