

February 15, Sir William Prescott, chairman of the Metropolitan Water Board, stated that the "site for the proposed reservoir at Walton has been selected after the most exhaustive examination of other available lands". It is not stated whether the expert opinion available to the Ministry of Agriculture or to the Geological Survey has been sought, but it is much to be hoped that such scientific advice may be consulted before the matter comes under discussion in committee of the House of Commons.

A New American Balloon Ascent into the Stratosphere

FOLLOWING on the American ascent into the stratosphere last year recorded in *NATURE* of July 28, p. 132 and November 3, p. 707, 1934, careful inquiry has now shown that the mishap was caused by internal adhesions of the lower part of the balloon fabric. Plans for a new ascent are well advanced. The personnel of the advisory committee has been chosen by the National Geographic Society working in co-operation with the United States Army Air Corps, and once again Capts. A. W. Stevens and O. A. Anderson will ascend. It is gathered from the announcement by the president of the Society in the *National Geographic Magazine* of February 1935 that the arrangements will differ but little from those of last year's flight. The balloon will have the same capacity and the ascent will be made from the same place. No details are as yet available of the instruments that will be carried, but as the lifting power will be about six tons and as "special emphasis is to be placed on data that can be obtained from manned balloons capable of lifting standard laboratory instruments", there is no doubt that every possible self-registering device that might supply information about the upper atmosphere and cosmic rays will be included. An advisory committee under the chairmanship of Dr. Lyman J. Briggs, director of the U.S. Bureau of Standards, is to be congratulated on the thoroughness of its investigations of the previous failure. The findings will be of greatest value to those who undertake future hazards.

A New Diphtheria Prophylactic

OWING to the prevalence of diphtheria during the last year, a considerable demand has followed for immunising agents for preventive inoculation, which is now extensively practised with good results. Various agents have been employed for this purpose, such as toxin-antitoxin mixtures and preparations of modified diphtheria toxin known as 'toxoid'. An alum-precipitated toxoid (A.P.T.) of high immunising efficiency is now available, and is issued by Messrs. Burroughs Wellcome and Co., in germ-proof containers of 1 c.c. and 5 c.c. This substance was first prepared in the Wellcome Physiological Research Laboratories in 1926. The results of animal tests showed that it possessed considerable immunising power against diphtheritic infection, and since that date its high immunising efficiency in human beings has been established. Caution has been exercised in applying the inoculation of A.P.T. in human beings on account of the production of a tissue response at the site of injection. This, though medically trivial,

may disturb parents of inoculated children. The efficiency of A.P.T. probably depends upon the deposition of the relatively insoluble aluminium-toxoid compound at the site of injection, and from this the immunising toxoid is gradually liberated. The complex toxoid compound, however, excites a tissue response in the form of a small painless nodule, and this tissue response is probably an essential factor in the potent immunisation that ensues. Unpublished experiments made in the Wellcome Research Laboratories have shown that in animals two spaced injections of one tenth, or less, of the ordinary human dose results in a more rapid, or a higher, immunity than one single larger dose. It is possible that a similar method may prove useful in human immunisation, the chance of troublesome local reaction being lessened by this course.

Juan Fernandez and Easter Island

By a recent decree of the Chilean Minister of Lands and Colonisation, it is reported by a correspondent of *The Times* in the issue of February 14, Juan Fernandez and Easter Island have been declared national parks. This gives effect, so far as Juan Fernandez is concerned, to a proposal which was first put forward so long ago as 1921. The two volcanic islands grouped together under the name Juan Fernandez and situated four and five hundred miles respectively west of Valparaiso are of popular interest because it was on one of them that Alexander Selkirk was marooned from 1704 until 1709; and his adventure is supposed to have inspired Defoe in writing "Robinson Crusoe". Easter Island, on the other hand, which lies about 2,300 miles from the mainland, is one of the most interesting islands of the Pacific. Its archaeological remains present a problem for ethnologists which hitherto has defied satisfactory solution. These remains consist of more than five hundred human figures, portrait statues, carved in stone, some of gigantic size and one at least approaching forty feet in height, over two hundred stone platforms and stone houses, unique in the Pacific, relics of a race of which the present inhabitants have no knowledge. Even more interesting in certain respects are the tablets inscribed in a script which no one has yet succeeded in deciphering. Since 1888 the island, which has an area of about 48 square miles, has been in the possession of Chile, and has served as a penal settlement. The native inhabitants, who are Polynesians with a Melanesian strain, barely exceed 200 in number, though in 1860 they numbered 3,000; but in the 'seventies a considerable proportion migrated or was removed to Tahiti and the Gambier archipelago. The decree of the Chilean Government, in so far as it will ensure the protection from vandalism of these unique relics of an otherwise unknown culture and an apparently vanished race, is a public-spirited act worthy of the highest commendation.

A Tidal Power Project in the Bay of Fundy

THE Bay of Fundy is well known throughout the world for the height of its tides. It is not surprising, therefore, that Americans are interested in the