

No account of Prof. Wheeler would be complete without reference to the respect and affection felt for him by the mining community, men as well as masters, to whom his name was a household word. His staff at the Buxton Research Station of the Safety in Mines Research Board treasure the tributes paid to him by colliers visiting the Sunday 'demonstrations', referring to him, for example, as "the greatest friend of the miner since Sir Humphry Davy".

W. PAYMAN.

Vice-Admiral Sir Percy Douglas, K.C.B.,  
C.M.G.

VICE-ADMIRAL SIR PERCY DOUGLAS, who died on November 4 at the age of sixty-three years, joined the surveying branch of the Royal Navy in 1898 and at once showed marked aptitude for this type of work. He possessed an alert brain and was more than a little interested in 'gadgets'; anything which could relieve the labours of the surveyor in the field was of particular interest to him, and being of an inventive turn of mind, he did a great deal to lighten their work and expedite production.

Whilst in command of H.M.S. *Waterwitch* on the China Station and in collaboration with the late Commander J. Sharpey-Schafer, Douglas introduced the Douglas-Schafer sounding gear, which was a great advance on former methods of sounding in comparatively shallow water; later he was responsible for the Douglas protractor and, jointly with Prof. R. Appleyard, perfected the arcless sextant. During the War of 1914-18, Sir Percy was appointed to serve as hydrographic surveyor on the staff of the Vice-Admiral, Aegean, and at a later stage in the same capacity with the Flag Officer at Dover; between these two appointments he was the first director of the Naval Meteorological Service.

His knowledge of hydrography and geodesy was of the greatest assistance in the Dardanelles campaign, and also in the attacks on the Belgian coast, where indirect fire and bombardment was of such importance and where sound-ranging was developed to meet the need for the accurate bombardment of enemy gun positions.

After the War, Admiral Douglas interested himself in the development of echo sounding apparatus, and it was largely due to his initiative that the Admiralty echo sounding gear was perfected and brought into use. In addition to his official duties as hydrographer of the Navy, Sir Percy was, during his term of office, an *ex officio* member of the National Committee for Geodesy and Geophysics of the Royal Society, and served on the Council of the Royal Geographical Society.

Sir Percy became a member of the "Discovery" Committee in 1925 and his wide experience and knowledge were of immense benefit to this body. Shortly after his retirement he was appointed by the Board of Trade to be acting conservator of the Mersey and somewhat later became chairman of the Dover Harbour Board.

Sir Percy was a fellow of the Royal Astronomical

Society and of the Royal Geographical Society and a Younger Brother of Trinity House. At the time of his death he was serving as Commodore Superintendent of the Dockyard at Dover.

J. A. EDGELL.

Dr. T. L. Prankerd

It is with deep regret that we record the tragic death in a street accident, on November 11, of Dr. T. L. Prankerd, for many years lecturer in botany in the University of Reading.

Theodora L. Prankerd was born in 1878 at Highgate, the daughter of Dr. O. R. Prankerd. She was educated at Brighton High School and the Royal Holloway College whence she graduated in science at the University of London. Later she was appointed to the staff of Bedford College (University of London) and then proceeded to carry out her early botanical researches at the University of Chicago. In 1917 she was appointed lecturer in botany in University College, Reading, where she remained until the College received its Royal Charter in 1926, and then she continued as lecturer in the University up to the time of her death. She was admitted fellow of the Linnean Society in 1919.

Dr. Prankerd's botanical researches were characterized by unlimited patience and exactitude. Her earlier work was morphological. In her first paper on the water violet, *Hottonia*, interest centres in pure anatomy and possible phylogeny; and this comes out more strongly in her next paper on a coal ball seed of which she gave a very careful description. Although her interest remained largely morphological, her other published papers are concerned with the perception of the stimulus of gravity by organs, and reveal a great number of patient experiments. She ardently supported the theory of statolith perception, and although many consider that this conflicts with the hormone theory, she herself was trying to combine the two into a comprehensive theory of perception and transmission.

But it will not be as a research worker so much as a teacher and friend that Dr. Prankerd will be remembered. Hosts of students have passed through her hands. Nothing was too much trouble for her, and many a student will recall with gratitude the kindly help which she always offered; and this was not confined solely to study. She took a personal interest in her students.

Dr. Prankerd had a keen sense of justice and would stop at nothing in her efforts to make justice prevail whether for an ideal or an individual. For that reason she was sometimes judged harshly by others though never by anyone who was prepared to probe beneath that veneer of seeming forcefulness, for then they found a kindly and sympathetic woman. He or she who finally gained her friendship soon realized how intensely loyal she was. She was a woman, too, of great breadth of vision and high ideals. Thus, her life was not devoted solely to her plants. She was a great advocate of peace, and her efforts for the League of Nations Union were tireless.

She was also an artist of no mean calibre. She had many delightful water-colour sketches to her credit. Her literary tastes were often reflected in her lectures, which, though not always easy to follow, were a delight to hear.

Hers was such a personality that she will be remembered affectionately by many of her former students when some of their more brilliantly scientific and successful teachers have been forgotten. It is an irony of fate that a woman who argued and worked for peace so unflinchingly should have met her death on Armistice Day.

Dr. Prankerd leaves her mother to whom she was devoted and to whom our deepest sympathies are extended.

WE regret to announce the following deaths :

Prof. F. Angell, emeritus professor of psychology in Stanford University, on November 2, aged eighty-two years.

Prof. Charles Barrois, formerly professor of geology in the University of Lille, on November 8.

Mr. C. J. Bond, C.M.G., a former member of the Industrial Health Research and of the Medical Research Board, on November 23, aged eighty-three years.

Mr. Wilfred Trotter, F.R.S., sergeant surgeon to H.M. the King, and consulting surgeon at University College Hospital, on November 25, aged sixty-seven years.

## NEWS AND VIEWS

### Pithecanthropus and Peking Man: Comparative Studies

By a happy and fruitful conjunction in comparative study of old and new material, Dr. G. H. R. Koenigswald, of Bandoeng, Java, and Prof. Franz Weidenreich of the Peking Cenozoic Research Laboratory, are able to record in another column of this issue of NATURE (see p. 926) some remarkable observations bearing on the relationship between those early fossil hominids, or precursors of man, Pithecanthropus of Java and Peking man. In the further light now thrown upon the problem of the descent of man by recent discoveries of both Sinanthropus and Pithecanthropus—of the former, some still undescribed, of the latter, some of the more important made only in the current year in response to intensified search—the authors demonstrate by detailed comparison not only the essentially human affinities of Pithecanthropus, which Dubois, its first discoverer, has come to question, but also the very close affinity of Pithecanthropus to Sinanthropus, of whose right to stand in the line of human descent no doubt has ever been raised. Further, among the latest Pithecanthropus material to be discovered is an upper jaw, which in the separation of canines from incisors presents a character hitherto regarded as distinctively Simian. The appearance of this character in Pithecanthropus is notable as it has been adduced as an argument in discussion of the Piltdown jaw. By far the most interesting and significant result to emerge is, however, not so much the affinities of the two groups of fossil remains as their differences, in which not only now one now the other exhibits an approach to modern man, but these differences also indicate that the variability, which is so marked a feature in the individual specimens of Sinanthropus, is almost equally striking when the two groups are compared each as a whole. In other words, there is evidence even at this comparatively early stage of human evolution of a variation which may be termed racial. Of the authors' pregnant allusions to the position of

*Homo soloensis*, no more need be said here than to express a confident hope of further light from an equally fruitful collaboration.

### Anthropometry and the War

In a written reply in the House of Commons under date September 28, to a question in reference to offers from ex-officer anthropologists to conduct an anthropometric survey of H.M. Forces, Sir Victor Warrender, financial secretary, War Office, stated that he was advised that "though such a survey might be of scientific interest, it is impossible in present circumstances to carry it out, owing to the time which would be required for the purpose". Captain A. G. Pape, by whom the attention of NATURE has been directed to the passage in *Hansard* reporting question and author (September 28, 1939, p. 1516), writes strongly urging the need and advantages of such a survey, which, he informs us, he himself had suggested to the authorities with the offer of his services. Readers of NATURE will scarcely need to be reminded of the deplorable gap in evidence relating to the constitution of the British population, owing to the lack of systematic records of physical characters and other anthropometric data. The survey contemplated by Captain Pape, however, is apparently of a far more extensive character, and would include observations demanding the services of medical and psychological specialists, and an extension to the rising generation through an organization embracing both university and school. Strong though the argument for an anthropometric record of the population may be—the need will be much more insistent when post-war measures of social amelioration have to be considered—it is probably quite inevitable that in so far as regards H.M. Forces, the time factor is all-decisive. While opportunity might possibly be found to examine troops serving in the field or in training, these subjects would not be representative of an average sample of the popula-