NEWS AND VIEWS

American Association: New President

DR. ALBERT FRANCIS BLAKESLEE, director of the Carnegie Institution Station for Experimental Evolution, Cold Spring Harbor, U.S.A., has been elected president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. This election will be welcomed all over the world, because he has a high reputation as a botanist and as a pioneer in more than one line of research, while his genial manner and ever-ready help to all scientific workers are very well known. His early work, in which he showed that only individuals of a fungus species which were physiologically different could take part in sexual union, initiated a large number of investigations into the behaviour of sexuality in the fungi.

Later, in collaboration with a number of workers he had attracted round him, Dr. Blakeslee analysed the cytogenetics of the thorn-apple, *Datura Stramonium*. The discovery of secondary and tertiary trisomics, and the analysis of their constitution by Blakeslee and Belling was a turning point in modern genetics. Studies of tetraploid segregation in Datura, the production of many haploids and novel chromosome types and the analysis of the effect of changes in the chromosome constitution of a plant by Blakeslee are established as classical reference material. More recently he has been a leader in the utilization of colchicine treatment in the production of polyploid forms. Results of economic importance are already being produced, while a neat use of colchicine is being made for the elucidation of sex-determination in plants. Dr. Blakeslee's wide interests are appropriate to the presidency of the American Association.

University of Cambridge Parliamentary By-election

THE recent by-election in the University of Cambridge to choose a successor to the late Sir John Withers in the House of Commons was of unusual personal interest to scientific workers in that the two candidates must be well known to many of them. Prof. A. V. Hill, Foulerton research professor of the Royal Society, formerly Jodrell professor of physiology in University College, London, has been one of the secretaries of the Royal Society since 1935. Prof. John A. Ryle, regius professor of physic at Cambridge since 1935, has had a distinguished medical career in London, and recently completed a four-year term on the Medical Research Council. Both candidates adopted the adjective 'independent', and while Prof. Hill accepted the support of the Cambridge Conservative Graduate Association, Prof. Ryle preferred to style himself 'progressive'. Prof. Ryle's advantage as a Cambridge resident was offset by the fact that Prof. Hill, as a former scholar and fellow of Trinity College, is well known in Cambridge.

The result of the poll was declared on February 24: Prof. A. V. Hill, 9,840 votes; Prof. J. A. Ryle, 5,386 votes. Prof. Hill therefore goes to Westminster as one of the Parliamentary representatives of the University of Cambridge. In his election address, he claimed the independence usually accorded to university members; in addition, he stressed the importance of international co-operation in attacking the problems which will face the world at the conclusion of the War. He also urged the need for bringing science and learning to bear on national affairs, and said that "science has still too little influence on higher policy in government, in departments and in industry". As regards the universities, their strength must be maintained; industry will require new methods and materials in the recovery phase; improvements in public health must be studied; trained and critical young minds will be needed to meet the problems of reconstruction; and finally, the "free pursuit of knowledge for its own sake must be kept up". Prof. Hill's programme is comprehensive, but no one who knows him will doubt that he will press his views at the proper time with skill and vigour.

Heinrich Wilhelm Matthias Olbers (1758-1840)

ON March 2 a century ago, the city of Bremen lost its most distinguished citizen, the physician and astronomer Heinrich Wilhelm Matthias Olbers, who died at the age of eighty-one years, after a life of unremitting industry. He was born on October 11, 1758, at the village of Arbergen, near Bremen, where his father was pastor, and from his boyhood he was an enthusiastic student of science. When nineteen he became a medical student at Göttingen and at twenty-three set up in practice in Bremen. A conscientious practitioner, he served his fellow-citizens in many ways, and after his death his statue was erected in the city. His astronomical work was done in the upper part of his house in the Sandgasse, which was fitted up to afford a view of the greater part of the sky. His instruments included a 5-ft. Dollond refractor of $3\frac{3}{4}$-in. aperture, a 5-ft. reflector by Schröter, a quadrant by Bird and a Troughton sextant. It is said that he never slept more than four hours at a time.

Olbers is chiefly remembered for his discovery of asteroids and his fifty years' study of comets. In 1772 Bode had discovered the law of planetary distances bearing his name, and when in 1781 Herschel discovered Uranus it was concluded that there was a planet between Mars and Jupiter, and largely through Von Zach, in 1798 a party of astronomers met at Gotha to start a search for it. Another meeting took place at Schröter's observatory at Lilienthal, and zones of search were assigned to twenty-four astronomers. One of these astronomers was Piazzi of Palermo, but before instructions reached him, on January 1, 1801, he

discovered the minor planet Ceres. The search being continued, Olbers, on March 28, 1802, discovered Pallas, on September 1, 1804, Harding discovered Juno, and on March 29, 1807, Olbers discovered Vesta. The fame of Olbers spread far and wide. He represented Bremen at the baptism of Napoleon's son the King of Rome in 1811, and during 1812–13 was a member of the legislative body in Paris. The Royal Society elected him a foreign member in 1804, and the Paris Academy of Sciences in 1829 made him a foreign associate. He was the correspondent of nearly every astronomer in Germany, and through him Bessel became known in the scientific world. Indeed he declared that his discernment of the genius of Bessel was a greater service to astronomy than his own work on comets and planets. He was a man of lovable disposition, generous and unassuming.

Laurent Théodore Biett (1781-1840)

DR. LAURENT THÉODORE BIETT, a celebrated Paris dermatologist, was born in 1781 at Schams, in the Grison canton of Switzerland. Seven years later he moved with his parents to Clermont-Ferrand, where he commenced his medical education under Bonnet, the senior surgeon to the Hôtel Dieu. At the beginning of the century he came to Paris, where he qualified in 1814 with a thesis entitled "Quelques Observations sur la frénesie aiguë idiopathique". Shortly after qualification he was appointed physician to the Hôpital Saint Louis, where he carried out some important improvements, including the establishment of an out-patient department for diseases of the skin, of which he was the director for sixteen years. While attending a patient in London in 1816, he took the opportunity of studying the work of Willan and Bateman, and on his return to Paris endeavoured to introduce their classification of skin diseases, which was in opposition to that drawn up by his friend Alibert.

Biett made many valuable contributions to the treatment of skin diseases, including the use of iron and arsenic internally, the employment of sulphur baths and the application of dry and hot air. His lectures, which were edited by Cazenave and Schedel, appeared in 1828, went through three editions, and were translated into English in 1842 by T. H. Burgess. He also contributed many articles to the "Dictionnaire des sciences médicales", and all the articles on diseases of the skin to the twenty volume "Dictionnaire de médecine", in addition to papers in periodical literature such as the *Bulletin de Thérapeutique*, *Gazette des Hôpitaux* and *Journal universel des sciences médicales*. Being a devotee of the arts, he was the medical attendant of many well-known painters, sculptors and actors. He died of heart disease on March 3, 1840.

Colonial Development and Scientific Research

PUBLICATION of the recommendations of the West Indies Royal Commission together with the important statement of policy on colonial development and welfare (H.M. Stationery Office. Cmd. 6174, 6175), to which Mr. Malcolm MacDonald, H.M. Secretary of State for the Colonies, made reference in the House of Commons on February 20, mark a momentous enlargement in scope in the administrative and financial relations between Great Britain and her colonial and other dependencies of analogous status which will have a profound effect on their future. The measures which the Government now proposes after an examination of Colonial problems which had been begun sometime before the outbreak of the War is an acceptance of an obligation which has long seemed inevitable to those who have been engaged in the scientific investigation of conditions in these dependencies if Great Britain's responsibility is to be met.

In brief, the proposals are as follow: The place of the Colonial Development Fund, instituted in 1929, and limited to a sum of £1,000,000 a year, will be replaced by a greatly increased provision for development and welfare. The sum will amount to not more than £5,000,000 a year for a period of ten years, at the end of which period this provision is to be reviewed. The amount thus made available, is not, however, from one point of view the most important enlargement. On one hand, assistance will no longer be granted, as hitherto in the main, solely to capital expenditure, but recurring expenditure will come under this provision. On the other hand, while certain purposes of expenditure have not been ruled out in terms, assistance has been granted generally to material development. In future this will not obtain; and such services as agriculture, health, education and housing will be brought into the account.

Nor are the claims of the important question of research overlooked. Hitherto, as Mr. MacDonald pointed out, the Colonial Office has been able to call upon the assistance of scientific and technical experts in dealing with Colonial problems. This service will now be placed upon a permanent basis by the institution of a Colonial Research Advisory Committee, while for dealing with its recommendations a sum of £500,000 a year will be allocated. This will be used to assist in the various fields of research. As already mentioned, these proposals apply not only to the Colonies and Protectorates, but also to the Mandated Territories. The pause, which, as Mr. MacDonald intimated to the House of Commons, must ensue before they can come into full operation, will give the necessary breathing space for the careful preparation of plans.

Tibetan Coronation

IT is perhaps not surprising that, even amid other and insistent preoccupations, the accounts of the final act of the installation of the new Dalai Lama sent by correspondents to the world's daily press, have created a profound impression. Nowhere else, except possibly in Japan, could the inauguration of a new head of the State have so closely wedded the spiritual and the political and civic elements in what is virtually an act of coronation, and at the same time united every member of the population in an expression of combined loyalty and religious fervour.