

are outside the scope of this article, can be offered. Secondly, it is evident that the amount of prenatal mortality must have considerable influence on the sex-ratio at birth. Many years ago, Tschuprow⁹ concluded that the sex-ratio at birth was largely determined by the amount of prenatal mortality. This generalization requires various qualifications—allowance for the sex-ratio at conception, for example—but all subsequent work has tended to emphasize the influence on the sex-ratio at birth of the decrease in the proportion of males which takes place during the gestation period. For example, the greater number of males born to younger mothers is probably due to decreased prenatal mortality¹⁰.

From the point of view of population problems, the important aspect, as Groome⁴ pointed out, is that a substantial decrease in prenatal mortality would give an increase in the proportion of males born. If the sex-ratio at conception is 120, and 20 per cent of the fetuses, having a sex-ratio of 200, die before term, then the ratio at birth will be a little more than 106. If the prenatal mortality were halved and retained the same sex incidence, the ratio at

birth would be more than 113. Such an increase, coupled with the present reduction in infant mortality, would ensure an excess of males at reproductive ages and would do much to reduce or abolish the excess of females with no chance of marriage. This long-term effect would seem to be of real potential importance in counterbalancing the declining birth-rate, and an intensive programme of research on the causes and prevention of prenatal death offers one of the more promising medical contributions to the problem. Such a line of attack, unlike many projects designed to raise the birth-rate, could arouse opposition only from the sternest exponents of the principle of natural selection.

¹ Registrar General's Statistical Review, 1913.

² Registrar General's Statistical Review, 1925.

³ Registrar General's Statistical Review, 1935.

⁴ Groome, J. R., *Eug. Rev.*, **29**, 154 (1937).

⁵ Russell, W. T., *J. Hygiene*, **36**, 381 (1936).

⁶ Martin, W. J., *Lancet*, **245**, 807 (Dec. 25, 1943).

⁷ Parkes, A. S., *Biol. Rev.*, **2**, 1 (1926).

⁸ Auerbach, E., *Arch. f. Rassen. und Gesellschafts Biol.*, **9**, 10 (1912).

⁹ Tschuprow, Al. A., *Bull. Int. Stat.*, **20**, 378 (1915).

¹⁰ Parkes, A. S., *J. Genetics*, **14**, 39 (1924).

NEWS and VIEWS

Sir Napier Shaw, F.R.S.

ON March 4 Sir Napier Shaw attains the age of ninety years. The present generation may be surprised to know that he had a distinguished career as a physicist before he took any part in meteorology. He was educated at King Edward's School, Birmingham, and at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, of which he was fellow during 1877-1906. He was University lecturer in experimental physics during 1887-99, and with Sir Richard Glazebrook was demonstrator in physics at the Cavendish Laboratory; their joint "Text-Book of Practical Physics" was a household word to students of physics of a generation ago. Sir Napier was elected to the Royal Society in 1891 and it was not until six years later that he was officially connected with meteorology, when he became a member of the Meteorological Council, a body responsible for the Meteorological Office. He became director of the Office in 1905. Then under his influence began a period of great advances in the science along many lines. He had the gift of stimulating the interest and enlisting the help not only of those working directly under him, but also of those outside his official orbit, and his ungrudging help is gratefully remembered by many.

Sir Napier retired from the Meteorological Office in 1920, but he did not retire from meteorology; in 1926 there appeared the first volume of his monumental "Manual of Meteorology", completed in 1931; a second edition of volume 2 appeared in 1936. A much enlarged and revised edition of his "Drama of the Weather" appeared so lately as 1939. These works show Sir Napier's energy at an age when many would have rested on their laurels. Honours have been showered on him by universities and societies both British and foreign. He was knighted in 1916. He was president of the International Meteorological Committee during 1907-23, of the Royal Meteorological Society during 1918-20, of Section A (Mathematical and Physical Sciences) of the British Association in 1908, and of Section L (Education) in 1919. In 1885 he married Sarah Harland, who ably helped him, whether when he was tutor of his College or later when he had to preside over meetings national

and international; she died in 1923. Meteorologists and many others will join in all good wishes for Sir Napier's ninetieth birthday.

John Theophilus Desaguliers (1683-1744)

IN the later years of Newton's life, there were few figures better known among the men of science in London than that of the short, thickset, near-sighted but broadminded and generous Frenchman, John Theophilus Desaguliers, who died on February 29 two hundred years ago in his lodgings near Covent Garden. Born at La Rochelle on March 12, 1683, he was brought to England by his father at the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, and spent the remainder of his life here. At first his father was minister of the French chapel in Swallow Street, London, but also had a school at Islington. The son helped his father and then proceeded to Christ Church, Oxford, and after taking his degree qualified for the Church. In 1710 he was appointed successor to Keill as lecturer in natural philosophy at Hart Hall, and three years later removed to Westminster, living first in Channel Row and then over the Bedford Coffee House, lecturing with great success year after year to "persons of all ranks and professions and even the ladies". He gained a reputation, too, by his translation of s'Gravesande's "Elements of Natural Philosophy". For many years he was demonstrator to the Royal Society and it was to him that the first actual Copley Medal was given, although both he and Stephen Gray had previously received monetary awards under the Copley bequest. As a clergyman he held various livings, one of these being that of Whitechurch, Middlesex, of the church of which Handel was organist. In his works he gives full particulars of the many experiments he made and also much information about the principal mechanical constructions of his time. His death took place when he was nearly sixty-one, and he was buried in the Savoy. One of his sons, Thomas Desaguliers (died 1788), for many years superintended Woolwich Arsenal, and was the first scientific investigator into gunnery in the British Army.