

Dr. T. W. King (1809-47)

THOMAS WILKINSON KING, who died of pulmonary tuberculosis on March 26, 1847, may without undue straining of the phrase be hailed as the 'father of endocrinology'. Such an appellation is justified by his paper "On the Structure and Function of the Thyroid Gland" (*Guy's Hospital Reports*, 1, 429; 1836), in which he described the colloid secretion of the thyroid and which is remarkable for this prophetic sentence: "We may one day be able to show that a particular material is slowly formed and partially kept in reserve, and that this principle is also supplementary, when poured into the descending cava, to important functions in the course of the circulation". This original article remained almost completely forgotten until it was rescued from obscurity by Sir Humphry Rolleston (Fitzpatrick Lectures, 1933). The son of a medical practitioner at Dover, at the age of sixteen King entered Guy's Hospital, on October 4, 1824. In 1837 he succeeded Thomas Hodgkin as curator of the museum and lecturer on morbid anatomy, assuming the additional lectureship on comparative anatomy and physiology three years later. As a lecturer he was not popular, for he was a poor speaker and inclined to be over the head of the average student. A tireless worker, he founded his many novel theories on clinical observations which he verified experimentally. On December 11, 1843, King became one of the original fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons of England. He was then practising at 36 Bedford Square, London; it is recorded that "Though young, he had an aged, worn look", and a perpetual cough.

World Federation of Scientific Workers

MR. J. G. CROWTHER has been appointed secretary-general designate of the World Federation of Scientific Workers. Mr. Crowther was during the War in charge of the Science Department of the British Council and is the author of several books on the history and social relations of science. The World Federation of Scientific Workers was founded last year at a conference convened by the Association of Scientific Workers in Great Britain and attended by representatives of many foreign associations of scientific workers. It is intended to serve as a centre through which the various national associations may render each other mutual advice and encouragement, to help the growth of the individual associations in their own countries, and to assist them to work out common aims and methods of organisation. It is preparing a charter of the rights and duties of scientific workers. The constituent associations work towards an agreed policy on matters of fundamental importance such as secrecy, and freedom and co-ordination in scientific research. The president of the Federation is Prof. F. Joliot-Curie, High Commissioner for Atomic Energy in France. Communications can be sent to the London office, at 15 Half Moon Street, London, W.1, or to M. P. Bonet-Maury, Institut du Radium, 11 rue Pierre Curie, Paris, V^e.

Chemicals from Petroleum

At a meeting held at the Mayfair Hotel, W.1, on March 11, an announcement was made by the Shell Petroleum Co., Ltd., of a new and extended programme for the production in Great Britain of chemicals from petroleum. In the past the main sources from which organic chemicals have been derived are coal by-products and fermentation processes.

The petroleum to be used as the new raw material will be imported from sterling areas, and the productive capacity of the Shell organisation in the United Kingdom is to be expanded to give a greatly increased output. This venture has been facilitated by the exemption from import and excise duty of hydrocarbon oils used as raw material for processes of chemical synthesis. By the use of modern methods and equipment it is claimed that a high output per man will be achieved. Among the basic chemicals to be produced are acetone, methyl ethyl ketone, methyl isobutyl ketone, isopropyl alcohol, diacetone alcohol, *sec.*-butyl alcohol, *tert.*-butyl alcohol, mesityl oxide, methyl isobutyl carbinol and isopropyl ether. A big expansion in the production of sodium higher alkyl sulphates, used as detergents and wetting agents, is envisaged, the method of manufacture being based on the vapour phase cracking of a petroleum wax to produce higher olefines. Further developments include the manufacture of insecticides, fungicides and other products used in agriculture; and an experimental farm has been acquired at Woodstock, Kent, where a study can be made of the application of new products to a variety of agricultural and horticultural purposes. Owing to the absence of natural gas resources in Great Britain, the production of chemicals from petroleum in this country calls for different manufacturing methods for the basic olefines from those generally followed in the United States of America.

The Fertiliser Society

It has long been felt by the various sections of the fertiliser industry that, as in other progressive industries, there was a need for a technical society to serve the personnel of the industry and to deal with technical problems. On the initiative of the Fertiliser Manufacturers' Association, therefore, representatives of the Basic Slag Producers' Association, the British Sulphate of Ammonia Federation, the Federation of Bone Users and Allied Trades Ltd., and the Horticultural Fertilisers Association Ltd., met recently to discuss proposals. The formation is now announced of the Fertiliser Society, having as its objects: (1) the provision of a medium for discussion of scientific and technical aspects of the production, use and application of fertilisers; (2) the promotion of the interchange of views and the dissemination of information to members concerning such scientific and technical aspects. Membership is open to persons engaged in, or associated with, the manufacture of fertilisers, and such other persons as the Council from time to time approve. The secretary is Dr. G. F. New, and the offices of the Society are at 44 Russell Square, London, W.C.1.

Health and the Suppression of Dust in Mines

THE relation of dust to the health of mine-workers will be the subject of meetings to be held at the Royal Institution during April 15-17. On April 15, at 5.0 p.m., the first Sir Julius Wernher Memorial Lecture of the Institution of Mining and Metallurgy will be delivered by Major-General A. J. Orenstein, chief medical officer of Central Mining—Rand Mines, Ltd., who will speak on "The History and Prevention of Silicosis with special reference to the Witwatersrand". The lecture will be open to the public, without ticket. During April 16-17, a Conference on Silicosis, Pneumokoniosis and Dust Suppression in Mines, arranged by the Institution of Mining Engineers and the