

## NEWS and VIEWS

## Dr. Robert Broom, F.R.S.

THE election of Dr. Robert Broom as an honorary fellow of the Royal Society of South Africa is a recognition of a long life devoted to scientific work. As a student of medicine in Glasgow, Dr. Broom became fascinated by the problem of the ancestry of mammals, and on qualification migrated to New South Wales in order to work on the comparative anatomy and embryology of monotremes and marsupials while earning his living as a general practitioner. The Australian scientific world discovered his existence when a paper on the Organ of Jacobson arrived at the Linnean Society from an unknown man in the bush, to be followed by others. But during a visit to England, Broom saw some of the fossil reptiles recently brought from South Africa by Prof. H. G. Seeley, and realizing immediately that they presented a novel and direct approach to his problem of mammalian ancestry, sailed for South Africa instead of returning to Australia. There in a very few years he revolutionized our knowledge of the fossil reptiles of the Karroo, showed in broad outline how they were related to one another, and introduced a zonal subdivision of the rocks in which they were found which has proved to be applicable in Russia and China as in Central Africa. In 1910 Broom visited New York and there discovered that the Pelycosaur from the Texan Permian were closely related to the Deinocephalia, the most primitive group of the African mammal-like reptiles. His paper on this subject established this point once for all, and has ever since formed a point of departure from which all more recent work on the classification and evolution of reptiles has proceeded.

This early work of Broom's is remarkable because in it he used his fossils for the solution of specific problems of morphology, and thus introduced a new point of view into vertebrate palaeontology. But while actively working on Karroo fossils and for the greater part of his life remaining in medical practice, Broom found time to investigate the poor fragments of fossil mammals found in Pleistocene deposits in South Africa, describing many of them and showing that an extinct Quaternary fauna had existed in that land. When Prof. R. A. Dart discovered the skull of *Australopithecus*, Broom began an examination of the numerous 'bone caves' which exist in South Africa and soon found two new genera of allied giant apes. His view on the significance of these forms is fully set out in a recently published monograph (see *Nature*, June 29, 1946, p. 863), in which he shows that the three form a special sub-family of giant apes, differing in very many ways from those which still live, and that in all these ways they resemble man. They are, in fact, the most man-like in structure of all the primates; and there is some indication that, unlike the forest-dwelling gorillas and orangs, they lived in a dry country not unlike South Africa to-day. The latest discovery is described by Dr. Broom on p. 602 of this issue. This work is the most important contribution to the problem of human ancestry published for many years, and is a fitting climax to Dr. Broom's fifty years work.

## Boyle Medal of the Royal Dublin Society: Prof. J. H. J. Poole

THE Council of the Royal Dublin Society, on the recommendation of its Committee of Science, has

awarded the Society's Boyle Medal to Prof. J. H. J. Poole, professor of geophysics in the University of Dublin, for his distinguished contributions to geophysics, many of which have been published in the Society's *Proceedings*. His early work, much of it in conjunction with the late Prof. J. Joly, was largely concerned with the measurement of the radioactivity of the earth's crust. His more recent papers include discussions of the earth's thermal history, the evolution of the atmosphere, and the possibility of initiating thermo-nuclear reactions under terrestrial conditions.

## Building Research Division, National Research Council, Canada

PROF. R. F. LEGGET, associate professor of civil engineering, municipal and structural division, University of Toronto, has been appointed head of the Division of Building Research under the National Research Council, Canada. The new Division of Building Research will work very closely with the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, and will provide the required scientific data for an adequate programme in all fields of construction, including building materials, types of construction, lay-out, and all other essential features. Prof. Legget had extensive experience in construction engineering in Great Britain and on the Continent before going to Canada in 1929 to join the Construction Division of the Power Corporation of Canada. He later became a member of the staff of the University of Toronto. Born in Liverpool in 1904, he was trained at the University of Liverpool.

## Marconi Jubilee and Exhibition

FIFTY years ago, in 1897, Signor Guglielmo Marconi gave the first demonstration of wireless telegraphy which was recognized by the Postmaster-General as establishing a new means of communication. At that time, Marconi was twenty-three years old, and he had come to Great Britain in the previous year from Bologna, where he had conceived the idea of using the so-called Hertzian waves for the development of a means of signalling without a wire connexion between the sending and receiving stations. Sir William Preece, who was the engineer-in-chief of the Post Office at the time, had been conducting experiments with a wireless circuit using magnetic induction between large loops; and it was due to Preece's interest and encouragement that Marconi was able to develop his experiments, leading to a successful demonstration across the Bristol Channel. It was in commemoration of this demonstration that a jubilee dinner was held at Guildhall on April 21 under the presidency of Lord Listowel, the retiring Postmaster-General.

In further celebration of these achievements of fifty years ago, the Marconi Company arranged a Jubilee Exhibition at Queen's House, Kingsway, London, during April 23-May 2. The Company was originally formed as the Wireless Telegraph and Signal Company soon after the demonstration mentioned above. A few years later, this became Marconi's Wireless Telegraph Co., Ltd., and, with the associated Marconi International Marine Communication Co., Ltd., has recently been incorporated in the English Electric Group of Companies. The exhibition comprised a photographic and pictorial display together with a collection of apparatus and equipment developed for various applications; this collection