

## Dr. A. S. Corbet

ALEXANDER STEVEN CORBET was born on August 8, 1896; on May 16, 1948, he collapsed from heart failure after hurrying for a train, and died shortly after. He was educated at Bournemouth and University College, Reading, taking honours in chemistry. Afterwards he took the Ph.D. degree, and in 1935 his D.Sc. in biochemistry. He joined the staff of the British Museum (Natural History) in May 1939, after an already varied career which had included appointments as bacteriologist at the School of Agriculture, Cambridge, bacteriologist and entomologist at the Rubber Research Institute, Kuala Lumpur, F.M.S., soil microbiologist at the I.C.I. Experiment Station, Bracknell, and bacteriological work with the Water Pollution Research Board.

Wide experience, linked with a life-long interest in entomology, resulted, when Corbet was enabled to devote his whole energies to the study of the butterflies of the world, in an approach and a method of treatment such as had not before been applied to these popular insects. A particularly successful example of his work was his treatment of the common and very variable sulphur-yellow butterflies of the genus *Eurema*, which had been a happy hunting ground of the name-coining 'splitters' of earlier days. Another was his revision of the rather intractable species of the 'Blues' of the Oriental genus *Arhopala*. In his work on the latter genus he made use of the parallel variation of a number of species occurring side by side throughout the Malaysian sub-region in a taxonomically novel way; he succeeded in defining the island races of particular species by reference to the general characteristics of each island group, thus eliminating a great deal of rather repetitive descriptive matter. The same parallelism among island species also emerged clearly from his revision

of the species of the genus *Euploea*, a large group of butterflies which also had until then resisted many attempts by more orthodox methods to reduce them to order. In a few years he had, in fact, overcome most of the systematic difficulties which had hitherto dogged the attempts of less gifted students of the systematics of the oriental Rhopalocera. His results are contained in the new edition of his "Butterflies of Malaya", which he has left ready for the press. The collections he formed in Malaya are bequeathed to the nation.

During part of the First World War Corbet served with the Royal Engineers; in the Second World War he was seconded to the Pest Infestation Branch of the Ministry of Food, where he was able, among other things, to carry out research on the taxonomies of insect pests of food which has proved of direct economic value.

Corbet was a prolific writer who had the rare merit of not wasting words. Though his entomological work cannot now be rounded off, the results of his soil research in Malaya have already appeared in highly condensed form in a single slim volume, his "Biological Processes in Tropical Soils". As a colleague he was invaluable, his unassuming modesty cloaking a width of experience and interest, and a personality of great charm. N. D. RILEY

WE regret to announce the following deaths:

Prof. Alfred C. Lane, emeritus professor of geology at Tufts College, Massachusetts, president in 1931 of the Geological Society of America, on April 15, aged eighty-five.

Sir D'Arcy Thompson, C.B., professor of natural history in the University of St. Andrews, on June 21, aged eighty-eight.

## NEWS and VIEWS

## Geology at Newcastle-upon-Tyne:

Prof. H. G. A. Hickling, F.R.S.

PROF. H. G. A. HICKLING is to retire at the end of this session from the chair of geology at King's College, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, which he has held since 1920. During this period he has greatly extended his own work in some of the branches of geology to which he had earlier made contributions, and his students have shown that wide range of interest which is characteristic of him. Already as a lecturer at Manchester he had investigated the Old Red Sandstones of east Scotland, described the footprints of fossil reptiles, examined the variations of gastropods, studied the structure of fossil plants, the microstructure of coals and the stratigraphy of the Lancashire coalfield; the latter topics he made his own at a time when coalfield work was thought by some to be scarcely suitable for academic geologists. At Newcastle he has added much to our knowledge of coals, and especially (by his development of techniques of section cutting) to the understanding of 'vitrain'. He has fittingly combined an active interest in the economic problems of the north of England with a full appreciation of the necessity for less obviously useful studies: all this has been to the advantage of his students. His work was recognized by the award of the Murchison Medal by the Geo-

logical Society in 1934 and by his election to the Royal Society in 1936.

Dr. T. S. Westoll

DR. T. S. WESTOLL, who is succeeding Prof. Hickling in the chair of geology in King's College, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, has had a distinguished career in geology and vertebrate palaeontology. Graduating in 1932 in the College to which he now returns, he commenced research on the famous fish fauna of the Permian rocks of that area. He was awarded a Ph.D. and a senior research award of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, with which he proceeded to University College, London, to work with Prof. D. M. S. Watson. During his three years in that position, he visited many of the principal museums in Europe and commenced the work to which he has since contributed most widely, namely, the further study of the Old Red Sandstone and its faunas, particularly in the north of Scotland. In 1937, with grants from the Geological and Royal Societies, he spent several months in the United States and Canada, visiting the principal universities and museums, and commencing stratigraphical and palaeontological field-work in the Gaspé Peninsula, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. The latter important work was interrupted by his election to a senior lectureship at Aberdeen, though not before

it had led to important results both in the stratigraphy and palaeontology of the Devonian and Carboniferous rocks of that region. In Aberdeen, field-work on the Old Red Sandstone of various areas of north-east Scotland, the Orkneys and Shetlands and on their faunas has been actively continued, along with investigations of the morphology and relationships of the various groups of fishes and the origin of tetrapod structures. This work has become of international repute. In 1941 the University of Aberdeen conferred on him the degree of D.Sc. In the following year Dr. Westoll was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh and a member of the New York Academy of Sciences. In 1947 he was invited to the Princeton Bicentenary Celebrations to participate in the conference on palaeontology, genetics and evolution, and afterwards to the Paris conference on palaeontology.

#### Chemistry at University College, Swansea :

Prof. J. E. Coates, O.B.E.

THE pending retirement of Prof. J. E. Coates from the chair of chemistry marks the close of an important period in the history of the University College of Swansea, for, of the professors of scientific subjects appointed at the time of its foundation, he is the last remaining in the service of the College. After a brilliant career as student at Bangor, in London and at Karlsruhe, and distinguished service during the First World War in the Royal Naval Air Service, he was in 1920, when a member of the staff of the University of Birmingham, called to the professorship of chemistry at the newly established Swansea College of the University of Wales. It then fell to his lot to start, build up and maintain one of the major departments of the College, and the magnitude of his success in this arduous and responsible labour is demonstrated by the rapid advancement of the Chemistry Department to its present prosperous condition, and great service to the important industrial area in which it is situated. Under his direction, a foremost feature has been activity in research in physical chemistry, in which branch he was trained during his early investigations under the great masters, Ramsay and Haber. Among his studies while at Swansea have been the physical and chemical properties of hydrogen cyanide and its solutions. His past and present students, his colleagues and his numerous friends will all wish Prof. Coates many years of further fruitful activity.

#### Dr. C. W. Shoppee

DR. C. W. SHOPPEE has been appointed to the chair of chemistry in the University of Wales, tenable at University College, Swansea, in succession to Prof. J. E. Coates. Dr. Shoppee's earliest research work was carried out in 1923 at the Imperial College with Dr. C. K. Ingold and the late Sir Jocelyn Thorpe. In 1924, he accompanied Prof. Ingold to the University of Leeds, and in 1928, after having held an 1851 Senior Studentship, was appointed to the staff of that University. In 1939, he was elected to a Rockefeller Research Fellowship, which he chose to hold in the laboratory of Prof. T. Reichstein at the University of Basle. In 1944, he was appointed to a readership in chemistry in the University of London, tenable at the Royal Cancer Hospital (Free). Dr. Shoppee is distinguished for his researches on the mechanism and kinetics of tautomeric change, and for his work on the hormones of

the adrenal cortex, which led to the establishment of the detailed structures of these physiologically important compounds. At the Chester Beatty Research Institute of the Royal Cancer Hospital (Free), he has applied his special knowledge of the microchemical and chromatographic investigation of natural products to the isolation and identification of the endogenous carcinogenic substances present in human tissues. In the steroid field, he has gained an international reputation, and his most recent work involves application of the new conceptions of the mechanism of organic reactions to the determination of chemical configuration in natural products, an ultimate aim being to illuminate the highly specific relationship between chemical configuration and physiological activity.

#### Engineering at University College, Swansea : Mr. L. J. Kastner

MR. L. J. KASTNER, of the Department of Engineering, University of Manchester, has been elected to the chair of mechanical engineering at University College of Swansea, which became vacant by the appointment in 1946 of Prof. R. N. Arnold to the regius professorship of engineering in the University of Edinburgh. Mr. Kastner took the Mechanical Sciences Tripos at Cambridge in 1934. Following a period of practical workshop training with Messrs. Davis and Metcalfe, of Romiley, he went to the University of Manchester to do research on internal combustion engineering, which led to the degree of M.Sc. In 1938, he was appointed to the staff of the Engineering Department at Manchester, and in 1945 became senior lecturer in the Department. While there he has been responsible for the advanced teaching in thermodynamics at Manchester and has also taken a large part in running the Engineering Laboratories. He has been actively engaged in research, more especially in the field of internal combustion engineering, and has published several original papers dealing with various aspects of this work. It is of interest to note that Mr. Kastner is now the third in the family line of university professors, his grandfather and father having in turn held the chair of French in the University of Manchester.

#### Department of Scientific Research, India

THE Government of India has created a Department of Scientific Research with effect from June 1. The Department will be in the charge of the Prime Minister of India, and Sir Shanti Bhatnagar, director of scientific and industrial research, has been appointed secretary and principal executive officer. The Department will take over the work of the Board of Research on Atomic Energy and the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research. The latter body, although attached to the new Department, will retain its unofficial character and will continue to function as before. The new Department will deal also with scientific advice to Government departments, *ad hoc* scientific research in universities and research institutions, research scholarships in applied scientific subjects, international scientific unions, scientific liaison offices, the Scientific Consultative Committee and such other subjects as may be transferred to it. The Department will co-ordinate the scientific activities of the other Ministries, and in this work it will be assisted by a co-ordination committee consisting of eminent men of science.