

work. In 1928 he spent a short time studying the methods of X-ray investigation of crystal structure under Sir William Bragg at the Royal Institution. On his return to the British Museum, Dr. Bannister set up apparatus for this work and very soon established a highly efficient laboratory in a partitioned-off corner of one of the rooms in the Department. This laboratory has been very active in the X-ray study of minerals and has a very high reputation for thoroughly accurate work among mineralogists at home and abroad. His lectures given at the Royal School of Mines in 1935 will still be remembered by those who were privileged to attend them. Dr. Bannister was honorary secretary of the X-ray Analysis Group of the Institute of Physics during 1945-48, and he attended the first general assembly of the International Union of Crystallography at Harvard in 1948 and the second assembly held in Stockholm in 1951.

#### A. A. Michelson (1852-1931)

ALBERT ABRAHAM MICHELSON, who was born a century ago, on December 19, 1852, at Strelno, in Prussia, near the Polish frontier, was perhaps the greatest authority of modern times on optics, and one of the most ingenious and accurate workers in experimental science. His family emigrated to the United States when he was two years old, and at the age of twenty-one he graduated from the United States Naval Academy, Annapolis, where he served as instructor in physics and chemistry during 1875-79. After studying at Berlin, Heidelberg and Paris, he held various posts before his appointment in 1892 as head of the Department of Physics at the new University of Chicago. His chief abiding interest was light, particularly the accurate determination of its velocity, and the study of optical interference. One of his greatest accomplishments was the construction of the interferometer known by his name, and among the many uses to which he put this instrument the most important were the determination of the international metre in Paris, the measurement of the angular diameter of a star, and the attempt to detect the relative motion of the earth in the ether. The negative outcome of the last-named experiment, carried out in collaboration with E. W. Morley, gave birth to a new philosophy of physical science, which culminated in Einstein's theories of relativity. With the aid of his échelon spectroscope Michelson examined the fine structure of spectral lines. The first American scientific worker to win the Nobel Prize for Physics (1907), he was a foreign member of the Royal Society and recipient of its Rumford and Copley Medals, and served on a number of international committees. He was a fine violinist and painter, and held that art finds its highest expression in science. He died of a cerebral hæmorrhage at Pasadena, California, on May 9, 1931, in his seventy-ninth year.

#### Antoine Henri Becquerel (1852-1908)

BORN in Paris a century ago, on December 15, 1852, Antoine Henri Becquerel came of a family long distinguished in the world of physical science. Educated at the École Polytechnique, Paris, his early studies were concerned with the magnetic rotation of the polarization plane of light, the influence of earth magnetism on the atmosphere, and the absorption of light by crystals. In 1892 he was appointed professor of physics at the Musée d'Histoire Naturelle—a chair held before him by his father, Alexandre Edmond Becquerel (1878), and by his grandfather, Antoine

César Becquerel (1837). Three years later he became professor of physics at the École Polytechnique. His greatest achievement was the result of a lucky accident, but at the same time it was the culmination of a long series of carefully planned experiments. In 1896 he found that photographic plates, protected against ordinary actinic radiations, were fogged by emanations from uranium ores. His paper entitled "Sur les radiations émises par phosphorescence" (*C.R. Acad. Sci. Paris*, 122, 420; 1896) ushered in the new era of radioactivity. Their discoverer in 1903 shared the Nobel Prize for Physics with Pierre and Marie Curie, who in 1898 had isolated radium from pitchblende. Becquerel received the Rumford Medal of the Royal Society in 1900 and was elected president and permanent secretary of the Paris Academy of Sciences in 1908, and in the same year was elected a foreign member of the Royal Society. He died in Brittany on August 25 of that year.

#### Weights and Measures in Great Britain

A QUESTION regarding the report of the Committee on Weights and Measures Legislation (see *Nature*, July 28, 1951, p. 142) having been asked in the House of Commons, a written reply by Mr. Peter Thorneycroft, President of the Board of Trade, was published on November 11. Mr. Thorneycroft states that the Government is in general agreement with the decisions of Sir Hartley Shawcross announced on May 10 last year, and action has already been started on those recommendations which do not involve legislation. Referring to the metric system, he remarks: "The Government are not prepared to proceed with the recommendation for the eventual abandonment of the imperial for the metric system of weights and measures. Consultations with countries of the Commonwealth have, however, shown widespread support for the suggestion that a firm and legally defined relationship between the imperial pound and yard and the international metre and kilogramme should be established. On account of the wide variety of the recommendations and extensive nature of the consultations, the legislation will not be introduced for some time."

#### Higher Education in Central Africa

IN A written reply to a question in the House of Commons on November 26, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr. Oliver Lyttelton, stated that the commission set up by the Governments of Northern and Southern Rhodesia and Nyasaland, in connexion with the establishment in Central Africa of a college for higher education for Africans, consists of Sir Alexander Carr-Saunders (chairman), Dr. A. Kerr, Dr. A. V. Hill and Prof. F. G. Young, with Mr. Walter Adams as secretary. The commission is now in Central Africa and its terms of reference include a review of the observations regarding the site of the college made by the committee appointed by the Central African Council, the making of recommendations regarding the site, type of courses to be provided and qualifications for admission, as well as on the type of buildings required. The commission is also to draw up a draft constitution for the college and to advise upon the form of 'special relationship' with an established university and on the staff required and its recruitment.

#### Current Literature relating to Scientific Instruments

THE British Scientific Instrument Research Association has issued monthly since 1946 a *Bulletin*,