

NEWS and VIEWS

Nobel Prize for Physiology and Medicine for 1952 :
Prof. S. A. Waksman

THE Nobel Prize for Physiology and Medicine for 1952 has been awarded to Prof. Selman Abraham Waksman, professor of microbiology and head of the Microbiology Department of the College of Agriculture and Experiment Station at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, N.J., for his discovery of streptomycin, the first effective antibiotic against tuberculosis. Prof. Waksman was born in 1888 in Priluka, a small town in the Ukraine, emigrated to the United States in 1910 and became a naturalized citizen there in 1915. The whole of his scientific life since 1911 has been spent at Rutgers University and has been devoted to the study of microbiology, and particularly to that group of soil micro-organisms which are frequently spoken of as ray fungi and belong to the genus *Actinomyces* or *Streptothrix*. Following the discovery of penicillin, which is fully effective only against Gram-positive bacteria, Waksman and his collaborators began, in 1939, a systematic search for an antibiotic active against Gram-negative bacteria and found it, in 1944, in streptomycin, a metabolic product of *Streptomyces griseus* (formerly known as *Actinomyces griseus*). They also showed that streptomycin is highly active *in vitro* against *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. This observation was quickly followed by the proof by Feldman and Hinshaw that streptomycin exerts a powerful suppressive action in experimental tuberculosis in guinea pigs, and finally by the demonstration by many investigators of its effectiveness in the treatment of different types of tubercular infections in man. Thus, in spite of some imperfections, streptomycin offered the first real hope of chemotherapeutic treatment of a disease which was formerly almost universally fatal.

G. A. Mantell, F.R.S. (1790-1852)

GIDEON ALGERNON MANTELL, who died a century ago, on November 10, 1852, belongs to that interesting band of medical men who have won both fame and popular applause in extra-professional pursuits. Son of a Lewes shoemaker, he was born on February 3, 1790. After serving as apprentice to a local surgeon and studying at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, he qualified M.R.C.S. in 1811 and thirty-two years later was elected one of the original three hundred Fellows of the Royal College of Surgeons. A busy medical practitioner in Lewes and the surrounding countryside, Mantell made many valuable contributions to geology, collecting specimens from the chalk around Lewes and from the Sussex Weald, sending reports to the Linnean Society, and building up a private geological museum, which he later sold to the British Museum for £5,000. A pioneer in the study of fossils at a time when this was regarded as impious, he is known for his discovery in the sandstone of Tilgate Forest of the iguanodon, which he reported to the Royal Society in 1825. A popular lecturer and a facile writer, his works, some of which went through several editions and were illustrated by plates engraved by his wife, include "The Fossils of the South Downs" (1822), "Thoughts on a Pebble" (1837) and "The Wonders of Geology" (1838). Mantell played a leading part in securing a free pardon for Hannah Russell in the Burwash case, and published his "Observations on the Medical Evidence Necessary to Prove the Presence of Arsenic in the

Human Body" (1827). He was elected to the Royal Society in 1825 and was awarded a Royal Medal in 1849; he received the honorary LL.D. of Yale University in 1834. A victim of extreme lateral curvature of the spine, which made him hypochondriacal and acrimonious, Mantell died of an overdose of opium.

British Museum (Natural History): Appointments

THE Trustees of the British Museum have promoted Mr. Wilfred Norman Edwards, keeper of the Department of Geology at the British Museum (Natural History) to the rank of deputy chief scientific officer, with effect from December 1; Mr. Edwards will continue to hold the keepership of geology. The Principal Trustees have also appointed Dr. Frederick Allan Bannister to be keeper of the Department of Mineralogy; and Mr. Alexander Cockburn Townsend to be deputy keeper in charge of the Library of the British Museum (Natural History) both with effect from December 1. Mr. Edwards was a scholar of Christ's College, Cambridge, where he took first-class honours in the Natural Sciences Tripos in 1911. He entered the Museum in 1913 and has been keeper of the Department of Geology since 1938. He has specialized in fossil plants. Dr. Bannister was educated at Clare College, Cambridge, and took a first class in both parts of the Natural Sciences Tripos in 1922 and 1923. He entered the Museum in 1927 as an assistant keeper and has specialized in the analysis of mineral structure by means of X-rays, in the development of which method he has taken a leading part. Mr. Townsend was educated at Shaftesbury Grammar School, St. Paul's School and Magdalene College, Cambridge. He obtained second-class honours in the Classical Tripos in 1926 and in the Modern Languages Tripos in 1928. He entered the service of the Trustees in 1930. During 1931-39 he was honorary secretary of the University and Research Section of the Library Association, and since 1948 has been honorary secretary and editor of the Society for the Bibliography of Natural History.

Groundnuts Scheme in East Africa

IN the House of Commons on October 29, a written reply was given to a question by Mr. A. R. Hurd asking the Secretary of State for the Colonies if he was satisfied, after another season's operations at the Kongwa, Urambo and Nachingwea centres of the East African groundnut scheme, that the large-scale experimental development proposed in Command Paper No. 8125, January 1951, was practicable; and if the policy and financial provisions then decided for the scheme had been adopted by the Government. Mr. J. G. Foster, Under-Secretary for Commonwealth Relations, stated that neither the board and chairman of the Corporation nor the Secretary of State is satisfied with the scheme as laid down. The experimental data which it was the object of that scheme to provide can certainly be obtained; but the board considers that there are fundamental agricultural problems in Urambo and Nachingwea which should be worked out on a lesser scale. The board is considering revised plans for this purpose which will keep the cost within the balance remaining of the £6 million. These should be available by December and the Secretary of State will then make a further statement.