

appropriate measures taken in time to secure that the maximum of information is obtained from meteorites with the minimum of destruction.

#### Mathematics at Hull : Prof. G. C. Steward

THIS year Prof. G. C. Steward retires from the chair of mathematics in the University of Hull. He has occupied this chair since 1930, soon after the University College was first established. On his retirement, separate chairs of pure and applied mathematics are being instituted. Prof. Steward had his degree studies interrupted by the First World War, and he did not finally graduate at Cambridge until 1920. He was joint winner of a Smith's Prize in 1922. Meanwhile, he spent three years as assistant lecturer at Leeds before returning in 1923 to Cambridge as fellow and mathematical lecturer at Emmanuel College. He went directly from Cambridge to Hull. In 1918 he worked in the optics division of the National Physical Laboratory. This determined the course of his research work, which has been mainly on optical systems, using the eikonal function of Bruns, and other methods. He is the author of a Cambridge tract on symmetric optical instruments. In recent years he has been increasingly involved in departmental organization.

#### Prof. W. H. Cockcroft

DR. W. H. COCKCROFT, who is to be the first holder of the chair of pure mathematics in the University of Hull, was one of Prof. J. H. C. Whitehead's research students in the immediate post-war period. Since his doctorate at Oxford he has taught at the Universities of Aberdeen, Chicago and Southampton, where he is now a reader. His scientific interests are naturally directly derived from his early work under Whitehead. He was concerned in the first instance with various algebraic questions about group extensions and with some special problems arising in homotopy theory. He has since made contributions to homological algebra and topology generally. To mention one or two examples of research work of his, one may refer to some work which he and R. G. Swann have done in making improvements in the algebraic machinery used in Whitehead's work on simple homotopy types. In his work on the co-homology groups of a fibre space he has analysed the methods of the Belgian topologist Hirsch. In particular, he has obtained an explicit form for Hirsch's co-boundary operator. This enables Cockcroft to make improvements in his own earlier work as well as to explain some results of Eilenberg-MacLane. Cockcroft has also taken great interest in the teaching of mathematics to undergraduates, and has taken part in symposia throughout the United States on the invitation of the National Science Foundation.

#### Prof. N. B. Slater

DR. N. B. SLATER, who has been appointed to the newly created chair of applied mathematics in the University of Hull, studied at the Universities of Edinburgh and Cambridge. For the year 1939-40 he was an observer at the Solar Physics Observatory, Cambridge; for the rest of the war years he was a member of Prof. L. Rosenhead's team in the Projectile Development Establishment. Since 1945 he has been on the applied mathematics staff of the University of Leeds, successively as lecturer, senior lecturer and reader. His Cambridge appointment led to a strong interest in amateur astronomy. It also led to an acquaintance with Sir Arthur Eddington,

and, after the latter's death, Slater was asked to go through his unpublished manuscripts. He found that these cast a vivid light on the development of the ideas in Eddington's *Fundamental Theory*, and described what he found in a book published in 1957. However, Slater's main research interest has been in the theory of unimolecular gas reactions, on which he first began work under R. H. Fowler before 1939. In this field he has produced a standard theory, which has attracted a good deal of attention. A course given while visiting Cornell University was expanded by him into a book on the subject, which was published in 1959.

#### The National Reference Library for Science and Technology

IN an adjournment debate in the House of Commons on March 14, Mr. A. Albu asked a number of questions regarding the National Reference Library for Science and Technology. Stressing the value to the research worker of the open access system in the Patent Office Library, he questioned the adequacy of the proposed book stock of 500,000 current volumes, and thought that comparison with similar libraries elsewhere suggested a stock twenty times that proposed. He asked for specific assurances that the non-current volumes to be transferred to the British Museum would be readily available, that the site provided adequate room for expansion, and that measures were being taken to recruit staff of appropriate high scientific calibre. The Parliamentary Secretary for Science, Mr. D. Freeth, in his reply, said that it is not anticipated that there will be any overlapping or confusion of responsibility, although the Library will be part of the British Museum Library and come under the Chancellor of the Exchequer and not the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research and the Minister for Science. It will occupy a site to the east of the southern approach just north of the existing Cornwall Hall, and it is considered that the Library's total area of about 130,000 sq. ft. is well suited to house the 500,000 volumes required to provide the complete reference desired, together with an expert staff and open access. Reading rooms totalling about 22,000 sq. ft. will seat about 300 with seating room for a further 300 among the book stacks. The total cost is estimated at about £2.5 million.

Mr. Freeth said that the site does not provide room for all the expansion that might be desirable in future, but it is believed that it will provide a worthy national reference library, and that it will be possible to provide a speedy and adequate system for research workers to procure earlier publications from the British Museum. Legislation will be necessary for this purpose. The present stock of the Patent Office Library amounts to 210,000 volumes of periodicals, 100,000 volumes of patent specifications and 70,000 text-books; more than 7,500 current periodicals, including 300 Russian, are taken. Expenditure in 1960 was just under £180,000 and the staff numbered 72. Building plans have already reached an advanced stage, and Mr. Freeth said that any suggestions which prospective users might have for this building should be sent to the Principal Keeper in the Department of Printed Books in the British Museum, London, W.C.1, or to the Librarian, Patent Office Library, 25 Southampton Buildings, London, W.C.2. The exact constitution of the advisory committee to be set up when the new Library comes into operation