NEWS and VIEWS

Medical Research Council and Sir Edward Mellanby, G.B.E., K.C.B., F.R.S.

SIR EDWARD MELLANBY will shortly be retiring from the secretaryship of the Medical Research Council, a post which he has held for some sixteen years. He has, however, served and inspired the Council for close on thirty-five years. He was invited by the parent body of the Council, the short-lived Medical Research Committee, to undertake an inquiry into the cause of rickets soon after the beginning of the First World War, and his remarkable success in solving this problem soon gained him a world-wide reputation. He became well known during the inter-war years as a leading exponent of the new science of nutrition. This is not the place to tell of Sir Edward's own important contributions to medical and physiological science—original work which he has pursued vigorously and fruitfully during all his years of administrative work at the Medical Research Council. Rather should it here be remembered that his fearless devotion to the pursuit of truth has stimulated and directed medical research in Great Britain along many and varied tracks with a gratifying degree of success. Those with genuine medical or physiological problems to tackle would not apply to Sir Edward in vain for a hearing. He might conduct searching and sometimes even chastening interviews with aspirants to medical research; but if he were convinced of the soundness of an idea and the integrity of purpose of its sponsors, he would be prepared to recommend the support of the man and the work with all the resources of his Council. Sir Edward will be sorely missed in his administrative capacity. There is, however, every reason for believing that he will still be able to give much of his time to his own medical research.

Prof. H. P. Himsworth

PROF. H. P. HIMSWORTH, who succeeds Sir Edward Mellanby as secretary of the Medical Research Council, has been since 1939 professor of medicine in the University of London and director of the medical unit at University College Hospital. It was from this Hospital that he qualified in 1928, obtaining the University Medal in both the M.B. and M.D. examinations. After holding the usual resident appointments, he started research into the mechanism of diabetes mellitus. The value of this work was recognized by the award of the Julius Mickle Fellowship by the University of London in 1935, and the results of his investigations were summarized in the Goulstonian Lectures, which he gave to the Royal College of Physicians in 1939, and in the Oliver Sharpey Lectures delivered last spring. During the War, his interest turned to the study of liver disease, using both the clinical and experimental approach. He has done outstanding work on the relation of nutrition to the causation of liver disease, differentiating clearly, in man and in the experimental animal, between the various types of degeneration and chronic fibrosis in the liver. His Lowell Lectures, which he gave in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1947, formed the basis of his monograph on diseases of the liver. He has also worked extensively on the treatment of thyroid disease with the new anti-thyroid compounds. In 1948, Prof. Himsworth was elected a member of the Medical Research Council, a body which he had already served in many capacities, for he was chairman of the Protein Requirements Committee and secretary of the special advisory committee on the medical aspects of food rationing. During the tenure of his present post at University College Hospital, he has shown himself keenly interested in medical education and in the advancement of clinical medicine. His wide clinical experience, his record of brilliant research work and his well-recognized administrative ability have fitted him excellently for the responsible post to which he has been appointed.

The Earhart Plant Research Laboratory

ON June 7 at the California Institute of Technology a new laboratory was opened for experimental botany. It is under the direction of Dr. F. W. Went. Dr. R. A. Millikan, a past president of the Institute, has called it a "phytotron" in the expectation that it may do for botany what the cyclotron has done for physics. The laboratory consists of six air-conditioned greenhouses and thirteen air-conditioned growth chambers, in which there can be produced various conditions of light intensity and quality, temperature and humidity, besides artificial rain, wind and fog. Nutrient solution is laid on to each chamber from a 1,000-gallon tank. There are arrangements for the routine photographing of plants in each growth chamber. Elaborate precautions are taken to exclude plant diseases and pests from the laboratory. The laboratory cost half a million dollars to build and will cost about 40,000 dollars a year to run. Its construction involved the solution of several difficult engineering problems. Of particular interest to plant physiologists is the claim that artificial illumination of 2,000 foot-candles can be secured by the use of fluorescent tubes operated at about four times the normal current density, supplemented by a few 60-watt incandescent lamps. It is stated that the life of fluorescent tubes under these conditions is still as much as 1,920 hours. Plant physiologists will await with interest the results of research from this novel laboratory.

American Technical Help in Colonial Development

THE Secretary of State for the Colonies, Mr. A. Creech Jones, announces that Dr. W. V. Lambert, dean of the College of Agriculture, University of Nebraska, Dr. W. A. McCall, assistant chief of the Bureau of Plant Industry, Soils and Agricultural Engineering, of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Dr. Arthur H. Cline, professor of soil science, Department of Agronomy, Cornell University, are to conduct a three-months survey of farming conditions in East, Central and West Africa, beginning in July. The Survey, which is part of the technical assistance programme of the Economic Co-operation Administration, is being undertaken at the request of the United Kingdom Government. It is designed to help the agricultural and veterinary departments of the East, Central and West African territories in the general field of production and in developing veterinary research, plant pathology and soil science, by finding out how best American technical agricultural assistance can be applied. This is the second project to be approved under the Administration's technical assistance scheme. The first, announced on May 16, provided for a six-weeks visit to West Africa and East and Central Africa respectively of an American scientific worker and an insecticide expert.