

NEWS and VIEWS

Death of President Beneš

By the passing of Dr. Eduard Beneš on September 3 at the age of sixty-four, Czechoslovakia loses its former president, and the world loses a cultured and learned man who had striven for the welfare of all mankind during the past forty years. Born in the Bohemian village of Kožlany on May 28, 1884, Beneš studied philosophy, philology and sociology at Prague and later at Dijon, where his thesis was "Le problème autrichien et la question tchèque". Beneš then spent a short time in London and Berlin before returning to Prague, where he attracted T. G. Masaryk's attention. In 1915 Beneš escaped to Geneva, and with Masaryk and Štefánik (a Slovak astronomer who became an air force general and Czechoslovak War Minister) organised Czech resistance to the Central Powers. Beneš became Czechoslovak Foreign Minister of the first provisional Government, and after the republic was established in October 1918, he retained that post in successive administrations until he succeeded Masaryk as president in 1935. His work became more arduous with the rise of Nazism in Germany, and Beneš had soon to face another exile. Returning in 1945 as president of liberated Czechoslovakia, he was confronted with greater problems than before, since war and occupation had brought more distress than the First World War. The strain of post-war anxieties, the events of February last and Jan Masaryk's suicide, deeply affected him. President Beneš, who had always maintained an interest in learning and culture (especially in the social sciences) made his last public speech on April 7, at the sixcentenary celebrations of the University of Prague (see *Nature*, May 1, p. 670). Among the exhibits in connexion with these celebrations were several items associated with Beneš' academic life, including the original Dijon thesis. Since February, President and Mme. Beneš had lived in their country house at Ústí Sezimovo in south Bohemia and had taken no part in public affairs, although he did not resign from the presidency until June 7. Like the Masaryks, Beneš was a 'great European' with wide vision, and though his work for greater understanding among peoples seems recently to have been in vain, he has shown mankind the way.

Presentation to Sir John Parsons, C.B.E., F.R.S.

At a ceremony held in the Royal College of Surgeons on September 3, Sir John Parsons was presented with his portrait in oils, painted by Mr. John Gilroy. The presentation was made by Sir Stewart Duke-Elder, in the name of the members of the Faculty of Ophthalmologists and the Ophthalmological Society, and to mark the celebration of Sir John's eightieth birthday. It is good that Sir John's long and strenuous career has met with such a fitting and happy culmination, for he has long been the acknowledged leader in all aspects of British ophthalmology—clinical work, basic research and public activities. For more than a generation he has been the recognized leader in the clinical practice of this specialty, and ophthalmologists of a much wider circle than Great Britain to-day treat their patients better because of his precepts and his writings. So long as ophthalmology is a science, his name will be remembered for the work he did fifty years ago as a pioneer in ophthalmic pathology. To-day he is still the fore-

most authority in the fundamental sciences concerning vision—biological, physiological and psychological. In guiding, stimulating and encouraging ophthalmic research he has in his time stood out almost alone. In all problems concerning vision successive Governments and industry have asked and received his help; he served in the two World Wars, in the First as consultant to the Army, in the Second as adviser to the Royal Air Force; in international ophthalmology he has consistently been an acceptable and gracious British ambassador; and for years he was the dominant figure in the social and political life of the ophthalmologists of Britain.

Probably, however, the greatest contribution which Sir John Parsons has made is the historical continuity he has succeeded in maintaining between the past and the future. In his youth, ophthalmology in Britain was great among the nations; but later—largely because with the evolution of science, individual effort had to give place to organised effort for which we were not prepared or equipped—ophthalmology undoubtedly lost its place in Britain. He was largely responsible for reinvigorating it to what may be a future as great as or greater than its past. To-day those who have eyes to see may discern the beginnings of the fruits of his labours. Thirty years ago he was responsible for interesting the Medical Research Council in ophthalmological problems, and to-day these are fully consolidated. Twenty years ago he endeavoured to bring about an amalgamation of London hospitals and inaugurate a research institute; to-day, that is an accomplished fact. He was primarily responsible for the inauguration of the Faculty of Ophthalmologists, and to-day it is growing lustily. To him and to all of us these promising developments of his ambitions ought to be a source of satisfaction.

Physiology at the London Hospital

Prof. D. T. Harris

PROF. D. T. HARRIS, on whom the title of professor emeritus has been conferred by the University of London, is to retire at the end of the present session from the chair of physiology which he has held at the London Hospital for the past sixteen years. Prof. Harris studied physics as a special subject at Cardiff, where he took his B.Sc. in 1904. He graduated in medicine at Manchester in 1914 and after holding various hospital appointments and experiencing general practice served as a temporary captain in the R.A.M.C. After a short period as lecturer in physiology at Manchester under Prof. William Stirling, he joined the Institute of Physiology at University College, London, where he held a Beit Memorial Research Fellowship and as Sharpey Research Scholar came under the influence of Sir William Baylis and Prof. E. H. Starling. He obtained the D.Sc. London in 1926 and held the post of assistant professor of physiology in University College, London, when he was appointed to the chair at the London Hospital in 1932. Throughout his academic career Prof. Harris has maintained his interest in physics, his scientific work being mainly concerned with problems arising in the territory bridging physics and physiology, and in particular with the biological action of ultra-violet radiations and ultra-short waves. His contributions to knowledge of these subjects have been published in a series of papers in the *Journals of Physiology*, *Biochemistry* and *Scientific Instruments*, and his textbook on "Ultra-Violet Radiation" is widely used by