

## A UNIVERSITY IN THE TROPICS.

THE TIMES of January 23 devotes one of its leading articles to the important question of the need of establishing a university in the tropics for the study of tropical agriculture. The subject is dealt with in a very interesting and forcible manner, and it is to be hoped that it may not be long before the proposal is realised.

At present, beyond the few facilities which exist at the Imperial College of Science and Technology, there is no place within the British Dominions where men who aspire to a tropical post, or have to deal with tropical estates, can learn more than a smattering of either the nature or magnitude of the problems which await solution. Yet men are constantly being sent out as agricultural officers to fill highly important and responsible posts, and they are expected to be able at once to cope with the difficulties which are presented from all sides.

Did we but stop to count the cost of our want of foresight in this matter we should realise that the expenditure in establishing a proper training centre in the tropics would long ago have been repaid by the increase of efficiency in the officers and the resultant improvement in agricultural operations.

The paramount advantage of a university or college of science established in some tropical colony would be that it would provide a centre where questions relating to soil, plant and animal breeding, plant and animal pathology, economic zoology, and various chemical and other questions could be investigated under tropical conditions by a highly competent professorial body, and where advanced instruction could be given to students—whose preliminary training had been received elsewhere—destined to fill agricultural posts in one or other of our tropical colonies. If the need of such an institution be admitted the question then arises, Where should such a university be stationed? Before suggesting an answer to this question it is necessary to point out that in view of the two-fold nature of the proposed institution, three points must be kept in mind. In the first place it should be situated in a colony offering the greatest possible scope for diverse agricultural pursuits; secondly, the healthiness of the colony should, so far as possible, be beyond reproach; and thirdly, the spot chosen for the university should be within easy access of the British Isles.

This last point is perhaps the most important one of all, since not only is it desirable on behalf of the students from home that the expenditure of time and money should not be unduly large, but also it is of paramount importance that the professors and lecturers should be able to have the opportunity of frequent intercourse with home, and so reduce to a minimum the possibility of stagnation and loss of vigour which might be liable to occur if personal intercourse with fellow-workers at home were rendered difficult by distance and expense.

This danger of stagnation would also tend very effectively to be obviated if the tropical university

or college of science could be definitely linked with an institution at home. Such an institution should be either a university especially interested in agricultural matters or an institution of university standing, such as the Imperial College of Science and Technology.

If then it be agreed that the points which have been urged, in considering the requirements of an agricultural institution in the tropics, must be regarded as conditions essential to its success, it would seem clear that the site for the institution must be sought in the Antilles. Nowhere among these islands do we find all the requisite conditions so fully met as in the easily accessible and beautiful island of Trinidad.

THE NATURAL HISTORY COLLECTIONS OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM.<sup>1</sup>

TO those familiar with the natural history collections in the old British Museum in Bloomsbury the work of Dr. Günther must revive many pleasant associations of the 'fifties and 'sixties of last century—when the insect room was frequented by naturalists of note in various departments. Thus, besides the staff of the museum, which then included the brothers J. E. and R. Gray, Dr. Günther himself, F. Smith, and foreign naturalists, one met such men as Dr. Bowerbank, Mr. Busk, Dr. Carpenter, Mr. John Gould, and such ladies as the charming Mrs. Alfred Gatty—all eager to absorb as well as impart information. No marine laboratories then existed, so that marine, as well as terrestrial, natural history centred in the great museum. In the historical treatise heading the list, which no one could write so well as Dr. Günther, we are brought face to face with all the conspicuous additions to the vast collections, which in 1868 were close on a million and in 1895 two millions, the changes in the staff, the nature of their work, the financial allowances, and, more than all, the remarkable task of transporting the collections from the old museum to the new quarters in Cromwell Road.

Few have any notion of the vast stores in every department of zoology which have been assiduously collected in one way or another by the trustees, or of the labour entailed on the staff, for instance, by the receipt of 63,000 specimens of a particular group at once, especially if they were not carefully named and labelled. Besides the task of incorporating the rare or new species, duplicates have to be selected and treated differ-

<sup>1</sup> "The History of the Collections contained in the Natural History Departments of the British Museum." Vol. ii. Appendix. General History of the Department of Zoology from 1856 to 1895. By Dr. Albert Günther, F.R.S. Pp. ix+109. (London: British Museum (Natural History); Longmans and Co., 1912.) Price 5s.

Catalogue of the Mammals of Western Europe (Europe exclusive of Russia) in the Collection of the British Museum. By Gerrit S. Miller. Pp. xv+109. (London: British Museum (Natural History); Longmans and Co., 1912.) Price 26s.

Catalogue of the Collection of Birds' Eggs in the British Museum (Natural History). Vol. v. Carinatae (Passeriformes completed). By W. R. Ogilvie-Grant. Pp. xxii+547+22 plates. (London: British Museum (Natural History); Longmans and Co., 1912.) Price £2 7s. 6d.

Catalogue of the Chaetopoda in the British Museum (Natural History). A. Polychæta: Part I. Arenicolidae. By Dr. J. H. Ashworth. Pp. xii+175+2v plates. (London: British Museum (Natural History); Longmans and Co., 1912.) Price 27s. 6d.