

from child-bearing is practically the same in St. Helens and in Croydon—two towns which differ markedly in general social and sanitary circumstances, and West Ham, a relatively poor and squalid neighbourhood, has a rate lower than that of towns like Brighton, Bournemouth, and Hastings! When it is realised that the mortality from child-bearing varies from 8.54 in Dewsbury to 2.20 in West Ham, it follows that by the adoption of improved measures of care of the prospective mothers before and at childbirth, we may hope materially to reduce what is one of the most pathetic forms of loss of life. The care of prospective mothers is still more necessary at the present time, when there is such a considerable increase in female labour, and such care will, in addition, diminish the number of still-births and of damaged children born.

Not only the maintenance, but the further increase, of our present rate of increase of population must be regarded as one of the most serious and urgent of national problems and responsibilities at the present time. The child is now a national asset of great price, and for the successful rearing of the greatest possible number we must look to improved care of prospective and actual mothers, and improvement of mothercraft and of infant and child welfare. R. T. HEWLETT.

#### MEDICAL RESEARCH.

THE first annual report (1914-1915) of the Medical Research Committee has been published. It bears date October 18, which is very appropriate, because that is St. Luke's day, the day of the beloved physician. St. Luke's medical knowledge, doubtless, was that which Browning ascribes to Karshish: we have improved on St. Luke, so far as medicine is concerned. This report is a notable bit of work. The Medical Research Committee, as we all know, was born of the Insurance Act, and was endowed, at birth, with a penny in the pound. It was intended to study the diseases of civil and industrial life. It was born in August, 1913. A twelvemonth later came the war. *Pendent opera interrupta*—the work on the diseases of dangerous trades, the work on the commoner maladies of our big cities, was more or less declared off. The nation was thrown, all of a sudden, all unprepared, into that most dangerous of all dangerous trades, War.

In this crisis, this day of judgment—for that is the meaning, and the only meaning, of the Greek word crisis—the Medical Research Committee took a very wise course. It added to its first scheme of work a series of proposals for special work, to be undertaken by the committee, in direct connection with the war and for the assistance of the Army Medical Department; and it made up its mind that as the war goes on there will be less and less work to be done for the nation apart from the Navy and the Army.

Not only was the plan of work upset by the war, but the Central Research Institute, the build-

ings of the Mount Vernon Hospital at Hampstead, had to be transformed into the Hampstead Military Hospital. And, as the proposals for amalgamation with the Lister Institute, after very careful consideration, have been suspended, we might say that the Medical Research Committee is still without a proper home of its own. But it has found many temporary homes or resting-places for its work, and a welcome for it everywhere.

The researches into subjects connected with the war cover a very wide range. Work has been done at many of the general hospitals of the Territorial Force, and at other military hospitals. Valuable help has been given towards the preparation of the medical history of the war. Wound infections, typhoid and paratyphoid infections, and cerebro-spinal fever have been very carefully studied; so have many problems apart from bacteriology. Special interest attaches to Dr. Leonard Hill's study of asphyxiating gases, and to Dr. John Freeman's expedition to Galicia, whence he brought back cultures of strains of cholera-bacilli, for St. Mary's Hospital to make anti-cholera vaccines for the Serbian Government and for our Mediterranean forces; and to Dr. Leiper's discovery that a fresh-water snail is the intermediate host, between man and man, of the Bilharzia parasite. Other important studies include the work done on "neurological" cases, and the testing of British makes of salvarsan.

In brief, this report is a very fine record of good work done under most unexpected conditions. The moral is, that he or she who works for the forces of the Allies is working also, in the long run, for the nation at home. It is not a weakness, but an added strength, of science, that it can adapt itself to circumstances, and venture into new fields of research at a moment's notice. When the war is over, there will be time enough for the workers under the Medical Research Committee to come back to win other laurels for science in the ways of peace.

#### FOOD ECONOMY.

A NUMBER of useful pamphlets are being issued just now on how to economise in war time in the matter of food. One of these, by Prof. W. H. Thompson, of Trinity College, Dublin, we noticed a short time ago. The latest that has come into our hands, entitled "Food Economy in War Time" (Cambridge: At the University Press, price 6d.), should be widely read and acted upon. It is written by Profs. T. B. Wood and F. G. Hopkins, both of whom can speak with authority, one from the agricultural, the other from the physiological, point of view. It is written in a clear style, such as the man in the street, or, what is more important, the woman in the kitchen, can understand.

There are many in this country who cannot economise; they already exist on the minimum. Saving must therefore be accomplished by the comparatively well-to-do, and that this can be done without detriment to health is clearly shown.

It may mean some self-sacrifice, but self-sacrifice just now is the duty of all. There must not be recourse to expensive foods, the quantity of animal food must be reduced and replaced by vegetables, especially those rich in nutriment. Above all, there must be no waste, no throwing away, for example, of bones and dripping.

The little pamphlet is full of useful hints, based on accurate scientific knowledge and trustworthy statistics. The nation roughly spends 600,000,000*l.* per annum on its food. The authors estimate that it is not possible to save more than a tenth of this if due regard is to be paid to health and to the necessity of feeding children well at any cost. Sixty million pounds saved a year looks a large sum, but in these days, when millions are treated almost like sovereigns used to be, it will not be a very large fraction of the total necessary saving if the war is to be carried out to a successful end. Statisticians tell us that the ordinary savings of the nation in peace time amount to 400,000,000*l.* This will have to be increased to 1,600,000,000*l.*; and sixty millions is only one-twentieth of the additional 1,200,000,000*l.* which must go in the shape of taxes and loans to war purposes. The other nineteen-twentieths of this colossal sum must come from savings in other directions, or else the saving in food must be greater; we can only hope that Profs. Wood and Hopkins have placed their estimate too low.

#### SIR JOHN RHYS.

THE wonderful romance of the life of Sir John Rhys and the great work which he did for Celtic learning have formed the theme of many a writer during the past week. In the pages of NATURE it is appropriate to speak of the man as he appeared to his scientific friends. The dominant qualities of his mind, as they were again and again revealed in intimate personal contact, were a never-failing freshness and elasticity together with the keen insight which seized at once upon the larger problems. "Well, what has been going on in science lately?" was his invariable question when we met after an interval; and his deep interest was always there, whether the subject was radio-activity, or some new light upon heredity and evolution, or Arrhenius's hypothesis of life-bearing germs, persisting from the eternal past, permeating all space, and driven by the pressure of light to all the worlds. And it was just the same in the province where he was master. John Rhys was always looking for the big, far-reaching conclusions. Place-names in the Iberian peninsula were the data for inferring a former southward extension of the Basques; while their northern migration was tentatively suggested by the names of chiefs among the Picts, that mysterious people of which scarcely anything is certainly known. The present writer has heard him tell of the Irish chieftain of whom it is recorded in time-worn stone that he was "the summoner of the fairies"—evidence for a fasci-

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ating interpretation of an ancient folk-lore. The fairies, being an older race, living in caves and clinging to the hills, would still be called on by their conquerors, to assist, for example, in repelling some new invader. Such were the delightful subjects of which he talked with scientific friends, and those who would wish to trace, in brief compass, the working of his master mind, cannot do better than read and re-read his presidential address to Section H of the British Association at Bradford (1900), in which he "endeavoured to substitute for the rabble of divinities and demons, of fairies and phantoms that disport themselves at large in Celtic legend, a possible succession of peoples, to each of which should be ascribed its own proper attributes."

With regard to his methods, one little incident may be recorded. About five years ago Lady Rhys told the present writer of a recent journey in Spain, and how the Principal, although with no conversational experience of the language, went up to a man, and, without any hesitation, began to ply him with questions, reading them out of a Spanish conversation book. In this way, taking opportunities as they occurred, he made remarkably rapid progress.

As head of a college it was always his anxiety to promote friendliness and sympathy, and he must, I think, have been satisfied that his efforts were attended with success. The kindness of his heart was well known to those of his many friends who were in trouble, and they at least could dimly imagine the blank left by the death, in 1911, of the comrade who had trodden with him the noble journey of his life.

It is hoped that these few sentences will enable the reader to realise in part the important place held by this great man in the brotherhood of learning, and will reveal something of the affection and admiration felt for him by his friends, and especially by the society to which he brought such high distinction. E. B. P.

#### NOTES.

THE action of the Government in assigning a sum of about 30,000*l.* for the development of scientific and industrial research seems likely to have an important influence in British possessions overseas. The Commonwealth of Australia is apparently prepared to expend whatever sum is necessary to establish and administer an institution for such research, even if the cost amounts to half a million. The *Morning Post* of December 24 makes this announcement, but no details are given; and it is not clear whether the Premier of the Commonwealth expressed the intention of his Government to put aside the amount named for an institution of scientific research in relation to industry, or only gave a general assurance that such an outlay would be forthcoming when believed to be necessary. We shall look with close attention for the announcement that the substantial sum mentioned in the report has actually been granted for the establishment of a national laboratory in Australia.