

The Advancement of Science: 1920. Addresses delivered at the 88th Annual Meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Cardiff, August, 1920. (London: John Murray, n.d.) Price 6s. net.

IN this volume are published the presidential addresses delivered at the recent meeting of the British Association at Cardiff. Such a collection, representing, as it does, the views of the leading authorities on progress made in various departments, and discussing some problems of prime interest, will be welcome to all students of science as well as to many members of the educated public. We hope the demand for the volume will justify the attempt of the Association to secure a wider circle of readers for the most interesting contributions to its annual meeting.

A Handbook of Physics and Chemistry. By H. E. Corbin and A. M. Stewart. Fifth edition. Pp. viii+496. (London: J. and A. Churchill, 1920.) Price 15s. net.

THE requirements of the new syllabus for the First Examination in physics and chemistry of the Conjoint Board of the Royal Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons have made it necessary to double the size of the volume issued in 1899. Short articles on statics, hydrostatics, expansion, refraction, absorption spectra, current electricity, ionisation, and radio-activity have been added in order to meet the new syllabus, and much new matter has been inserted with the view of making the book more useful to students preparing for other elementary examinations in physics and chemistry.

Common Diatoms. By Thos. K. Mellor. Pp. 16 + plates. (London: William Wesley and Son, 1920.) Price 6s. net.

THIS little pamphlet consists of eight pages of introduction, followed by a general index and seven plates of diatoms. The author's intention is to illustrate such diatoms as are usually found on "circle" slides sold by opticians, from such districts as England, Japan, Hungary, New Zealand, Istria, Samoa, the Adriatic Sea, Maryland, etc. The seven plates contain about 400 figures, and are fairly well drawn.

The introductory remarks are of a popular description, and do not profess to deal with diatoms from a scientific point of view.

Problems in Physical Chemistry: With Practical Applications. By Dr. Edmund B. R. Prideaux. Second edition, revised. Pp. xii+294. (London: Constable and Co., Ltd., 1920.) Price 18s. net.

DR. PRIDEAUX'S book, in its first edition, was found useful by teachers and students of physical chemistry, and served a very important purpose by assisting in directing the teaching of the subject into practical and intelligible channels. The new edition has been carefully revised and improved in many respects. The high price of the book, which is somewhat poorly bound and printed on not very good paper, will be the main drawback to its popularity among students.

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Letters to the Editor.

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The British Association.

THE Cardiff meeting of the British Association was pleasant and profitable in various ways, but the membership in an important and prosperous city like Cardiff might have been larger, and a certain amount of apathy on the part of the public in general to the presence of the Association was noticed. The Press did its best, but perhaps an influx of material prosperity has rendered folk temporarily callous to other forms of activity. My recollection of the Cardiff meeting in 1891 is that it excited more local interest—perhaps because it was the first in the city; perhaps also because the meeting included the week-end, extending from Wednesday to Wednesday, instead of ruthlessly encroaching on the four chief working days of the week and beginning sectional operations ten hours before the president's opening address. It is understood that future meetings will return to pre-war conditions in this and other respects. Other improvements may be desirable, so the manifesto of your Cardiff correspondent, Dr. R. V. Stanford, on p. 13 of NATURE of September 2 is opportune and timely.

The British Association differs from other learned societies in that it does address the general public, and travels from place to place in order to reach a wide constituency. In so far, therefore, as it takes the easier course and caters merely for specialists, it is not fully executing its mission. Its function might be described as bringing the general public into personal contact with a scientific discoverer and giving them some inkling of his methods and results. Technicalities are not always inappropriate, so they be suitably expounded; for no one can suppose that scientific work is a simple and easy matter readily understood of the people.

If the public were treated to nothing but the superficial froth they would rightly feel defrauded; they wish to realise that a plenitude of coherent material lies beneath the surface, much of it necessarily rather deep. The enthusiasm of a scientific worker is, or should be, contagious; and an impression of real value and interest can be produced, in spite of a plentiful lack of understanding.

Moreover, though it is difficult to overestimate the ignorance of the bulk of the population, there are likely to be in every civic community a few young minds, instinctively eager and unconsciously able, who may be stimulated by a discourse from a great man and become themselves disciples, and ultimately even co-workers. The awakening of one such youth per meeting would be well worth while; nor is it too much to expect. No one can tell beforehand what particular seed will come to fruition, and instances of such awakening in the past are historic. What is called science-teaching at schools has been known before now to have a depressing effect; direct aiming at a result may not achieve it; unorganised and indirect impersonal instruction, coupled with unconscious personal influence, may occasionally be far more stimulating.

To come to details, avoiding every sort of contemporary allusion and speaking quite generally: