

Recent Advances in Organic Chemistry. By Prof. A. W. Stewart. With an introduction by Prof. J. N. Collie. Fourth edition. Pp. xvi+359. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1920.) Price 21s. net.

ALTHOUGH the previous edition of this book was reviewed in NATURE so recently as in the issue for February 20, 1919, Prof. Stewart has written one new chapter, and made several additions to those already existing. The former directs attention to some of the problems which are still open to solution, such as the reason why carbon among all the elements is pre-eminent in its capacity for forming long atomic chains; the addition reactions of the aldehydes; molecular stability, etc. The chapter on polypeptides has received the addition of a section which attempts to trace in outline the connection between the synthetic materials and the naturally occurring proteins and their derivatives. A number of sections have also been added to various chapters with the object of bringing the book up to date.

Letters to the Editor.

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The British Association.

LIKE Prof. Armstrong, I have followed with much interest the discussion about the British Association. I have had a long and intimate acquaintance with it, and have a strong affection for it. For one thing, it is so truly British—so far from perfect, yet so adaptable. I am not sure that my most earnest prayer for it is not that it may be saved from the reformer, especially the type of post-war reformer who threatens to organise, systematise, advertise, and Teutonise every British institution on which he can lay hands. It is surprising that no one has suggested the Association should be put under the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research.

I have heard the British Association abused all my life; my own Section has always been the worst that ever was and hopelessly mismanaged, except in the year when I was its president—at least, so I have always been assured. But all the time the British Association has been bringing me—a rustic—into the possession of troops of friends in all quarters of this country and of foreign lands. I have gained more scientific help from it than I can well acknowledge, and I am sure a vast number of my contemporaries will say the same.

As to the intelligent public, I doubt whether the Association ever did so much as some people affirm. It does a little, if only in letting a hospitable bourgeoisie see that men of science are well-meaning human beings, more like themselves than you would have supposed. At one period the Association fluttered the theological doves and gave excellent copy for the Press. There has scarcely been a year in my time when the newspapers have not remarked ruefully that the president's address lacked the interest of Tyndall's at Belfast. It is not easy to see how the Association can give scientific enlightenment to those

who have not even the elements of scientific knowledge. In these days it can scarcely hope to appeal to the Press except by its indiscretions.

I should be sorry to be open to any just taunt of unprogressiveness, and, indeed, I have read carefully and reflected upon all that has been said by your correspondents. But it is difficult to discern agreement on any clear and practicable plan of reform. The British Association is an organism, not a machine. It seems to me to have grown, and grown well—not overgrown. I would say: "Let it grow, my friends; most of you have had fair fruit from it. Let us be chary of root-and-branch reform." The Association is very flexible; a great deal must depend on the personalities of the men in charge. To be a local secretary at the elbow of the late Mr. George Griffith when he was arranging a meeting and managing his superior officers was a memorable and impressive experience. Everyone will be able to recall a run of success in a Section when an exceptional man had a spell of office as recorder. I am sanguine enough to believe that exceptional men, capable and disinterested, will still be found; and that if, as I am not prepared to admit, we are unfortunate at present, we may safely count on recovery.

Lastly, as to the masses, it should be remembered that science is not the novelty it was. It is astonishing how many of them have seen phosphorus burn in oxygen. Anyone who has been in the trade knows that the old type of science lecture for the people, when a serious effort was made to illustrate the methods and topics of science, is a drug on the market. You find yourself as powder among the jam of overt or covert entertainers. In this direction let us hope the Workers' Educational Association may bring about results that can never be attained by isolated popular lectures during a British Association week.

I trust that nothing in the foregoing may appear disrespectful to those who have expressed opinions on the same subject. It is, no doubt, of great value to have comments and suggestions from such competent observers. I have only intervened because it seemed to me that bare justice has scarcely been done to what is undoubtedly good and great in the Association as it stands, and to the ruling powers who have an exceedingly difficult task to perform.

ARTHUR SMITHELLS.

December 19.

Science and Fisheries.

No one will gainsay Mr. H. G. Maurice's fundamental premise (NATURE, November 25, p. 419) that scientific fisheries investigation is primarily a matter for the State—if the authorities have a due sense of their responsibility in selecting for the task scientific men whose training and ability specially fit them for the complex work. It has long been advised that the three centres of the kingdom should have an adequate scientific fisheries staff, at the head of which a trained scientific expert of wide views should be placed.

Under Mr. Maurice's second head it is asserted that statistics could not be secured, say by the Marine Biological Association at Grimsby or at any other port; but whilst there is no doubt that the best channel for these, as in the case of the Fishery Board for Scotland, is the fishery officers of the Government, Mr. Holt's work alone at Grimsby shows that the statement needs qualification. The excellent method of the Scottish Board, which was in 1884 inaugurated by Lord Dalhousie, should be followed. It would also be well that returns by all fishing crews should be sent to