

The British Industries Fair.

THE London section of the British Industries Fair, organised by the Department of Overseas Trade, was opened at the White City on Feb. 18; the Birmingham section, which was organised by the Chamber of Commerce under the auspices and with the support of the Department of Overseas Trade, being simultaneously opened at Castle Bromwich. Both sections will be open from Feb. 18 until Mar. 1 inclusive. Only British manufacturing firms were permitted to exhibit, and no exhibitor might exhibit articles other than those of his own manufacture.

The primary appeal of the Fair is to trade buyers, and in order to attract them a special advance overseas edition of the catalogue of the London section was issued early in January to 10,000 business men in Europe, North America, South Africa, and the eastern coast of South America, in time to enable buyers in cities so far apart as Constantinople, Cape Town, and Vancouver to receive a copy before commencing their voyage to England. The catalogue contains descriptions, though in little more than bare enumeration, of the exhibits of more than 1200 British manufactures, and embodies a complete classification of all those exhibits by trades, as well as indexes in nine languages, thus enabling foreign buyers easily to trace the goods in which they are particularly interested. As catalogues go, it is as clear as its conciseness will allow, but the authorities responsible for its publication might realise that its format, by the mere growth of its pages, is now become awkward. There are 400 pages constituting the body of the catalogue, with more than 260 pages of advertisements in addition. The size of the page being relatively small, the result is a paper-backed volume an inch thick which has to be so tightly pasted that it is difficult to open the catalogue widely enough to enable the beginning of the line to be read with ease.

No less than 39 trades (several of them being really groups of trades) are represented in the London section, from perambulators to pianofortes; but readers of NATURE will naturally be more interested in the scientific industries. An outstanding exhibit is that of the Imperial Chemical Industries, Ltd., that 'rationalised'—to use a term currently fashionable—embodiment of more than forty subsidiary and associated companies, operating throughout the British Empire and the world. This exhibit comprises heavy chemicals, explosives and ammunition, dyestuffs, metals and fertilisers, all of which are shown on a large site having for its central feature a cinema hall. Here films are shown continuously illustrating the manufacture of heavy chemicals, the making of dyestuffs, the use of blasting explosives (depicting the fall of 30,000 tons of limestone); and a film showing by examples the uses of fertilisers and their benefit to agriculture.

British optical and scientific instruments and photographic goods occupy nearly 8000 square feet. This section was inaugurated only in 1926, when there were 22 exhibitors, occupying 1700 square feet. This year there are 60 exhibitors occupying no less than 7662 square feet—a significant testimony to the rapid growth of these important branches of British industry. In view of the growing use of optical and scientific instruments for purposes of research, control, and test, in an ever widening and varied field of industrial processes, the exhibits in this section should grow more rapidly still if the manufacturers concerned realise the value of the opportunities that the Fair provides. A glance through the optical section shows that many of the leading British optical manufacturers, some of whom have deservedly a world-wide

reputation, are represented, though there are also some not less notable omissions. It may be that for optical instrument manufacturers and also for the manufacturers of scientific instruments, in the stricter sense, the annual exhibition of the Physical and Optical Societies, held usually in January at the Imperial College of Science, South Kensington, provides a better *milieu* for appeal to the experts who can best judge of the value of such productions.

This view may account, in part at least, for the list of exhibitors in the optical and scientific instrument section of the British Industries Fair being less comprehensively representative than it might be. One can readily understand that the expenditure of time, energy, and money needed for the preparation of exhibits may easily constitute a serious financial burden on any firm, and more particularly on the comparatively small industrial units engaged in the optical and scientific instrument industries, if there should be an undesirable increase in exhibitions. But the British Industries Fair, with its wide range of appeal to trade buyers from the four corners of the earth, should provide a very suitable opportunity for display complementary to that provided by the annual exhibition of the Physical and Optical Societies.

The pre-eminence of British optical and scientific instruments in certain lines is unquestioned; but there are certain types of optical and instrument products in which the legend still lingers that particular foreign products are the best, even though recent improvements in the corresponding British productions may have falsified the legend. The British Scientific Instrument Research Association, for example, has recently published the results of a prolonged investigation into the characteristics of some typical British and foreign ammeters and voltmeters of the switchboard pattern. One upshot of that investigation is the definite conclusion that "the best-known British instruments of the kind dealt with are quite equal to the best-known corresponding products of foreign origin, in the suitability of their design for the purpose to be served, in the consistency of their indications, and in the general lines and details of their construction."

Among the conspicuous features of the exhibits of British optical and scientific instruments and photographic goods, the following may be mentioned: Ultra-violet ray equipment, embodying automatic control of the time of exposure; daylight lamps which, it is claimed, give the same effective results as before with the use of considerably less current; compasses suitable for fast motor-boats and a depth-sounding device for use at full speed; inter-communication telephones for use on aeroplanes or ships where noise makes the use of ordinary instruments impossible; a new splinter-proof glass for spectacles; the colour 'snap shot'—the special film which makes it possible to take colour 'snap shots' with an ordinary camera; a roll-film reflex camera for speeds up to 1/5000th of a second; and a photographic plate with a speed of '2000 H and D,' to use the appropriate technical term—four times as rapid, it is said, as any plate previously produced.

Scientific exhibitors, actual or potential, should also realise that, apart from the direct benefits in the shape of trade orders that are likely to accrue from the exhibition, the display of a representative and fairly comprehensive collection of optical and scientific instrument exhibits in a Fair organised by a department of Government may also have its indirect benefit in assisting Government to realise the value and importance, from a national viewpoint, of these particular industries.