News and Views

The King of the Belgians and Progressive Science

A GREAT figure of the War has passed away with the death on February 17 of Albert I, King of the Belgians, at the early age of fifty-eight years. For nearly twenty-five years he guided his people faithfully, carrying them with him through the War years, urging them on and directing their progress during the not less uncertain years following the Peace of Versailles. His work in the political field has been set forth in many places. We are concerned here with his interest in science and scientific research, of which he was a convincing advocate. He played an active part in the development of scientific institutions in Belgium. The protection of flora and fauna, particularly of tropical regions, early attracted his attention, and in 1909, after a visit to the Congo, he put forward a plea for protective measures which culminated with the creation, in 1929, of the Parc National Albert, a nature reserve of nearly 1,400 square miles. So recently as 1932, King Albert visited the Kivu Park with Prof. V. Van Straelen in order to see for himself the effectiveness of the protective measures.

KING ALBERT'S name will also be associated with the "Fonds national de la recherche scientifique" in Belgium. Speaking at the one hundred and tenth anniversary of the well-known Cockerill iron and steel works at Seraing in the autumn of 1927, the King declared emphatically that pure science is indispensable to industry, and that the nation which neglects science and the savant is marked for decadence. The appeal had an immediate effect. A great gathering was held at the Palais des Académies, Brussels, which was attended by the King, Ministers of State, and representatives of industry, finance, politics, science and the universities. Again King Albert made a powerful plea for science, poor herself but the creator of riches, for security and independence for scientific workers in order that they might devote themselves entirely to their studies; then he announced the creation of the "Fonds national", to which he invited industrial and financial interests to contribute. King Albert was well known in Great Britain, and on a recent visit, his enthusiasm for scientific research led him to spend an afternoon examining the treasures of the Royal Institution, after which he enjoyed a 'laboratory' tea with Sir William Bragg and members of the staff, and watched some experiments with liquid air in illustration of the late Sir James Dewar's work.

History Made in Germany

IN another column of this issue of NATURE (see p. 298) is a translation of an official circular, issued to all education authorities in Germany by the Minister of the Interior, on the teaching of prehistory and history, which contains 'directive ideas' to be followed in historical instruction and to serve as a standard in the adoption of textbooks. The directions in the circular deal first with certain 'points of view' which "hitherto have been considered inadequately, if at all", and secondly, give an outline of the manner in which the theory of Nordic racial and cultural supremacy is to be applied in dealing with the course of events from the earliest times to the present day. The study of 'race' and 'culture' are to be made to subserve the German nationalist idea, while the heroic legends will quicken the emotional appeal of leadership in present-day 'national assertion'. From the point of view of prehistoric and historical science, the contents of this document are astonishing. It is scarcely necessary to point out that the racial and cultural unities which are to be made the basis of the modern German nationalist State are non-existent in point of fact, but rest on misstatement or misinterpretation. If, however, these 'directive ideas' appear too biased, too frankly propagandist, to call for critical examination from the point of view of ethnology, archæological science, or history, they must none the less be regarded as symptoms of a grave condition of thought. The circular suggests that Germany is prepared to abandon all standards of intellectual honesty in pursuit of a political ideal, which, it may be noted, it is hoped to impose on all 'Nordic' peoples.

Prof. Harold C. Urey

PROF. HAROLD C. UREY, of Columbia University, has been awarded the Willard Gibbs medal of the Chicago Section of the American Chemical Society for his discovery of 'heavy water'. Prof. Urey, at the age of forty-one years, is the youngest man ever to receive this honour. He was born in Walkerton, Ind., on April 29, 1893. In 1917 he was graduated from the University of Montana with the degree of bachelor of science in zoology. In 1923 he received the Ph.D. degree in chemistry from the University of California. He received an American-Scandinavian fellowship for research in 1923–24, studying under Prof. N. Bohr at Copenhagen. He was assistant in chemistry at Johns Hopkins University in 1924–29, and has been associate professor of chemistry at Columbia since 1929. The Willard Gibbs medal, founded by William A. Converse in 1911, was named after Josiah Willard Gibbs, professor of mathematical physics at Yale University from 1871 until 1903, who, although not primarily a chemist, did much to advance the science of chemistry. It is awarded annually by the Chicago Section of the American Chemical Society to a scientific worker "whose work in either pure or applied science has received worldwide recognition". The award is determined by a national jury of men of science. The first Gibbs medallist was Svante Arrhenius of Sweden.

Constitution of the Stars

THE fourth Rickman Godlee lecture was delivered at University College, London, by Sir Arthur Eddington on February 16. Lord Dawson of Penn presided, and paid a tribute to Rickman Godlee's great pioneer work in the surgery of the brain and