

### University and Educational Intelligence

BRISTOL.—Dr. MacGregor Skene has been appointed Melville Wills professor of botany in succession to the late Prof. O. V. Darbishire. Dr. Skene, who is a graduate of Aberdeen, went to Bristol as senior lecturer in botany in 1926, and was made reader in that subject in 1929.

EDINBURGH.—At a graduation ceremony on December 14, the degree of D.Sc. was conferred on Mowbray Ritchie for a thesis on reaction kinetics of photochemical and related systems, and on Alexander M. Smith for a thesis on variation in soil acidity, the protein content of oats and the *Aspergillus* method of soil analysis. The degree of Ph.D. was conferred on Alan Mozley (thesis—"The Fresh-Water and Terrestrial Mollusca of Northern Asia"), Margaret F. Ritchie (thesis—"Optical Rotatory Power of Organic Acids and their Derivatives"), George P. Sillitto (thesis—"Comparative Reactivities of Chlorine Atoms on Chlorobenzene"), R. P. Sinha (thesis—"Adsorption of Gases and Water by Coal"), and James S. A. Spreull (thesis—"Microscopic Structure of the Spleen of Domestic Animals").

THE annual meeting of the Mathematical Association will be held at the Institute of Education, London, W.C.1, on January 7-8, when Mr. A. W. Siddons will take the presidency for the year 1935, in succession to Prof. E. H. Neville. The subject of the presidential address will be "The Food of the Gods". The following have been nominated for election as honorary members: Prof. E. Borel, University of Paris; Prof. J. Hadamard, University of Paris; Prof. G. H. Hardy, University of Cambridge; Prof. D. E. Smith, Columbia University; Prof. E. T. Whittaker, University of Edinburgh. Further information can be obtained from C. Pendlebury, 39 Burlington Road, Chiswick, London, W.4.

THE small independent college in America, with its ideal of a 'liberal education', has no longer the unrivalled prestige it enjoyed for generations, but it still counts among the notable formative influences moulding the youth of that country. In *School and Society* of October 20 appear two addresses delivered at the installation of the twelfth president of one of those institutions—Union College, Schenectady, New York. The new president, after enlarging on the unique value of the small college and the dangers that threaten it, suggested that American Governments might well go further along the line of the British Government in providing competitive college scholarships. "If the state," he said, "is to dry up the old wells of philanthropy by confiscatory taxation—and at the present moment this might seem to some no mere hysterical fear—it might support the training of its leaders in just this way, through the subsidy of selected brains". The other address, by Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler, entitled "The Challenge to Education" aimed at rallying the forces of light and leading at a time when there is imminent danger of the submergence of much of the best of the nation's social heritage in a tide of blatant scepticism and disunion, part of the aftermath of the War. The best hope for the future is, he thinks, in the endowment with a liberal education of as many as possible of those who are capable of attaining to it.

### Science News a Century Ago

#### Aurora Borealis seen at Woolwich

On December 23, 1834, William Sturgeon sent to the editors of the *Philosophical Magazine* an account of an aurora he had seen the previous evening. "A beautiful Aurora Borealis," he said, "was seen from this place last night. I was on Woolwich Common when I first saw it, then exactly six o'clock. It consisted of several groups of vertical beams of pale yellowish light on both sides of the north star, extending nearly to equal distances in the western and eastern directions. These beams presented the strongest light at their bases, and grew gradually fainter, to their superior extremities, here they softened and gently glided into the most attenuated light and were lost at various altitudes some of which were near to the zenith. . . . During the display of the fine streamers which first presented themselves about five minutes past six I hurried home to adjust a magnetic needle. It was about half past six before I had my magnetic apparatus fit for observation and the splendour of the aurora had now passed its meridian. I diligently watched the needle and the aurora until half past ten, but observed nothing in the motions of the former that could possibly be attributed to the influence of the latter."

#### Death of Malthus, December 29, 1834

The Rev. Thomas R. Malthus, the well-known writer on population problems, died at Bath on December 29, 1834. He was born on February 14, 1766, at the Rookery, near Dorking, then the property and home of his father. Educated privately in the first instance, Malthus entered Jesus College, Cambridge, in 1785, graduating ninth wrangler, and becoming in 1797 a fellow of his College. He was ordained in the Church of England, and for a time held a small living in Surrey. In 1805 Malthus was appointed professor of history and political economy at Haileybury College, Hertfordshire, the training centre for cadets of the East India Company. Here, throughout his life, he was able to pursue his researches upon the economic structure and implications of social life. Malthus joined the Statistical Society on its foundation in 1834; already, in 1819, he had been elected a fellow of the Royal Society, and, in that year, signed the charter book. In 1798 Malthus published his views in a work entitled, "An Essay on the Principle of Population as it affects the future Improvement of Society, with remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and other Writers". Revised and enlarged editions of the treatise were the subject of his facile pen down to 1826. A passage that Darwin wrote in his autobiography ("Life") may be recalled here: "In October 1838 I happened to read for amusement 'Malthus on Population', and being well prepared to appreciate the struggle for existence which everywhere goes on from long-continued observation of the habits of animals and plants, it at once struck me that under these circumstances favourable variations would tend to be preserved, and unfavourable ones to be destroyed. The result of this would be the formation of new species." Notwithstanding that much censure and calumny followed his published opinions, Malthus uniformly maintained composure and toleration, traits which were inherent in his character.