

News and Views

Prof. Graham Kerr and Parliamentary Representation

THE appointment of Mr. John Buchan as Governor-General of Canada necessitates a by-election for a representative of the Scottish universities in the House of Commons. We are very glad to see that Prof. J. Graham Kerr, regius professor of zoology in the University of Glasgow, has been adopted as a candidate by the Unionist Association of the Universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and St. Andrews. It would be difficult to find a man of science who could more worthily represent the Scottish universities in Parliament than Prof. Kerr. He combines long experience of the teaching and administrative sides of these universities with wide scientific interests and a high position in the political field, being president of the Scottish Unionist Association, chairman of the Glasgow Unionist Association, and holding similar offices in other Unionist organisations. Prof. Kerr's election to Parliament would involve considerable self-sacrifice, for it would mean the giving up of the life tenure of his chair of regius professor of zoology in the University of Glasgow. In these days, when the whole of our communal existence is permeated by science and its applications, it is the duty of scientific workers to take an active part in shaping the destinies of the nation by promoting the election into the House of Commons of representatives having scientific knowledge and outlook. At present there is not a single fellow of the Royal Society in the House of Commons, and if, as we hope and expect, the Scottish universities return Prof. Graham Kerr as their member, they will be rendering a notable service to science and the nation.

Ergometrine, a New Alkaloid from Ergot

THE clinical observations of Moir (*Brit. Med. J.*, i, 1119; 1932), that aqueous extracts of ergot are more effective in producing the uterine contractions to which this drug owes its medicinal use than are any of the known ergot alkaloids, for example, ergotinine, ergotoxine, ergotamine, has recently led to the isolation by H. W. Dudley and C. Moir (*Brit. Med. J.*, March 16, 1935) of a new ergot alkaloid which promises to become of great importance in obstetric practice. The new alkaloid, termed ergometrine, is a crystalline, water-soluble base, of which 0.82 gm. was obtained from 10 kgm. of defatted ergot. Oral administration of ergometrine, in a dose of 0.5–1.0 mgm., produces strong uterine contractions after 6½–8 minutes. By way of contrast, doses as large as 2–3 mgm. of ergotoxine and ergotamine, given by mouth, have a relatively feeble oxytocic effect after an interval of 35 minutes or more, and a similar type of activity is shown by the recently discovered ergot alkaloids, sensibamine and ergoclavine. Even when given by injection, the ergotoxine-ergotamine alkaloids are rather slow in action, and often produce such unpleasant symptoms as headaches, nausea and depression. Ergometrine is stated to be free from these undesirable subsidiary effects.

A SAMPLE tube has been sent to us of ergometrine as manufactured in the laboratories of British Drug Houses, Ltd., and supplied in tablets containing 0.5 mgm., suitable for oral administration. It is astonishing that the recognition of this active principle of ergot should have been so long delayed, and it may be that even more valuable secrets will ultimately be disclosed by this remarkable parasitic mould, the investigation of which has already yielded ergosterol and its irradiation products, including artificial vitamin D. Further reports on the pharmacology and chemistry of ergometrine will be awaited with considerable interest. In the issue of the *Lancet* of May 25 (p. 1243), M. S. Kharasch and R. R. Legault discuss the possibility that ergometrine may be identical with, or closely related to, the ergotocine recently isolated by these workers and their collaborators (*Amer. J. Obst. and Gyn.*, February, 1935, p. 155). Pure crystalline ergotocine is being manufactured in large quantities by the Eli Lilly Company, the recommended clinical dose for oral administration being 0.4 mgm.

Prof. P. Lenard of the University of Heidelberg

THE Physical Institute of the University of Heidelberg has recently, in honour of Prof. Lenard, been renamed the 'Philipp Lenard-Institut'. A correspondent has sent us a cutting from the students' magazine of that University, giving Prof. Lenard's reply to the congratulations of the Heidelberg students on this occasion. The following is a translation of Prof. Lenard's reply, and we prefer to make no comment upon it:—"I am very grateful to the students of the University of Heidelberg for their congratulations on the renaming, by the Ministry, of the Institute which was built some years ago under my direction. I hope that the Institute may stand as a battle flag against the Asiatic Spirit in Science. Our Leader has eliminated this same spirit in politics and national economy—where it is known as Marxism. In natural science, however, with the over-emphasis of Einstein, it still holds sway. We must recognise that it is unworthy of a German,—and indeed only harmful to him—to be the intellectual follower of a Jew. Natural science properly so-called is of completely Aryan origin and Germans must to-day also find their own way out into the unknown. Heil, Hitler!"

Rationalisation of Scientific Publication

A POINT raised in the leading article in *NATURE* of March 9 on the subject of "Rationalisation of Scientific Publication", relating to the duplication of abstracts, led Dr. Ainsworth Mitchell to state the views of the Society of Public Analysts in a letter published in our issue of May 11, p. 791. Further communications have since reached us from other members of the Society. The main contention is that the Society produces at its own cost something for the use of its members which is not supplied by