

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 ergo-clavine. 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

the British Chemical Abstracts ; and that these specialised abstracts are widely appreciated. In so far as a large number of members of the Society of Public Analysts are members also of one or both of the societies maintaining the Bureau of Chemical Abstracts, no reasonable objection can be raised to this action. None the less, the unprejudiced onlooker may regret the example when overlapping and duplication are still so widely apparent in chemical literature, and when the major scientific societies find the burden of publication a severe tax on their resources. He may still be entitled to conclude that it is idle to deplore such financial limitations or to lament the growing difficulty which besets every scientific worker of keeping abreast of his subject until there is to be found a much greater willingness to make generous sacrifices in the general interest. It is unfortunate that a phrase in the original article, intended merely to indicate the ground covered by the abstracts of the Society of Public Analysts, has been construed to refer to the matter and data of the abstracts in a way which the Society would have been justly entitled to resent. Such criticism of any society is, however, most effectively disarmed by the measure in which the Society publicly as well as privately supports the central institutions for the co-ordination of scientific literature in the particular science it avows.

Export of Antiquities from Egypt

A REPORT from Cairo points to the possibility of further restrictions on the export of antiquities from Egypt. Under the existing antiquities law, which has been in operation for a little more than a decade, the rights of the State in the allocation of the proceeds of legitimate excavation have been well—indeed some would say too well—protected ; but it has proved difficult to check clandestine digging. The finds from these illicit activities frequently, but not invariably, find a final resting place in the Cairo museum, but a considerable number still are smuggled out of the country. According to a dispatch from the Cairo correspondent of *The Times* in the issue of May 25, violent protest has been raised in the Arab newspapers as a result of reports of the value of papyri, and especially of the new fragments of a Gospel now in the British Museum, which have been sold at high prices to European collections. Inquiries by *The Times* correspondent have elicited the admission that sales by Cairo dealers to private collectors have been due to the fact that the Cairo Museum has not shown an interest in papyri except when of historical importance. As a consequence of this agitation, however, the Minister of Education, Nequid Bey Hilali, has appointed a committee to inquire into the question of illicit sales of antiquities. Although archaeologists may sometimes have felt the burden of the regulations imposed upon legitimate excavation to be unduly irksome, they will have no quarrel with any measure checking that destruction of scientific evidence which is the inevitable accompaniment of clandestine digging and illicit sales.

Control of Architecture

THOUGH a nation may not be judged wholly by its architecture, this at least forms an outward and visible sign of its mentality, and since many buildings outlive a number of generations, it is our duty to posterity to see that the structures we erect are not only fitted for their purposes, but also are outwardly gracious and in harmony with their surroundings. Great developments in building are in progress, municipal, institutional, commercial and most of all domestic owing to the programmes of slum clearance. These developments merit the employment of only qualified architects, to ensure the greatest economy in the expenditure of money and the most suitable results in design which proper training can alone give. The Royal Institute of British Architects sent last January to the Minister of Health a memorial expressing the readiness of the architectural profession to give assistance in the matter of slum clearance schemes, and pointing out that many of the local authority staffs have neither the time nor the experience to deal adequately with these large problems. Most people will admit the wisdom of employing a properly qualified professional man for any service, be it medical, legal or architectural, and the suggestion that public money should only be spent under competent professional advice appears to be sound reasoning. A great deal of time is given gratuitously by architects in serving on panels to assist in the improvement of designs submitted to local authorities, and through a very complete system of professional education the advice and service of competent men is now obtainable in all parts of the country.

Recent Acquisitions at the British Museum (Natural History)

OR all the regions of the world, the Pacific coast of South America is, perhaps, the most poorly represented in the Museum collection of fishes, and a representative series of the marine fishes of Chile has long been required. Through the kindness of Mr. V. Cavendish-Bentinck, of the British Embassy at Santiago, arrangements have been made with the Chilean fisheries authorities to supply the Department of Zoology with well-preserved specimens of the more important fishes. The first consignment of what promises to be a collection of considerable importance has now been received, and another consisting of specimens collected in the Juan Fernandez Islands is expected within a few weeks. Among the specimens acquired by exchange for the Zoological Department are examples of the Hawaiian land snail *Achatinella*. The species and races of these snails, which are often restricted to single ridges and ravines (in some cases even to single trees), are classical examples of the effects of isolation in species-formation. The Department of Mineralogy has acquired by purchase a remarkable set of 98 meteoric stones which fell in 1869 as a shower at Tenham station, Kyabra County, South-West Queensland, and are as yet undescribed. Another purchase is a fine doubly-terminated crystal of ruby and a faceted colourless chrysoberyl (7·15 carats) from the ruby