News and Views

Sir John Flett and the Geological Survey

ON October 1 Sir John Flett retired from the directorship of the Geological Survey and Museum. He joined the Survey in 1901, in 1903 he was appointed petrographer, and in 1911 he succeeded Dr. John Horne as assistant director for Scotland. On the retirement of Sir Aubrey Strahan in 1920, he was made director. He took over his new duties at a moment when several important changes had been introduced; the Committee of Advice on the Geological Survey, which had reported to the Board of Education since Sir Jethro Teall's induction to office, now gave place to the Geological Survey Board, reporting to the Lords of the Committee of the Privy Council for Scientific and Industrial Research; at the same time there was a considerable increase in the scientific staff. With characteristic energy, Sir John Flett began at once to make full use of the improved conditions: one of the first steps was the establishment of three branch offices in coal-field centres, which proved of great value in permitting closer contacts with the industry.

DURING Sir John Flett's directorship, not only has steady progress been made with the primary 6-inch survey, the re-survey of economically important areas, and the provision of colour-printed 1-inch maps, but also there has been marked improvement in the production and style of reproduction, both of maps and memoirs. Other departments of the Survey's activity—the investigation of underground water supplies, recording of boreholes, photography of geological subjects for educational and record purposes, the study of geophysical methods of surveying—have been vigorously stimulated, and useful collaboration has been set up with other bodies in relation to research upon soils, coal and building stones. Sir John's single-minded devotion to the work of the Survey and Museum and to the needs of the public, backed by a keen and able staff, achieved a fitting culmination with the opening of the new Museum of Practical Geology and Survey offices in South Kensington last July.

As recorded in NATURE of July 20, p. 96, Dr. Bernard Smith has been appointed to succeed Sir John Flett as director of the Geological Survey of Great Britain. It is now announced that Mr. Henry Dewey has been appointed to succeed Dr. Bernard Smith as assistant director (England and Wales). Mr. C. E. N. Bromehead, district geologist in York, will shortly take charge of the London District, now vacated by Mr. Dewey. Mr. T. H. Whitehead has been promoted district geologist, and will take over the Survey Office in York upon Mr. Bromehead's withdrawal to London. Dr. J. Phemister has been appointed petrographer in succession to the late Dr. H. H. Thomas.

Faraday's Eyesight and the Blind Spot

UNDER the heading "Science News a Century Ago" a paragraph headed "Faraday's Eyesight" appeared in NATURE of January 12, p. 77. The note referred to an entry in Faraday's "Diary" of date January 15, 1835, in which Faraday stated he had noticed "a slight obscurity of the sight of my left eye". Dr. Frank Marsh, writing from the Pathological Laboratory, c/o Anglo-Iranian Oil Co., Ltd., Masjid-i-Sulieman, via Ahwaz, South Iran, suggests that the quotation in NATURE indicates that "Faraday had discovered his 'blind spot', that is, the optic disc, the place of exit of the optic fibres from the retina, which exists in the retina of every normal person". We have consulted a leading authority on ophthalmology upon Dr. Marsh's suggestion, but he thinks that the explanation of the blur in Faraday's vision as being due to his blind spot is not satisfactory for several reasons. Faraday describes it as a "slight obscurity of the sight", that is, it was a definite blur—in ophthalmological phrase, a *positive* scotoma. The blind spot causes a hiatus in vision, but no positive blur; in other words, causes a *negative* scotoma. Apparently the blur was first noticed when Faraday used both eyes in reading, though it is not definitely stated that the right eye was open. If both eyes were being used, the blind spot would not be noticed in reading. Moreover, the size of the scotoma ("about half an inch in diameter") does not correspond with the visual angle subtended at the nodal point of the eye by the normal blind spot. Faraday's description is meticulously accurate, as one would expect from him, and it is unlikely that he would write "to the right and below the axis of the eye" if the true projection were to the left, as would be the case for the blind spot. It is probable that Faraday had a temporary retinal lesion, possibly a small retinal hæmorrhage, and that this accounted for the obscurity he described. In concluding his letter, Dr. Marsh asks whether Faraday's entry was "the earliest reference to observations on the physiological 'blind spot' ". It was certainly not; for in the second volume of the *Philosophical Transactions* it is recorded that Mariotte demonstrated the blind spot to the Royal Society before King Charles II in 1668.

A Science News Service in London

OF recent years the desirability of establishing a closer relationship than exists at present between the very different realms of science and the newspaper press has been realised by an increasing number of leaders in both; and a year ago attention was again directed to the movement towards a British Science News Service by Sir Richard Gregory, who made "Science in the Public Press" the subject of his presidential address to the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaux. The formation