News and Views

Broadcast Announcement of King George's Death

ON the occasion of the death of His Majesty King George V on the night of January 20, the organisation of the British Broadcasting Corporation was utilised in communicating the official bulletins to the whole of the British Empire. From 9.30 p.m. onwards, the ordinary broadcasting programmes were stopped, and all the stations of the B.B.C., including those conducting the short-wave Empire service, were linked together, but were kept silent except for the transmission of the official bulletin at 15 minute intervals. At 10 o'clock, a short service of recollection and prayer for the King was broadcast, after which the silent watch between bulletins was resumed. The final announcement of the peaceful death of the King came shortly after midnight. In this way was the great organisation of British broadcasting used in the manner of a gigantic public address system, with literally millions of listeners in all parts of the world constituting the audience. Thus were listeners able to share with the Royal Family the tense anxiety of the last few hours, and to receive simultaneously the news of the passing of our Sovereign. Never before in the history of the world has it been possible for the whole human race to unite in sympathetic response to the messages thus conveyed from Sandringham to listeners everywhere. Truly, "Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world", and the heart of man cannot fail to be touched by this great achievement of science. The imagination of a poet like the late Mr. Rudyard Kipling might well have been stirred by this theme of waves of emotion encompassing the earth to trace the changes which history has seen in methods of proclaiming to the nation the loss of its beloved King.

The Mount Everest Expedition, 1936

WE are glad that Lord Conway, in a letter which appears in our correspondence columns this week, expresses concern that not a single scientific member is included in the personnel of the new expedition to Mount Everest. It is greatly to be regretted that the leader of the expedition has made no provision for carrying on, or continuing, the scientific work of previous expeditions, especially as this could be done without hampering, or impeding in any way, the actual climbing party. The stratigraphy of the neighbouring portions of the Tibetan plateau was worked out by Dr. A. M. Heron in 1921, and the complicated structure of the immediate environs of Everest was studied by Mr. N. E. Odell in 1924 and by Mr. L. R. Wager in 1933. There are, however, many problems of stratigraphy and structure yet awaiting solution in this very important section of the main Himalayan chain. Also, there is much yet to investigate as regards the glaciers, which, on account of the prevailing conditions of high altitude and low temperature, show many unusual features, and exhibit characters that are more 'arctic' than 'temperate' in affinity. Moreover, the researches of the late Mr. A. F. R. Wollaston and Mr. R. W. G. Hingston in the natural history and ecology deserve to be followed up.

WE are strongly of the opinion that an expedition organised with the support of the Royal Geographical Society ought to undertake as a part of its activity some work in an area to which access can only be obtained under special conditions, an area nevertheless of the greatest geological interest. If the climbing expedition is successful, any defects on the scientific side will very probably be overlooked. If, however, the expedition is unsuccessful, criticism will no doubt be very freely levelled against it on the ground that it has achieved nothing. If, however, provision is made for scientific work, that, at any rate, would be achieved even if the main expedition does not realise its object. The conquest of Everest by a climbing party has a certain amount of human interest, but it should not become a newspaper 'stunt' and it should be associated with a desire to increase knowledge if it is to have any scientific value.

Bicentenary of Lagrange, 1736-1813

As stated in our issue of January 4, on January 25 occurs the bicentenary of the birth of the celebrated French mathematician Joseph-Louis Lagrange, a senator of France, a grand officer of the Legion of Honour and a count of the Empire. A born student, Lagrange was gentle and timid in manner, reserved in society, detested controversy, and for the greater part of his life was never in really robust health. Yet by the methodical use of his time and the exercise of his genius, he accomplished an amount of work, seldom, if ever, exceeded by any individual, while his "Mécanique Analytique" has been called one of the most remarkable monuments of human genius. To Sir William Rowan Hamilton, the "Mécanique Analytique" was "a scientific poem". The first thirty years of the life of Lagrange were passed in Turin, his birthplace; the next twenty years in Berlin and the last twenty-seven in Paris. As a young man he set out to visit London, but his journey was interrupted by sickness. He was the correspondent or associate of many of the greatest Continental men of science, such as Euler, D'Alembert, Clairaut, Legendre, Laplace, Borda, Berthollet and de Morveau, and it was the last who, when in October 1793 a decree banished all persons not born in France, secured special exemption for Lagrange so that he might complete some calculations on the theory of projectiles.

IN 1794 Lagrange was given chairs in the Ecole Normale and the Ecole Polytechnique, and his name was the first in the list of members of the Bureau