

## News and Views

### "Letters to the Editor"

IN this issue we are publishing eleven pages of communications under the heading "Letters to the Editor". While it cannot be maintained that any of these pages makes easy reading, it is probably not far from the mark to say that every page includes either a definite contribution to knowledge or one or more points worthy of careful consideration. However that may be, the addresses which appear at the ends of the various communications suggest some interesting reflections. In 'making-up' these pages, the principal considerations were to achieve a rough balance among the subjects represented and to take account of the date of receipt of communications. The result has been, we hope, a representative series of 'letters' as regards subjects, the authors of which write from London, Cambridge, Leeds, Reading and Teddington; Edinburgh; Bangor; Belfast and Dublin; Copenhagen, Cracow, Leningrad, Leyden, Moscow, Oslo and Uppsala; Chicago and Philadelphia; and Jerusalem. This list of places demonstrates better than any words of ours the widespread distribution of readers of NATURE, and substantiates the claim of science to be international in scope. In these days of political upheaval, with the exaggerated claims of nationalism imperilling the peace of the world, it is an encouraging thought that among men of science there is still a strong bond of common interest in original investigations and results, and we are gratified that they should select NATURE as the vehicle of their communications. For our part, we can only express the hope that this form of internationalism may grow, for in it we see the germs of the new order in which the spirit of the pursuit of knowledge will unify the interests and shape the destinies of mankind.

#### D. C. Solander (1736-82)

DANIEL CHARLES SOLANDER, the famous botanist, the bicentenary of whose birth occurs on February 28, was born in Norrland, Sweden, and ultimately became the favourite pupil of Linnæus. The son of a country parson, Solander attracted the attention of Linnæus while studying at the University of Uppsala, and was welcomed into the master's household, where he was treated with every consideration. It was the practice of Linnæus to accompany his pupils into the fields and woods in order to give them an intimate acquaintance with Nature, and Solander showed remarkable aptitude and understanding in his observations. A collection of plants which he made in his native province is still to be seen in the Linnæan Herbarium. It elicited the warm commendation of the Consistory for his diligence and skill. When the zealous London naturalists, John Ellis and Peter Collinson, requested Linnæus to send some of his pupils to encourage the study of natural history

in England in 1760, Solander was selected, Linnæus recommending him as his "much loved pupil". Solander became devotedly attached to England and never again returned to his fatherland. In fact, when Linnæus procured for him the offer of the post of professor of botany at St. Petersburg, he first consulted his English friends and then declined the appointment "for many reasons" which were not given. Solander was, as a matter of fact, engaged in classifying and cataloguing in the British Museum, and he also undertook to arrange the Duchess of Portland's museum. At the British Museum, Solander became successively assistant librarian, under-librarian and keeper of the printed books.

SOLANDER accompanied Sir Joseph Banks on his voyage to the Pacific with Cook in the *Endeavour* (1768-71). The journey was very prolific in results, 1,200 new species, with a hundred genera and a multitude of animals, fishes, insects and mollusca, previously unknown, being secured. Linnæus afterwards complained that Solander had not sent him a single plant or insect from the voyage; but the explanation of the apparent lack of courtesy is to be found in the fact that the specimens were not Solander's to give. They belonged to Banks, who had incurred great expense in the equipment of the vessel. The incident made no difference to the mutual regard of the two botanists for each other. When an article by Fabricius appeared in the *Deutsches Museum* containing references disparaging to Linnæus, Solander bought up all the copies he could find and destroyed them to prevent a misconception being more widely spread. On the other hand, when Linnæus heard rumours of a proposed second visit by Solander to the Pacific, he wrote to one of his English friends: "I have just read in some foreign newspapers that our friend Solander intends to revisit those new countries discovered by Mr. Banks and himself. This report has affected me so much as almost entirely to deprive me of sleep. How vain are the hopes of man! Whilst the whole botanical world like myself has been looking for the most transcendent benefits to our science from the unrivalled exertions of your countrymen, all their matchless and truly astonishing collection such as has never been seen before, nor may ever be seen again, is to be put aside untouched to be thrust into some corner to become probably the prey of insects and of destruction". As it happened, Solander went to Iceland and not to the Pacific, and the results of his work are embodied in manuscripts preserved in the Botanical Department of the British Museum. Solander died in 1782. Most of his writings were in the form of contributions to other authors' works, the most notable being to Brander's 'Fossilia Hautoniensia' and Ellis's "Natural History of Zoophytes".