

News and Views

The British Association and Social Science

THE Report of the Council of the British Association, adopted by the General Committee on September 9 at Blackpool, included two matters of particular interest relating to the development of the activities of the Association in the field of the social sciences. During the year covered by the Report, the Council appointed a Committee to consider how the Association might indicate the importance which it attaches to the development of the social sciences, either by the appointment of a third general secretary or by other appropriate means. As a result, this year's programme includes in a separate section the titles of addresses, papers, and discussions having a special bearing upon the relations between science and the interests of the community. Communications appropriate to this group may be suggested by organizing sectional committees or by sectional presidents. At least one discussion in each annual programme is to deal with the application of science to social problems, and at least one of the evening discourses. By these developments, it is intended to provide the evidence which public opinion now demands that the Association shall carry out one of its original aims, namely, that of "obtaining a more general interest for the objects of science".

Incorporation of the British Science Guild

In the same spirit, the General Committee accepted the recommendation of the Council for the incorporation of the British Science Guild in the Association. It will be remembered that the Guild was the outcome of Sir Norman Lockyer's presidential address to the Association, at the Southport meeting thirty-three years ago, on "Influence of Brain Power on History". The stated object of the Guild is "to promote the application of scientific method and results to social problems and public affairs". As is pointed out in the Report adopted at Blackpool, the same object is implicit in the aims of the Association; and the programmes of recent meetings have given evidence of a greater concern for these problems than was commonly exhibited in former years. The terms of the incorporation of the Guild in the Association include the transfer of the capital funds of the Guild to the Association, together with contingent bequests from Lady Lockyer and Sir Albert Howard. The Council of the Association will appoint a committee, to be called the British Science Guild Committee, which will be entrusted with arrangements for lectures already initiated by the Guild and for any similar lectures approved by the Council. The Norman Lockyer Lecture is to continue to be delivered annually and to have particular reference to the relations between science and the welfare of the community; and the Alexander Pedler Lecture is to be offered annually to one of the corresponding societies of the Association, or be delivered at a

centre outside London. The amalgamation of the two bodies was greatly to be desired, and we are glad that it has now been accomplished. Though, when the Guild was founded, few men of science took active interest in the application of scientific methods to the investigation of social problems, there is now a decided change of attitude in this respect and the columns of NATURE have afforded abundant evidence of such repercussions. The Association has responded to this extended influence, and has thus shown itself to possess the progressive spirit which should be characteristic of every scientific institution.

Jean-Sylvain Bailly (1736-93)

THE bicentenary of the birth of the French astronomer Jean-Sylvain Bailly, who was born in Paris on September 15, 1736, and perished on the scaffold at the age of fifty-seven years, recalls a career of great interest, for Bailly was not only a cultivated and distinguished man of science, but he was also one of the enthusiastic philanthropists who at the coming of the French Revolution adopted with ardour the popular cause and endeavoured to secure for the people sound constitutional reforms. The son of a keeper of the King's pictures, it was intended that he should follow in his father's footsteps as a painter, but literature proved more attractive than art, and science more alluring than either. It was his acquaintance with Lacaille that led him to astronomy, and one of his earliest labours was the reduction of Lacaille's observations on zodiacal stars. He also became known for his researches on Jupiter's satellites, but his greatest work was his "Histoire de l'Astronomie", a work full of animated description, luminous narrative and interesting detail. The correspondent of Voltaire and Buffon, the contemporary of D'Alembert and Diderot, Bailly's versatility was recognized by the unusual honour of his being elected a member of the Academy of Sciences, the French Academy and the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres.

ALL accounts of Bailly describe him as a man of the highest integrity, generous, courageous and liberal-minded. The popularity he enjoyed led to his election in 1789 as a deputy to the Tiers-Etat and to his being chosen president of the National Assembly. In his capacity of president he dictated to the members the oath taken in the Tennis Court at Versailles on June 20, 1789, "to resist tyrants and tyranny, and never to separate till they had obtained a free constitution". About a month after this, the Bastille fell, and on July 17, when Lafayette was made commander-in-chief of the new National Guard, Bailly was made Mayor of Paris. For two fateful years Bailly held his difficult posts, endeavouring amidst the rising tide of republicanism to serve