

## 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

both King and country. Then came his fall. On July 17, 1791, the demonstration took place in the Champ-des-Mars to secure signatures for a petition demanding the dethronement of the King. There was disorder and violence, Bailly gave the order for the crowd to be dispersed by force, fire was opened, some forty people killed and with the "massacre of the Champ-des-Mars" Bailly's popularity waned. A few months later, he resigned his posts and retired to Nantes. Two more years passed and against advice he visited Laplace at Melun. He was recognized and denounced, and was sent to Paris, where he was tried on November 10, 1793; on the next day he was condemned, and on November 12—a bitterly cold wet day—was taken in an open cart to the ill-fated Champ-des-Mars and there guillotined amidst the execrations of the people he had done his best to serve. Save for Lavoisier, who fell on the scaffold six months later, Bailly was the most distinguished man of science who fell a victim to the Revolution. He had, however, played a conspicuous and honourable part, and to-day his statue stands in the gardens of the Luxembourg.

#### Vitamin B<sub>1</sub>

THE structure of vitamin B<sub>1</sub> was made certain by its synthesis, recently announced from the laboratory of Prof. Williams of Columbia University (see NATURE, Aug. 29, p. 372), and this has now been repeated elsewhere. Grewe (*Hoppe-Seyler's Zeitschrift für physiologische Chemie*, 242, 89; 1936), working in Windaus's laboratory at Göttingen, describes the preparation of the pyrimidine half of the molecule, and completely confirms the latest formula put forward by Williams, though mention is only made of Williams's earlier suggestions which he himself has now modified. Grewe goes on to state that he had intended to work out a synthesis of the vitamin from the new pyrimidine derivative when he learned, through Prof. Windaus, that Andersag and Westphal had already accomplished this in the scientific laboratories of the I.G. at Elberfeld, and that patent protection had been sought. Prof. Williams's work was carried out with the collaboration of Merck and Co., Inc., Rahway, N.J.; it seems, therefore, on the cards that there may be some interesting developments in the patent field, should the synthesis of vitamin B<sub>1</sub> become practicable on a commercial scale.

#### Half-Castes and World Peace

A NOVEL view of the problem of the half-caste and of the role which might be played by communities of mixed origin in the promotion of world peace is taken by Mr. Cedric Dover in a memorandum which he presented to the International Peace Congress held on September 3-6. In a cursory survey of the figures, he points out that not only are half-castes more numerous than is realized generally, but that they form an appreciable proportion of the populations of the modern world. Mr. Dover, however, does not rely on the mere weight of number. He goes on to argue that half-caste communities, con-

sisting of 'marginal' men, who represent two cultures and exist under conditions of 'imperialism', owing to the presence of a dominant white population, present parallelisms, due to a common ethnic element derived from their white blood, a common language (English), a common religious belief, and common social and economic conditions. It is suggested, therefore, that the continued growth of ethnic relations and mixed populations should be accepted as part of the machinery of human evolution, of which advantage should be taken to promote the greater ethnic unity and cultural uniformity, which would afford an efficient counter to an aggressive spirit of nationalism, while the creation of a united front of marginal communities would lead inevitably to better international understanding.

IF Mr. Dover's suggestions to this end tend to a more rational attitude towards the half-caste, they will have accomplished much. Miscegenation, however, has not been overlooked as a possible ultimate solution of the colour question; but the world, it would seem, is not yet prepared, on present evidence of the effects of the crossing of widely diverse strains, to foster it deliberately or even to countenance it. The organization of a world-wide front of sufficient strength to make its weight felt demands resources and machinery, of which at present there seems little expectation. Quite possibly local loyalties would prove obstacles stronger than the communal parallelism upon which Mr. Dover would rely.

#### Roman Leicester

A FURTHER stage in the proceedings which will determine the future of Roman Leicester (see NATURE of August 29, p. 356) was reached on September 3, when an inquiry was held in the city by the Ministry of Health to examine the application of the Leicester Corporation to borrow £135,000 for the purpose of erecting baths on the site adjacent to the Jewry Wall, upon which archaeological investigations are being conducted by Miss Kathleen Kenyon. The application was opposed by the Leicester Archaeological Society, the Leicester Literary and Philological Society and the Leicester Civic Society, bodies co-operating in the excavation. They were represented by Mr. Macgregor Clarkson; and Mr. P. K. Baillie Reynolds, Inspector of Ancient Monuments, was also present, representing the Office of Works. In the course of his evidence, Mr. Clarkson stressed the unique position which the site conferred on Leicester. The recent discoveries, he urged, made it possible to point to the civic centre of the city in three historic periods—the Town Hall of Roman times, the Guildhall of the Middle Ages, and the modern Town Hall. Miss Kenyon's evidence dealt with the important archaeological features of the site added by her investigations, including part of the Forum and the ten feet depth added to the Jewry Wall, part of the Roman Town Hall, which, now standing at 35 ft. in total height, is one of the largest Roman walls in Britain. This wall is scheduled as an ancient monument.