

Progress of the Post Office

IN an address delivered to the meeting of the Portsmouth Brotherhood at Portsmouth on October 18, Mr. J. H. Brebner, the controller of press information for the General Post Office, gave a brief account of the history of the Post Office. He laid stress on the fact that in the early days, about 1800, the Post Office was considered more as an instrument for taxation than as an undertaking to be run for the benefit of the public.

In 1801 the Post Office was called on to make a contribution of £150,000 to the Exchequer. The Secretary of that date thought that this was an excellent opportunity to remedy what he considered a grave defect in its system of charging, namely, that the postage was the same whatever distance the letter was delivered, while obviously the charge should vary with the distance. He therefore fixed new rates proportional to the distance the letter travelled. In 1812, for example, the postage from London to Portsmouth was 8d. and from London to Thurso 5s. A consequence of these high rates was that the illegal conveyance of letters became general. To stop this, prosecutions were undertaken whenever evidence became available. Sometimes hundreds of prosecutions were proceeding simultaneously, and in one case in Scotland there were twelve hundred.

It is instructive to learn that owing to the increased long-distance telephone traffic, an extensive programme of underground cables costing £4,500,000 will be carried out this year. The traffic has increased so rapidly that to enable additional circuits to be provided in advance of the completion of the new cables, schemes are in hand for doubling the capacity of many of the existing four-wire trunk circuits by dividing them into two-wire circuits. Telephone lines more than 100 miles in length will be provided by means of a twelve-channel carrier system, from which twelve telephone circuits will be obtained. This compares with one circuit by normal methods. In this new system, at repeater stations, at every twenty miles, the power of the speech currents can be amplified 100,000 times. The first twelve-channel system will be brought into use between Bristol and Plymouth about the end of this year.

Those who think that radio communication has displaced submarine cables will be surprised to learn that arrangements have been made for the laying of two submarine cables of a new type between Great Britain and Holland, and for one new cable to Ireland. The two Anglo-Dutch cables will provide eleven circuits and the Anglo-Irish cable will provide eight circuits. It is anticipated that further circuits to meet the ever-increasing traffic will be obtained by the installation of additional terminal equipment at a later date.

In conclusion, Mr. Brebner said that the Post Office, by pursuing a policy of reducing the charges for its various services, has grown to be the largest employer of labour in the country. Its ever-increasing profits approximate thirteen millions annually; telephone calls last year were 1,800 million, showing an increase of 140 million over the preceding year. The remarkable progress of recent years is due to the recognition of the fact that the Post Office should work for the common weal. The results which have been achieved fully justify this policy.

Educational Topics and Events

CAMBRIDGE.—D. H. Valentine, of St. John's College, has been appointed curator of the Botanical Museum and Herbarium.

The degree of M.A. has been conferred on Dr. D. J. Bell, University lecturer in biochemistry.

At Trinity College, the following have been elected into fellowships: Dr. N. Feather, on appointment as assistant lecturer in natural sciences, M. H. L. Pryce, for research in mathematics, A. L. Hodgkin, for research in physiology, and T. T. Paterson, for research in geology.

GLASGOW.—Dr. J. W. McNee, University College, London, has been appointed regius professor of the practice of medicine.

The Rector, Sir Ian Colquhoun, is delivering his rectorial address in St. Andrew's Hall, Glasgow, on October 23, at 11 a.m., and a luncheon in his honour is being held in the Bute Hall of the University.

Prof. J. Graham Kerr, M.P., has presented to the Zoological Department of the University a very valuable collection comprising all his zoological manuscripts and the material on which the work was based, including a unique series of *Lepidosiren* and *Spirula*, Budgett's collections of *Protopterus*, and Minchin's slides and material illustrating his study of sponges. Many other collections of great historical interest are included, and will form a basis for many future investigations. In addition, the gift comprises a collection of more than seven thousand books and pamphlets together with various scientific apparatus, and a unique series of demonstration slides which had been accumulated during his long tenure of the chair at Glasgow. In accordance with Prof. Graham Kerr's wishes, the further study of the research material included in this gift is to be restricted to fully qualified investigators, and their work must be carried out in the Department of Zoology at the University.

Prof. F. O. Bower has presented a valuable Zeiss microscope, together with a very complete series of objectives, for the use of research students in the Department of Botany.

Mr. Lewis H. Littlejohn, of the Botany Department, has been awarded a Colonial agricultural research scholarship, and is spending one year at Cambridge and the second year in Trinidad.

NURSERY education problems were dealt with in two papers read before Section L of the British Association on September 11: one by Miss I. Jones on "Nursery Education in Lancashire" and one by Mrs. M. Wintringham on "Emergency Open-air Nurseries in the Distressed Areas". Both papers comment on the favourable influence nursery schools are capable of exerting not only on the children in them but also on the homes from which they come. Miss Jones described two successfully working examples of nursery education: one in "The Tannery School" comprising a full range of classes with children of ages 3-14 years, where older girls are serviceable in the nursery class, finding thus an outlet for mothering instincts, older boys cultivate and keep in order a school garden, and part of the playing field is available for use by toddlers; the other in "The Titan Works School", having only children up to the age of eleven; here conditions point to development into a 'home school' in which parents intimately co-operate