

countries such as Great Britain, Germany and France. Probably this is due to the greater facilities of communication by other methods in the latter countries. Russia has come to the front as an electrical manufacturing country. This is shown by the fact that the value of its imports, which rose gradually from 3.62 million pounds in 1929 to 9.15 million pounds in 1932, has fallen rapidly to only £789,000 in 1935. The outstanding example of self-sufficiency is the United States, the imports of which in 1935 were valued at only £427,000.

### Present State of British Bird Ringing

THE 1936 report on bird ringing in the British Isles (*British Birds*, April 1937) supports what the 1935 report indicated, namely, that future progress lies not in increasing the sum total, but rather in increasing the proportion of adult birds over nestlings, and scarcer species, marked. Although the total of 48,663 birds ringed is below the number for previous years, the total of trapped adult birds, 19,235, is a record, while that for nestlings (where mortality is naturally high) of 29,428 is a decline on the previous years. Dr. H. J. Moon again heads the list of ringers with 5,280 birds ringed, including 1,332 lapwings, 975 song thrushes, 849 blackbirds and 587 starlings; Mr. G. Charteris marked 3,524 birds, 1,166 of which were chaffinches, and Mr. E. Cohen marked 3,024 birds, including 865 shearwaters. There is an increasing number of birds ringed by schools and societies, and the two bird observatories. The Oxford Ornithological Society marked 2,639 birds, Bootham School 1,656, Rugby School 1,050, the Midlothian Ornithological Club 813, the British Empire Naturalists' Association 158, the Zoological Society 511 and Leighton Park School 403. Totals of ringed birds are not quite so significant as the numbers of birds of rarer species marked. Among the ringings of the Oxford Ornithological Society, for example, were 67 kingfishers, Skokholm Bird Observatory marked 27 white wagtails and 20 Greenland wheatears, Mr. A. Maynall marked 409 nightingales, Mr. C. Wontner Smith marked 201 rooks, Rugby School marked 169 rooks and 62 carrion-crows, Leighton Park School marked 21 fork-tailed petrels, Dartington Hall School 12 circl buntings, the Isle of May Bird Observatory a barred warbler, two bluethroats and a Continental coal tit. Of the national total, the most numerous species ringed were: 3,191 lapwings, 2,155 Manx shearwaters, 1,530 Sandwich terns, 1,271 common terns and 1,131 herring-gulls.

### The National Institute of Agricultural Botany

THE seventeenth report of the National Institute of Agricultural Botany, Cambridge, is now available, and copies may be obtained on application to the Institute (Huntingdon Road, Cambridge). The work of the Institute is directed to supplying the farmer with unbiased information as to the seeds he sows, and the report deals with methods by which this information was obtained in 1936. New varieties of all farm crops are tested by the Institute as soon as they appear, the trials being conducted on a field-

scale at six permanent stations in England, and in some cases at additional centres on a farmer's own land. In all cases, the varieties are grown just as they would be by the farmer himself. Every feature of the varieties is noted and the results are often extremely enlightening. For example, of all the new varieties of winter wheat that have been tested in the last ten years, only one has proved to be worthy of general recommendation by the Institute. This is the Dutch variety 'Juliana', which has in the past two years' trials given slightly better results than 'Wilhelmina'. The position with other crops is very similar, and it is clear that farmers will be well advised, before deciding to grow a new variety, to apply to the agricultural organizer for their county, or direct to the Institute, for information as to the merits of the variety in question.

### "The Hero"

LORD RAGLAN writes in reference to the review of his book "The Hero" appearing in *NATURE* (March 27, p. 532): "Your reviewer . . . suggests that in the absence of documentary evidence I would feel constrained to deny the existence of Nelson and Napoleon. My contention is that in the absence of documentary evidence we should none of us have heard of Nelson and Napoleon." In reply, the reviewer says that, in effect, Lord Raglan appears to agree. In so far as Nelson and Napoleon are characters in the folk drama, they stand on the same footing as Robin Hood, Maid Marian and the rest. These two names, however, were not an effort of invention, but were chosen as those of the popular hero and bogey of the day. Their survival in this form is an effect of folk memory and not of documentary evidence, and their appearance in a ritual does not preclude their real existence, however incongruous their dramatic action. In this instance, the inference happens to be supported by documentary evidence. The conclusion to the contrary, however, that is, that without documentary evidence we should not know of their existence, is shown not necessarily to hold good. Approved documentary evidence is the only source of certain knowledge, and to this extent Lord Raglan is above criticism; but the archaeologist maintains, on the other hand, that a legend may embody facts which may in certain conditions afford a clue to interpretation, when his evidence points in a certain direction. The story of the Minotaur may be ritualistic; but the setting of the Minoan civilization is the fact to which it gave Sir Arthur Evans the clue. It may be true that, strictly speaking, in the absence of documentary evidence we have no certain knowledge of Minos; but we have all heard and believe in the existence of the head of the great empire, for whom his name is the generic term.

### Russian Railway Transport

AT the International Exhibition of Art and Technique in Modern Life which is to be opened in Paris this month, Soviet railway transport will be well represented, the principal exhibit being a working