

News and Views

Prof. A. von Szent-Györgyi: Nobel Prize for Medicine

It is announced by the Stockholm correspondent of *The Times* that the Nobel Prize for Medicine for 1937 has been awarded to Prof. Albert von Szent-Györgyi, of the University of Szeged, in Hungary, for his work on vitamin C. More than fifteen years ago, experiments carried out by Szent-Györgyi on the adrenalectomized animal suggested to him that the adrenal cortex is in some way involved in biological oxidation. A detailed study of different animal, vegetable and synthetic oxidizing systems was made, but no connexion could be found between these and the function of the adrenal cortex. However, nine years ago, evidence was obtained that the cortex is in some way connected with the peroxidase system and at the same time a reducing substance, considered to be a 'hexuronic acid', was isolated from it. The same acid was also found in plants and shown to be an essential part of the 'reducing factor' of plant juices, being apparently connected with the function of the peroxidase system. Since the 'reducing factor' is found in fruit juices which contain vitamin C and cure both human and experimental scurvy, the antiscorbutic potency of the 'hexuronic acid' was investigated,

HOWEVER, it was not until four years later that Svirbely and Szent-Györgyi were convinced that the potency of this acid was really due to the acid itself and not to its contamination by some more potent substance. Success was dependent on the possibility of obtaining large quantities of the acid, and the authors were finally successful when they discovered that paprika, the Hungarian red pepper, is an unusually rich source. Meanwhile, investigation in various laboratories of the chemical nature of 'hexuronic acid' had necessitated a modification of the structural formula originally proposed and Szent-Györgyi and Haworth (*NATURE*, 131, 24; 1933) suggested the name "ascorbic acid", by which vitamin C is now generally known. It was not long after Szent-Györgyi's isolation of ascorbic acid from natural sources before the vitamin was prepared by chemical synthesis, and the synthetic vitamin is now employed in medicine when large doses are required. Although Szent-Györgyi's brilliant research may have closed a chapter in vitamin chemistry, it has nevertheless opened one in the treatment of disease.

Representation and the Australian Aborigines

To those whose vocation it is to consider the Australian aboriginal mainly, if not exclusively, in a context in which he appears as the most primitive, physically and culturally, among existing peoples, there is something incongruous in the report from Canberra (*The Times*, Oct. 27) that the aborigines have petitioned the King, asking His Majesty, through the Australian Government, to empower them to

propose one of their own people, or a sympathetic white, to represent them in the Federal Parliament. The purpose of the petition, it is stated, is to prevent their extinction. It goes on to point out that the injunction laid on the first settlers in Australia, that the aborigines should be adequately cared for, has not been obeyed, since aborigines' lands have been expropriated and legal status has been denied them. This is the first occasion in Australian history on which such action has been taken by the aborigines; but as the eighteen hundred and fourteen signatories to the petition, drawn from all parts of Australia, are chiefly from mission stations, the circumstances which have determined their mode of action are not beyond conjecture. The petition has been forwarded by Mr. Lyons, as Prime Minister, to Lord Gowrie, the Governor-General, for submission to the King.

WHATEVER may be its ultimate fate, the fact of the submission of the petition is significant. It is one among a number of indications of the profound cultural changes which are taking place among even the least advanced races under Imperial administration. It points to the fact that neither segregation, the provision of reservations, nor even 'indirect rule' are to be regarded as the final solution of the problems which arise in modern conditions out of even the regulated cultural contacts of white and backward civilizations. Cultural change, it seems, is inevitable; but in recent discussion of the colonial question, it appears to be overlooked that under democratic institutions the growth of a native opinion cannot be ignored, and the crux of the colonial problem is not ownership, but the will, as well as the competence, to guide native development in the light of detached and scientific study along lines beneficial to the native himself, as well as to the larger world in which he will have to find his level some day when he emerges from tutelage.

The Progress of Engineering

IN his presidential address to the Institution of Civil Engineers on November 2, Mr. Bryan Donkin pointed out that it is nearly thirty years ago since Siemens and Kennedy, who preceded him in the chair and who were like himself connected with both the mechanical and electrical branches of engineering, described the latest advances which had then been made in the new industry. The intervening gap he filled up most satisfactorily. In an essay on applied science written in 1810, Shelley said of electricity, "What a mighty instrument it would be in the hands of him who knew how to wield it." Shelley referred to the aerial mariner who could swim in the air with bladders and said that such ingenuity was not to be condemned. "Why," he said, "have we not dispatched intrepid aeronauts to cross Africa in every direction to survey the whole peninsula in a few