

News and Views

Dr. Aleš Hrdlička

ON March 29, Dr. Aleš Hrdlička, curator of the Department of Physical Anthropology of the U.S. National Museum, Washington, D.C., and the founder of the study of physical anthropology in America, celebrated his seventieth birthday. The occasion has been marked by a gathering of the American Association of Physical Anthropologists at Washington during April 4-5, and a commemorative volume is being prepared, to which the principal anthropologists of the world have contributed. Aleš Hrdlička was born in Bohemia on March 29, 1869, and graduated in medicine in New York. In 1903 he was invited to become assistant curator in the U.S. National Museum to organize a department of physical anthropology, of which he became curator in 1910. Under his direction, a collection has been built up, which is now the largest in the world, including more than 16,000 skulls, human and sub-human, from all parts of the world and of all ages. As an authority on the descent and racial affinities of man, Dr. Hrdlička's judgment is universally received as authoritative. Bold in theoretical argument, his views are invariably characterized by an intensely conservative regard for the precise limitations of the evidence in question. He is best known, perhaps, as the foremost authority on the occurrence of early man in America and the Asiatic origin of the American Indian race, of which he has found the ancestral stock in the primitive strata of Siberian peoples. For more than a decade Dr. Hrdlička has engaged in expeditions to the far north in each summer to investigate the evidence of the migrations of the Eskimo and their predecessors into the American continent. He will submit the results of his research to the Royal Anthropological Institute at a meeting to be held in London on April 25.

Herschel's Researches on the Structure of the Heavens

To celebrate the bicentenary of the birth of Sir William Herschel, the first president of the Royal Astronomical Society, a conversazione was held in the rooms of the Society on November 15. Sir Arthur Eddington delivered the lecture with the above title twice during the evening (*Occasional Notes, Roy. Astro. Soc.*, No. 3, January 1939). He pointed out at the beginning that in about thirty years the dimensions of the galactic system have been enlarged tenfold and the number of stars is now estimated to be 100,000 millions. It is remarkable that the picture of the universe which has resulted from modern research is very like the universe described by Sir William Herschel. His greatest enterprise was the systematic survey of the heavens, in the course of which he catalogued 2,500 nebulae and 800 double stars, and in all his research there was a definite plan to find out something about the structure of the universe. It seems remarkable that most of his observational

work on the general distribution of stars and nebulae was done with a reflector of only 19 inches aperture; the famous telescope of 4 ft. aperture was not a success and was not used very much. It is surprising that Herschel's speculations did not lead him astray more often. As one example, he assumed all stars to be of the same brightness, so that first magnitude stars were nearer than second magnitude stars, and so on. Actually, as we know to-day, apparent magnitude is a poor guide to distance. At the end of the lecture, Sir Arthur said that it is impossible for us to communicate with nebulae and receive a reply if they are more than 950 million light-years from us, owing to the speed of recession of the nebulae. It is expected that the 200-in. telescope will reach nebulae 1,000 million light years from us, so it is possible that we shall see galaxies with which it is impossible to communicate and receive a reply.

Study of Edmund Burke's Financial Integrity

DIXON WECTOR has recently investigated with the help of new material the vexed question of Edmund Burke's financial integrity, and the extent to which he was involved in the discreditable ventures of his brother Richard and his kinsman William Burke ("Edmund Burke and His Kinsmen", by Dixon Wector. University of Colorado Studies, No. 1, 1, Feb. 1939). Since he vehemently defended their actions at all times and denounced their adversaries and critics in unbridled terms, it is not surprising that Edmund Burke himself came under suspicion of conniving with them. Nevertheless, the author concludes from all the evidence now available that Burke honestly believed them to be upright in their financial transactions, however unfortunate their outcome, and there is no doubt that in his office as paymaster Burke reduced the nation's finances to order at considerable cost to himself. In any event he was always vague as to his own income and expenditure, and it is difficult to imagine him following the tortuous ways of his kinsmen with any care. Burke's passionate championship of these shady characters, while not historically important, shows how completely his judgment was blinded by sentiment. Of more material consequence is the parallel traced by the author between the changing course of William Burke's fortunes in India and Edmund Burke's change of attitude towards the East India Company, leading to the impeachment of Warren Hastings. It is not suggested that this connexion was perceived by Burke himself, whose advocacy the author believes to have been at all times passionately sincere. Of all men a great orator is perhaps the least likely to be aware of the less reputable sources of his interest. He was temperamentally unfitted to judge objectively either friends or adversaries, and this study admirably illustrates the importance of temperamental make-up in life.