

NEWS AND VIEWS

Prof. F. Vejdovsky

DESPITE the disturbed political situation and international tension, Czech men of science and their friends intend, if possible, to celebrate next October the ninetieth birthday of one of Bohemia's most distinguished living sons, Prof. František Vejdovský, who was born on October 24, 1849. After studying at the Charles University of Prague, and already as a young man winning fame as a zoologist, he was elected professor of zoology, comparative anatomy and embryology in the Charles University in 1892,



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retiring as professor emeritus in 1921. During his long life, Vejdovsky has not only been very active as a teacher and leader among Czech zoologists, he has also, by his own researches and those of his numerous pupils, contributed largely to the advancement of many different branches of zoology. His own work covers a very wide field, but it has dealt mainly with the morphology, development and systematics of various Invertebrata, and with cytology—especially spermatogenesis, fertilization and problems connected with the centrosome and the chromosomes. On these and other matters he has published some ten large treatises, and more than a hundred other memoirs in Czech, English, American, French and German periodicals.

IN his own country, Prof. Vejdovsky has long been held in the highest esteem, and his accomplishments and his personal kindness have endeared him to a wide circle of friends and correspondents abroad.

Few men attain the age of ninety years, and fewer still can look back upon so long a lifetime spent in the wholehearted pursuit of science for its own sake. Prof. Vejdovsky has lived through the classical periods of Darwinism and Mendelism, and has actually seen the rise of modern cytology—to which he contributed an honourable share—and he has hitherto survived the prolonged ordeals which his nation has suffered during this century. All true men of science everywhere must therefore offer him respectful congratulations on his approaching birthday, and wish him and his people that peace and future happiness which, by their steadfast devotion to science and civilization, they so richly deserve.

Petrus Camper, F.R.S. (1722-1789)

THE fifteenth volume of the *Opuscula Selecta Neerlandicorum de Arte Medica*, which has recently been published under the able editorship of Dr. B. W. T. Nuyens, of Amsterdam, contains the illustrated travel diaries in Dutch and English of the three visits to England made by Petrus Camper, who was not only one of the most eminent Dutch medical men in the second half of the eighteenth century, but was also a botanist, zoologist, mineralogist, palæontologist and draughtsman of distinction. The first visit, in 1749, three years after his qualification, was chiefly undertaken for the purpose of attending the lectures of William Smellie, the father of British gynaecology, and of taking lessons in drawing at the Royal Academy. During his stay in Great Britain he made the acquaintance of many of the leading scientific men of the day, including Sir Hans Sloane, Sir Joseph Banks, F. W. Herschel, John and William Hunter, John Smeaton, Mead and Cheselden. He attended the meetings of the Royal Society, of which he was made a fellow in 1750, visited the hospitals and museums and showed the keenest interest in contemporary scientific novelties. He did not confine his attention to London, but visited Oxford, Cambridge, Bath, Bristol and Birmingham, where he made the acquaintance of Withering and James Watt. In the next two visits which he paid in 1752, when he was professor at Franeker, and in 1785, a few years before his death, his energy and enthusiasm still appeared to be unabated, and his time was profitably spent in a congenial scientific atmosphere.

New Technical Branch for the Royal Air Force

OFFICIAL confirmation was given recently of a decision to form a separate technical specialist branch of the Royal Air Force. It has become increasingly obvious that, owing to the technical complexity of the problems relating to service aircraft and their equipment, it is necessary to allocate personnel to engineering and technical duties, allowing them to devote their whole time to such work and arranging various courses of training for them. Up to the present, the policy of the Royal Air Force

has always been that all officers must enter the "General Duties Branch", and devote their time to a complete training in flying for, at least, many years of their time as junior officers. Later they can express a wish to take up specialization in technical work, but they are still required to maintain proficiency in flying. Thus the process of becoming a technical specialist is a slow one, and in a service in which the retiring age is, possibly necessarily, set fairly early, as flying is primarily a young man's job, the officer choosing these branches always finds himself at a disadvantage, either for promotion within the service, or in respect of his ability to obtain employment in the technical side of aviation upon retirement. Also the break in continuity of training and accumulation of experience is usually considered to be unwise, and many young engineers, both from the universities and works apprenticeships, have undoubtedly been deterred from entering the Royal Air Force by this reason.

IN spite of the enthusiastic membership of the university air squadrons the number of technical graduates offering themselves for University Commissions in the Royal Air Force has always been relatively small. The new branch should remove these disadvantages. Entrants for commissions are now offered direct entry into technical work, without having to spend several years in acquiring proficiency in flying. They are to be recruited from university graduates in engineering or natural science, and student apprentices from works who have acquired theoretical knowledge up to a university degree standard. The retiring age limit may well now be extended, as the work is not that in which the younger man necessarily excels, in fact the older man would be superior by reason of his accumulated experience. Prospects of promotion should also now be greater as there must be senior administrative posts within the new department.

Further Archaeological Excavation in Syria

SIR LEONARD WOOLLEY'S third season of excavation on the ancient site of Allalakh at Atchana near Antioch, as anticipated, has enlarged and added further detail to the picture of a great meeting place of the civilizations of East and West at an entrance gate to western Asia; but at its close it held out promise of an even greater field of discovery still to be explored. Of this a glimpse may be afforded when the numerous cuneiform inscriptions retrieved in the season just past have been submitted to inspection. Sir Leonard in his preliminary report (*The Times*, August 2 and 3) opened with an account of the further excavation of the earlier palace, which preceded that of the fifteenth-century Hittite king, Nig-me-pa. This earlier building, cannot, Sir Leonard thinks, be much later than the time of Hammurabi, and he assigns it tentatively to the eighteenth century B.C. The structural features, which point to its use in part for administrative and business purposes, in part as a royal residence, convey the impression of a sense of dignity and propriety, com-

bined with an unusual appreciation of space and air, particularly noticeable in the arrangement of the upper residential chambers, with a loggia giving an extensive view over the city, and an approach by newel stairs, of which the first two flights are nearly perfectly preserved. It was, however, from a private house of the fifteenth century that the much desired further evidence was obtained of the contact with Crete, for which mainly the excavation of Atchana was undertaken. This now took the form of a fresco, which is exactly similar to a scheme of decoration found at Knossos, and a 12-wick lamp in red porphyry in the form of the capital of a column, which at Knossos would be hailed, Sir Leonard says, as a typical, but unusually fine, example of Minoan art.

It was, however, towards the close of the season's work that the most striking discovery was made, which, as Sir Leonard says, "goes far to complete the picture of the ancient city of Allalakh". This was a temple, which throws light upon the religion of the people, and gives examples of their major arts. Though the clearance of this part of the site has only just begun, it is already evident that here are the superimposed remains of at least four temples, of which the latest may date to about 1200 B.C. and the earliest to the fifteenth century. They had been richly adorned with sculpture. Although as yet it has not been possible for Sir Leonard to give more than the most summary of accounts, the record of finds is amazing in both number and interest. Among the more arresting finds are the remarkable sculptured lions, the bronze spearhead, deemed to be a cult object, and most remarkable of all, the hidden statue of a king or god in white limestone with its fifty lines of cuneiform inscription, of which the decipherment will be awaited with keenest anticipation. Such a mass of evidence of the character of Hittite art, and of so early a date—at least of 1200 B.C. and possibly even of the fifteenth century—is indeed an unexpected, but more than welcome find.

Excavations at Ezion-Geber

RECENT excavation at Tell el-Kheleifi on the Gulf of Aqabah, Sinai, by the American School of Oriental Research at Jerusalem, not only has confirmed the indications of the importance of this site in early times as a meeting place of a number of trade routes, afforded by investigations in 1938, but also has revealed that it was the centre of an extensive industry for the smelting and refining of copper and iron from the mines of the adjacent Arabah. The site has been identified with the great port of King Solomon, Ezion-Geber "which is by Elath on the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom". No longer, however, does it stand by the sea. The prevailing northerly winds have brought sand to silt up the head of the gulf, so that the shore is now half a mile away. The importance of the city as a commercial centre was indicated in the first season's excavation by a number of finds, of which the most important is held to be a large broken jar, on which