

NEWS AND VIEWS

Ministry of Information

QUESTION time in the House of Commons during the past few days has produced a crop of inquiries about the Ministry of Information. As is well known, the staff of the Ministry has suffered drastic reduction as the result of the criticism levelled against it. On October 18, Sir John Graham Kerr asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Information, "in view of the important part played in modern warfare by science and in view of the importance of accuracy in public information regarding such matters, how many of the 190 members of the staff of the Ministry, of which particulars have recently made public, are university graduates in science?" Sir Edward Grigg said in reply that the "information is not available and could only be obtained at an expense of time of which I should not feel justified in giving to the inquiry". He added that "scientific advice can be obtained whenever necessary from a large range of experts in Government service and outside it, and that it is therefore unnecessary to add on that account to the establishment costs of the Ministry". While it will not be denied that such advice is available, it is difficult to see how the Ministry, without scientific guidance from within, can hope to utilize to the full the scientific knowledge of the country.

Camouflage (Advisory Committee)

ON August 2 last, an advisory committee on camouflage by the use of paint, was appointed by the Government, which agreed that it should include a scientific member. Sir John Graham Kerr asked the Home Secretary on October 19 how many meetings this committee had held since its formation. Sir John Anderson, in reply, stated that the first meeting of the committee was held on October 18. In reply to a supplementary question, Sir John Anderson said that "the committee has been so constituted as to bring to bear on this important question of camouflage the opinions of many people who hold differing views on the theoretical and practical aspects of the question. The reference to the committee is very wide, and I have no doubt that the committee will be in a position to address itself to the question". No explanation was offered of the lengthy delay between the setting up of this committee and its first meeting.

Advisory Research Council of the Chemical Society

THE Council of the Chemical Society has formed an Advisory Research Council, under the chairmanship of Sir Robert Robinson, the main function of which will be, when approached, to bring to the notice of fellows and others engaged in chemical research, subjects for investigation likely to be of potential value to the nation at the present time. In the first instance such advice will be made avail-

able to unremunerated research workers (that is, unremunerated as research workers for some specific purpose) in universities, colleges and other research institutions, and to research students in receipt of grants not definitely related to any particular topic or in regard to which the topic can be changed. It is hoped to effect liaison with Government departments and industrial organizations so that the Advisory Research Council may be cognizant of pressing problems needing investigation and thus be able to suggest lines of research of national value. It will not be a function of the Council to exercise control over any research that may be undertaken. The field to be covered will embrace every branch of pure chemistry and include biochemistry and metallurgy. Chemists and various organizations (industrial and otherwise) will be invited to send in suggestions for research, and a list of topics for research considered of national importance will be drawn up and will normally be available to those wishing to make use of it for the purpose of initiating an investigation. Inquiries and suggestions may be sent to the General Secretary, Chemical Society, Burlington House, Piccadilly, London, W.1.

New Anthropological Periodical in India

INDIA is so poorly supplied with anthropological literature that the appearance of a new periodical to be devoted entirely to the scientific study of anthropology must be regarded as something of an event. The work of the Indian Anthropological Institute, to which reference is made elsewhere in this issue of NATURE (see p. 721), has been hampered seriously ever since its inception in 1936 through lack of an official organ for recording the deliberations and discussions of its members. Financial conditions proved an insuperable obstacle until the University of Calcutta, thanks to the good offices of the Vice-Chancellor, Mr. Syamaprasad Mookerjee, generously came to its assistance with an offer to assume responsibility for printing the *Journal* of the Institute free of charge. The first issue, which has appeared recently, includes communications received from members up to the close of 1938, among them the presidential address by Dr. J. H. Hutton, the first president, in which he puts forward the suggestion that the Institute should formulate a five years' plan of research, to be entrusted to sub-committees, and Colonel Gordon offers some pregnant, as well as pungently critical, comments on the methods and organization of archaeological studies in India. Reference to both these communications will be found on another page. A cognate question is raised by Colonel Germano da Silva Correia, who after a critical examination of the various theories of the racial origins of the peoples of India, put forward by anthropologists from the days of H. H. Risley onward, suggests that the methods of inquiry hitherto

pursued should be supplemented by a systematic survey of blood groups. Among other contributors Mr. Sasanka Sarkar puts forward a proposal for a classification of the nasal elevation index, and Dr. Biren Bonnerjea, profiting by his sojourn in the United States, discusses "Fish-Hooks in North America and their Distribution". We offer the new periodical a cordial welcome, and wish it a long and prosperous career.

Extension of Electric Power Supplies in U.S.S.R.

ACCORDING to "Russia Today" Press Service, the Commissariat of Power Stations of the U.S.S.R. is expending a sum of 1,056 million roubles on this purpose in the present year, when 882,000 kw. will be added to the capacity of the generating plants of the Union. The capacity of the power stations in the Ukraine has been augmented considerably, a notable addition being a 100,000 kw. turbine to the Zuyev Station, which is one of the largest in the U.S.S.R. Two large turbines have been added to the Moscow power system and three new heat and power stations are in course of construction in that city. The power system of the Urals has been augmented by a 50,000 kw. generator at the Central Urals Station near Sverdlovsk, which brings the capacity of this station up to 150,000 kw. A heat and power plant was recently put into operation at the Kamensk Aluminium Works in the Urals. Work on a large scale is also proceeding on hydro-electric power plants. This includes work on the world's largest power project, the Kuibyshev Hydro-Electric Centre (on the Samara Bend of the Volga), the power plant of which when completed will have a generating capacity of 3.4 million kw., and the hydro-electric power stations at Uglich and Rybinsk, two further links in the chain of the Greater Volga Project. The Uglich and Rybinsk stations will have a combined capacity of 440,000 kw. Construction is in progress on the first underground hydro-electric power station beyond the Arctic Circle, in the district of Kandalaksha, in the Murmansk Province. This station, which will have a capacity of 150,000 kw., will be the third power plant in the Soviet Far North. To provide power for the growing non-ferrous metal industry in the Altai Mountains, building has commenced for a generating station of 240,000 kw. capacity on the River Irtysh in Kazakhstan.

Precautions against Flooding in the London Tubes

IN order to protect railway and road transport services from the risks arising from air raids, London Transport, in conjunction with the Ministry of Transport, has undertaken a great programme of emergency work. The *Electrical Times* of October 19 states that the total cost of the programme, including that already completed at the outbreak of the War, will be about a million pounds. The most difficult part of the problem was how to protect the underground railways from flooding either from the Thames itself or from sewers or water mains where these are in close proximity to stations. There has been already a preliminary inspection of two examples

of such protective works, namely, floodgates installed at Waterloo, where the tunnels of the Northern line go under the river, and work which has been done at King's Cross Underground, to guard against flooding from water mains and sewers. When the works are finished, all the stations and sections of line at present closed will be reopened and journeys on the Underground will be as safe as in peace time.

BOTH the floodgates installed at Waterloo and Charing Cross stations on the Bakerloo line are electrically operated. They enable the sub-fluvial sections of the lines between these stations to be isolated during an air raid and so the risk of damaging the under-river tunnels is avoided. Similar floodgates are being installed at Waterloo and Strand stations on the Northern line, which also runs under the Thames. Each gate is made of built-up steel of an overall thickness of thirteen inches and weighs very nearly six tons. In normal open position it is against the headwall of the station platform tunnel, against the tunnel mouth. It is made to slide horizontally into position across the tunnel mouth within a framework of cast iron and can be operated either electrically or by hand. For electrical operation control is by push-button. The gates would resist a force of more than 800 tons, which is several times greater than any possible pressure of water that might have to be borne. The gates on the Bakerloo line were actually closed during each of the three air raid warnings which marked the outbreak of war, the time taken to close them being less than three minutes. The gates were designed by W. T. Halcrow, consulting engineer, in conjunction with London Transport's engineers.

Commercial Irradiation of Food

IT is now sixty years ago since it was first discovered that bacteria are killed by exposure to sunlight, and that the bactericidal effect is due to rays of short wave-length. For medical purposes the use of such ultra-violet rays is now well known, but it is not generally known to what extent irradiation is used commercially in the preparation of foodstuffs, and the engineering devices that are employed for obtaining the ultra-violet rays. Until recently, sterilization of water by ultra-violet radiation has been hampered by the complexity of the equipment available (*Elect. Rev.*, Sept. 23). Recently, Messrs. Hanovia, Ltd., have brought out the new 'Uster' type of sterilizer, which uses a simple straight generating quartz mercury arc tube with a 700-watt loading. This starts automatically by an electronic discharge from activated metal electrodes. One of these units can deal with 600 gallons of fluid per hour. Mr. Harding, a director of E. Harding and Sons, Birmingham, states that in a bakery he finds that dough which has been subjected to ultra-violet rays during the seven to ten minutes it is mixing not only gives a loaf a better colour, owing to the slight bleaching action of the rays, but also causes a definite improvement in fermentation. Another application of ultra-violet radiation is to determine