

NEWS AND VIEWS

Germanization and the University of Prague

RUTHLESS as have been the measures of repression directed by the Germans against Czech students and intellectuals for their part in the demonstrations on Independence Day, October 28, and the following days in the city of Prague, yet none will give rise to deeper resentment, nor have more far-reaching effect than the closing of the University and the technical schools. Not only do the Czech people feel a special pride in the University of Prague as the oldest University in Eastern Central Europe, but also the University has always been a central rallying point in the development of Czech national life and national culture. So long ago as the thirteenth century, Prague was a gathering place for students, and when in the middle of the fourteenth century it was recognized under a Bull of Pope Clement VI, Charles IV, Emperor and King of Bohemia, its founder, while organizing it on the model of Paris, of which he had been a student, in four "nations", intended that primarily it should serve the needs of students from Styria. Nevertheless, it drew its students from all parts of Europe, and in repute equalled the greatest of the medieval universities. It was, however, after the Napoleonic wars and in the earlier half of the nineteenth century that the University attained its greatest measure of influence in the development of a Czech national culture and consciousness. Not only was the study of the national language and antiquities taken up with ardour, but also industrial development was fostered in the movement which led to the foundation of the technical schools. In the course of events which followed on the War of 1914-18 the University has been no less active in promoting in the people a consciousness of their historical and intellectual heritage. Its suppression will have repercussions of which a better knowledge of their own history might have conveyed a warning to the Nazi leaders.

The Advancement of Science

THE first quarterly part of the *Advancement of Science*, the new journal of the British Association which is being issued in place of the annual volumes published by the Association from 1831 until 1938, contains the presidential address of Sir Albert Seward, "The Western Isles through the Mists of Ages", as well as the presidential addresses to Sections D (Zoology), H (Anthropology) and K (Botany), with abstracts of communications to those Sections. An admirably written introduction reviews the Dundee meeting and the circumstances which led to the premature termination of an exceptionally promising and well-attended meeting, and also indicates the tentative policy of the new journal, which it is hoped will make a wider appeal to lay readers than an annual volume could do. The number also includes

reports of research committees to Sections D, H, and K, as well as the report of the Council to the General Committee for the year 1938-39, and the report of the Division for the Social and International Relations of Science for the same period. Among the subjects which have received attention by the latter Division, other than those forming the subject of public meetings, are the incidence of taxation on scientific research; areas and objects worthy of protection on scientific grounds; recommendations on details demanded in census returns and their analysis; scientific news in the Press; scientific exhibitions; co-operation with the International Council of Scientific Unions in relation to questionnaires on science and society; and assisting the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning. The number also includes a first instalment of a scientific survey of Dundee and district.

Soil Problems in the Tropics

IN the editorial article entitled "White Settlement in the Tropics" of *NATURE*, July 29, 1939, reference was made to the insistence in the report of the Commission appointed to inquire into the possibilities of white settlement in British Guiana on the "inherent poverty of many, perhaps most, tropical soils" in contrast to earlier beliefs in their inexhaustible fertility. Writing from the East African Research Station, Amani, Mr. G. Milne foresees a danger that facile generalizations regarding tropical soils as such may result. He points out that "tropical soils tend to be poor when the climate is very wet, when the soils are of advanced maturity, when (like any other soils) they have suffered from man-accelerated erosion, or when their parent materials have been exhausted of plant nutrients by previous geological processes". One or more of these factors has rendered huge areas of East Africa infertile, but there are still large tracts where pessimism on grounds of intrinsic soil infertility alone is not justified. Recent work has made it clear that neither the luxuriance of natural rain-forest cover nor of grassland vegetation affords a reliable guide to the agricultural value of soils (Hardy, F., *Trop. Agric.*, 13, 315; 1936; Walter, H., *Forstliche Wochenschrift Silva*, 22, 201; 1936; Milne, G., *East African Agric. J.*, July 1937), and that therefore an ecological survey cannot take the place of a soil survey. The fundamental principle seems to be that a high forest has matured along with the soil that nourished it; in the old age of both, the forest comes to depend very little on further material supplies from a highly leached and impoverished soil. Two things seem clear: one that the principles of good soil management in the tropics have yet to be fully understood, the other that tropical soils are liable under improper management

(Continued on page 901)