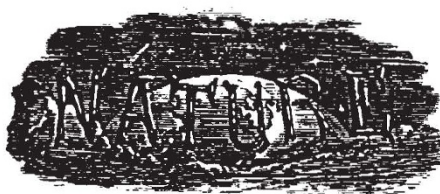


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## SCIENCE AND THE WAR

**S**T. ANDREW'S DAY, November 30, saw the customary anniversary meeting of the Royal Society, held this year, not at the Society's rooms in Burlington House, London, but at Trinity College, Cambridge, where the offices of the Society were removed on the outbreak of war.

In the general part of his anniversary address, Sir William Bragg spoke on the position of the Royal Society, and, by implication, of men of science generally, in relation to the war. He pointed out that a very large number of fellows of the Society are serving the nation in different capacities, but he is clearly not satisfied that full use is being made of the scientific resources of Great Britain. Sir William thinks—and his views will meet with general agreement—that in spite of the widespread acknowledgment of the effectiveness of science, the ways of using science and scientific men are being discovered too slowly. There can be little doubt that our administrators, as a body, lack that knowledge of the fundamentals of science which would enable them to make better and speedier use of its fruits. Sir William put this basic knowledge in the form of four "propositions":

"1. Science, that is to say, the knowledge of Nature, is of fundamental importance to the successful prosecution of any enterprise."

"2. Science is of general application. There is not one science of chemistry, another of electricity, another of medicine and so on: there are not even distinct sciences of peace and war. There is only one natural world, and there is only one knowledge of it."

"3. Fruitful inventions are always due to a combination of knowledge and of experience on the spot."

"4. There are difficulties peculiar to the application of science to war purposes", in that it is not easy to maintain during times of peace the necessary connexion between this special application and the general body of science.

These generalizations are well worth putting on record, for their significance extends far beyond the present times of stress which have provoked them.

Sir William then turned to consideration of the way in which more use might be made of science. He believes that, for the present, "the most successful ways of using knowledge are personal and elastic", rather than through a formal Ministry of Science, and he threw out the suggestion that the Royal Society, possibly through a selected small group of fellows, might be used as a regular consulting body, giving advice as required and also being kept so informed of the progress of events that "it might foresee occasions and needs".

The suggestion should be given very earnest consideration. The task of selecting a suitable group of fellows of the Royal Society for this purpose would not be easy, but there is no gainsaying that the Society has a unique range of consultant experience on which it can call. In addition to the direct use of such a body, it may be suggested that close collaboration with the Central Register of specialists maintained by the Ministry of Labour in association with the Royal Society and professional institutions would have valuable consequences. In this way the Register might serve, not only as a source of scientific and other trained personnel, but also, as an index to the state of research in Great Britain, to suggest lines of investigation which may enable us, in Sir William's words, to "foresee occasions and needs".