

NEWS AND VIEWS

Cultural Treaty between Greece and Great Britain

A CULTURAL convention, the first treaty of its kind to be concluded by Great Britain with any foreign power, has recently been signed by General Metaxas, Prime Minister of Greece, and Sir Michael Palairret, British Minister in Athens. Under the Convention, the Greek Government will provide every possible facility in the future for the British Council's work of making the English language and the British way of life and thought familiar throughout Greece. From the British point of view, the principal effect of the Convention is to give full scope for the British Council's activities in Greece.

The two most important provisions are as follows: (1) The British Council's Institutes of English Studies in Athens and the provinces are fully recognized by the Greek Government, who are sympathetically considering requests for expansion. The Council's immediate plans involve the opening of ten institutes in addition to those at Athens and Salonika, and five of these are now established. The same recognition is extended to the famous British School of Archaeology, established in Athens since 1886. (2) The British Council is authorized to establish two primary schools and one secondary school for British subjects in Athens and a primary school in Corfu.

The other main provisions are: (1) Exchange of university staffs and men of learning; (2) facilities for the teaching of Greek and English in either country; (3) facilities for students in either country; (4) mutual recognition of degrees or diplomas taken by Greek and British subjects in either country; (5) British students in Greece to enjoy entire equality with Greek students as regards school and examination fees, and *vice versa* in the United Kingdom; (6) mutual facilities for the import to either country of printed matter. Special exemption from tax for books supplied to the Council's Institutes; (7) students' visits to Greece and the United Kingdom are encouraged and facilitated; (8) an Anglo-Hellenic Commission to be constituted in Athens and in London, to which matters of cultural co-operation may be submitted.

Flora of Town Ruins

THE extent of building sites damaged by air raids in London, Liverpool, Berlin and other cities in belligerent countries, many of which may not be occupied until after hostilities, affords an opportunity for the botanist to observe any correlation of the famous spread of *Sisymbrium irio* over the ruins of London after the Great Fire, a rapidity which earned it the popular name of "London rocket". That there will be such a colonization by plant species even in the centres of great cities is borne out by recent studies of the flora of inner London, Liverpool, Manchester and other towns; but this points more to

a predominating success of *Epilobium angustifolium*, which was not a common British plant at the time of the Great Fire although it is now one of the most abundant weeds. Observations kept on the flora of building sites in London (*Selborne Soc. Mag.*, Oct. 1910; *J. Bot.*, 1911) showed that a building site cleared in Farringdon Street and left for two years before the War of 1914-18 produced twenty-eight flowering plants and ferns, one moss and one liverwort which established themselves, comprising widely distributed plants like *Epilobium angustifolium*, *Senecio vulgaris*, *Trussilago farfara*, etc., refuse weeds and forage or packing weeds.

Wild vegetation noted on a building site in the Strand, 1929, included *Epilobium angustifolium*, *Sisymbrium pannonicum* and *Erigeron canadense*; while a 1939 survey of the wild flora of the Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral building site, by botanists of the Merseyside Naturalists' Association, revealed forty-three species, of which *Epilobium angustifolium* was the most noticeable, others in abundance including *Senecio viscosus*, *Matricaria inodora* and *Trifolium repens*. *Epilobium angustifolium* is introduced to town sites by wind distribution of its seeds, but many plants will be introduced by birds or from seed distribution with commerce and building materials, as has already occurred on the building sites of some public air raid shelters. In the *Journal of Botany*, 1940, Dr. Ramsbottom described the introduction of the beech wood fungus, *Peziza repanda*, in abundance to London in the soil, etc., in rotting sandbags used in A.R.P.

Flora of South Albania

THERE can be few areas in Europe about which less is known of the flora than southern Albania. Large areas in the south of the country have been either wholly untouched by collectors or visited on a single occasion often only for a single day. Having regard to the richness of the flora of the Balkan Peninsula, the whole area might well be expected to yield results of taxonomic and plant geographical importance. Two expeditions made by A. H. G. Alston and N. Y. Sandwith (*J. Bot.*, May-Oct. 1940) in 1933 and 1935 have shown that the limestone mountains of the area reproduce in the main the characteristic flora of the Greek Epirus and the Pindus, and the vegetation of the higher serpentine areas is similar to that of parts of central Albania.

More than two hundred species new to the country were collected and a few new species and varieties are described. Near Moscopole two well-marked endemic species *Arenaria serpentini* and *Brachypodium serpentini* were discovered. Some notable extensions of range of previously described species are also recorded. Among these may be cited *Stachys decumbens*, previously regarded as endemic in the

Ionian Islands, discovered near Santi Quaranta; *Crepis rutilans*, formerly only known from Corfu, found between Santi Quaranta and Valona; *Cicer Montbretii*, recorded only from Thrace; *Geum heterocarpum* and *Cynoglossum pustulatum*, both new to the Balkan Peninsula, the latter previously known only in southern Spain.

Recent Additions to British Mammals

THE recent discovery of a specimen of the squirrel-tailed or edible dormouse (*Glis glis*) in Shropshire, near Ludlow (*Field*, Jan. 4) is an interesting example of an alien mammal that has colonized parts of the British countryside. Although it is a controversial point with naturalists as to whether or not established aliens and feral escapes in the countryside should be admitted to the faunal list, some recorders do accept them when they are permanently established in the wild. Some fifty years ago, the late Lord Rothschild released specimens of the squirrel-tailed dormouse, a native of south Europe, near Tring, since when it has established itself in parts of Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire and is increasing; but the Shropshire record is apparently farther north. There are small Japanese deer established in some woods in the Home counties and Lakeland, where they are often confused with roe deer, which also exist there, while an interesting example of feral animals establishing themselves are the herds of 'wild' goats that inhabit some of the mountains of Wales, as on Rhinog Fawr, near Llanbedr, where some of the old billies have huge horns; and also in Scotland, where at least thirteen wild herds were counted a few years ago at places like Ben Lomond, at Dochfour near Inverness, on the Black Isle cliffs near Cromarty, in western Ross, Mull, Islay, Harris, Tiree, Rum, Arran and Eigg. There was once a herd of feral goats on Ailsa Craig, but they were shot down because they interfered with the tame goats kept by the lighthouse keepers.

British Woodlands

PROF. A. G. Tansley discusses natural and semi-natural British woodlands in a paper published in *Forestry* (14, 1; 1940). The native British woodlands have been so largely destroyed, and existing woods are now so extensively the results of planting and replanting, says Prof. Tansley, that foresters are naturally inclined to think of them all either as plantations, or as derelict and worthless wood and scrub, of value only as possible sites for new plantations. Some foresters will think that the accusation is correct; for many quite lose sight of the value and importance of a study of the historical part of a forest region or area which may have been once afforested. Prof. Tansley traces the progress of forest destruction in Britain from Neolithic times downwards to the present day. The island climate and the fact that Britain could always obtain all she required by imports removed from us the disabilities following severe deforestation in other parts of the world.

Briefly, Prof. Tansley's thesis is that for any given type of soil the old type of forest peculiar to the soil and locality will reappear, given a chance to do so. He believes that the old forest of, say, the south of England still persists in the many examples of coppice with standards, where oak is so commonly one of the chief species among the standards; and that with the exclusion of man and his flocks, and the rabbits and hares in excessive numbers, Nature would restore in time the same type of forest as originally existed over so large a part of the country. This claim can be substantiated by careful observation, not only in Great Britain but also in several tropical countries.

Supply and Price of Bread

AN important statement upon the supply and price of bread was made by the Minister of Food in the House of Lords on December 19; it was supplemented by the chairman of the Medical Research Council. Lord Woolton said that, although we are already spending £35,000,000 in subsidizing flour generally, an extra £750,000 is to be spent in three months (as from December 1, 1940) to keep the cost of all bread at 8d. or less for the 4 lb. loaf. He had further decided to adopt an 85 per cent extraction as a basis for wholemeal flour, which would be supplied at the same price as what was called "national straight run" white flour (70 per cent extraction). Synthetic vitamin B₁ will be added to the white flour, but supplies will probably not be available in any quantity until May. Lord Woolton is loth to force wholemeal bread upon the public for several reasons, one very important one being the failure of high-extraction flour to keep as well as white flour. But he has been impressed by the unanimity of scientific opinion on the nutritive value of wholemeal bread, and therefore in the printed literature of the Ministry of Food he will continue to advocate its virtues.

Lord Balfour of Burleigh said that the Medical Research Council recommends that bread should be made of an extraction of the wheat grain of not less than 80-85 per cent, and that a small percentage of calcium salt should be added to the flour. Although wholemeal flour contains more calcium than white flour, it is more essential to add calcium to the former than to the latter—an apparent paradox which both he and Lord Woolton seem to find difficult to understand. The reason is that wholemeal flour contains more phytic acid than white flour, and this acid prevents the absorption of calcium from the intestine. Lord Balfour continued that there is evidence that calcium deficiency has long been a defect of nutrition among people in Great Britain. On one point only did he disagree with Lord Woolton: he (Lord Balfour) was told that high-extraction flour, properly made, would keep suitably. In reply, Lord Woolton said that he intended to continue in ignorance of what a vitamin is, to rely upon the men of science who give him their support, and to advise the public of the results of this scientific research.