

Mechanical Engineers in the Army

ONE of the recommendations of the Beveridge Committee on Skilled Men in the Services was for the formation of a Corps of Mechanical Engineers in the Army (see *NATURE*, March 7, p. 255). Replying to a question in the House of Commons on March 11, Mr. Duncan Sandys, Financial Secretary to the War Office, referred to this proposal to pool the mechanical engineering resources of the various Corps. He said that it has now been decided to bring together the greater part of the Army's engineering maintenance services and to form them into a new and separate Corps. The new Corps will be made up of three principal components: first, the entire engineering side of the R.A.O.C.; second, all the maintenance personnel of the R.A.S.C., with the exception of formation workshop platoons and independent companies; and third, a large part of the mechanical maintenance personnel of the Royal Engineers. These far-reaching measures of reorganization would entail not only extensive administrative changes but also large-scale transfers of personnel.

Nervous Shock in Peace and War

At a Chadwick Public Lecture delivered on March 17, Dr. William A. Brend considered nervous shock in peace and war. 'Nervous shock' is the same whether it is called 'nervous shock', 'shell shock' or 'traumatic neurasthenia' or any other of its names. Evidence of nervous shock can be found in early records, for example, in the Book of Job. Shakespeare gives an astonishingly accurate picture of 'battle-shock' in Henry IV. The modern history of the disorder begins about the middle of the nineteenth century when numerous cases were attributed to railway accidents. Many cases were seen in the Army during the War of 1914-18, and after the War a committee of investigation reported that the term 'shell-shock' had been "a gross and costly misnomer" which had done much harm. The essential cause of nervous shock is fear, but the effect of fear is often increased by injudicious 'suggestion'. Physical injuries play no part in the production of the disorder. Civilians suffering from shock after air-raids are not entitled to compensation under the Personal Injuries Act. Reasons were given for thinking that this was a very wise decision of Parliament. The influence of temperament was briefly discussed.

The biological significance of fear as an instinct was then examined. Capacity to feel fear is part of our normal mental make-up, and of the defence mechanism of the species. Fear only becomes a matter of self-reproach (that is, cowardice) if it is uncontrolled. Man then sinks to the level of the brutes and sacrifices the benefit of his intelligence. The public health aspect of nervous shock arises from the fact that the affection differs from organic disease or injury in that medical men are not considered to have a monopoly of the knowledge concerning either the cause or the pathology or the proper treatment of the disorder. There is a definite public opinion on all these questions which expresses itself through the Press and influences Acts of Parliament, provision of treatment and claims for damages, etc., in courts of law acting through judges and juries. It is very important, therefore, that this public opinion should be based on accurate knowledge. There are reasons for thinking that this is not the case at present, and indeed that in certain directions encouragement is given to the develop-

ment of the disorder. Increased understanding of the nature of the condition would accordingly help to reduce its incidence.

Physical Society Optical Group

THE inaugural meetings of the newly formed Optical Group of the Physical Society were held on March 6 at the Science Museum and the Imperial College, South Kensington. It is ten years ago since the Optical Society was merged with the Physical Society, and although in this period a good number of meetings have been devoted to optical subjects, there has been a widely expressed desire for the formation of a Group for discussions and lectures of a less exacting and critical character than those associated with papers intended as original contributions to science. A preliminary meeting was held in December 1941 at which a draft constitution was approved, the objects of the Group being the provision of opportunities for the meeting of those with optical interests, the promotion of research and education in optics (including the improvement of optical literature), and fostering public interest in this branch of science. The first business of the inaugural meeting was to adopt the Constitution, and to elect Dr. A. O. Rankine as chairman with Prof. L. C. Martin as honorary secretary. A representative committee consists of Instructor Capt. T. Y. Baker, Mr. R. J. Bracey, Mr. W. H. A. Fincham, Dr. V. G. W. Harrison, Mr. W. C. Hynd, Dr. H. Lowery, Capt. T. Martin, Mr. J. Perry and Mr. E. W. H. Selwyn.

The first lecture was delivered by Dr. W. M. Hampton (Messrs. Chance Bros. and Co., Ltd.) who took as his subject "Some Problems relating to Optical Glass", dealing especially with recent work on the effects of heat treatment on the optical properties of the medium. The meeting in the afternoon was devoted to a paper by Mr. R. J. Bracey describing "A Multi-purpose Collimator" and a discussion, opened by Mr. J. Perry, on "Thermal Effects on the Performance of Lens Systems". Both subjects provoked a good discussion in which valuable technical points were brought out. Upwards of fifty members attended a luncheon at which Profs. A. V. Hill and A. C. G. Egerton, secretaries of the Royal Society, were guests of the Physical Society. In proposing the toast "The Optical Group", Dr. Rankine said the membership already includes 127 names. He hopes that the formation of the Group will be of value in the scientific life of the country, and that where papers of optical interest are forthcoming they will in future be made available for discussion by its members. Exacting demands are being made upon the optical industry in Great Britain, and the new Group can do considerable service if it leads to increased co-operation among those whose duty and honour it is to be called upon to fulfil them.

Royal Microscopical Society (1839-1939)

THE recent publication of the presidential address delivered by J. E. Barnard before the Royal Microscopical Society (*J. Roy. Mic. Soc.*, 61, 1; 1941) in celebration of its centenary, and the republication in the same journal of the address given in 1895 by A. D. Michael (the president in that year) calls forcibly to mind the comparatively recent advent of the microscope particularly as applied to the variety of fields in which it is now so familiar. At the time