

NEWS and VIEWS

International Conference on Overfishing

ONE of the main achievements of fishery research in Great Britain and other countries has been to demonstrate that unrestricted fishing defeats its own end and leads inevitably to a diminution of total catch. This state of overfishing was shown to exist before the War in the North Sea and many other fishing regions. Realizing the danger of a recurrence of overfishing after the War, the British Government as early as 1940 appointed an expert committee to study measures for preventing it, and the recommendations of this committee, which included a proposal to limit the total tonnage of the fishing fleets engaged in any form of bottom fishing, were very carefully considered in all their aspects, in consultation with the trawling industry. As a result, His Majesty's Government considered it opportune to convene a conference of the twelve nations principally concerned, to discuss the possibility of international action to combat overfishing in the North Sea and other waters adjacent to the British Isles. The Conference met in London during March 25–April 5, and its conclusions are embodied in the "Final Act and Convention of the International Overfishing Conference" (Cmd. 6791; H.M. Stationery Office. 2d. net).

The Convention formally signed at the Conference, with a view to subsequent ratification, provides for a moderate increase in the size of mesh to be used and in the size-limits for the main species of fish; it represents therefore a definite advance upon the similar Convention signed in 1937 which was never fully enforced. On the more important question of limiting fishing power to an economic level, agreement could not be reached, though most delegations accepted the view of the British Government that mesh regulations and size-limits were not enough and must be supplemented by some form of direct control of fishing power. The Conference did, however, make the important recommendation that a standing advisory committee should be set up at once to study the question further, and make proposals within a year as to the best form of regulation to prevent overfishing. It also recommended that, pending the report of this committee, the Governments concerned should endeavour to prevent any undue growth in the size of their fishing fleets, though several countries made reservations on this point. The Conference was undoubtedly a useful one, and provided a welcome opportunity for an exchange of somewhat divergent views. Though it did not achieve complete success from the British point of view and that of several other nations, it at least left the question of overfishing open for further and urgent consideration.

National Parks in Britain

SIR NORMAN BIRKETT recently delivered the Rede Lecture at Cambridge and chose for his subject "National Parks and the Countryside" (London: Camb. Univ. Press. 1s. 6d. net). During the course of the lecture, a strong appeal was made that steps should be taken immediately to establish national parks in Britain. Of course, nothing on the scale of the Canadian or American parks is possible, but it is suggested that areas as small as 200 acres—though not smaller—would be adequate. The word 'park' is unfortunate as it has an urban connotation for most people. What is envisaged are large districts

of wild and cultivated land in beautiful regions where moor and fell, stream and crag can eternally teach man the true values in life. Doubtless such tracts where the jaded town dwellers might roam at will would not be difficult to acquire; surely one of the main difficulties inherent in the scheme is in the nature of English people themselves. National parks must be open to the public freely, except such areas as are actually under cultivation; will it ever be possible to train users not to turn any park in a few years into a vast litter bin? Sir Norman Birkett seems to think that untidy people are only a minority; unfortunately, rubbish such as broken bottles, etc., does not disappear. At the same time as the parks are created, the Ministry of Education should be asked to start a nation-wide drive to inculcate the necessity of tidiness; then the next generation may be different in this respect.

Science and the Social Order

THE object of the pamphlets in the Series "Looking Forward", issued by the Royal Institute of International Affairs, is to present problems rather than to solve them; and Dr. C. H. Desch has carried out this purpose in his "Science and the Social Order" (pp. 49. 1s. net). For the man of science, the pamphlet is indeed too elementary to be of much interest: its value lies rather as a means of educating the general public on the importance of the scientific habit of mind, as distinct from the knowledge acquired by scientific methods, and the dependence of government and administration on information supplied by scientific experts. Dr. Desch presents lucidly but persuasively the case for the use of scientific methods in planning—for substituting factual knowledge for guess-work—and emphasizes that only planned direction on an international scale making use of all the resources of science, physical, chemical, biological and sociological, is capable of undertaking the immense task of reconstruction that confronts us. He steers clear of political issues while stressing the need for further development of the social sciences, and he does not fail to challenge scientific men themselves to recognize their exceptional position and to determine that, so far as in them lies, their work will be directed to social uses. Dr. Desch suggests that as sociology becomes more generally accepted as one of the sciences, and as the history of scientific discovery is more and more studied in relation to political and economic history, appreciation will grow of the fundamental importance of science in the modern community. Within limits the physicist, chemist or biologist will become something of a sociologist, and the linking of his efforts in his special science with the service of society may resolve the ethical dilemma. Dr. Desch insists further on the need for clear exposition and the avoidance of jargon, and also on the impossibility of limiting scientific research and particularly fundamental research.

Continuity and Discontinuity

PROF. J. K. ROBERTSON, professor of physics, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, in his presidential address to the Royal Society of Canada delivered on May 21, 1945, argues that the notions of continuity and discontinuity as used in physics and other sciences are complementary and not just contradictory. When, in the eighteenth century, physical theory was occupied with the continuous aspect of things it was natural to suppose that the structure of the world must be either continuous or discontinuous,