

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,

not both. Therefore, since continuity was apparent, there could be no discontinuity anywhere, as Leibniz argued. The chemical atomic theory and the kinetic theory of gases of the nineteenth century brought out the aspect of discontinuity for the first time, and recent sub-atomic physics has gone a stage further. At every stage, however, as Prof. Robertson emphasizes, theory really requires both continuity and discontinuity. This was first realized in the case of light, which in some aspects is continuous, and in others discontinuous; and, later, electrons were found to play a similar dual part. Granted that the single electron is discrete, indefinite and indeterminate, it should not be inferred that the continuity, definiteness and strict causality found in the behaviour of large numbers of electrons are not equally genuine aspects of the physical world. Prof. Robertson refers briefly to the way in which the biological theory of evolution requires both a continuous long-term aspect and a discontinuous short-term one; and he ends by asking the question, whether new discoveries in science which look like discontinuities in the historical development of thought are not also in other respects examples of the continuity of thought.

Personnel of Museums

DR. ALLAN'S presidential address to the Museums Association on July 5 last is published in the *Museums Journal* (August 1945, pp. 73-80) under the title of "Museums Manpower". Dealing with the qualifications to be looked for in candidates for administrative posts in museums, Dr. Allan emphasizes (1) the educational background (which is usually provided by a university course leading to a degree or diploma); (2) specialized training in the museum; (3) ability for the work entailed; and (4) personality (which is not least in importance). That these attributes are not always recognized as essentials to good curatorship is evidenced by the numbers of small, dismal and neglected museums that are still to be found in various parts of Great Britain, and also by Dr. Allan's subsequent reference to the common contention that few museums can afford to employ holders of degrees or diplomas. In criticizing that attitude, he rightly points out that a local authority or public body which undertakes the provision of a public service (museum or otherwise) also undertakes the responsibility of maintaining it in efficiency. Referring specifically to local museums, he says: "If the local museum is merely a repository of curios, a caretaker is clearly all that is needed. . . . If the museum is to be an educational instrument . . . then it must be equipped and staffed accordingly—and the bill will be correspondingly higher."

Contrasting local museums in Britain with those of pre-war Europe, for example, Dr. Allan says, "much of our museum presentation is ill-founded and amateurish", and again, "a wonderful story available in museum material is all too often badly mis-handled". There are, of course, notable exceptions, and Dr. Allan, recognizing the progress that has been made in several quarters, is not pessimistic as to future developments. Of museum committees Dr. Allan speaks with caution, but he shows clearly that only co-operation and a measure of understanding between those bodies (which he terms 'non-museum expert') and the museum official (the 'museum expert') will make for the fruition of the task common to both, namely, the production of an efficient service. A study of Dr. Allan's address in full should be not

only of value to those already in the profession and those serving on museum committees, but to those, also, who aspire to a museum career.

Federation of Documentary Film Units

THE Federation of Documentary Film Units, which was set up in the middle of 1945 as a consultant and information organisation representing eight of the leading independent units making documentary and educational films, is issuing a regular *Bulletin* which will deal in turn with the use of films in health and medicine, industry, education, food and agriculture, architecture and housing. The periodical will attempt to report progress in providing films to meet specific needs in these fields, and will record work being carried out by professional and research institutions in assessing available films and will outline films made or in production. The first to be issued, dated January 1946, attempts to give some of the background information, outlining the system of sponsorship under which the making of documentary films has been carried out from the start. The Federation is organised to survey the requirements of potential sponsors, to advise on subjects, indicate production facilities and costs, and channels of distribution available. Inquiries relating to the making and showing of all types of factual films will be welcomed and should be addressed to the Organising Secretary, 18 Soho Square, London, W.1.

Survey of India

THE Civil Activities Report for the War Period, 1939 to March 31, 1945, of Survey of India, now published by order of the Surveyor-General, is in two parts. The first, dealing with activities up to March 31, 1944, indicates that the re-survey of India scheduled for completion in twenty-five years and 25 per cent incomplete in 1939, has been in abeyance since 1940-41, when 2,400 square miles were surveyed as against 8,500 in 1939-40 and 20,000 in 1938-39. Geodetic and other scientific survey activities were mainly shelved, except those such as tidal operations and certain computations which had a direct bearing on the war effort or were essential to the welfare of the country. Scientific work was also suspended early in the War, except such as was required for war purposes, but on the outbreak of war with Japan the War Survey Research Institute was created, which has carried out valuable work for the Armed Forces, much of which will be useful in reconstruction and development after the War. Big strides have been made in the design of instruments and the application of methods expediting and cheapening precision survey technique.

Further reference is made in the second part of the report, covering the year April 1, 1944, to March 31, 1945, to the improvement of air survey methods to meet requirements with the minimum use of skilled personnel, and some of the methods used for the air photo mosaic and for the large-scale mapping of dam sites for engineering plans are described by Lieut.-Colonel D. R. Crane in an appended note. The War Survey Research Institute, during this period, in addition to providing tidal data at many ports, carried out much research on the improvement of base measurement apparatus so as to take advantage of the much improved precision of modern angle-measuring instruments and new technique. It is also proposed to lay out over India a highly accurate framework, the All India Development Survey Frame-