

## NEWS and VIEWS

## Study of Public Administration

IN his inaugural lecture from the new chair of public administration at the London School of Economics and Political Science on February 3, 1948, Dr. W. A. Robson welcomed the creation of the chair as a sign of the extended recognition now accorded to the study of public administration by the University of London (London: Stevens and Sons, Ltd. Pp. v+26. 2s. 6d.). It is impossible, however, for this vast field to be covered adequately in regard either to teaching or research, he said, unless far greater provision is made for senior posts at academic institutions throughout Britain. The expansion in the scale and scope of public administration is a dominant feature of our times and is to be seen not only in the growth and multiplication of government institutions and of the public corporations, but also in the new conception of the task of government. The keynote of most of the recent developments has been extreme centralization, and Dr. Robson expressed the view that contemporary trends are not in conformity with the best democratic principles and that we are not making the most efficient use of our resources of political energy, administrative ability and experience. In particular, he criticized the failure to appreciate the need for a democratic form of regional government, and supported the view advanced since in the second report of the Local Government Boundary Commission that the Commission should be given wider powers. Public ownership and the nationalization of industry both call for much greater efforts to measure the results of public administration in relation to its cost in terms of money and effort, and he believes that the question of centralization and decentralization needs discussion in the universities before a coherent body of principle is likely to be evolved for practical use.

At the Cabinet-level also, there are changes which call for further study and discussion, and such problems as questions of personnel administration, the distribution of powers, methods of control, organic relationships and constitutional development require re-examination, quite apart from the new problems presented by nationalized industries and the relations between public corporations and Parliament. He urged that the Economic Survey should be accompanied by a corresponding survey of public administration at intervals of not less than a year. Overshadowing all is the problem of how to ensure that the vast powers which are needed by the executive are conferred and exercised in conformity with the political traditions and the liberal spirit of the British people. He urged that we should cease to think of freedom only in terms of the absence of restraint and consider it also in terms of opportunity. He suggested that Parliament should take pains to define more carefully the executive powers which it confers; to state more clearly the purposes for which they are to be used; and to see not only that the rights of the public and the duties of public authorities are reciprocal, but also that the obligations of the citizen and the executive are mutual. Finally, he pleaded that the universities of Britain have a special contribution to make to the discussion of such problems, by diffusing a knowledge of the principles underlying a sound system of democratic government among the wide range of students, by helping the community to become more discriminating in its attitude to govern-

ment, more critical of defects and more appreciative of achievements in the public service, and by investigating the working of institutions and analysing policies and processes. The more closely the different branches of social science can co-operate in a combined attack on the complex problems confronting us, the more effective the result is likely to be.

## Annular Eclipse of May 8-9

BAD weather conditions went far to spoil the project of the National Geographic Society to link up the triangulations of Asia and of the United States and Canada by exact timing of contacts at the recent eclipse (*Nature*, March 13, p. 389). Only two expeditions—those to Rebun Jima, a little fisher-folk island off the north-western tip of Japan and to Bangkok in Siam—were favoured by clear enough conditions to get satisfactory results. Dr. C. H. Smiley, head of the last-named party, reported thin cirrus clouds, while Dr. John A. O'Keefe of the other party had ideal conditions due to a last-moment clearing. These two observations may link up the Indian geodetic triangulation with those of Japan and possibly Korea. A link-up with the American triangulation may also be possible owing to the successful photographs secured from two B29 Superfortress planes working from an air base on Shemya Island in the Aleutians. Short-range navigation methods were used, radar signals being sent out from the aeroplanes and received by ground stations the exact locations of which were known. Obviously fresh problems are involved in the use of data from moving aeroplanes, and it will be interesting to see the final reports when the material obtained has been examined. It is to be hoped that Great Britain, from which the suggestion first originated that eclipse observations might be used for geodetic studies, may before long take a part in securing some valuable results along these lines.

## Hylean Amazon Institute

A NINE-NATION Conference for the creation of an International Institute of the Hylean Amazon, called jointly by the Governments of Peru and Brazil and by Unesco, has successfully concluded its deliberation at Iquitos, Peru. A convention establishing the Institute was agreed upon and will come into force upon final acceptance by the founding nations. The following nations signed the final act of the Conference: Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, France, Holland, Italy, Peru and Venezuela. The scientific programme for the Institute was formulated, and a budget of approximately 300,000 dollars was set for the first year of the Institute's operation. A financial protocol was also signed by Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, France, Holland, Peru and Venezuela, which determined the scale of national contributions toward financing the Institute. The United States and the United Kingdom expressed great interest in the Institute, and will study ways of actively participating in its work.

Pending the initiation of the operation of the Institute, an Interim Commission was established and the first meeting of the Commission opened in Manaus, Brazil, on May 13. In accordance with instructions from the Unesco General Conference held in Mexico last year, the Director-General has obtained the services of outstanding world experts to carry out surveys in anthropology, biology and soil science to guide the investigators of the Institute during its first years of operation in the Hylean

Amazon region. A survey will also be made of the existing scientific knowledge of the region and of the work carried out by institutions in other parts of the world on man's relation to a tropical environment.

### The Wool Industries Research Association

THE report of the Director of Research for the Wool Industries Research Association for 1947-48 summarizes a five-year building plan to provide permanent buildings for plant and workshops on the lower half of the Torridon plot. Construction of a new physics block, with provision for workshops and drawing offices and a central steam-raising plant for heating and process is already in progress, and together with a new woollen block is to be completed in 1948. The provision of a new wing for a library, offices and canteen is postponed until conditions become easier. As a result of a conference of eight research associations, a standing conference is to be constituted and the exchange and study of programmes of textile research is to be commenced immediately. A survey of shortened drawing processes in members' mills has emphasized the attention which must be given to yarn characteristics when considering a reduction in the number of drawing processes; other surveys lending themselves to detailed statistical analysis have covered the occurrence of slubs and faults in yarns and the scouring and milling of woollen and worsted pieces. Progress is also reported in the measurement of the characteristics of a yarn as they affect its ultimate performance, high-draft spinning and the mathematical and experimental study of the drafting process.

Fundamental investigations noted in the report include the confirmation and extension of the theory of water absorption by wool, the diffusion of formic acid and of large molecules in keratin, the behaviour of ions in horn keratin and a physico-chemical study of the washing of raw wool. Evidence was obtained that the molecular arrangement of the amino-acid residues of which the keratin molecule is composed is much more complex than was entertained in current theories. A new method of breaking down wool to macro-molecular components apparently similar to those obtained by Mercer by the use of enzymes has yielded extremely interesting results, and investigations of peroxide bleaching have continued, as well as biochemical work on the naturally occurring polypeptides, gramicidin *S* and tyrocidine. Analysis of the peptides derived from wool containing the dicarboxylic acids and of the peptides containing cystine has continued. Biological research has included fleece studies of the Romney flock maintained at Cambridge as well as follicle studies; while in the technological field, in addition to completing a detailed examination of the resistance to washing of proprietary moth-proofing agents, the Association has suggested to the Society of Dyers and Colourists the establishment of a committee to investigate the standardization of larval testing and of washing processes appropriate for assessing moth-proofing agents. Laboratory work on combing oils, woollen oils and fastness tests has continued, as well as studies of speciality fabrics, mechanical properties of yarn and cloth, and the performance of rapid regain measurement machines on the market.

### The British Boot, Shoe and Allied Trades Research Association

THE first annual report of the Council of the British Boot, Shoe and Allied Trades Research Association

covers the year ended December 31, 1947. The new Council, elected in June 1947, consists of members elected on a regional basis, together with co-opted members; the Scientific, the Industrial and the Statistics Committees supervise, respectively, the work of the Scientific and Technical Division, the Industrial and Productivity Division and the Trade Statistics and Economic Research Division. The chairmen of these three Committees are also members of the Finance Committee which controls the work of the Information and Administration Division. Of the 973 consulting questions recorded during the year, 45 per cent related to wear complaints, chiefly perspiration and damage by heat. Reports are in preparation on service trials of boots containing test components, tests of a co-polymer of vinyl acetate and vinyl chloride as a lining fabric, the use of 'Mycocide L' under factory conditions, the deformation of various shoe materials, a survey of children's feet and an analysis of American Army foot measurements. An interim report on the performance and quality of welt-sewing needles has been published, and work on the water-proofness testing machine is almost complete. Experiments on the use of a Baldwin moisture meter modified for use with leather have been completed, and practical applications are being investigated. A small laboratory has been set aside for testing adhesives, and work on the effects of perspiration on upper and insole leather has continued. The Council has also endowed a Satra Research Fellowship at University College, London, tenable for two years in the first instance, for research on the structure of the human foot and on the mechanics of human locomotion, and the first fellow, Dr. R. H. Hardy, commenced his duties on January 1, 1948.

### The Society for Psychical Research

IN a recently published pamphlet entitled "The Society for Psychical Research: an Outline of its History" (London, 1948. 2s.), which has been issued by the Society and written by its president, Mr. W. H. Salter, the author has provided a very useful account of the Society's activities from its foundation in 1882 until the present day. It is not generally realized what an immense amount of work has been done by members of the Society, a fact illustrated by its forty-eight volumes of *Proceedings*. Although the quality of the material presented is by no means uniform, the standard set by the more cautious members of the Society has always been a high one in spite of the persistent and sometimes successful attempts of its more emotional adherents to minimize the paramount importance of sound evidential material, and to introduce papers which tend to discredit the work of the Society both at home and abroad.

In his admirably objective account of the Society, the president has passed in review the various stages of its eventful career, although the general reader would scarcely realize from the author's smooth-running narrative that the two schools of thought mentioned above were always present within the Society, and that both are to this day still striving for mastery. It is these wide differences of opinion that make the Society so unlike the majority of scientific societies. For on one side we have those who believe that the Society's main function is to preserve the highest scientific standards both in research and publication, whereas on the other are grouped those who would make the Society a kind of academic and dignified spiritualist body voicing