

Charles's great Navy secretary, Samuel Pepys, was one of the early presidents of the Society. The Society's connexion with the Royal Observatory is closely paralleled in more recent years by its responsibilities for another great national institution, the National Physical Laboratory. From the earliest years the Society has been consulted by the Government in scientific matters, and the advice it has thus been able to give constitutes one of its most valuable public services.

It is well known that King Charles poked fun at the Society "for spending time only in weighing of ayre". There were other and more serious criticisms, in the early years, of the unsubstantial quality of many of the papers published, to which were added financial troubles, and problems of accommodation. Despite the reputation of Newton and the prestige conferred upon it by his presidency, the Society had many difficulties and some opposition with which to contend before it became firmly established. Later, at the end of the eighteenth century, during the long and autocratic presidency of Sir Joseph Banks, there were acute dissensions among the members and strong criticism of the methods of election to fellowship.

Gradually, however, reforms were introduced; scientific attainment was established as the essential qualification for admission of the great majority of the members, and the leading men of science came into control of the administration. By the middle of the nineteenth century, despite the competing activities of the many specialized societies which were being formed, the Royal Society had achieved the position of unchallenged leadership and authority which it holds to-day.

This book is the more valuable because it is obviously the outcome of extensive reading and careful investigation. Miss Stimson has special reasons for her interest in the American contacts of the Society, and has given many interesting particulars of the membership of Cotton Mather, Benjamin Franklin, and other prominent Americans.

THOMAS MARTIN

## APPLIED CHEMISTRY

### Thorpe's Dictionary of Applied Chemistry

Fourth edition, revised and enlarged. Vol. 9: Oils, Fatty—Pituitary Body. With an Index by Dr. J. N. Goldsmith. Pp. viii+671. (London, New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1949.) 80s. net.

THE national importance of the chemical industry, and of those allied industries which depend upon chemical science, is reflected to-day in the pronouncements of Ministers and the figures of trade. Chemical technology becomes increasingly scientific, and chemistry constantly makes available new knowledge of materials and reactions. It is essential that this new knowledge should be assembled in a convenient form. Moreover, in these days when we are in danger of being overwhelmed by a mere mass of information, it is most valuable to have it filtered and screened by experts.

The appearance of a further volume of the new edition of "Thorpe" is therefore to be greeted with pleasure and gratitude, both because of the wide range and the authoritative treatment of the subject-matter. The present volume, No. 9 in the series, contains articles from some seventy authors, and the

general level of the contributions may be indicated by some samples. Dr. E. J. Bowen writes on "Photochemistry", Dr. U. R. Evans on "Passivity", Prof. T. P. Hilditch on "Oils and Fats", Prof. E. L. Hirst and Dr. J. R. N. Jones on "Pectin", and Mr. B. Topley and Dr. B. Raistrick on "Phosphorus". The inclusion of contributions from distinguished overseas authors such as Prof. J. H. Quastel (oxidizing enzymes), Dr. Gustav Egloff (petroleum), and Prof. R. J. Williams (pantothenic acid) is a pleasing feature. The central position of chemistry in science is well exemplified by a comparison of the largely mathematical article of Dr. E. A. Moelwyn-Hughes on "Partition Function" with monographs from the biological end of the subject, such as that by Dr. E. Lester Smith and his collaborators on "Penicillin".

Sir Ian Heilbron and his colleagues on the editorial board are to be congratulated on the general high level of achievement. The world of chemistry is in debt to them and to the authors alike. R. P. LINSTED

## A STUDY OF IBO LIFE

### Ibo Village Affairs

Chiefly with Reference to the Village of Umueke Agbaja. By M. M. Green. Pp. xi + 262. (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, Ltd., 1947.) 10s. 6d. net.

THIS book is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the Ibo, not for the facts it contains but for the very clear exposition Miss M. M. Green gives in Part 1 (Village Organisation) of the general, almost conscious, tendency of the Ibo people to disperse authority over as many groups as possible—whether based on age, sex, occupation or anything else—rather than to concentrate it in the hands of any central organisation. There are, as she points out, no recognized bodies, either judicial or legislative, that function to the exclusion of other groups, for any group "can take the initiative and win the day if they can secure enough popular support". Many of the difficulties in establishing indirect rule in this part of Nigeria might have been lessened, if not avoided, if this had been fully appreciated earlier.

Parts 2 (Exogamy) and 3 (Women's Organisation) are of less general application. The argument that the system of exogamy (whereby all the daughters are married into, and all the wives drawn from, other villages) forms one of the strongest links by which villages, in the absence of any political ties, are joined together is probably true of Umueke Agbaja and similar communities where the exogamous unit is the village. Exogamy undoubtedly is a cohesive element; but its effect will obviously be of less political, and even social, importance in other parts of Ibo country where the exogamous unit is the extended family and where large numbers of women spend their life in the village or village group in which they are born.

Miss Green adds an interesting appendix in which she attempts to interpret the Ibo temperament in the light of the conclusions reached by Dr. Murdo Mackenzie, particularly in his book, "The Human Mind". Her views are tentative and are, as it were, merely set out for our consideration. But they are certainly thought-provoking, and investigations along the lines she suggests may well do much to raise the 'iron curtain' which all who have worked among the Ibo feel to exist between the minds of these people and their own.

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