Professor Samueloff's release at the week-end was not intended by the Syrian Government as an acknowledgment of the value of his scientific work or even of his innocence of military activity. With a companion from the same aircraft, he was traded for thirteen Syrians in Israeli hands.

It is important that the principles which have been raised by this shabby incident should not be forgotten now that Professor Samueloff is back in Israel. The most important issue is to know how the scientific community should respond to Dr Edholm's plea that learned societies should pay some attention to what happens when scientists are involved in acts of piracy like this. On the face of things, of course, there is a case for doing nothing. Hi-jacking, like other forms of piracy, is a serious assault on civilized conventions but also a matter for governments to deal with. This is the letter of the law, from which it seems to follow that there is no case for asking that scientists should be dealt with differently from other people or that scientific societies should intervene when other professional bodies are silent. This, however, may be needlessly passive. Some arguments tell the other way.

To begin with, simply because scientists frequently find themselves behaving as if science knows no boundaries, they tend to find themselves in dangerous places more frequently than, say, businessmen. Second, the international scientific community is often so tightly knit that it can exercise an influence which may be different from and even more powerful than that of other organizations, governments sometimes included. Especially when scientists are individually at risk, and where it seems that the scientific community could exert pressure in the right direction, there is a case for throwing seemingly disengagement from politics to the winds. To be sure, it is hard to see how the separate councils of individual learned societies could quickly make up their minds on a course of action when it seemed as if one of their members was threatened by an illegal civil act—in the case of Professor Samueloff, for example, some may have held that it would be more productive to press the Government of Israel to agree to an exchange of prisoners than to press simply for the unilateral release of the hi-jacking victims. Evidently there is plenty of room for argument there. Yet it is plain that incidents like these, and occasions when the liberty of scientists is impeded by the arbitrary acts of governments as in Brazil, will be more and not less frequent in the years ahead. Is it not time that the International Council of Scientific Unions put its hand to the formulation of an ostentatious set of principles by means of which governments should order their dealings with scientists of all nationalities? In the nature of things, it would only be possible to ask for the most elementary safeguards, and there could of course be no assurance that in a fight with a headstrong government, ICSU would emerge the winner. The boot would probably be on the other foot, indeed, but there is at least a chance that the threat of scorn among the scientific community would deter some governments from casual infringements of decency.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Talks on Universities (Part 2)

from our Education Correspondent

THE second instalment in the talks at the Department of Education and Science on university expansion in the 1970s took place last week. This time it was the turn of the Association of University Teachers to meet the chairman of the University Grants Committee, Mr Kenneth Berrill, and the Minister of State for

100 Years Ago

GOLD DIGGERS IN THIBET

THE Thibetan gold-field of Thok-Jalung in lat. $32^{\circ} 24' 26''$ and long. $81^{\circ} 37' 38''$ was visited by the pundits employed by the G. T. Survey, in 1867 (August). The camp was pitched in a large desolate plain of a reddish brown appearance, the tents stand in pits seven or eight feet deep for protection against the cold wind, the elevation being 16,330 feet, yet the diggers prefer to work in the winter, when nearly 600 tents are to be found there; the soil when frozen does not "cave in." They have no wood, but use dried dung for fuel, and the water is so brackish as to be undrinkable until frozen and remelted. They live well, taking three meals a-day of boiled meat, barley cakes, and tea stewed with butter. They will not use the Himalayan tea, as too heating and only fit for poor folks.

The curious posture for sleeping, universal among the Thibetans, was observed here. They invariably draw their knees close up to their heads, and rest on their knees and elbows, huddling every scrap of clothing they can muster on their backs; the richer rest thus on a mattress rising towards the head. The poorer avail themselves of a suitable slope on the hill side, or pile stones and earth to a convenient height. This position is most probably adopted in order to secure as much warmth as possible for the abdomen, the thighs pressing against it and excluding the air.

The gold-diggers recreate themselves with tobacco smoked in iron pipes, and, notwithstanding the hardships of their laborious toil, seem very merry, singing songs in chorus, in which the women and children join.

The Brighton Aquarium

WOULD it be unduly troubling you were I to ask you to inform me, through the medium of the columns of NATURE, if the much-talked-of Brighton Aquarium is really to be "started"?

H. H. MOTT

The Cloaca Maxima

WILL you pardon me for asking a question which probably I ought to be able to answer myself? Mr. Corfield, in his interesting comparison of the hygienic performances of the ancients and ourselves, mentions the well-known Cloaca Maxima as one of the great glories of the Romans. Can he tell us how they got the sewage into it? I presume the invention of Bramah was not known in those times, and I was a little disappointed in not finding in his able paper a solution of a mystery which has puzzled me since my childhood. What did the Romans want with a Cloaca Maxima, and how did they use it?

Dec. 11th,

IGNORAMUS

From Nature, 1, 192, December 16, 1869.

Education and Science, Mr Gerald Fowler. The talks centred on how the universities could accommodate the expected growth in student numbers which, according to the latest projections, should reach 700,000 by 1981. Working on the Robbins basis of relating entry to higher education with numbers of qualified school leavers, the ministry predicts that 437,000 students will be engaged in full-time higher education in 1971-72, 557,000 in 1976-77 and 727,000 in 1981-82 (compared with the Robbins estimates of 305,000, 388,000 and 510,000 respectively for these years). This expansion is bound to call for a radical reappraisal of the use of university facilities and university financing.

Like the previous conversation with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals (*Nature*, 224, 4; 1969), last week's talks were described as informal and in no way embodied positive proposals from either side. If the measures discussed with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals are anything to go by, however, some very radical proposals for achieving university expansion as cheaply as possible were discussed. The Committee of Vice-Chancellors has circulated a résumé of its discussions to the universities, and it seems that thirteen possibilities, including reorganization of the academic year and student loans, were put forward. Two year degree courses and six term years were also strongly canvassed.

Other interested parties will soon be appearing at the Department of Education and Science for discussions, and the end product is likely to be a green paper some time next year. This will necessarily include proposals distasteful both to the universities and the National Union of Students. Only if the debate can be removed from the aura of secrecy that has surrounded the talks so far will informed conclusions be reached.

SIXTH FORMS

Broader Curricula by Half

from our Education Correspondent

BREAKING down specialization in secondary school education has long been the objective of British educational reformers. The Joint Working Party on Sixth Form Curriculum and Examinations of the Standing Conference on University Entrance and the Schools Council is at last submitting proposals for broadening sixth form curricula to its parent bodies. These proposals, the result of eighteen months' work, call for two new examinations to be taken at the end of the sixth and seventh school years. Students would specialize much later than under the present system, taking eight subjects in the fifth year, five in the sixth year and two or three in the seventh year. Only in the seventh year would they be able to study exclusively arts or science subjects.

The sixth year examination is seen as a qualifying examination for all sectors of higher education, and would be midway between the present GCE O and A levels. The curriculum leading to this examination would comprise five subjects for about five-sevenths of the week, with the rest of the time devoted to unexamined studies. Students would have a restricted choice of subjects for the sixth year, spread over a reasonable spectrum of disciplines, and they would be expected to take no more than two sciences or two

languages. Normally, all five subjects would be examined at the end of the sixth year, but this does not preclude the possibility of spending more than a year on some subjects.

The joint working party goes on to suggest that specialization in the seventh school year is desirable, and that students should be able to choose two or three subjects for the proposed new Further Examination. University selection would be based on performance in the sixth year qualifying examination, assessment of course work, headmasters' reports and success in not more than three subjects in the further examination. It is also hoped that universities will specify as few subjects as possible by name for their entrance requirements. Students not seeking entrance to degree courses would probably study one or two subjects for the further examination, and some would combine these with continued or new study for subjects in the qualifying examination.

These proposals would, of course, mean an end to the GCE A level examination, but the joint working party emphasizes that it is not seeking to abolish the CSE and O level examinations, which are said to provide many valuable functions, particularly for those not intending to go on to higher education. Students taking the qualifying examination would probably not take O levels, however, because these would no longer be used for university selection purposes. The joint working party also recommends that the qualifying and further examinations should embody the latest examination techniques, and that they should be related as closely as possible to the teaching process. It is therefore hoped that they will not cause the sixth form curriculum to become examination-oriented, and that they will not encroach too much on teaching time.

The working party suggests that the first qualifying examinations should be taken in 1975, and the first further examinations in 1976. It recommends, however, that the new pattern should be universally adopted, because to run it as an alternative to the present A level pattern would create a system embodying five major public examinations. This would place an undue strain on the country's examination resources, and it would also mean that many schools and universities which would like to support the new system would not do so because of the uncertainties surrounding it. To ensure that the curricula and examinations are correctly planned, a national committee including representatives from the schools and the universities is proposed.

These proposals are half-way towards earlier suggestions from the Standing Committee on University Entrance, which proposed that sixth formers should study five subjects for two years. The Standing Committee says that it was converted to the new proposals because of the advantages of scrapping O levels as a yardstick for university entrance requirements.

UNIVERSITIES

Donnish Productivity

A NUMBER of university academic staff are taking part in a time and motion study. They have been asked by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals to complete a diary of activities between 8.00 a.m. and midnight for three weeks a year—a normal teach-