

University of Birmingham

At the annual meeting of the Court of Governors, the Pro-Chancellor, Mr. E. P. Beale, welcomed, with relief, the announcement that the Treasury grant to the universities is not to be reduced. He also announced with gratification that contributions from the Birmingham City Council and the surrounding local authorities showed a substantial increase, due mainly to the grant of an additional £750 from the Warwickshire County Council. He regretted that it had been necessary, owing to lack of financial support, to close the Department of Industrial Hygiene and Medicine; he hoped the setback would be only temporary. He also referred to the endowment of a chair of theology by Dr. Edward Cadbury. The endowment fund (£32,000) is the largest individual benefaction received by the University in 1939.

The Nuffield Physics Laboratory is now occupied the magnet of the large cyclotron has been erected free of charge by Messrs. Horsley Bridge and Thomas Piggott, Ltd., of Tipton, the steel for its construction having been supplied on most generous terms by Messrs. Colvilles, Ltd., of Glasgow. Prof. S. Zuckerman, who was appointed to the chair of anatomy to succeed Prof. R. D. Lockhart, is engaged on work of national importance and it has been agreed that, in consequence, he shall postpone taking up duty at Birmingham. Dr. C. F. V. Smout is continuing to act as temporary head of the department.

Higher Education in Palestine

THE Friends of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem have just published their annual report, 1938-39 (199 Piccadilly, London). This University is an important centre of culture in a distracted country and continues, we are glad to see, constructive effort, though faced with financial uncertainty. A new Medical Centre was opened last year, including a fine hospital with three hundred beds and first-rate equipment. For the present it will be mainly devoted to medical research and post-graduate courses. Progress has been made with agriculture and education, for which eight diplomas were awarded last year. The University is enterprising enough to broadcast popular talks on its work, and its friends are busy in Great Britain seeking to make up for losses due to the War. It is hoped that some special donations may help a large number of students who, coming from countries under German domination, can no longer receive the money on which they formerly relied. It is estimated that £6,000 will be needed for urgent cases.

The Hebrew Technical Institute, Haifa, has altogether more than seven hundred students and a staff augmented by some distinguished refugees. A Nautical School was started in 1938 and has its own training ship. The Daniel Sieff Research Institute has been experimenting, for the benefit of the orange industry, on peels and other waste products. Difficulties of transport will keep much of the present crop at home. Johnson used orange peel for indigestion, but it is scarcely likely to survive to-day as a remedy.

The Blind Spot

HELMHOLTZ, in his "Handbuch der physiologischen Optik" (1867), stated that the demonstration of the blind spot of the eye, the discovery of which was communicated by the Abbé Edme Mariotte to the Royal Academy of Sciences in France in the winter of 1667-68, was given before the King of England in 1668. Dr. J. Bröns, of Copenhagen, in a monograph on "The Blind Spot of Mariotte" (London: H. K. Lewis and Co., Ltd., 1939. 12s. net), proves that this statement is erroneous, and brings forward strong evidence of the manner in which it arose. In 1776, Georg Simon Klügel, professor of mathematics in the University of Helmstädt, published a translation of Joseph Priestley's "The History and present state of Discoveries relating to Vision, Light and Colours" (London, 1772). On p. 144 of the translation there is a footnote as follows: "(a) Smith's Opticks, Remarks, p. 6 (d. d. Ausg. S. 367). Oeuvres de Mariotte, p. 496. (Der Versuch ist 1668 vor dem Könige von England gemacht. Birch, T. 2, p. 281. Haller's Phys., T. 5, p. 470, K.)" The reference to Birch shows that the communication to the Royal Society was made by Oldenburg, and not by Mariotte, and there is good evidence that the king was not present at that, or indeed any other, meeting. The reference to Albrecht von Haller, also a footnote, is in his "Elementa physiologiae corporis humani" (Lausanae, 1763), also contained in his "Anfangsgründe der Physiologie", S, p. 470, Berlin-Leipzig, 1772. This reads as follows: "Factum ann. 1668 coram S. Reg. Maj. T. Birch, T. II, p. 281. Exstat oper. Mariot, p. 496, Ed. Holl." Dr. Bröns thinks that Klügel expanded the footnote to "Factum anno 1668 coram Sua Regia Majestate", adding his translation "Der Versuch ist 1668 vor dem Könige von England gemacht", whereas it should read "Factum anno 1668 coram Societate Regiae Majestatis"—"the experiment was shown before the Royal Society"

Progress at the British Museum

IT is strange to read in the recently published annual report of the British Museum of events like the special Thomas Cromwell exhibition and, in the Natural History Museum, the retirement of Dr. Tate Regan and succession of Dr. C. Foster-Cooper, which seem to be matters of ancient history, but perhaps that is inevitable when H.M. Stationery Office issues the Museum's Annual Report for 1938 at the end of 1939. The interest of the public in museums has been undoubtedly on the up-grade in recent years, and this is reflected in an increased attendance (7,720) at the Natural History Museum. It is more difficult to account for the serious fall of more than 80,000 in the number of visitors at the British Museum, where the total, still exceeding one million, was the lowest since 1926. Perhaps the decrease was a reflection of the international disturbances in the autumn of 1938, for the work involved in air raid precautions, in training the staff in anti-gas measures, and planning for the safety of the invaluable contents of these institutions obviously interfered with normal working in the departments. Yet in these museums