

NEWS AND VIEWS

Salvage and Utilization of Waste

A LEADING article in this issue of NATURE (p. 988) is devoted to a discussion of certain aspects of the salvage and utilization of waste. It is interesting to note that the sixth report issued by the Select Committee on National Expenditure consists of the conclusions reached by a Sub-Committee on Supply Services which has investigated the relation between the work of the Ministry of Supply and the Office of Works. These two departments are responsible for the provision of stores of various kinds, and, working independently as they do, they tend to compete with each other, thus causing unnecessary confusion.

The report recommends the appointment of a national controller of salvage, who shall direct the work of an inter-departmental committee which shall supervise the salvage work of all departments. A more intense publicity campaign for the salvage of waste products is recommended, and, in particular, it is suggested that the virtues of refuse dust as a fertilizer be made more widely known with the help of the Ministry of Agriculture and the National Union of Farmers. There is urgent need, too, for closer co-operation between the Salvage Department and the County War Agricultural Committees. This is particularly necessary in the important matter of the disposal of kitchen waste suitable for the feeding of pigs. There is no questioning the need for the appointment of a national controller of salvage with full power of co-ordination. The sooner the appointment is made, the sooner will the nation be in a position to use its so-called waste products effectively.

The Linnean Society during War-time

At the anniversary meeting of the Linnean Society held on May 24, the retiring president, Dr. J. Ramsbottom, delivered his presidential address, the substance of which appears elsewhere in this issue (p. 993). Discussing the affairs of the Society, Dr. Ramsbottom said it was decided that at the beginning of the War it was not only in the best interests of the Society but also of biological science that the Society should remain in Burlington House. No matter what happens it is hoped that the present policy shall continue. The Linnean collections, the Smithian collections and certain other irreplaceable belongings have been removed. Thus all reasonable precautions with the Linnean collections have been taken; but what if they should meet with disaster? During the time the collections have been away abundant evidence has been shown of the difficulties which arise when the Linnean Herbarium and the insect collection cannot be consulted. The Society has the negatives of photographs taken at various times of numerous specimens. Would it not be advisable to have photographs of the whole of the specimens taken under botanical or zoological supervision? Prints could be sold to anyone and complete

sets might be kept in one or two places: or it may be that reproductions could be published. It would be advisable also to photograph all the types in the Smithian Herbarium. There would be no point in publishing these, but records that can be preserved in safety would be available. The problem of manuscripts should also be considered. Would it not be wise to have microfilms or photostats of the Linnean correspondence and all important unpublished manuscripts in the Society's possession? These again should be distributed.

Amateurs in Natural History

At the 150th anniversary meeting of the Society it was shown that it regards natural history societies as workers in the same field. Many prominent fellows of the Society are keenly interested in their local natural history societies. Dr. Ramsbottom thinks it would be well if the Society encouraged the idea that election to the Linnean Society of London should be the hall-mark of excellence in the study of natural history. If this were so the Society would continue to have that leaven of the amateur which is so necessary to the well-being of the Society. Amateurs were in the past the very backbone of British biology: it would be a sad blow to the democracy of science, even to science itself, if the Linnean Society were ever to be regarded as a domain reserved for the professional worker. "As a Society, then, our task during the War is to carry on as normally as possible, and to help others to do the same. In this connexion the Council has agreed to bring forward a motion, similar to one passed during the last War, that refugee biologists should be allowed certain privileges such as permission to attend meetings and to use the library".

H.M. Forces and Natural History

As individuals, fellows of the Society may have an opportunity of doing something, though not in a very spectacular way. There are many in H.M. Forces who might be helped over difficult periods if they became interested in natural history. Many of these men are seeing the common plants, birds and insects of the countryside for the first time, others in circumstances when their interest is easily aroused. Entertainment of the troops is usually of a certain type, excellent in its way, and nowadays the most popular of its kind. But some need more than mere amusement. It is not a matter of previous education but of temperament. The need may be met with music, or poetry, or other literature; for some it is in natural history. What can one say in answer to a letter asking whether the enclosed flower is a cowslip? It may be to settle a bet—but it at least shows an interest and it is up to us to encourage any such interest, not with the intention of popularizing our special subjects, or for any other purpose whatsoever