

NEWS AND VIEWS

Prof. A. Virtanen : Helsinki

ON February 28, while the Russo-Finnish War was still in progress, the Editors wrote to Prof. Artturi Virtanen, of the Biochemical Institute, Helsinki, inviting him to send a message to scientific workers at large. Readers, and especially those interested in biochemistry as applied to agriculture, will be pleased to learn that Prof. Virtanen is safe and hopes to continue his scientific work. A letter, dated April 1, has just reached NATURE office, in which Prof. Virtanen writes: "I thank you for your kind letter of February 28, and am pleased to say that I have managed to retain my life during the war. My scientific work was, however, interrupted from the beginning of November. The danger to which my country and our civilization was subjected necessitated my taking up other kind of work. Our institute was emptied owing to the men joining the army and the young ladies being engaged on women's auxiliary labour. Three of my collaborators gave their lives for their country: L. Mansikkala, M.A., L. Eerola, M.A., and A. Arhimo, M.A., all men on whose forehead our Lord had written the word Honour. Together with Mr. Arhimo I have in this journal published two Letters to the Editors concerning the oxaloacetic acid and other keto acids in the plants. Following the destructive air bombing of Helsinki on November 30, I wrote my last letter to NATURE, as there was a possibility of my not being able to continue my work. Should circumstances permit, I hope to resume my reports to NATURE in the near future."

Prof. Alexander Findlay

FIVE years ago, Prof. Alexander Findlay published a characteristically comprehensive and interesting monograph on "The Teaching of Chemistry in the Universities of Aberdeen". His own approaching retirement from the chair of chemistry at Aberdeen, a chair which he has occupied with distinction for twenty-one years, inspires the thought that when some future scientific historian undertakes the task of bringing this volume up to date, he will find Prof. Findlay a subject as fascinating and as significant as any of his predecessors. A graduate himself of the University of Aberdeen and a research student under Ostwald at Leipzig, Findlay became recognized, very early in his career, as one of the leading promoters of physical chemistry in Great Britain and, before returning to his *alma mater*, held the positions of lecturer in physical chemistry in the University of Birmingham and professor of chemistry at the University College of Wales, Aberystwyth.

Pressure of teaching duties and lack of adequate laboratory facilities have unfortunately restricted Findlay's natural bent for original research, but ample compensation for this restriction is provided by the steady flow of text-books and 'popular' volumes of science with which he has instructed

thousands of chemists and entranced multitudes of laymen. Few physical chemists of the present generation have not been nursed upon Findlay's "Phase Rule" or "Practical Physical Chemistry" (to mention only two out of many); no chemist of the present generation has attracted a larger outside following than Findlay in "Chemistry in the Service of Man" or "The Spirit of Chemistry". It is to be hoped that the greater degree of freedom afforded by the new phase of professor emeritus will permit him to delight the component body of his friends and admirers with many more such works of art.

Dr. H. Melville

DR. H. MELVILLE, of the Laboratory of Colloid Science, Cambridge, who has been appointed to succeed Prof. Findlay, is well known for his work on the mechanism of gaseous reactions. His first important series of papers dealt with the oxidation of phosphorus at low pressures, in which it was shown that the diffusion of active molecules or radicals to the walls of the reaction vessel is a dominant process in regulating the velocity of oxidation. Theoretical advance was also made by the discovery of a method for measuring the branching of reaction chains in the oxidation of phosphine, one of the essential processes in controlling explosions in gases. This was the first estimate of this coefficient. He has also contributed to our knowledge on the photo-decomposition of the hydrides, the low quantum yield being traced and proved to be due to the occurrence of the recombination of the primary products of decomposition; this investigation led naturally to a supplementary one on the kinetics of exchange reactions of deuterium with the simple hydrides.

Latterly most of Dr. Melville's work has been directed to the elucidation of the mechanism of polymerization reactions. Suitable polymerizations have been found which occur in the gas phase photo-chemically and are amenable to kinetic study. One of the interesting results has been the discovery of molecules which grow, after photo-activation, in the dark for very long periods. Molecules of any size can thus be produced. By studying interpolymerizations it has become possible to build molecular sandwiches. Methods have also been developed for determining kinetically the molecular weight of polymers and for examining in detail the molecular statistics of the individual steps in a polymerization reaction, thereby leading to the exact control of molecular growth.

Karl Toldt (1840-1920)

PROF. KARL TOLDT, an eminent German anatomist and anthropologist, was born at Bruneck in the Tyrol on May 3, 1840. He received his medical

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