

NEWS AND VIEWS

President Roosevelt and United Democracy

IN his 'fireside talk' on December 29, President Roosevelt reached the highest point he has yet attained in his career as statesman and a great leader of democracy. No less than the successes of allied arms in the field, it holds out a promise of ultimate victory and marks a substantial stage in progress towards a 'new order' of democratic unity. As he had elected national security rather than war as his topic, his statement was addressed primarily to the people of the United States; but in order that he should place the situation as it affects their country fairly and squarely before them, he was bound by the logic of present realities to show how the forces of aggression embodied in the Axis Powers form a threat to the Americas as a whole, and in aiming at a world domination were bent upon the destruction everywhere of that freedom which is of the essence of democracy. By the cogent argument of the facts of recent history in the action of "a gang of outlaws" against weaker neighbouring peoples, and the inevitable consequences which would follow their success in Europe, he showed that American civilization and American independence "had never before, since Jamestown and Plymouth Rock," been in such danger.

"The Nazis," Mr. Roosevelt went on to point out, "can never reconcile themselves to a democratic world. The Axis proclaims there can be no ultimate peace between their philosophy and ours." The grave warning addressed to the people of Eire indicated that, in the opinion of the President, no less than of others more intimately involved, no reliance is to be placed upon the protection of a neutrality such as that on which Eire takes its stand. To the threat to the Americas the armed forces of Great Britain and those soldiers of its allies who have escaped alone oppose a barrier. Hence it behoves America, in President Roosevelt's words, to become the arsenal of the democracies, and to spare no effort, short of an expeditionary force, to support them. So from the President's exhortation to the American people there emerges a pattern—it might almost seem a prophecy—of a world in which stand united all peoples who hold fast to the democratic ideal, with Great Britain and the United States in the forefront. They stand, and will continue to stand, united in defence of those ideals, freedom, justice and tolerance, everywhere and at all times against aggression and exploitation.

The Fire of London

ON December 29, after four months of vicious, though unsuccessful, attempts to destroy the spirit of London, the Nazis attempted to destroy her heart by fire from the air. Those of us who experienced the wanton assault need no further proof that it was a deliberate attempt to fire one of the most vulnerable points in the world, although no targets of military value were attacked. It may be that the attack was not necessarily one of desperation (as suggested in

some quarters), but rather an integral part of the Nazi war effort to destroy anything symbolical of the democratic ideal and tradition. If so, then it has proved a dismal failure; London has withstood its ordeal by fire. It is true that some irreparable material damage has been done. Guildhall is a blackened shell; eight Wren churches have been wrecked; the Central Criminal Court has been damaged; the house in Gough Square, Fleet Street, where Dr. Johnson compiled his dictionary has been burnt out; Goldsmiths' College, which is incorporated in the University of London, was destroyed; and so on. The night was awesome—a clear demonstration of the senseless ferocity of aerial warfare as conceived by the Nazis.

But St. Paul's Cathedral, symbol of the faith of many Britons, stood out as a challenge and an inspiration. It has withstood previous attacks, though that of Sunday, December 29 must inevitably rank high among the many barbarous, though futile, attempts by the German High Command to crush the armies of freedom. History is being writ large; but more important at present is it that here we have further proof, if such is needed, that we are fighting, and must overcome, evil things. Nobody but another Nazi could support such 'strategy', which is eloquent of the very philosophy of totalitarianism, emphasizing as it does, among other things, the total destruction of all that democracy stands for, material and moral. Lovers of freedom, whether in the fighting services, defence services, office, field, library or laboratory, must collaborate wholeheartedly and give of their best, and thus become effective defenders of freedom.

British Museum (Natural History): Air Raid Damage

A NUMBER of bombs, both high explosive and incendiary, have fallen on the Museum premises, and serious fires have occurred in the General Herbarium and the Shell Gallery. Considerable damage was done to the botanical collections, but it will be impossible for some time to arrive at any final conclusion as to the extent of this, since so much depends on the degree of success achieved in the work of salvage and reparation which is still in progress. The greater part of the damage was done by water, and time alone can show how far this is irreparable.

The Shell Gallery was fortunately almost empty when the fire took place, and the damage to the collections was inconsiderable, though the roof of the Gallery was destroyed and a number of show cases were ruined. Some damage has been done by water in other parts of the Museum, but this is believed to be not very great. A vast number of windows and skylights have been broken, and there has been minor damage to the structure and to furniture in various parts of the building. The fossil tree which stood in the Museum grounds has been knocked down and broken but is capable of being repaired and re-erected.