

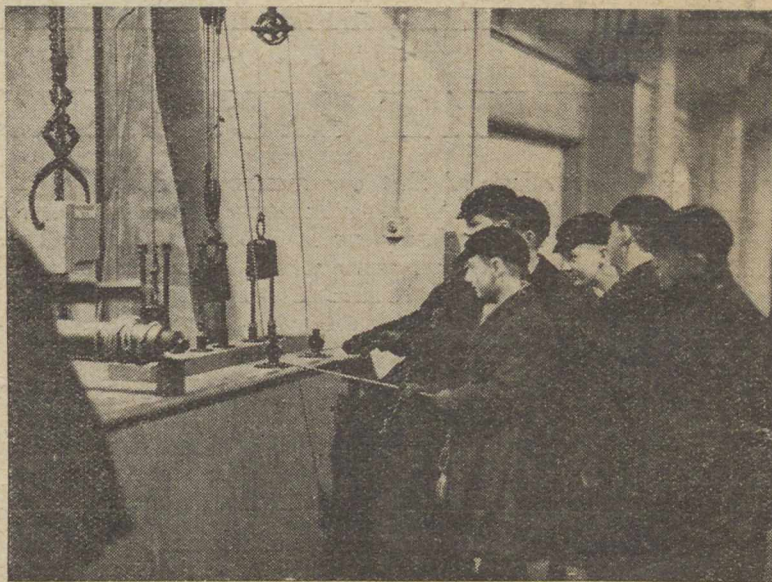
lesser collections in 400 other centres might see the whole of our American debt finally extinguished.

Well over a century ago, old Blucher remarked of London, 'What a city to loot!' It is rather tempting to imagine what he would think not only of London to-day, but of the treasures of many of our provincial cities. But I fancy the average Englishman—and even the average Scotsman too—would rather see another 6d. added to our income-tax than that our priceless national treasures should be dispersed to the four corners of the globe. Even if the contents of our incomparable museums and art galleries are worth millions and millions of pounds, their real value lies not in pounds, shillings and pence, but in the way they make life more beautiful and richer for each and every one of us who cares to visit them.

Take just one small museum, Keats House at Hampstead; go there, and get the real thrill of intimacy with genius that it gives; think then how your whole appreciation of Keats' work is intensified by actual contact with the things that he handled and loved. Remember also how in turn you pass on, or have endeavoured to pass on, the knowledge and the inspiration that such a visit gives.

Or go to the Natural History Museum at South Kensington, go upstairs to the first floor, and see there a single case, not four feet square, in which are exhibited dull and uninteresting rocks. One is instructed to press a handle lighting a quartz lamp, which brings out in a marvellous way some of the hitherto unknown glories of minerals. Grey rock, instead of being dull and uninteresting, becomes vivid and colourful—fluorspar glows bluish-violet, zinc-blende burns a fierce gold, calc-spar becomes suffused with a delicate rose-red. And then the handle slips back—grey predominates; but always one will remember that drab minerals are full of colour and can be made to glow with exquisite tints if only a sympathetic touch is given to the handle that the

the Children's Gallery where hordes of children every day see displayed before them the evolution of lighting, the evolution of transport, and machinery of all kinds. Watch them turn the handles, and hear them argue. The value of that gallery alone, the smallest of dozens, is incalculable in terms of education or culture.



Schoolboys testing the old fashioned weight-lifting machines in the new Children's Gallery of the Science Museum at South Kensington



Children examining the anatomy of a flea at the National History Museum, South Kensington

stones may reveal their inner glowing selves ablaze with fluorescence. What an opportunity for a moralist!

Or take a trip to the United Services Museum and see there day by day the crowds of children, eager-eyed and alert, drinking in the heroic stories of the Motherland, and incidentally realising that luck does not win battles, but science and courage.

Or, again, visit the Science Museum, and devote an afternoon to one small gallery that was opened a month ago—

Improving Museum Service

To assess museums in these terms, the contribution which they make to the uplifting of the present generation, is the only right one; and I venture to say that of all the educational forces in this country there is none potentially greater than museums. Schools and libraries have their uses, but schools and books both can only *tell* the child about the queer things and the real things of the world; in a museum, that is to say the right sort of museum, he can see for himself, teach himself, and such knowledge is the finest knowledge he can get. I forget who it was who said that 'we remember 30 per cent. only of what we read, but 70 per cent. of what we see'; but he was right. You can read about a sunset until you need spectacles, but to see one for a minute is to be entranced with the beauties of a fleeting panorama that cannot adequately be described in the bondage of words. Similarly one could read for days about the Battle of Waterloo, but to see the battlefield or a large scale model such as there is at the United Services Museum is to learn more in twenty minutes than a book can give you in a day. It is the same with natural history. Imagine anyone trying to learn what the sheen of minerals is like from a written account; or take engineering—just try telling a young friend what a carburettor does and see if she or he understands. Each and every subject in turn, excepting only perhaps mathematics and languages, can best be taught by sight and touch.

Now it is an unfortunate fact that this glorious educational ideal has not been quite so strongly visualised by all museums and art galleries as one would have hoped. Sir Henry Miers, in his Report to the Carnegie United Kingdom Trustees on British Public Museums in 1928, quotes a case of a curator, one of our few septuagenarian curators, who was conducting a class of twenty boys around his museum. 'As they were led past poorly labelled, overcrowded birds in dim wall cases he called out in succession "thrush"—"starling"—"ptarmigan"—"bird of paradise". The superintendent in the rear instructed the boys to "write it down, write it down, and keep away from the cases". After fifteen minutes of this treatment they were hurried off by him with the remark, "And now, boys, for the tertiary fossils".'

These boys were given scarcely a moment to see, still less the opportunity to handle. But supposing they could have seen and touched, supposing that this could have been preceded or followed by cinema demonstrations of ptarmigans nesting, flying, feeding—what a different impression on the boy!