

THE SOUTH KENSINGTON SOLAR PHYSICS OBSERVATORY

THE report of the Departmental Committee on the Solar Physics Observatory, now at South Kensington, has been issued as a Parliamentary paper and an abstract is given in the *London Times*. The committee was composed of Sir T. L. Heath, assistant secretary of the treasury (chairman); Mr. F. W. Dyson, F.R.S., astronomer-royal; Dr. R. T. Glazebrook, F.R.S., director of the National Physical Laboratory, and Professor Arthur Schuster, F.R.S., chairman of the executive committee of the International Union for Solar Research, with Mr. F. G. Ogilvie, C.B., as secretary.

The terms of reference were:

To consider the alternative schemes for locating the Solar Physics Observatory at Fosterdown and at Cambridge, respectively, and to report which of the two schemes is likely to secure the best results for an annual expenditure of approximately the same amount as is now incurred for the work done under the direction of the Solar Physics Committee.

The committee discuss the question in considerable detail, and three of them—Sir T. L. Heath, Mr. Dyson and Professor Schuster—agree on the following “conclusion and recommendations”:

We are of opinion that, on a balance of considerations, and especially having regard to the advantage to the progress of solar physics which may be expected to accrue from the establishment and support by the university of a real school combining the studies of solar physics and astrophysics, the Cambridge scheme is calculated to give the better results for an expenditure of approximately the amount now available for the Solar Physics Observatory.

We recommend, therefore, that the solar physics work be transferred to Cambridge, with an initial grant for buildings and a fixed annual inclusive grant-in-aid to the university, provided that the university will agree to the following conditions:

1. That the professor of astrophysics be the director of the Solar Observatory.

2. That there be a committee or syndicate nominated by the university with functions similar to those of the board of visitors of the Royal Observatory at Greenwich.

3. That the astronomer-royal and the director of the Meteorological Office be *ex officio* members of the committee or syndicate.

4. That the university undertake to carry out at the new observatory the necessary amount of routine work on the general lines indicated in paragraph 14 (b) and (c).

5. That an annual report, to include a statement of the work done, and an abstract of the accounts of the Solar Observatory showing the application of the grant-in-aid, be presented by the director to the committee or syndicate, to be by them transmitted to the Treasury.

With a view to securing the permanence of any arrangement that may now be made, the committee desire to point out the importance of attaching the directorship of the Solar Observatory, if established at Cambridge, to a professorship which is not merely of a temporary character. The university may not be in a position at present to give any definite assurance that the professorship will be renewed at the expiration of the present tenure; but we consider it highly desirable that the government should ascertain, before coming to a final decision, whether the university is willing at an early opportunity to consider favorably the establishment of a professorship of astrophysics on a permanent foundation.

Dr. Glazebrook, however, dissents with great regret from his colleagues' conclusion and recommendations. He says:

I believe that the evidence placed before the committee and the facts detailed in the report lead to the conclusion that, on a balance of all the considerations, a scheme for locating the observatory at Fosterdown . . . could be arranged at an annual cost of £3,000, with a capital outlay of £5,000, and would secure the best results.

It appears from an appendix that Sir Norman Lockyer, F.R.S., director of the Solar Physics Observatory, is not in favor of the transference to Cambridge, and recommends the Fosterdown site.

SCIENTIFIC NOTES AND NEWS

THE Jean Reynaud prize of ten thousand francs, awarded by the Paris Academy of Sciences every five years, has been bestowed this year on Professor Emile Picard, for his contributions to mathematics.