

change from existing conditions, apparently a highly desirable result. EDGAR T. WHERRY

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#### THE WELLESLEY FIRE

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: The article of Professor Caroline B. Thompson entitled "The Wellesley Fire" stated that "the more important losses to physics are lantern slides, a collection of crystals, a unique collection of Nicol prisms. . . ." The lantern slides, although a useful adjunct to the apparatus, represented an inconsiderable part of the total loss. It is true that it will be difficult to duplicate the larger crystal sections and that the Nicol prisms, although by no means forming a "unique collection," were unusually good for a college of liberal arts as indeed was the entire equipment.

In a loss amounting in the aggregate to many thousands of dollars it is idle to enumerate particular items, but it may be noted that the department was especially fortunate in its equipment for the study of advanced optics and electricity. The apparatus included a commercial photometer, a large optical bench for the study of interference and diffraction effects, a Michelson interferometer, Lummer plate spectroscope, polariscopes, polarizing microscopes, Frick polarimeter, apparatus for the Zeeman effect, etc. Recently considerable time had been devoted to developing an experimental lecture course in "Electric Oscillations." To bring the equipment again to the same degree of efficiency will be the work of years.

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#### SCIENTIFIC BOOKS

*Across Unknown South America.* By HENRY SAVAGE-LANDOR. Two volumes. Boston, Little, Brown & Company. 1913. Pp. xxiii + 377 and xvi + 439, illustrated.

A map given at the end of the first volume shows that the author traveled extensively in various parts of South America, but it is not clear which part of that continent he regards as unknown. From Rio he went to S. Paulo, and thence to Araguay in western Minas by

railway. From there to the city of Goyaz he traveled a much used road. From Goyaz he went westward on the road leading to Cuyabá. That road is not only much traveled and well known, but is shown on most maps of Brazil, such as Stieler's hand atlas and Baron Homem de Mello's atlases of Brazil, 1882 and 1909. There is even a telegraph line connecting the city of Goyaz with the city of Cuyabá. Francis de Castelnau made the trip in 1844, and his account of it is given in detail in the second volume of his "Expedition dans les parties centrales de l'Amérique du Sud," pages 218-282.

At Capim Branco, near Cuyabá, the author abandoned the main road and struck out across country by compass. The various disagreeable experiences off the main road were such as one would naturally expect, whether traveling in the interior of Brazil or in the interior of Pennsylvania. Little wonder that his men objected. This wandering about through the woods seems to have been regarded as exploration of an unknown region, though it is to be noted that he found farmers living there, and that the names of the streams were known to his companions.

After a few days in this "unknown" region he came out in the road leading from Rosario to Diamantino, and near the latter place took a canoe, without the necessary outfit, and descended the Arinos and Tapajos.

Here again he seems to regard the region as unknown. But the Arinos and Tapajos, in spite of their many and difficult falls and rapids, have been navigated constantly for more than a hundred and fifty years. Father Ayres de Casal in his "Corografia Brazilica," published at Rio in 1817, says (Vol. I., p. 261) that in 1747 Captain João de Souza descended to Pará by way of Rios Arinos, Tapajos and Maranhão, and returned by way of the Madeira with canoes laden with European goods.

Dr. Mello Moraes in his "Corografia historica do Imperio do Brasil," Rio, 1859, 486, speaks of the voyage of João de Souza in 1747, but adds that Leonardo de Oliveira descended that river in August, 1742.