value was chosen by Gray and Ramsay on purely genetic grounds, in accord with the then accepted value for radium of *226.4*. (The actual average of the experimental results of Gray and Ramsay was *223.0*.) The genetic principle once having been thus recognized in the atomic weight table, it would now appear requisite that the atomic weight of niton should be changed automatically to accord with that of radium. Of course from the standpoint of radioactivity the adoption of this change is automatic, but from the aforementioned considerations regarding the choice of Gray and Ramsay, there appears also no sufficient reason to retain the old value in the Atomic Weights Table.

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THE BRUCE MEDAL

THE notice of the award of the Bruce medal of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, as recorded on page 285 of the February 25 issue, contains the first public statement that has come under my notice of the very ingenious method of award of this medal, "probably the most unique in the history of science."

The plan is due to the late Dr. Edward S. Holden, then director of the Lick Observatory, who secured the gift of the fund for this international medal. The plan he devised was designed to preserve the value of the medal as an international honor of high character, in spite of the fact that many of the directors of the society who would determine the awards would not be professional astronomers and often would not be capable of forming independent judgments as to the value to science of the distinguished services. In short, it was his purpose to make practically impossible an award to those who appear to be unable to keep their names out of prominent locations in the daily press. A glance at the list of recipients of the medal as published in your said notice shows how very successfully have worked out the plans thus contrived by him.

While the deliberations of the directors in making these awards are kept strictly confidential, a sidelight or two may be interesting. The rules provide that the six observatories named shall be invited to nominate not more than three men distinguished in astronomy. Ordinarily, this insures eighteen names, only one of which can receive the award; but in reaching the decision the directors often have been guided by the number of times the proposed recipient has been nominated. Occasionally, an elderly nominee, nearing the end of his activities, has been preferred over a younger man with the prospect of useful years ahead of him. It is worthy of note that the lists of every one of the six nominating observatories, for the first award of the medal, contained the name of Simon Newcomb.

One very well-known foreign observatory, however, added weight to its nominations in entirely different fashion. The first year it nominated Newcomb, Auwers and Gill, in the order named. Newcomb was the first medalist. The second year it nominated only Auwers and Gill. Auwers was the second recipient. The third year it nominated Gill alone, and Gill was the third. The fourth year it nominated three.

Only thirteen awards have been made in eighteen years because of the comparatively large sum spent out of the fund in the design and cutting of the dies. Designs were requested from experts both in this country and abroad, and the competition was arranged so that the name of the designer was unknown to the committee. When the designs were opened, although all were of high degree of excellence, one stood out in such contrast that only one choice was possible, and, with certain minor modifications, it was adopted. Alphée Dubois, of Paris, was the successful artist, and during his lifetime he personally engraved on the medals the names of the recipients, the dies being kept in the French Mint for this purpose.

This medal fund is only one of a number of such gifts of the late Miss Bruce, she having contributed frequently to the advancement of science.

ALLEN H. BABCOCK