

BEREA COLLEGE announces a gift of \$10,000 from the late James Talcott, of New York City, received shortly before his death. This gift was part of a total pledge for \$40,000 for the erection of a girls' dormitory, which will be ready for occupancy on January 1.

THE New York School of Dental Hygiene has become allied with the new Columbia University School of Dentistry and the College of Physicians and Surgeons. The school will open on September 27, classes being held in the Vanderbilt Clinic.

IRVING H. BLAKE, A.M. (Brown, '12), instructor in the Oregon Agricultural College, has been appointed instructor in the department of zoology, Syracuse University.

MR. CHARLES COLBY, recently of the Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tenn., has become instructor in geography at the University of Chicago.

AT the University of Chicago, Anton Julius Carlson, of the department of physiology, and Charles Manning Child, of the department of zoology, have been promoted to professorships. Lee Irving Knight, of the department of botany, has been promoted to an assistant professorship. New appointments are: Ernest Watson Burgess, of Ohio State University, to be assistant professor in the department of sociology and anthropology; Professor Jean Piccard, of the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, to be assistant professor in the department of chemistry, and Dr. W. B. Sharpe and William E. Cary, to be instructors in the department of hygiene and bacteriology.

DISCUSSION AND CORRESPONDENCE

PRESIDENT WILSON'S SCIENTIFIC APPOINTMENTS

THE two articles in SCIENCE of August 25, 1916, on "Scientific Appointments under the Government" and "President Wilson's Scientific Appointments" are interesting and suggestive, but not entirely convincing. They do not fully cover the question; the writers were apparently not familiar with a number of facts which have a very important bearing upon the

point at issue. In fairness to all concerned it is necessary to call attention to a few scientific appointments made by the Wilson administration about which the writers failed to enlighten the readers of SCIENCE and *The Scientific Monthly*.

In the first place, it has been generally understood (and even claimed by some of the parties interested) that the original administration slate contemplated the appointment of E. Lester Jones to the position of commissioner of fisheries. That this slate was broken is much to the credit of the American Society of Naturalists and the American Society of Zoologists. But what followed? The president immediately appointed Mr. Jones deputy commissioner of fisheries. That position, in many respects, even more important to science than that of the commissionership itself, and which should have been filled only upon the recommendation of the commissioner, was at once filled by the appointment of Mr. Jones. The commissioner of fisheries was not even consulted. He was completely ignored by the president and the secretary of commerce not only in this case but in other important appointments in the bureau of fisheries, a few of which may be mentioned. One of the first was the appointment, without even consulting the commissioner of fisheries, of a young man as private secretary to the commissioner. It would seem that the chief of an important bureau should be permitted to select his own private secretary, the position being so distinctively personal and confidential. The young man appointed was, it is understood, from the home town of John H. Rothermel, at that time a congressman from Pennsylvania and chairman of a committee of the House that had been for some years conducting certain fur-seal hearings. The young man was neither a stenographer nor a typewriter (it was said he was a plumber). It was said at the time (and there is every reason to believe it was true) that he was appointed as a spy to keep Rothermel and Henry W. Elliott informed as to the commissioner's relations to fur-seal matters, in which Rothermel at that time was very active—so active, indeed, that at the next

election, he was unable to explain certain charged irregularities and his constituents declined to return him to congress.

Another flagrant violation of the principles of the civil service and a total disregard of fitness was the appointment of one H. O. Smith, of Palestine, Illinois, as chief Alaska salmon agent. This appointment was made without consulting the commissioner of fisheries or the chief of the Alaska fisheries service, and after the secretary of commerce had assured the commissioner of fisheries that he would promote to the position the assistant Alaska salmon agent, Mr. Ward T. Bower, a thoroughly competent and experienced man. H. O. Smith openly claimed that his appointment was made at the instance of Senator James Hamilton Lewis, of Illinois.

The duties of the Alaska salmon agent, like those of a deputy commissioner of fisheries, are highly technical, and require special knowledge and experience of the fisheries. Neither Mr. Jones nor Mr. Smith possessed even elementary knowledge of fishes or fisheries; it was apparent that neither could tell a salmon from a sucker. Each of them made at least one tour of inspection of the Alaska fisheries, bringing discredit upon the bureau wherever they went, so lacking were they in knowledge or appreciation of the problems of the fisheries. The voluminous and profusely illustrated report by the deputy commissioner will probably never be excelled in the number of inaccuracies, absurd statements, fairy stories and erroneous conclusions it contains.

One other case may be mentioned, one with which the National Academy of Sciences is concerned. In the spring of 1914 the administration decided to send a special commission of zoologists to the seal islands of Alaska. The secretary of commerce, when a member of congress, had voted for a bill which prohibits all commercial killing of fur seals for five years in spite of the fact that every zoologist in America, England, Russia and Japan who had studied our fur-seal herd advised against such a course.

Having taken a position favoring the suspension of commercial killing the secretary

might very properly decline to reverse his opinion until he had secured further information. The administration thought this information could be secured by sending a special commission to the islands. To assist in selecting the members of the commission the president asked the National Academy of Sciences, the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and the secretary of agriculture each to nominate one member of the commission. This was done. The National Academy of Sciences nominated a very able and distinguished zoologist, Dr. George H. Parker, of Harvard University. The commission went to the seal islands in the summer of 1914, made a study of the seal herd and, upon their return to Washington, submitted a very comprehensive report, in which, evidently to the surprise of the secretary of commerce, every important thing for which Clark, Jordan, Evermann, Stejneger, Lucas, Osborn, Townsend, Merriam, Lembkey and others familiar with fur-seal matters had contended, was sustained.

The report contained a number of recommendations, the most important of which was the immediate repeal of the law which prohibits commercial killing of seals, and for which Mr. Redfield had voted and which he had said, as late as October 13, 1913, was "a sound and wise one."

Dr. Parker and his associates submitted their report to the commissioner of fisheries on January 23, 1915, by whom it was promptly transmitted to Secretary Redfield on January 25. Although the report contained recommendations of vital importance to the fur-seal herd, which if acted upon promptly would save hundreds of thousands of dollars to the government as well as save the seal herd from irreparable injury, Mr. Redfield pigeonholed the report for more than three weeks and did not transmit it to congress until February 17, only a few days before congress adjourned. And, very strangely, and to the great disappointment of the commission, Mr. Redfield studiously refrained from calling attention to any of the recommendations of the commission; nor did he make any recommendation himself that congress should take any action

on the recommendations of the commission. In fact, it is understood that it was Mr. Redfield's desire that congress should not take any action. He wholly ignored, and wished congress to ignore, the recommendations of the commission named by the National Academy of Sciences, the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and the secretary of agriculture. It would be proper for the National Academy of Sciences, the official adviser of the government on scientific matters, to ask the president what action, if any, has been taken on the recommendations of the board which it assisted in naming; and if called upon again for expert advice, the academy would do well to inquire whether any attention would be paid to its advice when given.

The statement in *The Scientific Monthly* article that E. Lester Jones "has proved to be an efficient executive" was probably made without intimate knowledge of the facts. It is well known in the bureau of fisheries that just the reverse was true, as was clearly shown by the very extravagant and unbusiness-like administration of Alaska fishery matters of which Mr. Jones took entire charge. Two or three illustrations may be given. It is understood that the sending of supplies to the seal islands under Mr. Jones's management cost the government several thousand dollars more than it had cost before, and yet the natives suffered severely for want of food.

A certain important scientific investigation of the Alaska salmon, begun in 1910 and which required at least six years to reach conclusive results, was stopped in 1914, thus breaking the continuity of the investigation, with the result that the whole thing must be done over again if the results are to be of any value.

If these illustrations of inefficiency are not enough, inquiry might be made regarding the boat *Roosevelt* purchased by Mr. Jones for the Alaska service.

But if the appointment of a politician to the head of a scientific bureau is justified because the appointee proves to be a good executive, then President McKinley's appointment of Mr. Bowers as Commissioner of Fisheries is fully justified, as Mr. Bowers proved to be an excellent executive, who gave the bureau of

fisheries a thoroughly business-like administration, during which more real productive scientific work was done than ever before by the bureau.

BARTON WARREN EVERMANN

FIREFLIES FLASHING IN UNISON

IN *SCIENCE* of February 4, 1916, page 169, I recorded for the first time an observation made fifty years ago of a large number of fireflies flashing in perfect unison. I have been on the lookout ever since that time for a confirmation of my observations, consulting every book on entomology and watching the fireflies ever since for the recurrence of this phenomenon without success. In *Nature* for December 9, 1915, is recorded a paper by W. G. Blair, Esq., entitled "Luminous Insects" in which reference is made to the remarkable synchronism of the flashes in certain species of European fireflies. A somewhat extended extract is given from Mr. Blair's address. A copy of this paper was sent to my friend Professor E. B. Poulton, of Oxford, and in return he has sent me a proof sheet from a book he is editing entitled "A Naturalist in Borneo" by R. Shelford, who died a few years ago, a former assistant of Professor Poulton. I am taking the liberty of presenting an extract from this advanced page:

On the opposite bank was a small tree growing close to the water's edge, which was covered with thousands of fire-flies, small beetles of the family Lampyridæ; and I observed that the light emitted by these little creatures pulsated in a regular synchronous rhythm, so that at one moment the tree would be one blaze of light, whilst at another the light would be dim and uncertain. This concerted action of thousands of insects is very remarkable and not easy of explanation. Another instance of it was mentioned by Cox; certain ants that are found very frequently proceeding in columns along the floor of the jungle, when alarmed, knock their heads against the leaves or dead sticks which they happen to be traversing; every member of a community makes the necessary movement at the same time, and as the movements are rapid a distinct loud rattling sound is heard. In this case the action is probably a danger-signal, and we can understand—theoretically at any rate—how it was brought