

At the University of Edinburgh, Dr. F. A. E. Crew has been appointed professor of animal genetics and director of the university department of research in animal breeding. The chair, which is to be known as the Buchanan chair of animal genetics, was founded by a donation from Lord Woolavington, supplemented by a grant from the International Education Board.

DISCUSSION AND CORRESPONDENCE

RESEARCH PLUS NEWS-GATHERING

ALTHOUGH not primarily a research institution, Science Service is now contributing in a small measure to the advancement of science.

In some instances it is possible to combine a certain degree of research with the news-gathering activities of the Service. The most successful instance to date is the earthquake reporting service that Science Service organized and conducts with the cooperation of the leading seismological observatories, the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey and the Jesuit Seismological Association. This system serves the needs of seismologists as well as newspapers. During the year ending March 31, 1928, twenty-seven earthquakes were located and reported through this service. As many as eighteen seismological observatories, some as far away as Alaska and the Philippines, have cooperated. Whereas before the inauguration of this service scientists and the public were often in ignorance for weeks as to the location of many earthquake epicenters, now practically every shock of any importance is located within six to twenty-four hours. We often locate disastrous earthquakes, and predict loss of life that occurred, days and weeks before the news reaches the world through the routine news channels. When the Bulgarian city of Philippopolis was destroyed on April 18, Science Service reported the earthquake early the next day, stating the probability of disaster, while the cables did not carry the news until April 21. On April 10 our instrumental data located a severe earthquake in eastern Peru; a week later on April 17 the news came from the region itself. On May 23, 1927, a severe earthquake in Kansu Province, China, was recorded, and Science Service announced its exact location and predicted heavy loss of life. Not until the latter part of July, two months later, did the confirmation of this great disaster filter out from the interior of the yellow continent.

This combination of research and news activity is now being extended to the fields of anthropology and archeology.

It is very important to be able to send to the spot of the alleged archeological find a competent investigator. Prompt action is necessary from the point of view of anthropology because of the liability that evi-

dence as to the character of the discovery of its geological position or the indications of the age of the deposits may be forever destroyed by careless excavators or faked relics; and from the point of view of Science Service because it is our job to see that exaggerated and misleading reports do not get the start of authentic news. To meet such emergencies we proposed to cooperate with the department of psychology and anthropology of the National Research Council by offering to provide funds sufficient for the preliminary inspection of the find if we were supplied with a list of authorized "scientific minute men" located at strategic points all over the country to whom we should be at liberty to wire for advice in cases of disputed questions. If plans for action are made in advance they might, without delaying to consult us, take train or automobile at once to the place where a prehistoric inscription or the bones of an antediluvian giant has been reported.

The division of anthropology and psychology of the National Research Council has authorized cooperation with Science Service in this undertaking and will arrange with us in preparing such a list of anthropologists and other specialists who will wire us at our expense directly from the field. This obviously requires cooperation with geologists, paleontologists, archeologists and ethnologists. By taking measures for the prompt preliminary investigations we may forestall such squabbles as those of the French savants over the alleged Glozel finds.

The volcanoes of the world will be watched as carefully and thoroughly as the earthquakes, if our plans for cooperation between Science Service and the section of volcanology of the American Geophysical Union materialize.

A committee of the section of volcanology was authorized at the recent meeting of the American Geophysical Union to work out methods of cooperation.

The volcano observatories in this country and abroad, scientists who have paid particular attention to volcanoes and who live in their vicinity and others will be invited to participate in a volcano reporting organization by means of which accurate and prompt information on volcanic activities will be obtained by wire and cable, supplemented by mail reports. It is also planned to bring together historical data upon known active volcanoes which will be of service to both newspapers and scientists. Volcanologists have expressed themselves as feeling that this service will aid their science as effectively as the earthquake reporting service of Science Service has aided the science of seismology.

Science Service desires to extend in the future such combined news-gathering and research activities, and we should like to receive from scientists and scientific

bodies suggestions for other such cooperative investigations.

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AGRONOMIC JABBERWOCKY

WHO among us has not thrilled to Lewis Carroll's sonorous and gruesome lines:

Twas brillig and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe
All mimsy were the borogoves
And the mome raths outgave.

Now after these many years the jabberwock has been aroused again and with eyes of flame is whiffing through the tulgey wood and burbling as he comes:

The rugaplanes in thickth midlux
Midodored in the coolth
But straighth and plumpth the illth umblux
Midceptisist in fulth.

The new ululations of this fearsome beast are not neglected *Dodgsoniana* resurrected by the antiquarians. They are the grotesque inventions of three moderns who, if not so mellifluous as Dr. Dodgson, are almost as whimsical.¹

Incomprehensible though it may be, these present fantasies of sounds are not intended as poetic amusement for adolescents. They are offered in all seriousness as aids to American agronomists who, it appears, are struggling perspiringly to be articulate in the refractory English language. That these etymological freaks are welcome is evidenced by the approval with which they were accepted at the Chicago meeting of the agronomists. Presumably hereafter these scientists are to seek lucidity in a ludicrous lexicon of such words as midceptimmune, thickth, plumpth, straighth, midgoodth and rugaplane.

There may be those who will espy the Machiavellian hand of "Big Bill" in this attempt to besmirch the King's English, but that the act took place in Chicago is believed to be the purely fortuitous result of more deep-seated genetic causes.

Proceeding apparently on the theory that the case of the agronomists required heroic treatment the committee on terminology made a herculean effort. The energetic chairman distinguished himself in linguistic prestidigitation, pulling monster after monster out of his hat to be added to a language already reputed to contain 50,000 (or is it 500,000?) words. Whichever

the correct number, there surely are enough to meet all the rhetorical requirements of the agronomists, once they have been thoroughly mastered.

It is true that agronomic literature like that of most sciences is open to criticism, but the defect is to be found in the lack of a facile command of the language rather than in a shortage of suitable words. Since "the ultimate aim of research is publication,"² inability to express one's thoughts fluently is a fault worthy of most serious study. Any sensible effort to discover a corrective should be welcomed, but an effective cathartic for costive minds hardly is to be obtained by compounding new words, however bizarre. The hapless agronomists have fallen upon evil times and are not likely to find an alleviating diagrydium in the upas shadow of Dr. Ball's Carrollian pastiche.

One can not but be astonished at the egotistic effrontery of a group of men who, after a few weeks' consideration, attempt to improve a language which has met the test of world-wide use for so many centuries. English speech lacks median terms? Forsooth they shall be supplied and presto with a flourish of the pen these diaskeuasts create a veritable Walpurgis of words.

Their words tell us precisely nothing. Objects may be large, small or middle-sized, like the three bears in the nursery tale, but these terms are recognized as being purely relative. They have no meaning in the discrete units of quantity nor should they have. As with general size so with other qualities; things may be tall or short, stout or slender, broad or narrow, deep or shallow, dark or light, straight or crooked, just as committeemen may be wise or foolish, profound or superficial, inferior or superior, grave or comical, sharp or dull, sensible or silly, brilliant or stupid. In fact, there is an almost interminable number of words designating opposite extremes of variable scales. For the positions between the extremes there is an appropriate series of qualifying words such as intermediate, middle, normal, medium, moderate, partial, semi, ordinary, etc. These terms are useful in describing general conditions but are always relative to each other and require definition anew with each discussion where some specific limit is intended.

Not satisfied with having words for the extremes and middle, Dr. Ball's committee is now urging a whole series of new words to mark the quarter positions! These new words, formed by combining adjectives and nouns, are required, presumably, for ac-

¹ Ball, C. R., Shantz, H. L., and Shaw, C. F. "Median Terms in Adjectives of Comparison." *Jour. Amer. Soc. Agronomy*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 182-191. February, 1928.

² Allen, E. W. "The Publication of Research." Lecture before the class in "The Nature and Method of Research." Graduate School, Department of Agriculture. Published in mimeograph form for the information of the staff of the Department of Agriculture, February 11, 1925.