

knew of no proposal to clear away the ornamental water or to interfere with the general appearance of the gardens. Yesterday Mr. Lansbury said that the beauty of the gardens would not be destroyed when

the lease expired. The gardens would be added to Regent's Park and the public would be able to enjoy them. He added that no doubt provision would be made for carrying on horticultural research work.

## DISCUSSION

### ARE PLANETS RARE?

IN the August 15 number of *SCIENCE* Professor Jermain G. Porter challenges a statement of mine that "a planet is a very rare occurrence."

Permit me to quote as authority for this statement Sir James Jeans, who in his "Astronomy and Cosmogony" (1928) follows Chamberlain and Moulton in ascribing the birth of the solar system to the near approach of another star, which is necessarily a rare event. After developing the theory in detail, he concludes (p. 401):

... only about one star in 100,000 is at present surrounded by planets. Planetary systems must then be of the nature of "freak-formations"; they do not appear in the normal evolutionary course of a normal star.

Also Professor A. S. Eddington, in his "The Nature of the Physical World" (1929), p. 177, says:

The data are too vague to give any definite estimate of the odds against this occurrence, but I should judge that perhaps not one in a hundred millions of stars can have undergone this experience in the right stage and conditions to result in the formation of a system of planets.

To a humble physicist it would seem that Mr. Porter is hardly fair to his fellow astronomers when he says:

That double stars have planetary systems may be doubtful, but there is absolutely no reason for the assumption that the formation of families of attendant worlds may not be the ordinary course of evolution for the single stars.

Rather than referring to a second-hand account of a press interview with me, in which obviously no arguments or authorities could be presented, would it not have been wiser for Professor Porter to present his case for frequent planets in the astronomical literature for the consideration of Messrs. Jeans and Eddington and others of like mind?

ARTHUR H. COMPTON

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

### CURIOSITIES OF SCIENTIFIC NAMES

UNDER the above title, Dr. Gifford in a recent number of *SCIENCE* adds certain instances of "errors in nomenclature," particularly in the coining of new names, and implies that care should be used in seeing that these are bestowed with due regard to classical usage. That this is an excellent principle no one will deny, yet a book full of "odd stories about scientific

names" will some day make good reading. The birth of a new scientific name is, with Dr. Gifford, a "serious business," but with those who have much to do with this matter of names the solemnity of the occasion eventually loses somewhat of its glamour. It is, of course, well known that many names are merely anagrams that have no classical counterparts, for names, after all, are nothing more than handles by means of which particular objects are designated. So *Daption* for the Pintado petrel is merely an anagram of that word; *Teonoma* is another formed from *Neotoma*, to designate a genus of similar rats; *Delichon* from *Chelidon* is another instance. But the element of subtle humor comes in where a deliberate play upon words, often inobvious to the uninitiated, is made. It was perhaps a doubtful compliment when one zoologist named a new skunk in honor of a colleague, but when another named a bat *carissima* few might see that it was in honor of its discoverer, Mr. Darling. The term *Kogia*, for a genus of strange looking cetaceans, is said to have been coined by J. E. Gray because it was an odd "codger." In like manner the name *clavium* by Barbour and Allen for the Florida Key deer, to which Dr. Gifford refers, was a deliberate pun, for which the authors are entirely unrepentant, while the name *keyensis* that he suggests would be not only an amateurishly and awkwardly coined word, but would obviously refer equally to Key Island near Papua. There are many other names that hide a bit of humor and all of which, no doubt, are a manifestation of that same twist of human nature that prompted the builders of cathedrals in the middle ages to add to the sacred structure in out-of-the-way places the faces or figures of demons or evil spirits as a relief from the seriousness of their undertakings. The Lincoln Imp is a famous instance.

So they whistled the Devil to make them sport,  
Who knew that sin is vain.

G. M. ALLEN  
T. BARBOUR

### PRIORITY IN FAMILY, ORDER AND HIGHER GROUP NAMES

THE International Rules of Zoological Nomenclature provide that a family name shall be formed by adding *idae* to the stem of the type genus, and that if the name of the type genus is changed, the family name shall also be changed. It does not specify how