SCIENTIFIC EVENTS

CENTENARY OF THE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF GREAT BRITAIN[1]

THE Geological Survey of Great Britain is the oldest national geological survey in the world, having now been in active existence for a hundred years. It owes its inception to the private enterprise of the late Sir Henry Thomas De la Beche, who became its first director. Geological material was quickly accumulated and De la Beche was compelled to ask for museum accommodation. This was provided in a house in Craig's Court, Charing Cross, where it was opened to the public in 1841, as the Museum of Economic Geology. In 1851, the museum was transferred to Jermyn Street, where it has continued until recently. For many years past, however, the space available has been inadequate, and it has been impossible to display to full advantage the very extensive collections of rocks, fossils and minerals in the possession of the survey and museum. In 1912, the Bell Committee recommended the transfer of the museum and survey to a site in South Kensington next to the Natural History Museum, but no action was taken until the Museums Commission met in 1927. The government then agreed to the transfer, and the new building was completed by H.M. Office of Works in 1933. Occupation by the Geological Survey was, however, delayed by its utilization as the meeting place of the World Economic Conference, 1933.

It is now announced that the new Museum of Practical Geology will be formally opened next July. Advantage has been taken of this to arrange a joint celebration of the centenary of the Geological Survey and the opening of the new museum. In the new museum at South Kensington ample accommodation has been provided to display the exhibits in a building specially designed to meet modern museum requirements. New material has been acquired from many sources and the extent and scope of the exhibits has been enlarged. For the past three or four years, geologists of the survey and museum have been mainly engaged in rearranging and bringing up to date the collections, their normal field work being subordinated to the needs of the museum. At the back of the museum new offices have been provided for the Geological Survey, together with modern laboratories for the prosecution of petrological and mineralogical research. Enlarged accommodation has been provided for the library and collection of maps which, as in the past, will be available for consultation by the public. The museum is to be opened by the Duke of York on July 3. On July 4 there will be a morning reception of delegates to the centenary, followed by an address by the director of the survey on the history and functions of the Geological Survey of Great Britain. On the evening of July 4 there will be an evening reception by H.M. Government. Excursions to several of the classic areas of British geology follow immediately after the meetings. It is expected that a large and representative gathering of geologists from all parts of the world will be present for the celebration.

[1] From *Nature*.

INVESTIGATION OF WEATHER CONDITIONS IN THE STRATOSPHERE

PLANS for continuing the study of weather conditions in the stratosphere by means of sounding balloons equipped with sensitive recording instruments have been announced by the Division of Meteorology of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The study will begin soon at Lambert Field Airport in St. Louis, Mo., where the institute already has carried out two successful investigations of this type.

Chris Harmantas, who will be in charge of field operations, has left for St. Louis. He took with him 36 sounding balloons. While the time of their release will depend on weather conditions, it is hoped that they may be sent up within a short time.

Each balloon will carry a specially designed instrument, weighing only a few ounces, for automatically recording temperature, humidity and atmospheric pressure. The balloons will be only partially inflated in order that they may expand upon reaching the rarefied air of the stratosphere. Upon reaching their limit of expansion they will burst, allowing the instruments, which are encased in shock-absorbent frames, to fall to the earth. Each will carry an identification label offering a reward for its safe return to Professor C.-G. A. Rossby, director of the division.

Following the balloon flight last November, 29 of the 35 bags released were found and returned by residents within a radius of 100 miles around St. Louis. In view of the more favorable season, institute meteorologists hope to recover an even greater number in the forthcoming tests.

While the data obtained in the previous investigations are still being studied, several interesting observations have been made concerning the nature of the stratosphere, that layer of the atmosphere where temperature no longer decreases with height. At the base of the stratosphere over St. Louis last November, extraordinary fluctuations of temperature, ranging from 36 degrees below zero Fahrenheit to 78 degrees below, were recorded. The base of the stratosphere itself was found to vary greatly in height, shifting suddenly from 25,000 to 40,000 feet above the earth.