

SCIENTIFIC EVENTS

THE ROYAL OBSERVATORY AT GREENWICH

THE astronomical correspondent of the London *Times* writes that on June 1, according to custom, the appointed Board of Visitors of the Royal Observatory met at Greenwich under the chairmanship of Sir Gwladford Hopkins, president of the Royal Society, to make the annual inspection and receive the astronomer royal's report for the past year. With two exceptions all the 16 members of the board were present:

J. H. Reynolds (president of the Royal Astronomical Society), Sir William Bragg, Professor Alfred Fowler, Sir James Jeans, Sir Joseph Petavel, Professor Sydney Chapman, Dr. H. Knox-Shaw, Sir Gerald Lennox-Conyngham, Professor Newall, Professor Stratton, Professor H. H. Plaskett, Sir Arthur Eddington and the hydrographer of H.M. Navy, Rear Admiral Edgell.

Dr. Spencer Jones, the astronomer royal, reports that with the old non-reversible transit circle about 9,500 observations were made during the 12 months ended April 30. Included in these were 130 observations of the meridian position of the sun and 94 of the moon. The observations of the moon in 1934 continue to show a decrease in the difference in its position from that given by Brown's tables that were introduced in 1923. The correction to the longitude given by the tables, which was then seven seconds of arc, is now four seconds; and the progressive rate of the change may lead to knowledge of some further item in lunar theory.

Determination of stellar parallax, observation of double stars, and measurement of the variation of latitude, which are now staple work of the observatory, have been continued. The Yapp reflector with its spectrograph is used to take photographs to determine the temperature of stars by photometric measures of their spectrum, and has also been found specially useful during the past six months in the matter of Nova Herculis, the first photograph of which, it may be remembered, was taken with this instrument immediately after its discovery on the morning of December 13. An extensive work in hand is the measurement of the photographs of the small planet Eros, taken at various observatories in 1930-31 when near its opposition, from which it is expected a very precise value of the distance of the sun will be deduced.

As to the record of the sunspots that is kept at Greenwich, it is stated that sunspot activity has definitely increased, though somewhat irregularly from the solar minimum which happened during the latter half of 1933, but the sun's rising activity is more consistently shown by phenomena observed with the spec-

trohelioscope, an instrument or apparatus that has been comparatively recently added to the equipment.

Dr. Spencer Jones called attention to the long-mooted question whether Greenwich is now a suitable place for an observatory, and, in closing his report, sets down categorically some reasons to the contrary. The pollution of the air due to the surrounding industrial works and factories by the precipitation of sulphur-dioxide, soot and hard grit, is very detrimental to mirrors and other delicate parts of astronomical instruments; the condensation of moisture from hot gases ejected from near-by chimneys is a source of trouble and especially the use of mercury vapor lamps for street lighting lately introduced in the neighborhood is objectionable because the ultra-violet light they discharge affects photographic plates exposed at low altitudes.

INTRODUCTION INTO THE UNITED STATES OF DISEASE-RESISTANT PLANTS

MORE than 1,800 lots of seed from drought-resistant plants brought back from Turkestan by explorers of the U. S. Department of Agriculture are now growing in the plant reserve stations established last year by the department. Additional lots of seed have recently arrived from Manchuria and Mongolia, and still other valuable shipments are expected after the expedition now working on the edge of the Gobi Desert has had an opportunity to harvest the seeds which will ripen this fall.

An expedition headed by Professor Nicholas Roerich was sent to the areas bordering the Gobi Desert because of the great pasture areas which apparently withstand the heat of summer, the cold of winter and the scanty rainfall. Through centuries of natural selection strains of grasses and legumes which are able to cope with these conditions have developed and increased. Also, the origin of many plants has been traced to the old world centers in Asia and it is reasonable to expect that there are already in existence grasses, legumes, shrubs and trees that would be of value under similar conditions in the United States. No region in the world offers more promise of obtaining economic plants which are drought-resistant, soil-binding and otherwise peculiarly important at this time. The discovery of just one desirable plant species would repay the costs of the expeditions manyfold.

The semi-desert has the appearance of a large plain with an altitude of approximately 2,000 feet. The climate of the region is characterized by a "snowless, rigorously cold winter, a cold and rather rainless spring and autumn, and a hot dry summer, for

although there is more rain in the summer, the water quickly evaporates, owing to the heat which sometimes reaches over 100° F." In this region were recorded species of important plants such as wheat grass, brome grass, blue grass, rye grass, fescue, alfalfa, lespedeza, and other lesser known species of possible value. About twenty different grasses and four species of shrubs were reported, but no trees were recorded in this section.

In addition to the plains region, considerable areas of unstable and in some places movable sand dunes were encountered. The greater part of the sand dunes were more or less covered with turf. Various species of wheat grass including *Agropyron pseudoagropyrum*, blue-joint, June grass, foxtail, alfalfa, clovers and other lesser known grasses, shrubs and trees were reported in this region.

The bench lands in the river valleys are covered with perennial grasses, shrubs and trees which are "able to withstand, without any failure," the winds, the heat and the cold. Various species of *Spodiopogon*, *Arundinella*, *Digitaria*, *Stipa*, *Calamagrostis*, *Koleria*, *Melica*, *Festuca*, *Bromus*, *Salix*, *Quercus*, *Ulmus*, *Rosa*, *Armeniaca*, *Medicago*, *Astragalus*, *Vicia*, *Securinega* and *Thymus* were reported.

Seeds of the plant species already obtained from the Roerich expedition and now being grown in experimental greenhouses include *Stipa* or needlegrass, *Agropyron* or wheat grass, including the species *pseudoagropyrum*, lespedeza, trifolium and elymus or rye grass.

THE UNION CATALOGUE OF MEDICAL LITERATURE

Two years ago the Institute of Medicine of Chicago made available an initial fund for the establishment of a union catalogue of medical literature in Chicago. The work of organization of this project was entrusted to a Committee on Coordination of Medical Libraries in Chicago, which had been appointed a year before.

The first aim of the committee was to bring about closer integration of effort among the major medicobiological libraries, including dental and pharmacological, of the city (John Crerar Library, Universities of Chicago, Illinois, Northwestern and Loyola, Rush Medical College) to obviate unnecessary duplication, triplication or even quadruplication of special literature, and divert the economies achieved to a fuller representation of the world's medical literature in Chicago. The second aim was the creation of a union card index centrally placed, so that investigators in medical problems are able to locate the desired reference volumes with the least expenditure of time and energy.

It is hoped that eventually the service of the catalogue will be made even more effective by the attachment of a permanent librarian and the availability of information by telephone. The task of achieving such a union catalogue and its cost in effort and money are much greater than the original estimates indicated. The work towards its completion is still in progress, but is pushed as quickly as possible. Every month these different medical libraries are sending in the cards of their new acquisitions, so that the catalogue is brought to date. It is hoped that in time the important holdings in the smaller medical libraries in the city will be represented in the catalogue.

The final editing of this union index may not be accomplished before another two or three years have passed. Despite its present gaps and imperfections, it has already given valuable service to the medical librarians of the city, and to investigators who were aware of its existence. The union catalogue is now open to a wider medical public, which is invited to make use of it for reference and to cooperate in its further development and extension of service. It is to be found on the twelfth floor, or floor of the medical reading rooms, in the John Crerar Library.

Further information concerning it may be obtained from the medical librarians indicated above, or from the central office of the Institute of Medicine of Chicago, 629 South Wood Street. Criticisms or suggestions should be sent to the latter. The chairman of the committee is Professor Otto F. Kampmeier, department of anatomy, College of Medicine, University of Illinois, Chicago.

THE MYCOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA

THE summer foray of the Mycological Society of America will be held at Ithaca, N. Y., from August 20 to 23, inclusive. The mycological laboratories of Cornell University on the third floor of the Plant Science Building will serve as headquarters. The local committee in charge of arrangements will consist of Professor H. M. Fitzpatrick and Professor H. H. Whetzel. The Ithaca members of the society extend a cordial invitation to all mycologists to attend. Lodging and meals will be provided at reasonable rates at rooming houses bordering the campus and at the university dining halls. Camp sites are available nearby for any who desire to use tents.

Ithaca is located in the scenic Finger Lakes region of central New York at the head of Cayuga Lake, and is well known to botanists for the natural beauty of its surroundings and the richness of its flora. Within easy reach are fresh-water marshes and lakes, peat and marl bogs, numerous small gorges with many waterfalls, upland woods and open fields. High hills afford a variation in elevation of more than fifteen