weeds, and even the tropical species appear to be sparsely represented.

They should not be subjected to ragweed pollens in Oceania between the latitudes 20° N. and 20° S. This zone includes practically all the large islands of the Pacific area between Japan and Australia where fighting has been in progress since our entry into the war.

South of the equator, in southern temperate latitudes, the ragweeds appear to show a distribution in response to length of day and other factors similar to that of the north temperate zone. The flowering season, however, is now related to the south temperate summer and fall season, which occurs from December to March and April.

Even in European regions where ragweed might occur as a casual, it will be limited to very low altitudes, owing to its requirements for particular conditions of seasonal warmth. In eastern North America, and in these middle latitudes where the seasonal length of day favors its optimum success as a vigorous and abundant weed, the plant disappears near altitudes of 3,200 feet, as in the Cabin Mountains of West Virginia. It is small and a rather localized component of the flora at Davis, West Virginia, at an elevation of 3,100 feet. Temperature alone operates at these altitudes, since the summer mean temperatures are very low, the season of growth between spring and autumn frosts short, and unfavorably low temperatures are likely to occur at any time during the growing season.

While it is recognized that allergic persons are affected by the pollens of particular groups of related plants in a family, rather than by a single species, because their pollens appear to have certain irritant principles in common, the ragweeds must still be considered major offenders wherever they occur abundantly. This is recognized in the United States and in the temperate regions of South America, more especially in parts of Argentina where certain species are very abundant, and where two to three per cent. of the population is allergic from one cause or another.

From this survey of the occurrence of the ragweeds (Ambrosia), in temperate and tropical latitudes, as revealed by the principal floras of the world, it seems safe to conclude that American soldiers campaigning in most of Europe, in the tropical regions of Asia, Africa and the warm tropical islands of Oceania, lying between 20° N. and 20° S., will have little to fear from troublesome ragweed pollens, even though they may have been allergic to such in America.

OBITUARY

JAMES McGIFFERT
1868–1943

ON June 18 James McGiffert passed away at Los Angeles, a few hours after he arrived at his residence in California where he used to spend his summer vacation for many years.

Of Scotch-Irish descent McGiffert was born at Stockport, Columbia County, N. Y., and received his early training in nearby Hudson. Entering Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1887 he graduated in 1891 with the degree of civil engineer. After one year of postgraduate work in mathematics at Johns Hopkins he returned to his alma mater as assistant in mathematics. Three years later he entered Harvard University, where he took the degrees of A.B. and A.M. simultaneously in 1896. Resuming his career in Troy he became assistant professor in 1900, associate professor in 1920 and in 1932 full professor in charge of graduate courses and consultant to the department of mathematics. In his early years as a teacher he published, mainly for the use of his own students, "Notes on Algebra," "Problems on Mensuration" and "Mathematical Shortcuts." His growing blindness, which deprived him of his sight completely when he was fifty, did not diminish his efforts to keep up with the times. In June, 1927, when he was approaching his sixties, Columbia University awarded him the doctorate in philosophy and in the next year McGiffert published his "Plane and Solid Analytical Geometry." Shortly before his death he wrote a brief introduction to algebra and geometry for use in defense courses. An active member of the American Mathematical Society and for years on the board of editors of the *Mathematical Magazine* he frequently lectured on mathematical and allied topics.

A staunch Presbyterian and devout churchman, he conducted for many years a class for students whom he impressed as much with his knowledge of the Bible as with his wizardry in mathematics. Outside his own field he was particularly interested in language and languages (was it not Gibbs who stated that mathematics was also a language?). A purist in the matter of language, who knew and appreciated the origin and the meaning of words, McGiffert for twenty-eight years presided over and guided the destinies of the Troy Society for Spoken English, where he acquainted his fellow-Trojans with leaders of science, literature and the pulpit.

No account of his life work could be complete without mentioning Cora Emily Medway, whom he first met in his Harvard days and married shortly afterwards. Without his "Coralie," an accomplished musician, a marvelous housewife, a never-tiring reader and (by courtesy) an assistant-mathematician, his life

could never have been so complete. His superb courage and cheerful optimism in the face of adversities, among which his blindness was the most perplexing, were astonishing. What he might have accomplished without this affliction, nobody can tell. As it was, his married life was singularly happy and full, he had a host of friends, few if any were his enemies, and his epitaph may well be summarized in three simple words —loving, lovable, loved.

H. S. VAN KLOOSTER

RECENT DEATHS

DR. HENRY GRAY BARBOUR, professor of pharmacology and toxicology in the School of Medicine of Yale University, died on September 23 at the age of fifty-seven years.

THE death at the age of sixty-nine years is announced of Dr. Umetaro Suzuki, known for his work on vitamins. Dr. Suzuki was president of the Scientific Research Institute of Manchukuo and professor emeritus of Tokio Imperial University.

SCIENTIFIC EVENTS

VISIT TO THE U.S.S.R. OF BRITISH SURGEONS

IT is reported in the *British Medical Journal* that the four British surgeons who had been paying a three-weeks visit to Soviet Russia attended a reception given in their honor by the British Council immediately upon their return, and gave the assembled company some account of their experiences. This British mission was sponsored jointly by the British Council and the Medical Research Council, and its members were Surgeon Rear-Admiral G. Gordon-Taylor, consulting surgeon to the Royal Navy; E. Rock Carling, consultant adviser to the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Home Security and the Ministry of Pensions; Major-General D. C. Monro, consulting surgeon to the British Army (War Office); and R. W. Watson-Jones, civilian consultant in orthopedic surgery to the Royal Air Force. Two American surgeons, Lieutenant-Colonel Elliott and Lieutenant-Colonel Loyal Davis, and a Canadian surgeon, Professor Wilder Penfield, accompanied them.

The visitors during their short stay in Russia inspected hospital arrangements as far forward as Vyazma on the Western front, visited the clearing field and mobile hospitals, and inspected the medical institutes and depots in Moscow. They found the organization of Russian medical services excellent. In their surgical work the Soviet medical service, with some differences in detail, follows the same general principles as those accepted in British war surgery, and has reached the same conclusions. The commissar in charge of the service stated that at the time of the last war the Russians realized that their arrangements were not as good as those of their allies, and during the twenty-five years between the two wars they have set themselves to reach a standard of medical and surgical work which will bear comparison with that of any other belligerent country.

Two points impressed the mission very greatly. One was the system of blood transfusion, which is carried out on a colossal scale. The arrangements for the collection of blood are beyond criticism, and the number of voluntary donors is very large. In one institution in Moscow a daily average of 500 to 800 donors are bled, and 90 per cent. of them are women. No woman is allowed to be bled more than seven times a year, but in practice, so large is the number of volunteers, they are not bled more than five times. They receive extra rations and also payment, but four fifths of the money received is returned for war purposes. The same procedure is followed as in this country in the use of plasma and serum. In no circumstances has the Russian Army lacked transfusion blood.

As for the medical personnel, the chief of the medical services of the Russian Army, General Smirnov, is thirty-five years of age, and an expert opinion on him given by an academician was that he not only was an admirable administrator but was held in the highest regard by his colleagues from the professional point of view. The medical service is becoming a woman's service; 90 per cent. of the doctors now under training are women, as compared with 50 per cent. in peacetime. For doctors in Russia the ordinary course before the first state qualification is five years, which is comparable with the British requirement. It takes three years to get a bachelorship and three more years to get a doctor's degree. Nurses had three years' training before the war, and this is now reduced to two years.

The Russian nurse evoked the great admiration of the visitors. Not only is she excellent at the job for which she has been trained, but she can turn her hands in spare time to any employment, even to building hospitals, involving cutting down trees, squaring timber, making window and door frames, digging out foundations. She is specially expert in the art of camouflage.

The visitors made as extensive an inspection as was possible during their brief stay. They saw something of the research institutes and medical organization in Moscow, where the civil defence and ambulance ar-