



SATURDAY, DECEMBER 14, 1929.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
The Museums Report and National Folk Museums	901
The Universe. By R. A. S.	903
Discovery and Invention	905
Pharmaceutical Products	906
A "Handbuch" of Zoology	907
Our Bookshelf	909
Letters to the Editor :	
Severe Environmental Mortality among <i>Abra</i> (= <i>Syndosmya</i>) <i>alba</i> , <i>Donax vittatus</i> , and other Organisms off the Lancashire Coast.—Prof. J. H. Orton	911
Mechanism in Nerve Centres.—Prof. Alexander Forbes	911
The Energetic Efficiency of Photosynthesis.— Dr. René Wurmser	912
A Phenomenon of the Oscillating Arc.—Prof. William Cramp and A. P. Jarvis	913
The Tides of the Upper Atmosphere and the Heights of Meteors.—J. Egedal	913
The Oxidation of Acetaldehyde by Oxygen.— E. J. Bowen and E. L. Tietz	914
New Phenomena in a Sounding Dust Tube.— Eric J. Irons	914
'R 101.' By Prof. R. V. Southwell, F.R.S.	915
The British Association in South and East Africa. By Sir Richard Gregory	918
Obituary :	
Dr. J. C. Melvill. By Dr. J. Wilfrid Jackson	921
News and Views	922
Our Astronomical Column	926
Research Items	927
Water Power Development in Canada and Malaya	930
Conversion Tables for Galactic Co-ordinates	930
Rice Grass and Land Reclamation	931
University and Educational Intelligence	931
Calendar of Patent Records	932
Societies and Academies	932
Official Publications Received	935
Diary of Societies	935

Editorial and Publishing Offices :

MACMILLAN & CO., LTD.,
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON, W.C.2.

Editorial communications should be addressed to the Editor.
Advertisements and business letters to the Publishers.

Telephone Number : GERRARD 8830.
Telegraphic Address : PHUSIS, WESTRAND, LONDON.
No. 3137, Vol. 124]

The Museums Report and National Folk Museums.

IN the concluding paragraphs of Part 1 of the Final Report of the Royal Commission on National Museums and Collections,¹ some outstanding needs in the national museum service are indicated. In the order named there are : an ethnographical museum, a folk museum, an Oriental museum, and a museum of casts. This sequence is not without its significance.

While it may be admitted without question that the Commissioners, in giving first place to the need of an ethnographical museum, have emphasised an almost astounding neglect of opportunity, and what is more, of a duty in an imperial system such as that of Great Britain, they are equally justified in regarding the institution of a folk museum as coming second in importance on the ground of urgency. If it is desirable that a record should be preserved of the daily life of the people in the past—a matter about which there can scarcely be two opinions when once its full significance has been grasped—it is necessary that steps should be taken to give effect to the proposal as soon as possible. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that in all probability there is no question upon which the Report of the Commission has touched which calls more insistently for immediate action. Almost day by day it will become more difficult to bring together the material from which such a museum must be formed. The action of the Royal Society of Arts has stimulated public opinion to an interest in the preservation of typical or striking examples of domestic architecture of the humbler sort belonging to the past. But these efforts are limited by a variety of conditions and they are confined to one class of material only. Peasant industries carried on in the cottages and villages of the remoter districts, such as the lace-making and wood-turning of Buckinghamshire, even if artificially stimulated as some have been, are unlikely to survive for very long ; articles of obsolescent use will be thrown aside for modern substitutes, and those which have been discarded but preserved by a generation which once used them will be cast out as rubbish when that generation dies out. Recent experience has shown that it is becoming increasingly difficult to find examples of objects which a few years ago were comparatively common in the countryside.

In making its recommendation, the Commission

¹ Royal Commission on National Museums and Galleries. Final Report, Part 1: General Conclusions and Recommendations, dated 29 September 1929. (Cmd. 3401.) Pp. 93. (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1929.) 2s. net.

has very precisely in mind the type of museum which it would wish to see established. Not only is a museum illustrating the domestic life of the people in the past contemplated; it is also recommended that this should be of the type known as the open-air museum. The report refers to the museums of this kind which have been instituted in Scandinavia and in Holland. These museums, as is well known, consist of a number of typical dwellings of different periods which have been set up in a park, each fitted with the appropriate furniture, utensils, domestic appliances, and objects of peasant art of the period of the dwellings in which they are housed. At present there is nothing of this kind in existence in Britain, and it is recommended that ultimately there should be one each for England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, but it is stressed that for the moment the case of England is the most urgent. Herein the Commission does not go beyond the warrant of the facts. Conditions in Scotland, Wales, and Ireland are, and perhaps for some little time will continue to be, more favourable to the preservation of their distinctive peasant culture than they are in England, where local peculiarities are rapidly disappearing before modernising influences, and the population itself is rapidly losing the conservatism which still remains a characteristic of the people in the remoter parts of the rest of Britain.

The Report contemplates a museum which will illustrate the domestic life of the past; but it is clear that such a museum of the folk is capable of an almost indefinite expansion in regard to time, local character, and the nature of the exhibits. To take the last point first. The Commissioners would appear to have had something of the nature of this question in mind when they refer to the advantages of the situation of the open-air museum at Stockholm near the famous 'Northern Museum' which contains "an enormous collection of objects illustrating the history and development of the Swedish people". Now, as it is not probable that our museum will have a similar advantage, this suggests the question: Up to what point can the function of a folk museum be understood to be to illustrate the culture of the people as a whole, or, in other words, where in the social scale must the line of demarcation of 'the folk' be drawn? Does there not come a stage in the time series at which the collections run the risk of being merely of antiquarian interest and of losing much of their educational value as an index of culture if a hard-and-fast line separating the grades of society be laid down? As an example of a practical question that arises, the authorities of

the National Museum at Cardiff have included in their folk museum galleries, costumes of the upper classes of the eighteenth century. Their local origin may be held to justify their inclusion there. In a national folk museum in England, their late date alone would determine their exclusion as other collections are available to receive them. Yet when it becomes necessary to adjudicate upon exhibits of an earlier date, which are less generally familiar, provided they are significant of the general level of culture and not of highly specialised character—military, ceremonial, or sumptuary—decision will become increasingly difficult.

An analogous question may arise in connexion with the selection of the buildings it is desired to re-erect to form the museum. Cottages, barns, and the like offer no difficulty, but the church and the manor house were equally an integral part of the life of the countryside, even if not intended for the occupation or sole use of the peasantry. Village crosses, boundary marks, milestones, and the like objects may also, it may be taken, come within the scope of our folk museum.

As regards exhibits distinctively local in character, it may be thought that it is evidently the function of the local museum in the first instance to ensure their preservation. On the other hand, it would be difficult to over-estimate the value to the anthropologist, the historian, and the geographer, of the inclusion of localised series exemplifying, for example, the culture of the Cotswolds, or of the Sussex area with its iron industry of uninterrupted pedigree, extending back to the early days of the working of that metal in England.

In the time series, it may perhaps be found equally difficult to draw the line of demarcation. The end of the Roman occupation affords a convenient starting-point. Yet settled life in Britain does not begin at that date, and if an attempt were made to complete the picture by reconstruction of dwellings and village sites for which there is evidence, there is no logical ground why a further step should not be taken and a lake-village or a hill-fort site, or even mounds and barrows, should not be reproduced.

It may seem that a consideration of these points at this juncture is irrelevant to the recommendation of the Report, which goes no further than to recommend the institution of an open-air museum illustrating the *domestic* life of the people in the past. But the Report has made no attempt to define the scope of such a museum, and it is as well to keep in mind the difficulty of avoiding the expansion of the museum into something much wider than merely

peasant art and industry, cottage utensils, appliances and ornaments, in their appropriate setting of time and space. Both from the educational and the scientific point of view, a museum of the history of our national culture of which the open-air museum formed a part would be the ideal. At present, however, if only on practical grounds and as emphasising the immediate and pressing need, a more restricted conception of the aims of a folk museum must be regarded as holding the field.

One reason, however, why it may be worth while to keep in view the widest interpretation of the folk museum is its relation to the choice of a site. The site should be such as to admit of expansion beyond immediate needs. The Report mentions two possibilities: one, the ground in Regent's Park at present occupied by the Royal Botanic Society, which it is said is to be vacant in 1932; and second, the grounds at Chiswick House, of which the extent is 66 acres. A possibility which has been put forward in the daily press, but is not mentioned in the Report, is the Forest of Dean. As regards the last named, most, we venture to think, will be in agreement with the Report when it says that the site should be in or near London. It is imperative, however suitable the site in other respects, that it should be readily accessible to the largest possible number of students and visitors. As regards space, it should have sufficient acreage to allow for the setting up of a number of peasants' dwelling-houses of various types and periods with gardens when appropriate, say at least ten acres, perhaps even twenty, and provision must be made for administrative offices and the exhibition of smaller objects, amulets, personal ornaments, and the like, which it would not be advisable to exhibit in the dwelling-houses.

It is obvious that such a site will not be easy to find in or near London. At Chiswick House both house and grounds have a marked individuality which does not lend itself to providing an environment adaptable to the character of peasants' cottages, even if the claims of the public under the agreement by which the property has been entrusted to the local authority permitted the cession of a sufficient area of land to the museum. Regent's Park is ideally central in position, and it is doubtful if a better site could be found; but being Crown land in one of London's great open spaces, the suggestion has been criticised on the ground that this land should no longer continue to be enclosed. If, however, the open-air museum were instituted as a part of our national collections and, therefore, open

to the public, this objection would lose much of its force. On this aspect of the matter, however, the Report is anything but encouraging. It holds out little hope that the deficiencies to which it directs attention will be met from public funds. Here it again invokes the private benefactor.

An enterprise of the magnitude and importance of an open-air folk museum should undoubtedly be a national concern, but if present financial conditions preclude government action, is there any alternative? The institution of a folk museum is a question of which the urgency has long been apparent. It had been under the consideration of the Council of the Royal Anthropological Institute even before the appointment of the Royal Commission. A committee was formed, which has since been strengthened by the addition of representatives of scientific bodies most actively interested in this matter. A site alternative to those proposed in the Museums Report has been offered to the committee. It possesses many advantages and the price is low. But, clearly, no body of this character could enter upon an undertaking of such magnitude without the assurance of considerable public support, and only in the last resort when all efforts to secure the performance of an obvious public duty by the State had failed.

The Universe.

The Universe Around Us. By Sir James Jeans. Pp. x + 352 + 24 plates. (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1929.) 12s. 6d. net.

THIS book is an attempt to picture, in language which any intelligent reader can follow, the universe around us, from its greatest to its minutest features. Astronomy has undergone, in the last generation, a peaceful development which is greater than a revolution. It has become universal. The change of base from the solar system to the stars is a greater change than the change from the earth to the sun, and the consequences are not the less momentous because in this case the change has been made without conflict or opposition. That some such change must be taken, at some future time, has been obvious. In the past, guess and forecast have always fallen short of the facts, and in any case they are repugnant to those who value facts and see how the impressive scheme of astronomy has been built up by following the rule of never saying more than we know. But the means of gaining knowledge seemed wholly inadequate to cope with the question. There seemed no hope of getting a trustworthy outline in our time,