

argument as to whether some form of international organization for co-ordinating the work of national associations for the advancement of science and the national associations of science writers should be set up. Finally, however, a recommendation was adopted to the effect that it was undesirable at the present moment to establish an international organization for these purposes, but that Unesco should consider the possibility of forming a consultative committee to further co-operation between the various national associations if this should prove necessary.

Although the Conference produced no definite or positive conclusions, it was nevertheless valuable in showing that the problems of popularizing science vary greatly from country to country, and in bringing people together with similar interests from many countries.

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## ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS, KEW

A REVIEW of all aspects of the work of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, during 1954, is presented in the *Kew Bulletin*, No. 1, 1955. The past year has been one of sustained progress, but various problems of accommodation remain acute—for example, the Palm House, the Herbarium and Library—and are receiving close attention. The main activities of the Gardens, however, are being maintained with unimpaired vigour. It is impossible to touch on more than a few of these in this short article, but some idea of the nature and volume of the problems handled may be indicated by some selected references. Thus, the specimens received for the Herbarium, excluding those prepared at Kew from living material, amounted to 55,994; some 9,166 sheets were received on loan; 5,652 were sent on loan; 16,424 sheets were distributed as duplicates; and, in all, some 47,780 sheets were mounted (excluding algae, lichens, fungi and bryophyta, and specimens received already mounted). No fewer than 4,077 botanists paid visits during 1954, many of these being from overseas, attending the Eighth International Botanical Congress at Paris. Here, too, reference may be made to the fact that 2,635 inquiries and plant consignments were dealt with during the year.

As in previous years, important activities were the identification of economic plant products and the supplying of information on economic plants: for example, cinnamon, groundnuts, sesamum, raffia, balsa, senna, sansevieria, capers, opium poppy, aloes, patchouli, pepper, ginger, vanilla and cardamoms. In relation to the present high prices of tea and coffee, various inquiries as to the possibility of growing these crops in new areas received consideration.

For many years the Gardens have rendered an important service to scientific agriculture by maintaining the Quarantine House, the function of which is to prevent the spread of diseases and pests during the transference of economic plants from one part of the world to another. Thus, at the present time, varieties of cacao from the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture, Trinidad, have occupied most of the available space during the year, these being the most promising of the Imperial College selections of Trinidad trees and some Amazonian forasteros originally collected on the Upper Amazon. Rooted cuttings from these plants have been suitably packed

and sent by air to the West African Cacao Research Institute, Gold Coast, and to the Departments of Agriculture in Malaya, Ceylon and Fiji, and, with the exception of a consignment sent to Malaya, are reported to be growing successfully in their new environments. Material of *Theobroma* and the related genus *Herrania*, collected in Colombia in 1952 and sent to Kew via Trinidad, is now on its way to West Africa for the use of plant-breeders there. Various banana and cotton collections are also under surveillance in the Quarantine House.

A further service to countries of the British Commonwealth consists in obtaining plants of potential value. For example, young plants of ipecacuanha (*Cephaelis ipecacuanha* Rich.) have been sent to the Departments of Agriculture in Nigeria, British Honduras and Malaya for local trials.

Work of a rather different kind consists of research on the systematic anatomy of the Monocotyledons; notes on this important and extensive undertaking have appeared from time to time in these columns. Arrangements for the publication of this work in three volumes, of which the first will deal with the Gramineae, have now been made with the Clarendon Press, Oxford. A large number of routine inquiries, relating to miscellaneous botanical materials, including timbers, archaeological specimens, and rubbed and powdered herbs, have been dealt with in the Jodrell Laboratory during the year. Among the more unusual samples were nylon bobbins examined on behalf of the Board of Customs and Excise, twigs of alleged apple trees, most of which proved to be plum suckers, submitted by the laboratory at New Scotland Yard, and unsatisfactory pick handles which were found not to have been made of the timber that had been specified.

The report also deals in some detail with the progress that has been made in the preparation of the several regional floras, and with other taxonomic studies, and the cultural work in the different sections of the Gardens is appropriately reviewed. A comprehensive list of publications and a staff list conclude this interesting and important publication.

## OPINIONS AND SOCIAL PRESSURE

WHAT is the effect of the opinions of others on our own? How strong is the urge towards social conformity? An American psychologist, Solomon E. Asch, has approached these questions by means of unusual experiments. These, and his findings, have been described in the November issue of *Scientific American*, which contains a number of other articles of outstanding interest as follows: "Trenches of the Pacific", by R. L. Fisher and R. Revelle; "Synthetic Diamonds", by P. W. Bridgman; "Radiation and Human Mutation", by H. J. Muller; "Empty Space", by H. C. van de Hulst; "What makes Leaves Fall?", by W. P. Jacobs; "Etruscan Metallurgy", by A. N. Modora; "Too Many Deer", by A. S. Leopold\*.

Dr. Asch's investigations were guided by certain underlying assumptions, which to-day are common currency and account for much that is thought and said about the operations of propaganda and public opinion. The assumptions are that people submit uncritically and painlessly to external manipulations by suggestion or prestige, and that any given idea or

\* *Scientific American*, 193 (November 1955), 2 West 46th Street, New York. 50 cents.