

taking office, announced the founding of the medal in commemoration of Henry Stopes; after mentioning Stopes's work on prehistoric man and Pleistocene geology, he called upon Dr. Marie Stopes, herself a pioneer in certain branches of geology, to make the presentation. She alluded to Mr. Kennard's varied work on this subject and, in particular, to the debt which many prehistorians owe to him for his detailed study of the contemporary land and freshwater mollusca as indicators of climatic and other environmental factors. The next award of the medal, the only one in Britain given for prehistory, will be in 1949, when, at the express desire of the donor of the fund, all members of the Geologists' Association will have a vote in the selection of the recipient or joint recipients.

Two Notable Geomagnetic Storms

DISTURBANCES of considerable intensity, comprising two distinct geomagnetic storms, occurred during the interval March 23–29. Displays of the aurora borealis have been reported; there was dislocation over long-distance radio channels and, in the case of the second storm, with submarine-cable telegraphy. The Astronomer Royal has given the following provisional data: ranges in the three elements (D , H and V) of the earth's magnetic field as recorded at the Abinger magnetic observatory during the three 24-hour intervals commencing March 23 at 11h. U.T.

	D	H	V
March 23–24	0.9°	300 γ	180 γ
" 24–25	0.8	230	400
" 25–26	1.5	430	510

A small abrupt movement in H at 17h. 16m. on March 23 might be taken as the beginning of this storm, which at first did not, however, increase rapidly. The aurora borealis was seen in Britain on each of the above nights. At 17h. on March 23, a biggish group of sunspots was nearly 50° east or four days before central meridian passage of the sun's disk—not a favourable position for any transient corpuscular stream ejected from the spot region to encounter the earth.

On March 28, another disturbance began suddenly at 6h. 35m. and rose to one of great intensity within a few hours. The range in D probably exceeded 2½° and that in H 1500 γ , but further details are awaited. The last storm of similar intensity occurred in 1941 on March 1–2, in which the D range at Abinger was 3.0°; 1770 γ in H and > 800 γ in V . At 6h. on March 28, the spot group was 13° or 1 day past the central meridian. The connexion between the spot region and this storm seems more probable, but at present there is an absence of reports of major solar flares having been observed with their accompanying radio fade-outs. Superficially, the recent solar conditions seem to contrast sharply with those preceding the magnetic storm of February 7–8 (see *Nature*, February 16, p. 187). There was then the great spot near the central meridian; numerous fade-outs had been recorded, and some distinctive solar flares had been observed.

Development of Atomic Energy in Great Britain

SPEAKING in the House of Commons on March 28 on the motion for the adjournment, Mr. John Wilmot, Minister of Supply and Aircraft Production, emphasized a point which has repeatedly been made by scientific men, namely, that there is no justification for the suggestion that the use of atomic energy for peaceful purposes will provide a quick solution of

industrial problems. The most probable use will be for the production of electrical power by big units employing steam or gas turbines. The possibilities of development, however, are immense, and Mr. Wilmot considers that the prospects for Great Britain in this connexion are bright. He admitted that the United States has valuable technical experience of which Britain is not fully informed; but experience is being gained through development work now proceeding and mainly financed by the Canadian Government. So far as Great Britain is concerned, he said that the Government is determined to push on with research and development with the utmost vigour; the central planning is in the hands of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, advised by the committee under the chairmanship of Sir John Anderson on atomic energy.

Turning to the work being done in Great Britain, Mr. Wilmot said that the work of converting the air-field at Harwell into the research establishment for atomic energy is proceeding. A team of experts is in Canada preparing plans for the highly specialized buildings required. The planning of the main production plant for fissile material is under way; and engineering and other expert staff is being recruited. No decision has yet been made on a site for the main production plant; a Government factory at Springfield, near Preston, will be used for a subsidiary plant for processing materials. The Government's policy, he said, is also to encourage and support research at the universities and elsewhere on fundamental problems in the field of atomic physics. Speaking of the amount the Government is prepared to spend on this field, Mr. Wilmot said that the limit of what can be done is physical and not financial. It is hoped to mobilize the best brains for the tasks ahead; and as large a sector of the national effort as can be spared will be used for this development, which the Government regards as of transcendent importance.

Biological Risks of Atomic Fission

SIR HENRY DALE, chairman of the Medical Research Council's Committee on the medical and biological applications of nuclear physics, has commented (*Lancet*, 399, March 16, 1946) on the letters written to the *Lancet* by Dr. Wiesner and Mr. Kenneth Walker on the biological dangers of atomic fission (see *Nature*, Feb. 23, p. 222). The issues raised by these letters are, Sir Henry Dale agrees, undoubtedly important; "but," he continues, "having knowledge of what has been done to deal with them, I can say with assurance that all the dangers mentioned in the two letters have received full consideration by those in charge of the Canadian and British Atomic Energy Projects, in connexion with which an elaborate health organisation has been built up". The possibility of genetic effects is being kept in mind and "authoritative opinion is being kept in touch with the nature of the risks to which workers concerned with an atomic energy installation might be exposed, and will require to be satisfied that these are reduced to a level which is not significant. . . ." New information hitherto covered by security restrictions will be released as soon as possible. "A study of the extensive existing literature on this subject," concludes Sir Henry, "would make possible a more correct assessment of the dangers involved than that which the letters of Dr. Wiesner and Mr. Walker might be taken to suggest." Meanwhile some work on the toxicity of uranium is the subject of an annotation in the *British Medical Journal* (397, March 16, 1946). Fair-