

News and Views

Jean-Baptiste-Louis Romé de l'Isle (1736-90)

AUGUST 26 is the bicentenary of the birth of Jean-Baptiste-Louis Romé de l'Isle, an assiduous student of natural history and a writer on crystallography. He was born at Gray in Haute-Saône. After being educated in Paris, he sailed to the East Indies as secretary of a company of artillery, and in 1761 became a prisoner of the English at Pondicherry, being held captive for three years. Having acquired a taste for science, on his return home he became a student of the chemist Balthasar-George Sage (1740-1824) and applied himself to mineralogy, forming a mineralogical cabinet, and in 1772 publishing his "Essai de Cristallographie". This work he afterwards enlarged and published in 1783 under the title "Cristallographie, ou Description des formes propres à tous les corps du règne minéral dans l'état de combinaison saline pierreuse ou métallique". It contained tables of all the crystals then known. Another subject to which he devoted much time was metrology, stimulated no doubt by the chaotic state of the weights and measures in France at the time. He collected a great mass of material relating to the subject, some of which he embodied in his "Métrologie, ou Table pour servir à l'intelligence des poids et mesures des anciens . . ." which appeared in 1789, the year the Revolution broke out. Through his close application to study he suffered somewhat from failing eyesight, and this being brought to the notice of Louis XVI, he was granted a small pension, although he had held no official position. His death took place in Paris on March 7, 1790.

Water Resources and Supply Control

THE Parliamentary Joint Committee appointed to consider and report on measures for the better conservation and organization of water resources and supplies in England and Wales has, in its report just issued (London: H.M. Stationery Office. 3d. net), made some caustic comments on the attitude of the Ministry of Health towards the general aspect of the whole question of national water administration, pointing out the one-sided nature of the composition of the Advisory Committee on Water, upon the reports of which the proposals of the Ministry of Health have been framed. The Joint Committee states that it is of opinion "that the methods of the Ministry of Health justify in no small degree the criticisms that have been levelled against them by reason of their apparent failure either to consider the point of view of, or to consult with, opposing interests before submitting their proposals to the Committee". Accordingly, the Committee does not see its way to endorse the memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Health, in which it is proposed that power should be given to the Minister to make orders scheduling areas within which the conservation of surface or underground water resources for water supplies is of

public interest, the object of the orders being to prevent water from being drawn from those areas for water undertakings, or for industrial or other purposes, without his consent. The evidence of witnesses who appeared before the Committee showed unmistakably the hostility of interests connected with industry, agriculture and fisheries to any such form of dictatorship in water administration, alleging the incompetence of the Ministry of Health to appreciate needs other than those which are associated with water for domestic and sanitary uses. The Committee's judgment is that all proposals for the appropriation of supply areas should remain, as heretofore, under direct parliamentary control, and it is unable to recommend any procedure other than the continuance of that by Private Bill.

Proposed Central Advisory Water Board

THE principal constructive feature of the Joint Committee's report is its recommendation that a statutory Central Advisory Water Board should be set up, comprising representatives of the various ministries affected and other interested bodies, such as catchment and fishery boards, water undertakers and mill and riparian owners. In addition, it recommends the extension and development of the nine Regional Advisory Committees, at present in existence in various parts of the country, by the addition of three or four others, so as to cover the remaining areas, and it expresses the view that these bodies, which are purely voluntary with representation confined to water undertakers and the Ministry of Health, should be enlarged to include representatives of the catchment boards and other interests, and that they should discuss and report to the Central Advisory Water Board on any difficulties or differences and on general matters concerning their respective areas. The Central Board would collect and marshal all the available statistical data and information of the country's water resources and requirements, and advise the appropriate Minister as to the initiation of any schemes or proposals considered necessary in the public interest. The Central Board should further submit reports to all Select Committees of Parliament considering Bills on water supply, and make an annual report to be laid before both Houses of Parliament. The Joint Committee's report also deals with the question of compensation water, admittedly beset with complications, some of which are pointed out. Rejecting the formula proposed by the Ministry of Health, and indeed any formula, since no suitable formula can be found for general application, the Joint Committee concludes its report with a statement of the considerations which must apply in the assessment of compensation water, each case being, of necessity, determined on its particular merits.