

by the late Mr. F. H. Melland and presented by Mrs. Melland. The collection contains some very fine sable and roan antelope heads and is of special interest in that the species represent a transition stage from the southerly types of South Africa to the more northerly forms found in Tanganyika Territory and Kenya Colony. Another interesting gift is the skull of a hippopotamus from Nigeria presented by Mrs. Piper. Purchases include a large collection of South American mammals from Dutch Guiana, and another from Ecuador. The latter is worthy of special mention since it contains a series representing that most interesting genus of Diprotodont marsupials, *Caenolestes*. The Department of Mineralogy has received a series of specimens of Darwin glass from Mt. Darwin, Tasmania, collected and arranged by the late Mr. Hartwell Conder and presented by his widow. Darwin glass is a silica glass. Thousands of tons of it in the form of rounded and rod-like pieces are found over an area of sixty square miles in Tasmania. It is believed that the silica-glass was formed by the heat engendered by the impact of a large meteorite. Some crystals of the rare mineral withamite, a pink variety of epidote, have been presented by Mr. W. G. Myers, who found them at the type locality in Glencoe where the new road has cut through the lavas in which withamite occurs. Good crystals of this mineral are rare. A very large rough crystal of microcline feldspar from Norway has been purchased. This crystal measures about $14 \times 12 \times 10$ inches and weighs about 100 pounds.

Report on Abortion

THE report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Abortion, which was appointed by the Minister of Health and the Home Secretary under the chairmanship of Mr. Norman Birkett, K.C., has been issued (H.M. Stationery Office. 2s. 6d. net). In the Majority Report, signed by fourteen members, the question of the prevalence of abortion is first examined. They stress the difficulties entailed in arriving at any estimate; but suggest that the number of abortions occurring annually in England and Wales is between 110,000 and 150,000, of which perhaps forty per cent are criminal. The Committee discusses the existing law, analyses the motives for criminal abortion and the methods employed, and examines proposals for amending the law. It recommends that the law should be clarified so as to make it plain that the induction of abortion is legal when the operation is carried out to save the life, or to prevent impairment of health, of the pregnant woman, but expresses strong opposition on ethical, social and medical grounds to any broad relaxation of the law. It is recommended that therapeutic abortions should be notifiable by the operator to the medical officer of health, and that there should be some restriction on the sale of abortifacient drugs. The majority of members of the Committee are not prepared on general grounds to recommend the unrestricted dissemination of birth control advice by the public health services.

The New Radcliffe Observatory

IN *Occasional Notes Roy. Astro. Soc.* (No. 4, March 1939), Dr. H. Knox-Shaw gives a very full description of the work on the erection of the 74-inch reflector at Pretoria, and three plates illustrate various parts of the equipment, the turret, the telescope itself as viewed from the north-east, and also the Newtonian observing carriage and the Coudé room. It is satisfactory to know that the pyrex disk for the large mirror has been successfully cast and the figuring will be completed in a few months, after which the mirror will be sent to Pasadena for aluminizing. It will be possible to use the telescope at three foci, Newtonian, Cassegrain and Coudé, the focal length in the first case being 30 feet, and the equivalent focal lengths in the last two being 111 ft. and 173 ft. respectively. The Newtonian focus will be used for direct photography and the other two for spectroscopic observation. A two-prism spectrograph for use at the Cassegrain focus is under construction and will soon be ready, and a projection measuring machine and also a microphotometer have been made for the Observatory. It is anticipated that the full programme of the work will be undertaken early in 1940, and the initial programme will include the determination of the radial velocities of the *O* and *B* type stars in the portion of the galaxy beyond the reach of the northern observatories. The object of this research is to corroborate present views on galactic rotation. When opportunities occur, photography of the nebulae south of -40° declination will be undertaken.

Museums and Children

THE revival of museum efforts which in Great Britain has followed upon the Miers report, has fortunately included in its sweep attempts to increase facilities for the interest and education of the young. But in this aspect of museum work America undoubtedly leads the way, and everyone interested in juvenile education must be grateful to Miss Ruth Weston for her impressions of American methods which appear as a supplement in the *Museums Journal* (39, 93, May 1939). Her first impression is one of the bold conception, enterprise, and general 'aliveness' which have produced such museums. Some are special children's museums housed in their own special buildings, in several instances right away from any other museum. Others form sections of larger museums, with special exhibition and other rooms for juveniles, either as an isolated wing or included within the main building. Sometimes the show galleries are supplemented by club rooms, library rooms, reading rooms, and a lecture theatre, which in Boston Children's Museum can seat more than 500. Loan collections of natural history objects for schools and even for individual child borrowers (as at Brooklyn), loan art collections, recording in colour and in black and white the development of art in different periods and countries (like the 2,000 reproductions at Toronto Art Gallery), have become the order of the day in these progressive museums. Much has been done in some British museums, but