

## KENYA'S PASTORAL NEEDS

IN 1929, an agricultural commission under Sir Daniel Hall reported on the grave condition to which certain native reserves in Kenya had been reduced as a consequence of overgrazing and soil erosion, and recommended an immediate reduction in livestock and an increase in agriculture as means of countering a serious and growing menace to the existence of the country. In 1931, Sir Frank Stockdale reported that an increase in agriculture and consequent reduction of area available for grazing were accentuating the dangers of erosion. In 1933, the Kenya Land Commission recommended an extension of the cropped area, using dry-farming methods, in order to increase production in densely populated reserves. In 1936, Sir Alan Pim's report on Kenya directed attention to the danger of extending the cultivated area without suitable precautions being taken to maintain fertility, and to the absence of any definite policy with regard to soil erosion. In 1937, both Sir Frank Stockdale and the recently appointed soil conservation officer (Mr. C. Maher) expressed the view that the overworked land needed a complete and prolonged rest without which much of it was irretrievably doomed. They further recommended the development and intensification of agriculture to compensate for loss of production from 'rested' land.

This summary of the recommendations of some of the consulting 'physicians' who have attended Kenya in the last ten years of its decline is given (in more detail) in Dr. Pole-Evans's account of a visit to the Colony last year.\* It will be noticed that all the other physicians recognized that the worst affected parts needed rest, but proposed to maintain productive capacity by throwing an additional burden on to other parts, that is, by extending agriculture. That the productive capacity of the native reserves must be maintained at a certain minimum in the

\* Report on a visit to Kenya. By Dr. I. B. Pole-Evans. Pp. 36+18 plates. (Nairobi: Government Printer, 1939.) 2s. 6d.

immediate interests of the inhabitants is the burden of these physicians' arguments. Dr. Pole-Evans is more forthright in his recommendations. He is a South African ecologist who lacks the bedside manner of the official reporter or commissioner. He considers that the situation is so grave that the complete rest which should have been given years ago is now imperative and must be given regardless of economic and political obstacles, if a greater future disaster is to be avoided. The remedy he proposes is simple on paper; it has been used time and again in history to rest exhausted land while keeping it under human control, and it has rarely failed. It consists in restoring the natural grass cover and utilizing animals in suitable numbers to keep the grass in good condition. It means a general reversion to less productive pastoral farming with greatly reduced stock in densely populated native reserves. Dr. Pole-Evans admits the value of supplementary measures of soil conservation—afforestation, terracing, strip-cropping, etc.—but they are practically useless unless the foundations of native society are grounded in pastures. The population can only support itself on a predominantly pastoral basis if administrative intelligence and action are concentrated on the problem of growing luxuriant grass on exhausted land in a semi-arid climate. The solution of that problem will demand all the resources of science backed by wise and far-sighted administration, and Dr. Pole-Evans's report is a plea that the necessary help and encouragement of the right kind be given before it is too late.

The report is depressing in the extreme, but it carries deadly conviction. One wishes that it could be read and its implications understood by every member of parliament. We might then get the beginnings of a Colonial policy which takes account of the harsh—the very harsh—realities of Nature that will determine policy in the end.

G. V. J.

## THE ROYAL SOCIETY OF CANADA

### ANNUAL MEETING

THE annual meeting of the Royal Society of Canada was held at the University of Montreal in the new Botanical Building during May 22-24. A large attendance of fellows from all parts of Canada had an opportunity of seeing this splendid new development of a botanical garden in Montreal with its laboratories, greenhouses and large park still in the progress of completion as a works project financed by civic and Government authorities and under the direction of Frère Marie-Victorin of the University of Montreal.

The presidential address was delivered by Dr. Victor Morin, who spoke on "La Chanson Française à travers les siècles", with interpretations of songs by the "Quatuor des Alouettes". This address was preceded by the introduction of new fellows and by the presentation of medals awarded by the Society.

The Flavell Medal was awarded posthumously to the late Prof. J. Playfair McMurrich in recognition of his distinguished work in anatomy. Dr. Wilfred Bovey received the Lorne Pierce Medal, and the Tyrrell Medal was presented to Dr. E. Z. Massicotte. A unique social feature of the meeting was the Operetta-dinner held in the ballroom of the Mount Royal Hotel, at which the fellows and their wives were the guests of the City of Montreal. This fanciful dinner-play was written by the president of the Society, Dr. Morin, as a reconstitution of the feasts given by the 'seigneurs' of olden times. Parodical rhymes on gastronomical subjects adapted to the music of well-known operas of the French repertory were sung by artists in cook's and maid's costumes, as the several dishes of the dinner were served.