

has now commenced. This building, which had recently become extremely dilapidated, was erected as a temporary structure for the International Exhibition of 1862, and continued to be used thereafter by the Science Museum for exhibition purposes until the beginning of the War in 1939. For many years these galleries have been scheduled for destruction, and owing to their susceptibility to fire and bomb damage were a source of considerable anxiety during the War. The main portion of this old building is now being demolished to make room for a new centre block for the Science Museum, on the roof of which a planetarium is to be erected. It is anticipated that the ground floor and basement of this new building will be available in time to accommodate the science and technology portion of the Festival of Britain Exhibition in 1951. After this, work on the building will be continued and the building when completed will form the centre block of the Science Museum, with four floors of exhibition galleries. Arrangements for the occupation of this portion of the Science Museum are well under way, and it is anticipated that long before this additional accommodation becomes available, detailed arrangements for the display of specially appropriate and attractive exhibits will have been completed.

Scientific Instruments of George III

WHILE he was still Prince of Wales, the future King George III showed much interest in mechanics, optics, astronomy and scientific experiments of all kinds. Thus encouraged, the leading instrument makers of the second half of the eighteenth century constructed many models and apparatus for the instruction of the Prince. As might be expected, these models illustrate the craftsmanship of the period, and collectively they convey a remarkably clear impression of the general field of scientific study and experiment at that time. Fortunately, the instruments were preserved as a collection, and for many years they were kept at Kew Observatory. They were used again for instructing the many children of George III, and in 1841 they were presented to King's College, London. The collection was loaned to the Science Museum in 1926, but since 1928 it has been in store on account of the lack of space. It has now been placed on exhibition again and may be seen, until the end of September, at the Science Museum, South Kensington, London, S.W.7. Historically, the exhibition is of interest, as it covers an important era in scientific development—an era which witnessed the growth of modern physics and chemistry from the 'black magic' and haphazard alchemy of the Middle Ages, the development of such instruments as the thermometer, and great advances in the study of electricity. Science was becoming popular, but at the same time the foundations were being laid for progress on logical lines of experimental and theoretical philosophy. The course of instruction and the experiments performed tended to follow closely the lines laid down half a century earlier by the Dutch philosopher 'sGravesande, himself a disciple of Sir Isaac Newton, and one of the gems of the present exhibition is the 'Philosophical Table', which is similar to that designed by 'sGravesande. In the parlance of this more vulgar age, a 'philosophical table' is a 'laboratory bench'. Other items worthy of special note are the vacuum pumps made by George Adams and two fine microscopes constructed about 1750.

Commission on South African Museums

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LAST year, in *Nature* of November 27, p. 861, it was reported that the Government of the Union of South Africa had set up a Commission to inquire into the financial position of certain State-aided institutions which, it was then understood, included certain museums, art galleries and zoological gardens. An announcement in the *Government Gazette (Pretoria)* for March 4 of this year extends the field of inquiry, and lists the institutions concerned, as follows: the South African Museum, Cape Town; the Transvaal Museum, Pretoria; the Natal Museum, Pietermaritzburg; the Orange Free State Museum and Monument Museum, Bloemfontein; the Voortrekker Museum, Pietermaritzburg; the South African War Museum, Johannesburg; the South African National Art Gallery, Cape Town; the Michaelis Collection, Cape Town; the National Zoological Gardens, Pretoria; and the National Botanical Gardens, Kirstenbosch.

The inquiry now covers not only the financial aspects of these institutions, but also their organisation and activity. The Commission is directed to make investigations and recommendations regarding the co-ordination of the research carried out by each institution; the possibility of co-operation between the named institutions, universities and other institutions towards a greater economy and efficiency in the preparation of material for exhibition and educational purposes; the advisability of forming a national board of trustees, or similar organisation, for the co-ordination of the work of the named institutions; the advisability of co-ordinating the research and education functions of the institutions and certain others not State-supported; the advisability of all or some of the named institutions becoming full State institutions; the incorporation of war museums in other museums; and the establishment of a science museum in Johannesburg. If the Commission finds that the last-mentioned is desirable, it is asked to make recommendations for its organisation and control. For the purpose of the inquiry outlined above, the Commission is given full authority to consult any person and Government book, record, etc. The wide scope of the inquiry and its importance demonstrate the formidability of the Commission's task, and it is indicative of a strong Government interest which will ultimately not only strengthen the efficiency of the Union's museum services, but will also point the way to even further developments.

Survey of India: Annual Report

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THE Survey of India has issued a Civil Activities Report covering the period April 1, 1945–March 31, 1946, which replaces the detailed General and Geodetic Reports which have been in abeyance since 1939 but are to be introduced for the year 1946–47. Much of the work of the Survey during the year was directed towards the furtherance of a number of long-term projects, such as the Kosi, Mahanadi and Tista irrigation schemes. For these schemes somewhat rigid priority assessments had to be made owing to the shortage of men and instruments, and new and cheaper survey expedients were adopted to provide preliminary information. Even so, the routine topographical programme received scant attention. With the widespread resumption of civil surveys, the concentration of resources in Dehra Dun has been reversed, and the Eastern Circle controlling work in Assam, Bengal, Bihar and Orissa has been