

Oil Pollution of the Sea

A MEETING of the Permanent Committee on oil pollution which was set up in June 1952 was held at the House of Commons on October 23, under the chairmanship of the Earl of Ilchester. Representatives of the following organizations which constitute the Committee were present: Association of Sea Fisheries Committees of England and Wales, Council for the Preservation of Rural England, International Committee for Bird Preservation, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Universities Federation for Animal Welfare, County Councils Association, Association of Municipal Corporations, Urban District Councils Association, Rural District Councils Association and the General Council of British Shipping. It was decided that the official name should be the Co-ordinating and Advisory Committee on Oil Pollution of the Sea (*Secretary*: Miss Phyllis Barclay-Smith, International Committee for Bird Preservation (British Section), c/o British Museum (Natural History), Cromwell Road, London, S.W.7). The meeting expressed gratification at the setting up by the Minister of Transport of a Government committee to investigate the problem, and it was agreed to offer this committee every assistance and co-operation, particularly with regard to providing factual evidence. The urgency of the problem was again stressed and the serious situation with regard to the pollution of small harbours was emphasized.

The clerk of Truro Rural District Council reported the results of an experiment carried out on St. Agnes Beach, Cornwall, during June 1-September 8, 1952. During these hundred days the beach, which is a small one of 160 yards in length at highwater mark, was cleared of oil deposits, which were weighed. The results showed that more than fifty-seven hundred-weights of waste oil were washed up during this period, that is, an average of more than 64 lb. per day.

Greenwich Mean Time

THE practice at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, of dropping the Time Ball, the symbol of Greenwich time throughout the world, was resumed at 1 p.m. on October 26. The Time Ball is a dull red sphere, 5 ft. in diameter; it is part of the Wren Observatory building and was erected for the purpose of enabling masters of vessels proceeding down the Thames to adjust their chronometers. The Time Ball is raised half-way up a mast, on which it slides, at five minutes to one, hauled to the top at two minutes to one, and released electrically on the hour. It was the earliest means of making Greenwich mean time known to the public, but the system has now been superseded for all practical purposes by the six pips broadcast at fixed times by the B.B.C. and by the speaking clock operated by the G.P.O. The Ball was operated continuously from 1833, when first installed, until the Observatory was evacuated during the Second World War. Its operation was temporarily resumed at the start of the Festival of Britain, but it is now intended to continue dropping it as long as members of the Observatory staff remain at Greenwich. Instruments of purely historical interest, such as the Time Ball, will remain at Greenwich.

Meteorology and Agriculture

SIR ROBERT WATSON-WATT, in his presidential address in 1951 to the Royal Meteorological Society, suggested a number of steps which might be taken to match meteorology to man's needs. One was for the Society to set up 'Interest Groups' for such

subjects as agriculture and horticulture, fishing, education, transport and engineering. This suggestion has led to the initiation by the Royal Meteorological Society of its first Interest Group, on meteorology and agriculture and horticulture, under the leadership of Dr. G. L. Hogben. This development will be marked on the occasion of the second annual dinner of the Society on November 27, to be held in London, when the guest of honour will be Sir James Scott Watson, chief scientific and agricultural adviser of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and director general of the National Agricultural Advisory Service. He will be supported by distinguished representatives of agricultural science and practice and of meteorology.

Seismic Refraction Shooting in the Atlantic

M. N. HILL and J. C. Swallow have developed a method of seismic refraction shooting at sea using hydrophones at a depth of 100 feet below the surface of the sea, connected with sono radio buoys at the surface. Depth-charges exploded at a depth of 900 ft. send compressional waves through the sea and the rocks of the sea-bed. These *P*-waves are received on the hydrophones, and the records are transmitted to the ship by signals from the sono-radio buoys. Thus only one ship is necessary for the work. Experiments to test the method and to explore the sea-bed were carried out by Hill and Swallow from the Ocean Weather Ship *Weather Explorer* during August 1949, while the ship was occupying her routine position for meteorological observations at lat. 53° 50' N., long. 18° 40' W. The results have been written up by Hill alone (*Phil. Trans. Roy. Soc., A*, No. 890, 244, 561; June 17, 1952; 7s. 6d.). The depth of water in this area of the eastern Atlantic is approximately 2,400 m., and below this Hill and Swallow found, as the result of the experiments, unconsolidated sediments of thickness 1,900-3,000 m. The velocity of *P*-waves in the sediments varied from 1.5 km./sec., nearest the water, to a limiting value of 2.5 km./sec. at depth. Below the unconsolidated sediments they also deduced the presence of crystalline rock to a depth of 2.7-3.4 km., through which *P*-waves travelled at 5.0 km./sec. Below this, to an unknown depth, they deduced the presence of rock which transmitted *P*-waves at 6.3 km./sec.

Overseas Information and Broadcasting Services

REPLYING to a question in the House of Commons on October 22, Mr. H. A. Nutting, Under Secretary, Foreign Office, said that the following committee has been set up to inquire into the overseas information and broadcasting services: Lord Drogheda (chairman), Sir R. Bruce Lockhart, Mrs. Mary Stocks, Mr. J. W. Platt, Mr. Gervas Huxley, Mr. Donald McLachlan, Mr. Victor Feather, and Mr. Laurence Heyworth. The terms of reference are: "To assess the value, actual and potential, of the overseas information work of the Foreign Office, Commonwealth Relations Office, Colonial Office, Board of Trade, and Central Office of Information; the External Services of the British Broadcasting Corporation; and the work of the British Council; to advise upon the relative importance of different methods and services in different areas and circumstances; and to make recommendations for future policy"

The Night Sky in November

FULL moon occurs on Nov. 1d. 23h. 10m., U.T., and new moon on Nov. 17d. 12h. 56m. The following