

Overseas Science Students Association, formed in 1952 to welcome postgraduate science students from other countries and to bring them into closer contact with each other and with the scientific life of Britain, has its home in the premises of the Society for Visiting Scientists. The Society's financial resources were hitherto derived mainly from an annual grant of £4,000 from the British Council. The recent reduction in the Government's grant to the British Council as a whole has forced the Council to halve its annual grant to the Society. To enable the Society to function efficiently, at least £6,000 per annum is required; it is therefore necessary to raise an annual sum of £4,000. It is hoped that much of this sum will be contributed by corporations and individuals through deeds of covenant, though other subscriptions will, of course, be welcomed. Inquiries should be sent to the Honorary Treasurer, Society for Visiting Scientists, 5 Old Burlington Street, London, W.1.

Flamsteed's Observatory

TREASURY approval has been given to a scheme, proposed initially by the Astronomer Royal, under which the historic buildings of the Royal Observatory at Greenwich will be taken over, as they are vacated by the removal of the Observatory to Herstmonceux, by the National Maritime Museum. These include the original building, designed by Sir Christopher Wren, and built in 1675, containing the Octagon Room (the observatory of the first Astronomer Royal, the Rev. John Flamsteed), and the various additions made during the eighteenth century. The historic instruments, which have played so large a part in the progress of fundamental astronomy, will remain at Greenwich. They include Halley's transit instrument—the first transit instrument to be used in England; the zenith sector, with which Bradley discovered the aberration of light and the nutation of the earth's axis; and the Airy transit circle, installed in 1851, which by international agreement defines the zero of longitude. It is the intention of the director of the National Maritime Museum to move a portion of the exhibits relating to navigation from the main museum to the Observatory, which will become an Annexe of Astronomy and Navigation. This is peculiarly appropriate, as the Royal Observatory at Greenwich was established by Charles II in the interests of navigation. The Wren building, which suffered damage during the War, has been repaired by the Ministry of Works and restored as nearly as possible to its original appearance. It is expected that the Octagon Room will be opened to the public about the beginning of May. The Shepherd 24-hr. electric clock, outside the main gate, which is an object of interest to visitors, will remain in position. The custom of dropping the time-ball at 13.00 hr. each day has been resumed: the time-ball was installed in 1833 and provided the first public time-signal in Great Britain.

Agriculture in the United States

DURING the years 1945–50 Mr. A. N. Duckham, then agricultural attaché to the British Embassy in Washington, travelled all over the United States, gaining an insight into the methods of farming in each of the forty-eight States he visited. An interesting account of his experiences is given in an illustrated booklet entitled "American Agriculture: its Background and its Lessons" (pp. 78+4 pl.; London: H.M.S.O., 1952; 2s. 6d. net). The chief objects of

this report are to provide the necessary technical and commercial background for a proper understanding of farming methods in the United States, and to point out features of their agriculture which may hold positive (or negative) lessons of potential value to the British farmer. The subject is dealt with from four main aspects—geographical and social background; rural organization and agricultural services; production techniques; and farm organization and labour economy—while maps and statistics giving crop acreages and yields, number of livestock and machines, etc., are included in an appendix. Throughout the report it is abundantly clear how differences in soils and climate, natural resources, land-tenure systems and social background have influenced the development of agriculture in the two countries of Great Britain and the United States, and that in general no direct comparison can be made between their farming practices. Nevertheless, Mr. Duckham appears to regard the human element as the chief cause for present-day differences, the British farmer taking a special pride in good husbandry, whereas his American counterpart attaches more weight to efficient organization and labour economy. Each, he maintains, has something to learn from the other, and, if this were achieved, rural standards on both sides of the Atlantic would be raised.

Rabbit Problem in Gotland Island

IN Bulletin No. 9 of the Royal School of Forestry, Stockholm (Stockholm: Kungl. Skogshögskolan, 1952; 5 kr.), G. Notini and S. Forselius discuss the methods which have been undertaken to exterminate the wild rabbits on Gotland Island. The wild rabbit was introduced into Sweden with the object of providing a new game animal of commercial value. Vigorous stock was selected and care was taken to ensure the proper environmental conditions, based on European accumulated experience in parts where the stock had become more or less stabilized, excess numbers being kept down by small predatory animals and also disease. As has occurred in other parts of the world where mammals, birds and plants have been introduced outside their own habitat, the rabbits in Gotland increased rapidly in numbers. None of their ordinary checks was present, the only one being the occasional severe winters experienced in the island. The ordinary methods of man—shooting, poisoning, snaring, etc.—but not poison, have proved ineffective; poison is regarded as too dangerous. The rabbit problem has therefore been transferred from the Game Department to the domain of rural economics. The rabbit to-day in Gotland constitutes such a menace to sylviculture and agriculture that it is ranked with the small rodents. Work is now being undertaken on the introduction of the virus disease *Myxomatosis cuniculi* into the Gotland rabbit population. These trials are on similar lines to those already in operation in Australia, where considerable success has already been reported (see *Nature*, 170, 7; 1952), and it will be interesting to see how the results in the two different hemispheres will eventually compare.

Problems in the Calculation of Interplanetary Orbits

IN a paper on "Interplanetary Orbits" (*J. Brit. Interplanetary Soc.*, 11, No. 5, September 1952), J. G. Porter points out two fundamental errors in dealing with interplanetary travel (the discussion being