

the books and accounts of the universities relating to expenditure of non-recurrent grants by the Comptroller and Auditor General. The Committee is unconvinced by the Treasury objections as detailed in the special report last February (see *Nature*, 173, 383; 1954), although it welcomes the appointment of a special committee of four to examine the universities' methods of contracting and of recording and controlling expenditure. Nevertheless it recommends that the matter be considered afresh by the Committee for the next session, and meanwhile it also recommends that the Comptroller and Auditor General should in future have access to the papers and records of the University Grants Committee relating to non-recurrent grants and also those which contain requests from the universities for assistance and the record of the consideration of them by that Committee. This persistent attempt to subject to close control expenditure which has been deliberately made the responsibility of a non-government institution, for reasons which are generally understood and approved, is disturbing. The proposals endanger an administrative device primarily designed to preserve the ancient freedom of British universities. Admittedly, the device will only endure so long as its value is clearly understood and approved, in Parliament and outside; but could not the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee usefully look into the question why academic freedom is subjected to this sustained attack by a committee of members of Parliament appointed primarily to ensure that the Government is not wasting public money and, secondly, to ensure that public money is not wasted by independent bodies?

Earthquake near Orléansville, Algeria

In the early hours of September 9, an earthquake occurred with an epicentre near Orléansville in Algeria. Most of the buildings in the town were damaged and many of them collapsed entirely. The Hotel Baudouin and two other hotels, the sub-prefecture, a college, two blocks of nine-story workers' flats, the hospital and the railway station were destroyed immediately. The cathedral in the marketplace and the Church of Saint Reparatus dating back to the fourth century were badly damaged; and part of the jail collapsed, killing ten prisoners. Almost the only large building which escaped damage was the mosque. Nine out of every ten houses in the town were rendered uninhabitable. Telephone and telegraph communications were interrupted, gas mains were torn out, and roads and railways in the neighbourhood were rendered useless. The villages of Ponteba and Vauban were reported heavily damaged and other villages in the area were in ruins. Altogether devastation was caused over an area of some forty square miles from Ténès in the north, southwards, and from Miliana in the east, westwards. The 160-ft. wall of the Oued Fodda dam was cracked, but was quickly repaired, though a main irrigation duct was dislocated and this latter caused considerable flooding. The smaller Lamartine dam is reported to have collapsed, also causing flooding. The shock was felt in Algiers but caused no damage there. Altogether the damage is estimated at four million pounds. There were more than 1,250 killed and some 2,000 injured in the district. Orléansville was a town of about 22,000 inhabitants.

The shock was recorded at many observatories. At the Royal Observatory at Edinburgh, eP was registered at 01h. 09m. 15s. G.M.T. and iS at 01h. 12m.

52s. G.M.T. There appears to be a distinct possibility that the shock was double, and that an aftershock was recorded on the Edinburgh seismogram in the coda of the first shock. This would make the initial time of the main earthquake 01h. 04m. 49s. G.M.T. The depth of focus was normal and there were large surface waves. Algiers Observatory registered sixty-nine tremors in the twenty-four hours following the main shock, fifteen of them being strong. According to records collected by Prof. J. P. Rothé and Mme. A. Hée, of Strasbourg, earthquakes are by no means uncommon in Algeria. The line of orogenic activity stretches from Gibraltar, along the Rif in Morocco and the Little Atlas mountains in Algeria to Sicily and thence to the Apennines in Italy and to the Alps. The epicentres in Algeria lie on the principal anticlinal axes. Between the years 1790 and 1949, fifty-four earthquakes originated from a focus with epicentre some fifty kilometres to the east of Orléansville, and in the same period thirty-eight shocks occurred which had another epicentre some twenty-five kilometres north-north-west of Orléansville. The region most susceptible to earthquakes in Algeria appears to be that immediately to the south-south-west of Algiers.

Silver Jubilee of the Indian Ceramic Society

THE Indian Ceramic Society was inaugurated in the Banaras Hindu University on April 15, 1928, by the late Mahamana Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, founder of the University; the silver jubilee therefore fell last year but, for various reasons, could not be celebrated until February 1954. The celebrations included the delivery of a presidential address, the reading and discussion of papers on the ceramic raw materials of India, and the opening of the Society's new headquarters within the Glass and Ceramics Department of the University. Prof. W. E. S. Turner was the chief guest during these celebrations. In his presidential address, Dr. Atma Ram described the efforts that led to the foundation of the Society and its early struggle for recognition. While discussing future policy, Dr. Ram commented on the great progress made during the past thirty years in ceramic science and in mechanization within the industry; he thought it equally important that the general outlook on matters of organization, planning and personnel had also progressed. He emphasized the need for caution in adopting mass-production methods in a country such as India, where consumption of many of the articles that would be produced is at present low. The symposium on ceramic raw materials was organized jointly by the Society and the Central Glass and Ceramic Research Institute. Its objects were to make an appraisal of the domestic resources of the raw materials needed by the Indian ceramic industry and to examine methods for their preparation and purification.

Geophysical Conference in South Africa

A SUCCESSFUL conference on geophysical subjects was held during July 19-22 at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, under the auspices of the Bernard Price Institute of Geophysical Research. The field covered recent determinations of the ages of rocks and their geological implications (eight papers), geodesy (four papers), crystal structure of the earth, including seismological and gravity investigations (eleven papers), geomagnetism (four papers), the mechanical properties of rocks, including the phenomena of rock bursts (five papers), the earth's