

Appointments

DR. ATMA RAM, formerly director of the Central Glass and Ceramics Research Institute, Calcutta, has been appointed director-general of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research in India, in succession to Dr. S. Hussain Zaheer.

DR. C. C. SPICER, at present chief statistician (medical) to the General Register Office for England and Wales, has been appointed director of the Medical Research Council's new Computer Unit, to be set up in London early next year. The unit will provide general computing services to a number of the council's research establishments which have hitherto been largely dependent on university facilities.

Announcements

THE creation of the first university department of the history of medicine, in Britain, has been announced by the Wellcome Trustees. It will be within the Department of Anatomy in the Faculty of Medical Science at University College, London, and will be under the direction of Dr. E. Clarke, at present medical historian to the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum and Library. The department will function from new accommodation provided by the Trust, but, until this is ready, it will be at the Wellcome Building in Euston Road, London. The object of the department is to foster the study of the history of medicine through teaching and research.

MR. P. M. MANN is preparing a biography of the late Prof. G. T. R. Hill, who held the Kennedy chair of mechanical engineering in University College, London, from 1934 until 1948, and he would be glad to receive any reminiscences or other material concerning him. Such information should be sent to Mr. Mann at the Department of Anatomy, Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario.

THE first issue of *Solar Physics*, a new journal for solar research and the study of solar-terrestrial physics, will be published by the D. Reidel Publishing Company, Holland, in January 1967.

THE seventh Tennant Memorial Lecture, under the title "Pyrites—The Fiery Stone", will be delivered by Dr. A. Kent in the Department of Pure and Applied Chemistry, University of Strathclyde, on October 19, at 6 p.m.

Note to Contributors

MANUSCRIPTS received on or after October 1, 1966, and eventually accepted for publication, will be accompanied by the date of their first receipt, together with the dates of revised versions, if any. Contributors will see that in the physical sciences the time between receipt and publication will be substantially that required for consultation with referees and for preparing manuscripts for the press. Because of an accumulation of manuscripts in the biological sciences, some of these manuscripts will be delayed; it is hoped that the cause of this delay will have disappeared before the middle of 1967.

The Editor wishes also to say that unsolicited reports of meetings and conferences will not usually be accepted for publication. It would be appreciated if organizers of conferences wishing to see reports appear would make arrangements with the Editor in advance.

CORRESPONDENCE

Decimalization

SIR,—Your description (211, 1112; 1966) of the differences in opinion regarding the arrangements to transfer Britain's currency to a decimal basis leads one to ask if serious consideration has ever been given to the basic requirements that a rational system for currency and measurement should satisfy.

It may be provable that so much saving in book-keeping and routine calculation will result from the change, but it is the common usage to which a system must be put that should be the main consideration, and it is certain that no cost-benefit analysis of this aspect has been made, either for money or ultimate metrication.

Our present currency and system measurements have evolved to provide units and quantities that are eminently suited to ordinary requirements. They also have easy relationships with one another by being divisible into simple proportions that can be expressed without invoking unwieldy numbers. A radix of eight is naturally most suitable for volumetric purposes, but there is not a single subject with arithmetic associations for which the greater divisibility of 12 would not be an asset. The use of the dozen was common throughout Europe before the imposition of the metric system, and even to-day packaging is by dozens and their fractions despite the incompatibility of these numbers with a decimal currency.

It would surely be a retrograde step to reject our (mainly) twelve-based system in favour of one that is less versatile, and whose fundamental unit has no practical or scientific justification. The present hybrid twelve-twenty relation could be easily eliminated by the introduction of a twelve-shilling unit which would make all our common measurements of currency, size and time numerically interchangeable with one another without the costly upheaval now contemplated.

In recognition of these facts there are associations in several countries to advocate the adoption of a twelve-based arithmetic. The difficulty that there are no accepted symbols for ten and eleven to allow a point position notation is covered by the use of readily available type for the publication of proceedings. The Duodecimal Society of America has adopted a Greek chi, similar to the Roman X for ten, and an inverted 3 for eleven, whilst the Duodecimal Association of Great Britain uses an inverted 2 for ten. The fact that dozenal notation is being used is indicated by prefixing the number with an asterisk.

We visionaries recognize that the world's arithmetic is firmly committed to a radix of ten at the moment, but now that purely arithmetical processes are relegated to machines there is no need to perpetuate the primitive practice of counting on one's fingers. The basic principles of numeration are now being taught in schools, and the use of symbols 1 0 to represent any number is no longer cause for surprise. Thus, there cannot be any objection to a dozenal arithmetic for currency and measurement in parallel with binary, octal, and decimal, and the last can, in good time, be ultimately supplanted by the more efficient form for general purposes.

In any case, the scale of twelve will be obstinately retained, as in the France of 1799, by the applied arithmeticians of the workshop and market-place, simply because of its suitability for these applications. The use of twelve digits to facilitate existing practice will require less explanation than the re- (probably de-) valuation of the penny.

Yours faithfully,

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