

University News

Dr W. E. Watson has been appointed to the chair of physiology in the **University of Edinburgh**.

Dr B. A. Corry, London School of Economics and Political Science, has been appointed to the second chair of economics at **Queen Mary College, London**, and **Professor B. M. Foss**, Institute of Education, London, has been appointed to the chair of psychology, tenable at **Bedford College, London**.

Announcements

THE following awards were presented at the annual meeting of the US National Academy of Sciences: **The National Academy of Sciences Award in Microbiology** in honour of Selman A. Waksman, to **J. L. Strominger** of the University of Wisconsin for his work on the biosynthesis of the bacterial cell wall and the modes of action of antibiotics; **the US Steel Foundation Award in Molecular Biology** to W. Gilbert of Harvard University for his contribution towards understanding the regulatory mechanisms operative in genetic control of protein synthesis; **the John J. Carty Medal** to M. Gell-Mann of the California Institute of Technology in recognition of his contributions to the development of elementary particle physics, particularly through the concepts of "strange particles" and unitary symmetry; **the Comstock Prize** to be shared by **Leon N. Cooper** of Brown University and **J. R. Schrieffer** of the University of Pennsylvania for their roles in the development of the Bardeen-Cooper-Schrieffer theory of superconductivity.

Nominations are invited for the award of the **Colworth Medal**, which has been donated by the Unilever Research Laboratory and is awarded annually by the Biochemical Society to a young British biochemist. Further information can be obtained from the Executive Secretary, The Biochemical Society, 7 Warwick Court, London WC1.

The proceedings of the **Third Nuffield Conference on Rheumatism** are now available without charge to interested people. Copies can be obtained from the Director, The Nuffield Foundation, Nuffield Lodge, Regent's Park, London NW1.

ERRATUM. In the communication "Photosuppression of Mitomycin-induced λ -Phage Development" by Toshiyo Takeno, Takeshi Nagata and Tamitaro Mizunoya (*Nature*, 218, 295; 1968) the sentences beginning on the fourteenth line of the second paragraph on page 296 should read: "There is no photosuppression when the pre-irradiated cells are incubated with mitomycin C or the cells are incubated with the pre-irradiated mitomycin C. These facts show that the photosuppression is caused by the co-operation of mitomycin C, light and the lysogenic cell".

CORRESPONDENCE

Nomenclature Madness

SIR,—The article "Nomenclature Madness" (*Nature*, 218, 10; 1968) inveighs against a non-existent problem. The article states "The commission decided that the familiar and sensible three-letter symbols which are used to denote amino-acids occupy too much space, especially when they are used for comparing long sequences in tables, lists or figures." This is not an accurate rewording of the statement by the commission, which is as follows:

"In publications, CBN recommends that one-letter symbols be used only in comparisons of long sequences in tables, lists, or figures, and for such special use as

tagging three-dimensional models of proteins. They should not be used in simple text nor for original reports of experimental details of sequences. This system is not suitable for reporting the details of peptide synthesis, for example, where a fuller description of substituents is needed and where uncommon amino-acids may occur. It should not be used in papers where the single-letter system for nucleoside sequences is employed (ref. 1a, sections 5.4 and 5.5), as in representing codons, etc."

The article asks, "How will it be possible to maintain perfect alignment between a sequence of triplet codons and single-letter abbreviations for the amino-acids they specify?" This question has been answered by the CBN: the current and proposed nomenclature specifically designates the familiar three-letter abbreviations for the twenty amino-acids to be used in tabular comparisons with codons, thus

Ala-Thr-Tyr-Lys-Val- . . .
GCN-ACN-UAY-AAR-GUN- . . .
(N = A, C, G or U(T); Y = C or U(T); R = A or G)

The task of memorizing the proposed single-letter code for the amino-acids is understandably repugnant to those who subconsciously harbour the psychic residues of mnemonic compulsions experienced in childhood. Nevertheless, the task can be accomplished, even by people with indurated mentalities, among whom may be included

Yours faithfully,

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Is the Literature Really Exploding?

SIR,—It seems to me that the argument put forward in your editorial feature "Is the Literature Really Exploding?" (*Nature*, 218, 41; 1968) is misleading because it neglects to tell the whole story.

The principal criterion for literature growth is taken to be the number of "live" journals at any one time. Surely, this overlooks the fact that the average size of viable journals, and correspondingly the number of papers published, is continually growing. The size of *Chemical Abstracts* has grown from 73,000 pages in 1965 to 153,000 pages in 1968—doubling within four years—and it is expected to reach 174,000 pages by 1970. Agreed, the extrapolated rate of increase shows some signs of falling off, but it would still represent an appreciable growth rate. Furthermore, an appraisal based solely on journal titles fails to take into account the vast and increasing amount of documentation appearing in other forms such as reports, patents and proceedings of conferences and symposia.

I agree that it may be possible to overemphasize the effects of the literature "explosion" because, as the volume of information increases, the amount of effort expended by each individual in digesting it is adjusted accordingly by increased specialization, improved co-operation and by applying a greater degree of selectivity. (Is this the inverse of Parkinson's Law?) Moreover, more efficient information handling techniques are helping to ease the task of keeping up with new knowledge. However, to doubt that the literature is undergoing a fast chain reaction, if not an explosion, would seem to be flying in the face of the evidence.

Yours faithfully

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