

along these lines will be expanded, for it should contribute much to our knowledge not only of the origin of coals and oil shales, but of petroleum. Such studies have an important bearing, also, on the rôle of these components in the production of artificial petroleums of different types. Similar or analogous studies should be made of peats and richly organic mud deposits now forming. "A pitifully small number are engaged in the study of the paleontology and conditions of origin of peats, and still less interest is taken in the paleontology of the bituminous muds now depositing to form the mother substance of petroleum in a future epoch." No one can guarantee that money given for such researches would be the means of bringing to light new principles of practical value to the oil man, but in the light of past advances in science and industry it would be safer to believe that than the opposite.

It is with peculiar timeliness that Dr. Slosson now reminds us that Bacon, after giving other and more evident reasons for investigation, commends experiments without other provocation or justification than that they have never been tried before. The shock comes when we note the concrete thing he suggests, to illustrate such otherwise purposeless adventures or "experiments of a madman." "But of what I may call close distillation no man has yet made trial. Yet it seems probable that the force of heat, if it can perform its exploits of alteration within the enclosures of the body, where there is neither loss of the body nor yet means of escape, will succeed at last in handcuffing this Proteus of matter and driving it to many transformations." Little did Bacon know what this proposed adventure in *destructive distillation* would some day give to the world in coke and gas and coal-tar products and the cracking process and gasoline and dividends. So much for what Bacon called experiments of *Light*. "And it must ever be kept in mind (as I am continually urging) that experiments of *Light* are even more to be sought after than experiments of *Fruit*."

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## SCIENTIFIC EVENTS

### THE OLD ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM AT OXFORD

R. F. GUNTHER, of Magdalen College, Oxford, writes to the *London Times* under date of November 25, as follows:

What is to be done with the Old Ashmolean?

After the Bodleian, the Ashmolean is more widely known than any other university institution. And justly so, for Elias Ashmole, by bringing the contents of Tradescant's London Museum to Oxford, became the founder of the first public museum of natural history in Great Britain. That the scientific collections of Ashmole might be shown in a manner worthy of them, the university erected what is now known as the Old Ashmolean Building, which included a chemical laboratory. It was opened with great ceremony in 1683. For a hundred and fifty years the specimens were to be seen there, and became historic; but when, in the Victorian period, they were scattered among the new museums, many disappeared, and their seventeenth-century association with the old museum was lost.

The building is a fine one, built in the time, and perhaps under the supervision, of Wren. The well-proportioned rooms designed for a public museum are not now much visited by the public. For a number of years they have been used as offices for a succession of praiseworthy undertakings. Some are now empty, and the tenure of the last of the temporary tenants, the staff of the *New English Dictionary*, is approaching an end. The question arises, What is to be done with the Old Ashmolean?

One proposal is to fill it with books, and to use it as an adjunct to the Bodleian, which is casting covetous eyes on the Divinity School, the Old Clarendon Building, the Sheldonian Theater, the Convocation House, even on Exeter College, and on all adjacent buildings—without doubt it could fill them all.

But, according to another view, the answer is clear. The Ashmolean Museum was built for the collections of Ashmole and Tradescant. These collections should be restored to their ancient home; and to her great public library and the oldest Botanic Garden in Great Britain, Oxford would add the oldest public museum of this country in its original building. Visitors from overseas would find here one more link with the past.

At the present moment a compact and exceedingly valuable collection of ancient scientific instruments of great rarity, and of greater intrinsic worth than the contents of Tradescant's Ark, is

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being offered as a gift to the University by Mr. Lewis Evans, F.S.A. The new museums in Oxford have regretfully declined the offer, owing to lack of space. The upper rooms of the Old Ashmolean are standing empty. Mr. Evans's gift is conditional upon his instruments being properly displayed. Their acquisition, in addition to those instruments which are already in the possession of the colleges, would certainly put Oxford in a preeminent position.

When it is remembered that, in the fourteenth and again in the seventeenth centuries, Oxford was the principal home of British science, and that the Ashmolean was a child of the Scientific Renaissance, and for a century and a half the center of the scientific life of Oxford, there is a greater appropriateness in these Oxford collections of early scientific instruments and specimens going there than anywhere else in the world.

#### THE NATIONAL OFFICE OF EUGENICS IN BELGIUM

ACCORDING to the *Eugenical News*, there was inaugurated at Bruxelles a Belgian National Office of Eugenics. This occupies one of the small rooms of the Solvay Institute of Sociology, situated in the charming Parc Léopold of that city. The director of the new Eugenics Office is Dr. A. Govaerts, who is assisted by Mr. W. Schraenen, an anthropological assistant to Dr. L. Vervaeck, physician of the prison. It is understood that the Institute Solvay has made an appropriation of 10,000 fr. and that Mr. Armand Solvay will make a personal gift of 7,000 fr. Among those who have been instrumental in the establishment of the office may be mentioned, first of all, Dr. M. F. Boulenger, director of the School of the Feeble-Minded at Waterloo and president of the Société Belge d'Eugénique; M. Berryer, Minister of the Interior and of Hygiene; the surgeon general of the Belgian Army, Willemaerts; Col. Noterman, head of the Army Institute of Physical Military Training; H. Velghe, director general of hygiene in the Department of the Interior; M. Dom, director general of justice; M. Vandervelde, Minister of State; M. Wittemans, senator; M. Gheude, senator of the Province of Brabant; Dr. Bayet, member of the Royal Academy of Medicine; M. Brunet, president of the House of Representatives; Professor Demoor, delegate of the Academy of Medicine; M. Hostelet, director of the Sol-

vay Institute of Sociology. Others who participated in social affairs connected with the congress were Dr. and Mrs. Leclerc-Dandoy, of the University; Professor Ley; Dr. Péchère, Dr. R. Sand and the Rev. Père Fallon. At the meeting of the International Commission in Antwerp the mayor of the city announced that an appropriation had been made for a branch office of the National Office of Eugenics, to be located at Antwerp.

#### SIR EDWARD SHARPEY SCHAFFER, F.R.S.

SOME time ago the suggestion was made that the meeting of the British Association in Edinburgh in 1921 would form a fitting occasion for the presentation to Sir Edward Sharpey Schaffer of some token of their esteem from his present and past demonstrators and fellow research workers first in London and afterwards in Edinburgh.

As so many of those who had been trained under him now occupy posts in distant lands it was found impossible to make the necessary arrangements for the presentation at that early date, but Professor Halliburton made a statement at one of the largely attended meetings of the Physiology Section, expressing the desire of all who had been associated with their old master in the prosecution of physiological research to present him with some mark of their esteem and affection, and indicating the form it would probably take. It was appropriate that the announcement should be made in Edinburgh, for Sir Edward Sharpey Schaffer has been professor of physiology there since 1899.

It was decided that the presentation should consist of a life-size portrait plaque, and that a medal reproducing the portrait and inscription should be offered to each of the many subscribers. The plaque and the medal are the work of Mr. C. d'O. Pilkington Jackson, A.R.B.A., and the portrait is excellent. The obverse bears in bold relief the bust of Sir Edward Sharpey Schaffer and the reverse contains a dedicatory inscription. The plaque itself is of bronze and has been mounted on stone with the inscription shown on the reverse of the medal underneath it. At Sir Edward Sharpey Schaffer's desire it will eventually be placed within the University of Edinburgh, but at present it remains in the sculptor's