

# SCIENCE

Vol. LXXI

FRIDAY, JANUARY 10, 1930

No. 1828

<i>The American Association for the Advancement of Science:</i>	
<i>Permanent Elements in the Flux of Present-day Physics:</i> PROFESSOR P. W. BRIDGMAN .....	19
<i>The Mutual Influence of Organic Compounds in the Animal Body:</i> PROFESSOR F. KNOOP .....	23
<i>Scientific Names:</i> PROFESSOR JAMES G. NEEDHAM .....	26
<i>Scientific Events:</i>	
<i>Engineers in American Life; Dental Council on Materia Medica and Therapeutics; Gold Medals of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society; Presentation to Professor Nowy; The George Herbert Jones Chemical Laboratory of the University of Chicago</i> .....	28
<i>Scientific Notes and News</i> .....	31
<i>Discussion:</i>	
<i>Some Limitations of the Experimental Method in Biology:</i> PROFESSOR E. C. JEFFREY. <i>Adsorption and Emulsion Formation:</i> DR. P. G. NUTTING. <i>Excystation of Coccidial Oocysts in Vivo:</i> DR. JUSTIN ANDREWS. <i>Investigations of Applications of Iodine:</i> DR. LAWRENCE W. BASS. <i>What is the Best System of Presenting Bibliographies?:</i> DR. M. C. MERRILL .....	34
<i>Scientific Books:</i>	
<i>Wagner on the Platinum Deposits and Mines of South Africa:</i> DR. GEORGE F. KUNZ .....	39
<i>Scientific Apparatus and Laboratory Methods:</i>	
<i>An Electric Kymograph:</i> DR. W. T. PORTER, C. E. ROY and A. VIANEY .....	41
<i>Special Articles:</i>	
<i>A Possible Relation between Natural (Earth) Radiation and Gene Mutations:</i> PROFESSOR FRANK BLAIR HANSON and FLORENCE HEYS. <i>The Effect of Varying the Duration of X-ray Treatment upon the Frequency of Mutation:</i> C. P. OLIVER. <i>Ovarian Changes during Pregnancy in the Bat:</i> DR. OLIVE SWEZY and PROFESSOR HERBERT M. EVANS .....	43
<i>Science News</i> .....	x

SCIENCE: A Weekly Journal devoted to the Advancement of Science, edited by J. McKEEN CATTELL and published every Friday by

## THE SCIENCE PRESS

New York City: Grand Central Terminal  
Lancaster, Pa. Garrison, N. Y.  
Annual Subscription, \$6.00 Single Copies, 15 Cts.

SCIENCE is the official organ of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Information regarding membership in the Association may be secured from the office of the permanent secretary, in the Smithsonian Institution Building, Washington, D. C.

## PERMANENT ELEMENTS IN THE FLUX OF PRESENT-DAY PHYSICS<sup>1</sup>

By Professor P. W. BRIDGMAN

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MANY of us could, I believe, confess to a feeling of breathlessness at the rapid changes of our present physical progress, and some of us might even, in a moment of candor, admit a little resentment at our shortness of breath. Let us discuss together what we may perhaps best do to recover our poise.

The changing situation which is responsible for our discomfort is complex. First and foremost there is our changing experimental knowledge, reaching over the entire range from the infinitely small to the infinitely large. The upsetting feature here is not so much that we have discovered an enormous array of new facts, which in themselves are difficult enough to

<sup>1</sup> Address of the retiring vice-president and chairman of Section B—Physics, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Des Moines, Iowa, December, 1929.

keep pace with, as that these facts have proved in many cases to be irreconcilable with our previous expectations of what was possible, so that we have been forced to change our entire conceptual attitude. These conceptual changes have in many cases been associated with mathematical theories, which are being continually formulated at an ever-accelerating tempo and in a complexity and abstractness increasingly formidable. Some of the more important landmarks in this progression are: The electromagnetic theory of light, the special theory of relativity, the general theory of relativity, the quantum theory of Bohr, the matrix calculus of Heisenberg, the wave mechanics of Schrödinger, the transformation theory of Dirac and Jordan, the group theory of Weyl and now the double quantization theory of Jordan and others.

# Science

71 (1828)

*Science* 71 (1828), x-46.

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