HYGIENE

1927 Has Best Health Record

So far 1927 has been an exceptionally healthy year, judging by figures just issued by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.

Fewer people have died in the first half of this year in the representative slice of the population included among the company's policy holders than during the corresponding period of any previous year, the statisticians' figures show. The white death rate for the six months was 8.6 as compared with 9.7 for the first half of 1926. The colored mortality figures, though higher than those for whites, also showed a decided improvement.

The nearest approach to the present figure occurred in 1921, when the rate for the first six months was 8.7. The statisticians point out, however, that the gain made by 1927 is greater than appears from mere comparison of figures, since the company has recently adopted the policy of insuring infants under one year of age, the period during which susceptibility to disease is greatest. Consequently the gain in lives of 1927 is considered a most encouraging indication of health conditions in the light of the fact that some 492,000 infants are included in the calculations.

The outstanding feature of the year's health record to date is the big drop in deaths from tuberculosis. The season of the year when the most deaths from tuberculosis occur is past, and it is hoped that 1927 will show a new low water mark for deaths from this disease.

Mortality from influenza and pneumonia were lower than they have been in several years. While the typhoid rate rose, due probably to the outbreak in Montreal, there has not as yet been any notable increase from conditions arising from the Mississippi flood. Measles, scarlet fever, and whooping cough have claimed fewer victims, but diphtheria has made a slight gain. The cancer situation is unimproved and shows a slight increase in the number of deaths among whites and a bigger gain among colored people.

In spite of the generally hopeful conditions with respect to disease, the record for violent deaths is high. One fourth of all the accidental deaths were automobile fatalities, while the drownings registered a ten per cent. gain among whites and actually doubled among negroes.

BIOLOGY

CHARLES ATWOOD KOFOID

Premier Protistologist

When the news was published last week that Prof. Kofoid had been elected to the presidency of the Pacific Division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, biologists generally concurred in the opinion that the action of his coast colleagues was highly appropriate. Prof. Kofoid's reputation is more than sectional, more than national, as an indefatigable worker, a prolific publisher and a front-rank teacher in the difficult field of the minute acellular life that swarms in ocean and stream, and all too often in our afflicted insides. He drives his students as hard as he does himself—they sometimes complain that he half kills them with work. But he makes good zoologists out of them.

Charles Atwood Kofoid was born in Illinois in 1865. Like many another scientist who has made his mark in the coast states, he first attended a middle-western college (Oberlin), and then worked out his doctorate at Harvard. He reached California in 1900, and has been Professor of Zoology at Berkeley since 1910. His multifold activities have taken him all over the world, first as a student of marine protista and lately in the more immediately practical field of parasitic protozoa. He assists in the direction of several research activities away from the university campus, and edits or helps to edit a whole string of scientific journals. He seems to be able to multiply himself kinetically as his pet protozoa multiply themselves morphologically.

ASTRONOMY

"New" Star in Milky Way

A "new" star, flashing out from previous obscurity, has just been located in the Milky Way, according to Dr. Harlow Shapley, director of the Harvard College Observatory. The discovery of a strange celestial object was made by Dr. Max Wolf, of the observatory at Heidelberg University in Germany. Photographs made at the Harvard Observatory have confirmed the fact that it is really a "nova" or "new" star.

However, though the discovery has just been made, the new star might have been detected several months ago. It first appeared sometime between June 8 and June 21, and was photographed on plates made at the Harvard Observatory during that period. As it is in a region of the sky where thousands of stars can be photographed in a single exposure, it is not surprising that its unusual character was not noted at the time. Plates made before June 8 showed no record of it, though they were capable of showing stars as faint as the sixteenth magnitude. From such an exceedingly faint object, it quickly rose to the eighth magnitude, too faint to be perceived by the unaided eye, but visible in a small telescope.

Now its light is on the wane, and it is of the ninth magnitude. An effort is being made to have American astronomers observe it, to measure its variations in light before it gets too faint to be readily observed.

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METEOROLOGY

July Weather—and Murphy

July, 1927, passed and still the American farmer is cheerful. Most of the great staple crops of this continent are flourishing. Wheat will be a bumper crop. Corn has made rapid recovery from the effects of adverse conditions last spring. The weather of the past month was in no way exceptional or remarkable.

The unofficial prognosticator who threatened us with devastating cold waves in July took a long shot. The odds were a hundred to one against him, but he might have hit the mark. Such things have happened. There was the case of Murphy.

In England, after the lapse of nearly a century, they still talk of "Murphy's Winter." Daniel Murphy published a "Weather Almanac," in which, among a number of vague and haphazard prophecies, he declared that the lowest temperature of 1838 would be experienced on

(*Just turn the page*)

"New" Star for Milky Way

(*Continued from page* 131)

Photographs of its spectrum will also be made.

Astronomically, the position of the nova is given as 18 hours and 52 minutes right ascension, and 3 degrees 25 minutes south declination. This is in the constellation of Antinous, a group visible in the southern sky in late August evenings. It is just below and to the west of the bright star Altair, in the Eagle, which towards the end of August is directly south at about 8:00 p. m.

A nova is really the explosion of a star, and is the most vast of all known physical catastrophes. But despite the violence, the stars that are affected seem to be pretty much the same after the outbreak as before. Though they are not all bright enough to be observed, it is estimated that ten novae occur in our stellar system in a year. This precludes the possibility of one theory that has been suggested for their origin, that they are caused by collision between two stars. The stars are so sparsely scattered in space that such a collision would be millions of times rarer.

The tremendous energy which is liberated is now believed to be due to a breaking up of the atoms of which the star is made. Some internal condition might start it, or some collision with a very small body in space might act as the trigger to set it off, according to astronomers' ideas.

Science News-Letter, August 27, 1927

July Weather—and Murphy

(*Continued from page* 131)

January 20. This prediction was verified in the fullest measure. January 20 was the coldest day England had known for generations. The prophet became famous overnight. People flocked to the booksellers to buy copies of his almanac. The edition was soon exhausted and this work actually underwent more than fifty reprintings to satisfy public demand.

Meteorologists have since compared the daily predictions in Murphy's almanac for 1838 with the weather that prevailed day by day during that year in London. The announcements for 197 days were decidedly wrong. The others were wholly or partly right, but were mostly as indefinite and elastic as almanac weather predictions are wont to be. One lucky guess made the author immortal, and, incidentally, rich.

Science News-Letter, August 27, 1927