

Texas Observatory Assured

Astronomy

After three years of litigation, a compromise has been effected which assures the University of Texas of a major portion of the bequest of the late W. J. McDonald, of Paris, Texas, for the advancement of astronomy. This announcement was made recently by Dr. H. J. Benedict, president of the University of Texas.

In place of the \$1,200,000 left, the University will receive \$900,000, Dr. Benedict said. The Board of Regents of the University have full power to use this fund at once or later to advance astronomical knowledge in any way they see fit. As it was known that Mr. McDonald had contemplated the accumulation of the fund over a number of years before the actual establishment of the Observatory, the Regents will proceed with plans very slowly and in accord with advice from the greatest astronomers.

Science News-Letter, May 18, 1929

Avoid Vitamin Excess

Chemistry

You may get too much of a good thing, even vitamin D, it appears from studies reported to the American Chemical Society meeting by R. F. Light, Glennard Miller and Dr. C. N. Frey. Loss of weight and halted growth result from too much of this vitamin, smaller amounts of which are essential to the formation of bones and teeth. Using white rats as subjects, these investigators found that moderate overdosage of ergosterol, potent source of vitamin D, when given for short periods of time had no effect on the growth of the rats. Massive overdosage, as much as 100,000 times the curative dosage per day, caused the animals to stop growing and they lost weight. They ate less and the amount of calcium and phosphorus in their blood increased when these massive doses were given daily.

Science News-Letter, May 18, 1929

The Terror of the Desert

Aviation

One of England's most expert aerial photographers, Capt. Alfred G. Buckham, F. R. P. S., contributes the cover picture for this week in the form of the first aerial photograph of a sandstorm, known in Egypt as the "terror of the desert." The Great Pyramid of Cheops is in the foreground.

Science News-Letter, May 18, 1929

Synthetic Scents

Chemistry

That the chemist has become a rival of the musk deer in the manufacture of perfumery was demonstrated by Prof. Marston Taylor Bogert of Columbia University in an address to the Washington Chemical Society. He presented for the inspection and inhalation of the assembled chemists a variety of synthetic substances having a musky odor, some indistinguishable from the natural and others of a different but similar scent. One of these artificial musks, which the chemist calls "cyclopentadecanone" and the perfumer calls "Exaltone", sells for \$275 per ounce. This is not a high price considering that the best grade of the natural Tonquin grain musk, which sells at \$35 an ounce, does not contain more than one per cent. of the pure muskone that gives off the odor, and therefore this would be worth \$3,500 per ounce if it could be extracted in a pure state.

Unless the chemist soon comes to the rescue, the little musk deer is likely to become extinct, for the number killed annually in the mountains of Tibet and western China is estimated between 50,000 and 100,000. Since the perfume pod or scent gland is only carried by the male deer and each weighs about an ounce dried, the total output is between one and two tons a year, worth at New York prices over a million dollars a year. Musks are also found in the vegetable kingdom. The seeds of the Hibiscus or ambrette and the root of the Archangelica have the scent of musk, though its chemical composition is different from the animal musk. All the compounds of musky odor are composed of long chains of carbon atoms, consisting of fourteen to seventeen carbons, hooked up into rings, and containing an oxygen atom in addition to their hydrogen atoms.

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