

EDUCATION

Wanted: Young Scientists

NOTED ANTHROPOLOGIST Margaret Mead has suggested that spending some time in the company of working scientists would inspire many more young students to want to be scientists themselves.

In a talk to science and mathematics teachers attending an eight-week summer science institute supported by the National Science Foundation at Hampton Institute, Hampton, Va., Dr. Mead, an associate curator of the American Museum of Natural History, advised that a promising young person should be given an opportunity to observe the activities of a working mathematician, for example, and to know him realistically as a human being. Such first hand information on science and scientists would be much more effective than reading books about such geniuses as Einstein, who seem awesomely remote to young readers.

More gifted and average high school students would be brought into the scientific community, Dr. Mead predicted, if they could be convinced that careers in science are "not just for unique people." Some popular magazines and even some teachers, she said, have pictured a scientist's life as one of inhuman drudgery that could be performed only by a superman.

Advising the educators on the important problem of encouraging gifted children, Dr. Mead said that if an exceptionally gifted child is too "different" from his classmates, he should be sent to a school "where he will not be persecuted or be allowed to persecute others with his superior knowledge."

PUBLIC HEALTH

Overrate Pollution Dangers

POLLUTION of sea water with sewage may be more of an aesthetic problem than a health problem.

A British physician told the First International Conference on Waste Disposal in the Marine Environment meeting in Berkeley, Calif., that the general public too often tends to blame sewage-polluted sea water for any intestinal illness contracted at seaside resorts.

Dr. B. Moore of the Medical Research Council, Exeter, Devon, England, cited several instances of incorrect attribution of such illnesses to sea bathing. These included an outbreak of paratyphoid fever, later shown to have been caused by ice cream, and a widespread outbreak of acute non-bacterial gastro-enteritis.

Results of studies on the isolation of salmonellae (a group of bacteria including the typhoid and paratyphoid bacilli), said Dr. Moore, indicate the risk of contracting enteric fever or other salmonella infections through bathing in polluted sea water is very slight.

Investigation of the bathing histories of children living by the seaside who con-

tracting poliomyelitis was also described by Dr. Moore. Here, the findings strongly suggested that a history of bathing in cases of polio is irrelevant, he said.

In another report to the Conference the disappearance of large kelp beds around major sewage outfalls in the ocean near Los Angeles and San Diego was discussed by K. A. Clendenning and W. J. North of the Institute of Marine Resources, University of California, La Jolla, Calif.

The causes of this seaweed recession are being sought in field and laboratory studies. The two scientists said, however, that the disappearance of kelp several miles from the outfalls is not caused by toxic agents. Reduced light penetration, on the other hand, seems to be a more likely cause of the detrimental effects of sewage on kelp.

Increased water turbidity and greater random abundances of phytoplankton, or minute plant life, reduce light penetration to deeply immersed young kelp plants. These then die off. But the established kelp plants, having a surface canopy, are better adapted for survival in turbid water.

Science News Letter, August 8, 1959



RARE BIRD—The Kookaburra, an Australian native, is becoming a rare bird. Conservationists are concerned about its possible disappearance and are planning to take steps to protect it. However, as with many other rare animals, man and civilization are destroying much of its habitat. The Kookaburra is known for its strange cry which sounds like human laughter.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Alcoholism Is Nation's No. 3 Health Problem

ALCOHOLICS are being produced at the rate of 500,000 annually in the United States. Their life expectancy is 20 years less than the national average, a University of Illinois scientist said.

"Alcoholism is now the nation's number three health problem from the standpoint of incidence, lives lost and people disabled," Dr. Andrew C. Ivy reported at the Fourth Annual Institute of Scientific Studies for the Prevention of Alcoholism meeting in Washington.

Dr. Ivy said there are 8,000,000 persons afflicted with alcoholism—5,000,000 outright alcoholics, and another 3,000,000 "pre-alcoholics." He pointed out that 350,000 alcoholics die annually with the average life span being about 51 years compared to a life expectancy of 70 for non-alcoholics.

After a person has become an alcoholic, he can expect to live an average of 16 years, according to Dr. Ivy. These figures are based on medical records and life insurance statistics.

There has been a 12% decrease in the number of adult drinkers in the past 13 years, but an increase in the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Most of the decline in drinking is traced to women, who accounted for eight percent of the decrease.

"Increasingly, women are deciding it's not worth the price to keep up with the hard-pouring Joneses," Dr. Ivy said.

Science News Letter, August 8, 1959