



Statesmen-Scientists

► WASHINGTON'S birthday is always an occasion for comparing the stature of present-day statesmen and politicians with that of our first President and the men who worked with him during the first difficult days of our republic. As a rule, the moderns come off second best, even in the fields of law, economics and public affairs, for which most of them are specifically trained.

However, there is one field in which such comparisons between the Founding Fathers and public men of today are rarely made. Among our earlier statesmen it was nothing uncommon to find good knowledge of the sciences of their day, despite relatively poor facilities for dissemination of such knowledge. But scientific training among present-day makers of public policy has become so rare that its lack is simply taken for granted. We apparently are willing to entrust decisions on such immensely important scientific questions as atomic energy, soil conservation, public health and mineral resources to lawyers, bank-

ers, businessmen and newspaper editors who "never took any science" when they were in college and who certainly haven't taken any since.

Yet our Founding Fathers made themselves masters of the science of their day simply as a part of what a decently educated man was expected to know—and most of them got their knowledge without benefit of college degrees, at that. Washington had no agricultural college to attend, yet he became one of the most advanced agriculturists of his day; he never even heard of an Institute of Technology, yet he was a good practical civil engineer, and some military historians declare that he thought out his military measures along engineering lines.

Franklin never even finished elementary school, yet he became one of

the most versatile and brilliant scientists of his century, more than holding his own in an intellectual French royal court and being elected to membership in the Imperial Russian Academy of Science. Patrick Henry was perhaps as much of a professional politician as the times produced, yet had some well-grounded views on such things as soil erosion. Jefferson's interest and activity in scientific fields are a familiar classic of American history.

Latterly Congress has come to some realization of its lacks in scientific and technical knowledge and has attempted to remedy them by arranging for a corps of advising specialists. That will help, but it is not enough. There is no outside substitute for knowledge inside your own head.

Science News Letter, February 21, 1948

MEDICINE

Whooping Cough Remedy

► FIRST trials in patients of a new penicillin-like remedy active against whooping cough are reported by Dr. P. N. Swift of the County Hospital, Farnborough, in the *Lancet*, (Jan. 24), British medical journal.

The 10 little patients, whose ages ranged from one month to two and one-half years, all showed a definite response within the first 48 hours. Two of the 10 died. In both of these the drug seemed to control the disease, and the whooping cough was not considered the direct cause of the deaths. The other eight recovered, the speed with which they got well depending on how early in the disease the new drug was started.

Aerosporin is the name of the new drug which may turn out to be a remedy for typhoid fever as well as for whooping cough. While penicillin comes from a mold, aerosporin comes from a bacterium found in soil and air and in the tap water in an American city, Chicago. It was discovered by Drs. G. C. Ainsworth, Annie M. Brown and G. Brownlee of the Wellcome Physiological Research Laboratories.

Aerosporin is "more discriminating" than streptomycin, test-tube studies reported by Drs. Brownlee and S. R. M. Bushby show. It has no action against the tuberculosis germ. But for germs against which it is active, it is 10 to many hundred times more powerful than streptomycin.

The new antibiotic, as this kind of remedy is called, does not merely check germs but kills them. It has the further

advantage that disease germs do not readily grow resistant to it.

It cannot be given by mouth, because it is not absorbed from the stomach or intestines. It is more acutely toxic than streptomycin but its greater anti-germ activity gives it a large margin of safety. A kidney-damaging effect was gotten rid of as the drug was further purified. Aerosporin is not yet available commercially.

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ASTRONOMY

Cluster of Six Galaxies Found Extremely Dense

► A GROUP of six galaxies in the constellation of Serpens, the serpent, has been found to be at least 200 times more dense than the most crowded cluster of galaxies previously known.

The brightest member of this Serpens sextet, Dr. Carl K. Seyfert of Vanderbilt University announced, has an intrinsic total brightness as great as that of the nearby Spiral Galaxy in the constellation of Andromeda, which most astronomers believe to be quite similar to our own. The star density of this and the other five galaxies in the cluster thus becomes very high, for the brightness of stars depend on their masses.

In the entire survey, made with photographs taken with the Schmidt telescope of Harvard College Observatory, Dr. Seyfert found approximately 5,000 new galaxies.

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