

## REVIEW

Annual Report of the Smithsonian Institution for 1950  
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The Smithsonian Institution was established more than a century ago by James Smithson, a Britisher, "to found at Washington an institution for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men". As this report emphasizes, those words have had a far-reaching effect upon American science, for they have enabled the Institution to operate without excessive restrictions and with freedom of initiative and outlook. In the beginning the Institution carried on its research programs largely by subsidizing the work of scientists not on its own staff and by publishing the results of their work. The value of the various activities gradually became known to the Nation, and eventually one by one they were recognized as public necessities by the Congress. Most of them are now supported largely by Federal Government funds, altho remaining under Smithsonian direction. The following are the main responsibilities and activities of the Institution: U. S. National Museum, with its departments of Anthropology, Zoology, Botany, Geology, Engineering and Industries, and History; the National Gallery of Art; the National Collection of Fine Arts; the Freer Gallery of Art; the Bureau of American Ethnology; the International Exchange Service; the National Zoological Park; the Astrophysical Observatory; the National Air Museum; and the Canal Zone Biological Area. The reports of these activities contain much minutae, of little interest to the average reader. However, the work of the International Exchange Service is worthy of being called to the attention of our readers. This service makes it possible for many scientists and scientific institutions to exchange technical publications without the necessity of paying foreign postage.

About two-thirds of the entire volume is occupied by the General Appendix, the purpose of which is "to furnish brief accounts of scientific discovery in particular directions; reports of investigations made by staff members and collaborators of the Institution; and memoirs of a general character or on special topics that are of interest or value to the numerous correspondents of the Institution". These memoirs illustrate at least some of the more remarkable and important developments in physical and biological discovery, as well as showing the general character of the studies resulting from the activities of the staff of the Institution itself. Of the 19 papers included in the Appendix of the Report for 1950, only 3 or 4 are by staff members of the Institution. Other papers are by outstanding authors in Sweden, Ireland, Great Britain, and Australia. The majority of the authors are on the staffs of American scientific and educational institutions; a few are affiliated with commercial firms. Astronomy and physics, aviation, chemistry, biology, seismology, geology and building construction, conservation of natural resources, anthropology, and entomology are the broad fields under which the papers in this present volume might be classified. But this list cannot give the slightest idea of the interesting topics which are discussed, nor of the beautifully clear language in which some of the essays are couched. To attempt to present a review of such an important yet heterogeneous assortment, is not possible within reasonable limits. This reviewer can only urge the reader who is interested in more than passing his time, to sample for himself at least the first three or four of the papers.

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