PHIMSY

The new Trieste prizes

As a banquet is part of every good conference and an award or two enlivens any banquet, so was it at Trieste. Part of the International Symposium on Contemporary Physics held at Abdus Salam's International Centre for Theoretical Physics, Trieste (PHYSICS TODAY, June, page 73, September, page 77, and this issue, page 95) was the banquet awards.

To Eugene Wigner of Princeton went an alarm clock because he was declared the participant most often late to meetings. Robert E. Marshak,

Rochester, was recognized as the person who asked most questions and as a prize got a loud-hailing bull horn. (After the banquet, Paul Dirac complained; he should have received the award for the "quietest participant.") To Julian Schwinger, a meter-long Chinese silk scroll, for the "longest and most appreciated" address. To Salam a globe and a baton, symbolizing his position as maestro of the worldwide spread of physics. For Paolo Budini, deputy director of the center, a trowel in testimony of his ability as a builder.

A break for Galileo

Our old friend Galileo may have been right after all. Three centuries after he recanted the theory that the earth moves around the sun, I hear that the Roman Catholic Church, of which he was a subject, is thinking of reopening his case. The head of the organization authorized Franz König, cardinal of the church and archbishop of Vienna, to tell an assembly of Nobel prizewinners about the possibility of a retrial—an indication that the church still isn't sure what moves around what in the solar system.

I wasn't there when the cardinal brought up the case, but I can't help wondering how the scientists felt. Were they puzzled that there is anything left to discover in a retrial? What happens if a commission decides that the church was right after all, Galileo was wrong, and the sun does move around the earth?

Of course if Galileo does not lose on the appeal, the church, with its authority, infallibility and dogma, will be on the side of free inquiry, equality before the laws of nature and skepticism, and two world systems will have become one.

Whatever happens, I'm looking forward to press accounts of the trial. I can't wait to go out on the street and hear a news vendor shouting, "Galileo cleared! Galileo cleared!" Then I will think about who has been cleared of what.

Allison and positronium

DEAR PHIMSY: I wasn't aware, until I read the interesting historical note on positronium on page 15 of the July issue, that there was interest in the question of who first thought of the idea. Had I known that, I would have submitted the name of Samuel K. Allison, who was teaching a course in spectroscopy at the University of Chicago in 1932 when Carl D. Anderson's discovery of the positron was announced. I was taking Sam's course, and I remember that we had just learned about the effect of reduced mass on the lines in the hydrogen spectrum. A few days after he had derived the reduced-mass correction, he told us, in some excitement, that Anderson had just discovered the positron and that he had stayed up late the night before, looking through Henry A. Rowland's table of solar lines to see whether the hydrogen-like lines were present. I remember hearing him say that he was very disappointed

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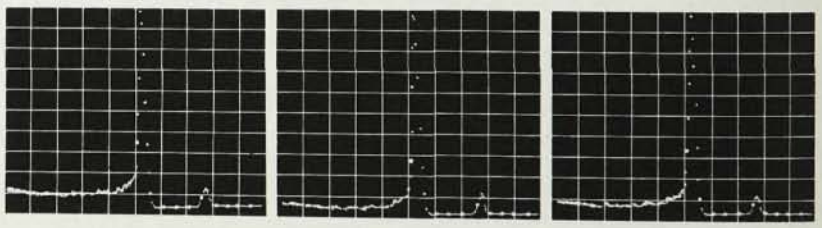

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not to find them since, as he said, they would have instantly made him a famous astrophysicist, and he had never done any work in that field.

The only people who could have beaten Sam by more than a few days were those who were "in the know" at Cal Tech. My guess is that they probably thought of the idea and also had their look in the solar wavelength tables but did not feel that a negative result was worth publishing.

I have a personal reason for believing that someone at Cal Tech probably made such a search. The very same day in 1939 that Robert Cornog and I found that He^3 was a stable isotope and not radioactive as everyone believed at the time, I went over to the library and looked through the table of coronal lines to see whether by any chance He^3 lines were there along with the He^4 lines. I too was disappointed, and this is the first time I've mentioned that negative result to anyone.

LUIS W. ALVAREZ
Lawrence Radiation Laboratory, Berkeley

Perpetual-motion solution

DEAR PHIMSY: Your remarks on inventors of perpetual-motion machines (PHYSICS TODAY, July, page 15) bring to mind the following story told me by Professor A. C. Hardy. It seems that Hardy received a letter from such an inventor, describing his machine and demanding, as is customary, to be told why it wouldn't work. Before he had replied to this letter, Hardy received a second letter from another inventor, making exactly the same demand.

Hardy then wrote to both inventors, saying that although he himself was not an authority on perpetual-motion machines, he knew someone who was, and sent each inventor the name and address of the other.

FRANCIS W. SEARS
Dartmouth College

When a super is a semi

I usually think of semiconductors having a resistance in between those of insulators and conductors and of superconductors having none at all. So I have to revise my thinking. A recent title in *Sov. Phys.—Solid State* is, "Sound Dispersion in Superconducting Semiconductors." □