# *New Editor of Reviews of Modern Physics*

## E. U. CONDON

E. U. Condon, professor and head of the Department of Physics at Washington University, St. Louis, Mo., has been named by the American Physical Society as Editor of its quarterly *Reviews of Modern Physics*. His appointment becomes effective January 1, 1957.

THE *Reviews of Modern Physics* started as Physical Review Supplement in July, 1929. It has developed, in the 27 years since its foundation, into one of the most important sources of information for physicists. The need for a review journal which summarizes recent progress and trends in certain parts of physics, for the benefit of those whose principal interest and preoccupation is in other fields, must have been evident to its first editorial board which included John T. Tate, A. H. Compton, K. T. Compton, K. K. Darrow, E. C. Kemble, C. E. Mendenhall, and D. L. Webster. Today, the unprecedented growth of the volume of publications renders such a journal a necessity. Without journals such as the *RMP*, our special interests would make our knowledge of the various branches of physics even more oppressively narrow than most of us feel it already is. This writer, for one, derives practically all his acquaintance with radio-astronomy, with the theories of earth magnetism, with magneto-hydrodynamics, from articles in the *Reviews of Modern Physics*, and he suspects that the majority of his colleagues could present a similar list.

*J. W. Buchta, the retiring Editor of* RMP, *has been associated with that journal for a full quarter-century. Dr. Buchta is professor of physics and associate dean of the College of Science, Literature, and the Arts at the University of Minnesota.*

John T. Tate was the first *Editor of the Reviews of Modern Physics* and the list of the first contributors reads like an enumeration of famous names of American physicists of the first half of this century. The first issue contains articles by R. T. Birge on the probable values of the physical constants ($c = 2.99796 \pm 0.00004 \times 10^{10}$, $e = 4.770 \pm 0.005 \times 10^{-10}$, $h = 6.547 \pm 0.008 \times 10^{-27}$, $N_0 = 6.064 \pm 0.006 \times 10^{23}$/mole), by A. H. Compton on the corpuscular properties of light, and by K. K. Darrow on the statistical theories of matter, radiation, and electricity. Later issues carry articles by Kemble and Hill, Mohler, Osgood, Mulliken, Stewart, K. T. Compton, Langmuir, Swann, Eckart.

The present editor, J. W. Buchta, joined Tate in 1931 and was virtually fully in charge of the *RMP* since 1944. The character of the *Reviews* has undergone, since its founding, two types of changes. First, the authors form a much wider group than in the early days. This, I believe, reflects the growing confidence of American physics in itself, the certainty that a wider group among us can speak with assurance and authority. It also re-

flects the diversification of our interests which calls for articles on subjects not at the temporary focus of current attention. The other change refers to the type of articles carried by the *RMP*. To the original review-type article, collections of articles and collections of data have been added. The latter type of article is again a reflection of the expansion of the volume of our knowledge and of the difficulty to have its results in focus even in a narrow field. The collections of articles on a definite subject, such as cosmic rays, reflects our confidence that many of us can speak with authority in a field, that our work remains coordinated in spite of the increase in our number. It also reflects, unfortunately, the extreme preoccupation of some of our best minds with urgent problems which leave them little leisure for completing a full and comprehensive review even on the subject of their own principal interest. Dr. Buchta was most successful in recognizing the need for certain changes in policy of the *RMP* and to give effect to these changes without lowering in any way the high standards established in the early days. We can justly feel proud of the *Reviews of Modern Physics*.

In spite of recognizing the need and justification of the changes in the character of the *Reviews*, many of us feel the significance, the increased significance, of the original objective of review articles about rather wide fields. The articles which stick most in the mind of this writer are review articles written by one or two authors and it is these which had the greatest influence on most of us and which we remember most clearly. Some of these acquired world fame, such as the article of Sommerfeld and Frank on the electron theory of metals, of Bridgman on high pressures, Eckart's on group theory, Fermi and Breit on the quantum theory of radiation, Konopinski on beta decay and, last but not least, the articles of Bethe, Bacher, and Livingston on nuclear physics. Many, many others are only slightly less famous because the author has relayed his knowledge more extensively also through other media. Again, we owe a debt of deep gratitude to all who have encouraged these articles and recognized their importance.

Dr. E. U. Condon, who takes over the editorship of the *Reviews*, is known to every physicist. His name is associated with the first realization of important laws of physics in a great variety of fields. These include molecular phenomena (the Franck-Condon principle), the theory of radioactivity (the Gamow-Condon-Gurney theory of alpha decay). He has done important work during the war in connection with the two most monumental projects, atomic energy and radar. On the latter (as well as on optical rotatory power), he has contributed an article to the *RMP*. His most monumental work, however, is the *Theory of Atomic Spectra*, written in 1935 in collaboration with G. Shortley, which continues to be the standard book recording our understanding of atomic spectra. His encyclopedic interests make Dr. Condon a unique choice as Editor of our cherished journal, the *Reviews of Modern Physics*.

**Eugene P. Wigner**