CONGRESS TIT-BITS

(1) Professor André Weil, aged 72, of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, U.S.A. delivered a lecture on 'History of mathematics : why and how?' When introducing him, Professor Marshall Stone said, "If there is anyone among us who deserves a place in the history of mathematics, it must surely be André Weil."

(2) Speaking on the classification problem of finite simple groups, Professor Daniel Gorenstein of Rutgers University, U.S.A., proclaimed that the problem was 'almost solved' and that hopefully the complete solution would be available before the next ICM in 1982. This is probably the first time in the history of the Congress that an important problem in mathematics was announced to be 'almost solved'.

(3) What is the difference between the 'Fischer monster' and the 'baby monster'? The former is still being searched for (by finite simple group theorists), and the latter has been found (by none other than group theorists).

(4) Professor Robert Langlands of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, lectured on 'Automorphic forms and L-functions.' He was introduced as the 'one man who has done most in directing the general programme of the study of the subject and whose name (by coincidence?) bears the same initial as that of the functions.'

(5) Professor Jacques Tits of College de France, Paris, on reporting the work of the Fields medallist G. A. Margulis, said that during one academic year he lectured on the results of Margulis in a graduate seminar, and 'I must confess that I have never learned more mathematics in any one year than in that year.'

(6) Professor I. M. James of Oxford University reported on the work of the Fields medallist D. Quillen. The young mathematician's work in K-theory exhibited extraordinary ingenuity and depth. "That was of course a very 'Quillen' thing to do," said James.

(7) Professor N. Katz of Princeton University spoke on the work of the Fields medallist P. Deligne : "The solution of the Weil Conjectures is but one of the many extremely brilliant works accomplished by Deligne."

(8) The work of the Fieldsmedallist C. Fefferman was reported on by Professor L. Carleson of the University of Uppsala, Sweden. He said that 'Fefferman's work has revived the subject of classical analysis, thought to be dead some time ago.'

(9) The Polish mathematicians (a group of more than 100) chartered a boat to Helsinki and spent their evenings on board.

(10) Professor G. C. Rota of M. I. T., U. S. A., spoke on 'Recent developments in combinatorics'. "In the beginning," he began, "there was Euclid and he introduced geometry. Then co-ordinates were created and there came the analysts. They taught the geometers to differentiate and integrate. Thus started the age of differential geometry. Along came the algebraists who said, "Look, there is no need to dy/dx. Everything is subsumed under commutative algebra. Let us show you how." And so arrived the era of algebraic geometry. Now we come and we shall tell them how geometry is to be done. Who are we? We the combinatorists of course!"

(11) Professor Roger Penrose of Oxford University spoke on the theory of manifolds and relativity. He was introduced as the person who was generally responsible for luring mathematicians into mathematical physics.