

the occurrence of actual tornadoes, his measure of success will be directly apparent. G.

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ELECTRICIANS.

THE president of the United States, in pursuance of a special provision of congress, has appointed a scientific commission, the composition of which we gave in No. 78, of which Professor Rowland is chairman, and which may, in the name of the United-States government, conduct a national conference of electricians in Philadelphia in the autumn of 1884. The law creating the commission is as follows: "That the president of the United States be, and is hereby, authorized to appoint a scientific commission which may, in the name of the United-States government, conduct a national conference of electricians in Philadelphia in the autumn of 1884; that said commission may invite scientific men, native and foreign, to participate in the conference, and may, in general, determine the scope and character of its work; that the sum of seven thousand five hundred dollars be appropriated to meet the expenses of the commission in conducting the conference and investigations, and to meet the expenses of preparing reports of the same, *provided* that the whole amount of the expenses incurred by said commission shall not exceed the said sum of seven thousand five hundred dollars, and the members of said commission shall not receive any compensation for services." It is left to the discretion of the commission to invite foreign scientific men to join in the labors of the conference; and the United-States government does not dictate in regard to the topics which are to be treated in the conferences, further than to require that the first meeting shall be held as early as Aug. 7, 1884. In the letter to each member of the commission, apprising him of his appointment, Secretary Frelinghuysen writes, "It is hardly necessary to observe that this commission, appointed for high scientific purposes, will not permit its influences to be exerted in behalf of any person or company, manufacturers of electrical apparatus or machines."

The *raison d'être* of this commission is the conjunction of the electrical exposition in Philadelphia with the meeting of the American association of science in the same place, and the meeting of the British association in Montreal. It is hoped that a number of foreign scientific men may be induced to deliberate with the American commission upon more or less international electrical questions. It is thought by some that there is hardly need of another conference of electricians. The French conference has lately adjourned. Lord Rayleigh has made an exhaustive determination of the ohm. A standard of light has been adopted which is the best that present experience indicates. The meteorological directions of electrical science need time, and not conferences, for their development; and the protection of international cables and international telegraphic relations was fully considered in the French conference. In answer to this view, it must be pointed out that the mere assemblage of those most interested and practised in any department of science is necessary in the present state of scientific research. There are no 'gentle hermits' in the subject of electricity; and no one can hope to advance the subject by working in a remote lighthouse or on a desert island. There may be Victor Hugos in poetry and fiction, but not in electricity.

It is possible that American science may enlighten foreign science, even on such trite subjects as the ohm and the standard of light. There is, moreover, the adoption of the electric light by the American lighthouses, and a report upon the uses of electricity in connection with torpedo warfare, — a subject, when it is considered that torpedoes constitute our principal means of harbor defence, of especial interest in the coming presidential election. The imagination needs only a slight stimulation to perceive that the government can reasonably expect as great a return for the sum of seven thousand five hundred dollars invested in an electrical conference, as it can hope to have from the same sum expended in improving the harbor of Podunk.