SCIENCE.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 1884.

THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION MEETING IN PHILADELPHIA.

In selecting Philadelphia as the place of its meeting in 1884, the American association for the advancement of science has returned to its birthplace. Forty-four years ago, a score of geologists — one of whom, James Hall, still lives in honor and vigor — assembled in the rooms of the academy of sciences, and formed the Association of geologists and naturalists. Three years later, in Boston, it was decided to enlarge this association; and so at another meeting in Philadelphia, on the 20th of September, 1848, under the guidance of a leader who has but lately departed, — the beloved William B. Rogers, — a new constitution was adopted, other scientific professors and workers were enlisted, and the association, as we now know it in its catholic comprehensiveness, was launched upon its course.

The new name and the new form were doubtless suggested by the British association, which dates its origin from the meeting at York in 1831. The object of the American society was declared to be, "by periodical and migratory meetings to promote intercourse between those who are cultivating science in different parts of the United States; to give a stronger and more general impulse and a more systematic direction to scientific research in our country; and to procure for the labors of scientific men increased facilities and a wider usefulness." Subsequently the scope of the society was extended, and 'America' took the place of 'United States.'

In again re-assembling at Philadelphia, when time has reversed the digits from '48 to '84, it is natural to consider how far the purposes of the founders have been fulfilled. The most sanguine among them could not have anticipated such a growth of scientific endowments, in the period of one generation, as we now look back upon. The museums, the laboratories, the surveys, the observatories, the professorships, the schools of science and technology, which have been established and maintained since the association was formed, not only in the east but in the west, are results which, perhaps, may not be directly attributed to the association, but which certainly would never have been secured without a wide diffusion of scientific enthusiasm, such as usually follows these migratory congresses of investigators and teachers. We are among those who believe, that, if it could be shown that the association does nothing for the intellectual advantage of its members, nevertheless, all the efforts expended in its management are rewarded like the labors of the sowers in the springtime. The seed springs up, 'some ten, some sixty, some a hundred fold.' The educated people in every community, whether they are specially interested in science or not, are always attracted to the meetings; and the reports of papers and addresses are read far and wide through the land. Impressions are thus made in respect to the importance of different lines of research; and the names of scientific leaders become known to those who would never enter the dens and caves of the specialists, and would never have the benefit of their inspiration were it not for these autumnal conferences.

Rarely is there a meeting of the association which does not afford striking examples of the relations of government to science, and of the importance of securing for the public the results of prolonged research. Astronomy, geology, geodesy, certain branches of physics, ethnology, and now biology, through the admirable studies of the U. S. fish-commission, receive their most generous encouragement from the national government. To make the same assertion in another form, we may say that an enlightened people insists upon it that congress shall secure, for the good of all citizens, whatever results can be obtained by the liberal employment of

science in the public service. More than this, individual citizens have discovered that there is no better use for wealth than by endowments like those which are annually added to the educational resources of the country. In aiding all such tendencies, the American association has performed a noble part.

As we have seen, the founders of the association declared as their first object the promotion of "intercourse between those who are cultivating science in different parts of the United States." One of the obstacles to progress in this country is the wide separation of those who are workers in kindred departments. A professor in Dublin or in Edinburgh may go to London in a night; but it takes seven days for our California friends, and half that time for many a professor in the interior, to reach Washington or Boston. So much the more reason is there that these annual congresses, bringing people together from every part of the land, should be kept up. Acquaintances, friendships, copartnerships, promotions, criticisms, suggestions, assistance, are the fruits of this intercourse. Those who live in the centre of scientific activities, who see more people of mark in every month than are to be seen at other places in a year, are in danger of undervaluing all popular assemblies and conventions, and are tempted to stay away from the unsatisfactory throng. But it has been fortunate that nearly all the most eminent members of the American association have been ready to attend these meetings frequently, if not invariably, and to give the encouragement of their presence, their counsel, and their friendly greetings, to those who were younger. Not to mention any who are living, was there ever a more benignant and inspiring teacher than Agassiz? did any one ever forget the greetings of Bache who once felt his friendly grasp? and could anybody be more ready than Henry to lend a helpful hand to all who needed encouragement? Are there not scores of workers in the field to-day who remember with gratitude this trio, and others of their kin, as they appeared, for instance, at the Albany meeting when the association was in the first flush of its youthful vigor? Are there not like recollections of the great assembly of 1880, when Boston and Cambridge gave such admirable facilities for seeing institutions and men?

It seems to us that there is always danger of so multiplying the number of meetings, and of so subdividing the sections, as to confuse the members of the association, detract from the general interest, and interfere with the exchange of personal courtesies. The remedy lies with the officers of the association, preventing with firm and judicious decisions the reading of poor papers, and cutting off the discussions of wordy and rambling speakers. A few able papers are much better worth the consideration of the association than a multitude of unimportant communications. *Ponderanda non numeranda.*

As we write these lines, the meeting has not begun; but the circulars which have been issued show that every thing has been done in Philadelphia which experience in hospitality can suggest for the pleasure of the association. We trust that the reflex influences of the gathering will be felt upon the new institute of biology, on the great schools of medicine, on the University of Pennsylvania, on the Academy of natural sciences, and on all the other scientific foundations of which the city is justly proud. The seat of the American philosophical society is a shrine which the countrymen of Franklin and Rittenhouse will visit with pleasure under the presidency of Lesley.

J. PETER LESLEY.

The subject of this notice was born Sept. 17, 1819, in Philadelphia. Both his grandfather and father were cabinet-makers, intelligent, strong, and honest men, who brought up large families in the faith of the Church of Scotland, and in a love for hard work of every kind, physical and intellectual. He was sent to school on his sixth birthday, to the academy on his twelfth, and to the University of Pennsylvania on his fifteenth, getting his diploma in 1838. At an early age, his religious expe riences were of the severest type. He knew