

THE RECENT AGRICULTURAL CONVENTION AT WASHINGTON.

PURSUANT to a call issued by the commissioner of agriculture in May last, a convention of agricultural colleges and experiment-stations was held in Washington on July 8 and 9. The meeting was well attended, some thirty states and territories being represented by nearly fifty delegates; and the deliberations of the convention were marked by a noteworthy spirit of harmony and earnestness.

An informal gathering of the delegates in the parlors of the Ebbitt House on the evening of July 7 served to increase their acquaintance with each other and the commissioner of agriculture, and to outline a plan of organization for the convention.

The meetings of the convention were held at the Department of agriculture. At its first meeting, on Wednesday morning, it was organized by the choice of Hon. Norman J. Colman, commissioner of agriculture, as president; Presidents Willets of Michigan, Lee of Mississippi, Atherton of Pennsylvania, and Fairchild of Kansas, and Professor Dwinelle of California, as vice-presidents; and President Fairchild of Kansas as secretary.

The opening address of the commissioner occupied nearly an hour, opening with a review of the history of the land-grant colleges, but mainly occupied with suggestions as to how these colleges may attain to greater usefulness and success. The speaker regarded agricultural experimentation as being at present one of the most important and profitable functions of agricultural colleges; and the two thoughts most prominent in the address, as well as in the subsequent proceedings of the convention, were the need of a more generous financial support for this work, and the desirability of establishing more intimate relations between the U. S. department of agriculture and the several state institutions devoted to the furtherance of scientific agriculture.

The first business of general interest brought before the convention was a resolution introduced by the committee on order of business, approving the principle and general provisions of the bill to establish experiment-stations in connection with the agricultural colleges, introduced into the last congress, and known as the Cullen bill. The resolution was supported by Col. Switzler of Missouri in an eloquent speech, and also by Professor Knapp of Iowa, President Smith of Maryland, and Professor Cook of New Jersey, and was adopted by an almost unanimous yea and nay vote, only three or four delegates being absent, and no one voting nay. Following this, a committee of three on legislation, consisting of Presidents Atherton of Pennsylvania, Willets of Michigan, and Lee of Mississippi, was appointed to act in conjunction with the commissioner of agriculture in endeavoring to secure from the next congress legislation on this subject. Subsequently a general committee of one from each state was appointed, one of the duties of which was to endeavor to bring public opinion to bear upon this question, and to secure the votes of their respective states for the measure.

Upon the important subject of the relations which should subsist between the department of agriculture and the agricultural colleges and experiment-stations of the country, the convention expressed itself with a commendable degree of moderation. It is sufficiently obvious, to any one who is practically acquainted with conditions of experimental work, that the dreams of certain enthusiasts who would like to see this work organized with almost military rigor, under the direction of a central authority at Washington or elsewhere, can never be realized until human nature undergoes a radical change. Men who are competent to plan and carry out original investigations will not consent to lose their individuality, and become parts of a machine, however well constructed. The convention wisely recognized this fact, and confined its recommendations to the establishment of a 'bureau of correspondence and exchange' in the department, to serve as a means of communication for the several colleges and stations with each other and the department. It is intended that this bureau shall act as an agent in the exchange of reports of experiments, and also that it shall publish at regular intervals a summary, couched in popular language, of the results of investigations in this country, and possibly also in foreign countries. To aid in accomplishing the latter purpose, those present agreed to furnish the commissioner of agriculture, when called upon, with the results of experiments conducted at the institutions represented by them.

Commissioner Colman entered heartily into the plan, and agreed to carry it into execution as fully as the funds at his disposal would permit; and it is due to him to say, that, in all the proceedings, he showed a hearty desire to co-operate with the convention in carrying into effect any plan deemed wise by it, and exhibited not the least spirit of dictation or desire for the undue aggrandizement of his department.

Very plain language was used by several speakers to characterize the present methods of seed-distribution; but nearly all agreed in recognizing it as, for the present, a necessary evil. The commissioner announced, however, that he hoped to secure a special appropriation from congress for the purchase and distribution of seeds and plants from foreign countries, and that, if he were successful, he desired the co-operation of the agricultural colleges and stations in testing them in different regions of the country. This proposition met with the hearty and formal approval of the convention.

In addition to these matters, various subjects of minor importance were considered; and a very interesting discussion was had upon industrial education, opened by a paper by President Willets.

While the final success of the convention will be judged by its results, as a meeting it was eminently satisfactory; so much so, that it was unanimously voted to continue the organization by the appointment of a general committee of one from each state, as already noted. From this general committee, an executive committee of six was chosen to arrange for another convention at the proper time.