

— An Italian ship has been sheathed with glass plates, cast like iron plates, so as to fit the hull, to take the place of copper sheathings. The joints of the plates are made water-tight by the use of waterproof mastic. The advantages claimed for glass over copper are its insensibility to oxidation and its exemption from incrustation.

WASHINGTON LETTER.

At the last meeting of the Philosophical society the evening was devoted entirely to the election of officers for the ensuing year, and the reception of the annual reports of the secretaries and treasurer. The report of the secretaries included some comparisons of the work of the society in 1885 with that of 1884, a *résumé* of which will doubtless be of interest to many readers of *Science* who are connected with scientific societies in other parts of the country.

The number of new members admitted in 1885 was 20, while in the previous year 35 were added to the roll. The total active membership has increased from 173 in 1884, to 183 at the close of 1885. Sixteen meetings were held in 1885, one more than in the previous year. The average attendance at these meetings has increased from 42 in 1884, to 48 in 1885, showing a considerably greater percentage of increase than that in the active membership. The number of papers presented was the same in both years, being 32; while the number of persons taking part in the discussions increased from 38 to 41. The 'general committee,' which transacts most of the business of the society, consists of 17 members. The average attendance at the meetings of this committee was 11.9 in 1884, and 12.1 in 1885.

To this exhibit ought to be added that of the mathematical section of the society, which held six meetings in 1885 with an average attendance of 15, these numbers being identical with those for the previous year. The section received 11 papers in 1884, and 14 in 1885.

Altogether the showing is indicative of steady progress. In round numbers, it may be said to enroll two hundred active members, and at any of its meetings one is tolerably certain to find as many as fifty people.

The report of the treasurer was also satisfactory, showing the financial condition of the society to be excellent. It must not be forgotten that within a few years three vigorous societies have 'swarmed' from this, including the anthropological, biological, and chemical societies of Washington, and that one or two of them are larger than the parent society. By careful attention to the character of the papers presented, the committee

on communications has prevented specialization, and has thus succeeded in retaining the support and loyalty of those interested in all departments of science. The philosophical society is not yet fifteen years old, but it promises to be one of the three or four leading scientific societies in the country.

The joint committee of congress for the consideration of the scientific bureaus of the government continued its work up to the holiday recess. It is said that the geological survey was recently the subject of a searching investigation at its hands, the examination having to do principally with business methods and financial transactions. As stated in a previous letter, the recent addresses of the retiring presidents of some of the societies were devoted, in some degree, to the consideration of the absorbing question of the relation of the government to scientific work; and it is known that at least one member of the joint committee availed himself of the opportunity then afforded to learn something of the views of representative scientific men, expressed with that freedom from restraint which is characteristic of communications of that nature. The committee is expected to report in January.

The 'star-eyed goddess of reform,' as represented by the auditors of the treasury department, very properly shows herself to be blind to the existence of party lines or political affiliations. Commissioner Coleman of the agricultural bureau has recently had an account suspended against him, amounting to \$1,800, arising out of the purchase of seeds for distribution by members of congress among their constituents. The purchase was made very soon after his appointment, and appears to be precisely similar in character to those which gave rise to the much larger discrepancy in the accounts of his predecessor, Commissioner Loring. It will not be regretted if the adjustment of these accounts leads to a revolution in the manner of conducting the seed-business in the department, which has for many years diverted a large part of the annual appropriation from channels in which it might have been made tributary to the real progress of agriculture.

The friends of Dr. Emil Bessels will regret to learn of the loss he has sustained in the burning of his residence in Prince George county, Md., not far from Washington. The fire occurred on Christmas morning, and it is stated that the doctor himself had a narrow escape. The principal and irreparable loss was his library, which is said to have been entirely destroyed. It included a large collection of rare and costly scientific books, valuable manuscripts, and arctic charts. Z.

Washington, D.C., Dec. 28.