SCIENCE.

FRIDAY, APRIL 30, 1886.

COMMENT AND CRITICISM.

THE COMMISSION APPOINTED to investigate the various scientific bureaus of the government has submitted a partial report on the result of its labors, and has draughted a bill restricting the work and publications of the geological survey. Briefly, the measure provides, that, after June 30 next, no money shall be expended except for the collection, classification, and proper care of fossils and other material; no money is to be used for paleontological work or publications, nor for the general discussion of geological theories. The survey is to be prohibited from compiling or preparing for publication monographs or bulletins, or other books, except an annual report, which shall embrace only the transactions of bureaus for the year. All collections of minerals and other material now or hereafter to be made by the survey, and not needed for the current work thereof, are to be deposited in the national museum. The works whose publication is discontinued may be published by the authors at their own expense, who are to be allowed to copyright their material. The secretary of the interior is empowered to sell all the laboratories and other property now in use by the geological survey which shall no longer be needed after the passage of the proposed bill, and the proceeds of the sale are to be turned into the U. S. treasury. The bill provides that all printing and engraving done for the geological survey, coast and geodetic survey, and hydrographic office of the navy department, and the signal bureau, shall hereafter be estimated for separately, and prepared in detail for each of the said bureaus. The full report of the commission on the other bureaus is expected this week. The members claim that there has been great extravagance practised in the publication of works by the geological survey, and they propose to stop these 'reckless expenditures.' The report of the commissioners is unanimous in their action on the bill reported.

This report will be received with much regret by scientific men. The effect, so far as it pertains to the U. S. geological survey, should the bill become a law, will be most disastrous, crippling, if not almost entirely destroying, the survey's usefulness. Such sweeping and radical measures seem ill-advised. The causes that have led to the result, it is not hard to discover. Personal errors in other branches of the government surveys, and the exertions of a number personally opposed to the present management, will have placed the survey in a position from which it will be impossible to recover in many years. We do not need to repeat the argument, except to emphasize it, that national aid in the publication of many scientific works is absolutely necessary. In Europe such facilities exist in endowed scientific societies that do not exist in the United States, and will not for many years to come. The result simply will be that such works will not be published at all, and science will be so much the loser. Permission to copyright the works published at the expense of the author will only evoke a smile on the part of scientific men. One can imagine the danger likely to accrue to the author of a thousand-paged quarto on tertiary vertebrates, from his work being ruthlessly stolen, and issued in cheap paper form. The work of the geological survey has been managed honestly: no accusations whatever have been sustained against it. Neither can charges of extravagance in general be urged. The survey has perhaps grown to be too extensive; but the evil by no means calls for such severe pruning. Aside from arguments which will appeal to scientific men, it must be borne in mind that the survey can best justify its existence by furnishing valuable results to the miner and the farmer; and these results can only be reached when the evidence of all pertinent branches of investigation are available.

ABOUT A YEAR AGO much interest was taken in the discussion of requisitions for admission to colleges, when it was known that the faculty at Harvard had taken action in favor of recommending a sound course in laboratory study of chemistry or physics as an alternative for the admission requirements in Latin or Greek. A second step in this direction is now taken in the report of a committee of the board of Harvard overseers to

that body, in which the following vote is recommended among others: "That, in the opinion of the board of overseers, it is advisable to permit a scientific substitute, in accordance with the terms of this report, to be offered by applicants for admission to the college for either Latin or Greek, one of these two languages always being required." The terms here referred to are substantially that the scientific substitute must be a real equivalent of the old language course in amount of time needed for it, and amount of training gained from it, and that this demands more than a 'text-book' and 'memory' study. The four members of the committee who present this majority report consider the scientific substitute above referred to as recommended by the college faculty an adequate one: a minority report from one member still maintains the need of Greek for all. Favorable action may therefore be expected from the overseers.

THE GREAT SUCCESS of the free lectures recently given at Columbia college by Professors Boyesen and Butler — applications for tickets to the second course numbering over two thousand — emphasize a point in university work that has been long and persistently overlooked; that is, the duty of the university toward the people at large. Our colleges and universities depend, for success and support, upon popular interest and encouragement. They are continually in want of money, and always desirous of attracting large numbers of students. A large endowment, provided it be judiciously administered, and a large body of students, constitute a successful university. Of course, the test of numbers is of itself of small value; but the college with a thousand students can create more enthusiasm, exert a wider influence, as well as find work for more instructors, than a college having only three hundred names on its roll. The test of numbers, then, stands not so much for itself as for what it implies and represents. But these two conditions of success — money and students — might be made much easier of attainment were the relations between the universities and the people closer than they now are. As a rule, the college professor is looked up to as a useless sort of individual, who knows a great deal, but whose knowledge is of a shadowy and unpractical character. Our professors are too prone to give encouragement to this opinion by shutting themselves up within the four walls of their studies and class-rooms, and producing no results of their labors that to the non-collegiate man seem practical. Persistence in this isolation must weaken the university, and cut it off from the very sources of its support. The university should have some message to the outside world that is of a less formal and abstruse character than that usually locked up in memoirs and the transactions of learned societies. For this the lecture-hall seems pre-eminently fitted, and through it can the university find that contact with the people that it so much needs. Especially in our large cities, and by the staff of instructors in our larger universities and colleges, is this plan feasible. For years the Johns Hopkins university has given courses of lectures on semi-popular subjects, and with great success; and now Columbia, in an informal sort of way, is trying the same experiment. Perhaps the great interest of the subjects of the courses that have already been given there — 'The tendencies of contemporary literature' and 'Education as a science' — have had much to do with the great success of the Columbia lectures; but we are fully convinced that a large variety of subjects, both literary and scientific, are capable of being treated by university professors in a way that will not only attract large audiences and be an educating influence among the people, but also bring life and strength to the university itself.

THE APRIL MEETING OF THE NATIONAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.

THIRTY-NINE members attended this year at the spring meeting of the academy, and found Washington in its most charming vernal dress. If we except the visit of courtesy made to the President of the United States, the only social incident of importance was a reception at which the members of the academy met the members of the local scientific societies for which Washington is justly celebrated.

The academy determined by vote not to consider the nominations that had been made for membership, so that no new members were chosen. The expiration of Professor Agassiz' term of office as foreign secretary created a vacancy; and, as he declined re-election on account of ill health, Prof. Wolcott Gibbs was selected to succeed him. Gen. M. C. Meigs and Profs. S. F. Baird, G. J. Brush, C. A. Young, E. C. Pickering, and S. P. Langley were elected to the council, and the remaining officers held over.

During the past year the government has made