whether the Board can legally make a grant to an institution of a denominational character. But since the discussion of these questions will take some time, it is proposed to continue the grants of £1,500 to University College and £1,000 to King's College for next year, on the understanding that such a conference shall be held.

PROF. W. DAMES has been appointed successor to the late Professor Beyrich in geology and paleontology at Berlin, and will also have charge of the collections in geology and paleontology in the Museum of Natural History.

DR. WILHELM WIEN has been promoted to an associate professorship of physics at Berlin.

DISCUSSION AND CORRESPONDENCE.

THE DEWEY DECIMAL CLASSIFICATION AND SCIENTIFIC CLASSIFICATION.

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: Every one who hopes for any good results from the bibliographical conference held this summer in London must be pleased to learn that that body did not see its way to adopt the decimal classification as a foundation for the system to be used in the proposed international index to scientific literature. To adopt that system, even with modifications, would undoubtedly have resulted in a deadlock for the whole science of bibliography, and would have lessened, in a very considerable degree, the usefulness of the international bibliography scheme. And more—it might, if such a thing could be possible, have hampered the progress of science as a whole, as far as scientific work is dependent on the sources of information and the methods of making these sources available.

It is ludicrous to see how certain Belgian, and, surprisingly enough, also English, supporters of the decimal classification are full of enthusiasm over this so-called 'new scientific language,' which is destined to take the place that was held by Latin in olden times. As one of these enthusiasts at great length explained: 'Värme' is a Swedish term, 'Chaleur' is French, 'Heat' is English, and you must know these different languages to be able to make out what these terms mean. But if you write down the magical formula '536,' then, of course, all the world knows everything about it! But if the treatise on '536' should happen to be written in Japanese, and you do not know that language, would you be any happier, if these three figures were written on the top of the title-page?

No completely satisfactory scheme for the classification of the sciences has ever yet been made, and very likely never will. Science is ever progressing, and with each step it knocks some part of your system upside down. And the solution is *not* found by letting odds be even and deciding for all time that '536' shall always mean 'Heat.'

The decimal classification is now being discussed from both sides in French and German bibliographical publications,* and it might result in clearing up the subject of classification as a whole, and in the laying down of some foundation for a flexible scheme that might be used in the international index. And if that be so, the enthusiasts in Bruxelles have done a good work, even if not exactly in the direction they meant.

Some features of the decimal classification might be retained, namely, first of all, the use of decimals, and, perhaps, the form divisions. But the scheme itself is too hastily made up, and contains too many blunders, to be used as it stands, or even as a foundation for the scheme itself.

I suppose there are very few libraries of any consequence that have adopted the scheme unreservedly. It would be interesting to know the standing of those 1000 American libraries using the system that were spoken of in the Bulletin of the *Institut International* in Bruxelles. In the two libraries, where it was first used, Amherst College and Columbia University, it has all been made over again.

It has never been perfectly clear, I think, whether it was devised as a system for arranging books on the shelves of a library, or as a scheme for the classification of knowledge. If you attack it on the grounds of its failure in libraries, its advocates explain that it is mainly a means of classifying knowledge, and *vice versa!*

* The favorable part of the discussion was reviewed at some length in the last number of the *Library Journal*, but it was only mentioned that there was some dissent.

The subject of scientific classification is a very important one, and it is well to know that it is in as good hands as those of the committee of the London Conference. But while this committee works, others do not need to sleep. The science of classification, and of bibliography generally, has no representative in this country, neither a society nor a periodical. The *Library Journal*, 'chiefly devoted to Library Economy and Bibliografy,' is really devoted exclusively to the former. The few short contributions to bibliography that have appeared there of late have been of small consequence, and perhaps naturally so. The librarians are confronted with many practical questions of administration that urgently need solution, and have little time to devote to mere theoretical questions. But there is certainly not only room, but need, for some center for the study of bibliography proper, and more particularly, classification. It is too late now to make any proposition for forming a section of bibliography at the Buffalo meeting of the American Association. But, in the meantime, would not the editor of SCIENCE consider the establishment of a department for bibliography in the columns of this JOURNAL? If the men who work in this field could have such an intellectual meeting place they might by and by find their way to meet and organize for work.

AKSEL G. S. JOSEPHSON.
THE JOHN CRERAR LIBRARY, CHICAGO.

METEOR OR BIRD?

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: In your issue of July 31 (p. 140), quoting from the daily press, it is stated that Mr. William R. Brooks, Director of Smith Observatory, while observing the moon recently, saw a dark, round object, believed to be a meteor beyond the earth's surface, pass slowly across the moon's surface in a horizontal direction. Is it not possible that this 'object' may have been a bird?

Few astronomers, in my experience, are aware of the number of nocturnal migrating birds that may be observed under proper conditions. If, during the September migration, a comparatively low-power glass is focused on the full moon, at certain elevations, it is probable that an almost continuous stream of migrants will be seen passing through the narrow angle subtended by the moon's limbs. Thus at Tenafly, N. J., on the night of September 3, 1887, in the observatory of the late Mr. J. F. Panlison, Mr. John Tatlock, Jr., and myself, using a 6½-inch equatorial, saw no less than 262 birds between the hours of eight and eleven. (*Auk.*, V., p. 37.)

Several years later we obtained nearly similar results from the observatory of Columbia University, New York City, where, thanks to the courtesy of Professor Rees, we were permitted to use a glass, the finder of the large telescope proving strong enough for our purpose.

Previously, observations of this kind had been made at Princeton, N. J., by Mr. W. E. D. Scott and Prof. C. A. Young, in October, 1880, and April, 1881. On the first named date four and one-half birds were recorded per minute, for a period not stated; on the latter date thirteen birds were noted in three-quarters of an hour. (Bull. Nutt. Orn. Club, VI., pp. 97, 188.)

The spring migration of birds begins in this latitude in February, reaches its height early in May, and is concluded by June 10th. The fall migration begins about July 1st, reaches its height in September, and is not concluded until December. It is evident, therefore, that an observer of the moon is likely to have birds cross his field of vision at almost any time of the year, though the movement can be studied with greatest profit during the September migration, when the heavens are, doubtless, more thronged with birds than at any other time.

It happens that we are now on the eve of this great flight of feathered meteors, and astronomers who have the time and inclination to focus their glass on the moon this coming 21st of September can render an important service to ornithology.

In the first place, their observations would throw much light on the question of 'highways of migration.' It is generally accepted as a fact that birds are guided in their nocturnal journeys by the topography of the land over which they are passing, and that river valleys and coast lines are the most frequented pathways. The results obtained by observers situated within the limits of the same wave of migration would have a direct bearing on this subject.