

# SCIENCE

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## THE MEETINGS OF THE AMERICAN AND BRITISH ASSOCIATIONS FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE.

THE current progress of science and the activity of scientific thought in the civilization of the present day have been signalized in a noteworthy manner by the meetings of the American and British Associations for

the Advancement of Science, and of kindred societies, held recently at Detroit and Toronto. As might have been expected, the meeting of the American Association at Detroit and that of the British Association at Toronto both fell somewhat short of the average numbers in attendance; but, on the other hand, both meetings were above the average in the number and quality of the addresses and papers presented and in the enthusiastic interest of the participants. The meetings of the affiliated societies were marked likewise by the high order of the papers read and by the profound interest of the discussions and conferences of the members and foreign guests in attendance. To one present at these meetings and cognizant of the zeal, fidelity and good cheer of the delegates assembled, it would hardly appear that scientific men are seriously disturbed by those publicists who think that science will soon overreach itself, if it has not already fallen into 'bankruptcy.' Nor could one who heard a number of the scholarly addresses delivered at these meetings, addresses remarkable for their literary finish as well as for the value of their contents, entertain the scholastic fear that the perfume of the

Attic violet is likely to be stifled by the mephitic odors of the laboratory.

The sessions of the American Association at Detroit were held during the week beginning August 9th, under the favorable auspices presented by a beautiful city and by the admirable facilities of the Detroit Central High School. The ample accommodations of this building, the generous hospitality of the citizens of Detroit, and the assiduous labors of the local committee, afforded an ideal environment, and one to which the Association will doubtless be pleased to return in due time.

Owing to the death of Professr E. D. Cope, the duties of the retiring President fell upon Dr. Theodore Gill; while the absence, by reason of illness, of the President-elect, Professor Wolcott Gibbs, threw the labors of the presidency of the Detroit meeting on the next senior Vice-President, Dr. W J McGee. It was commonly and justly remarked that the fidelity and ability with which Dr. Gill and Dr. McGee executed the arduous trusts thus unexpectedly brought upon them contributed in a most marked degree to the success of the meeting.

The opening session of the Association was held in the spacious auditorium of the high school and proceeded with the usual invocation and addresses of welcome from representatives of the city. Perhaps there is still need of this formula in introducing to a community a national scientific organization whose work and aims are but little known. But its use sometimes leads to inconsistencies and absurdities which are very depressing to men of science. The

invocations are not infrequently tantamount to an apology for the existence and to a plea for the toleration (within due limits) of science which are at once needless and undignified; while the labored efforts of unscientific men to welcome science as the 'handmaid of religion' are often painful episodes in an otherwise pleasant greeting.

In spite of the small attendance the meeting must be regarded as one of the most successful in the history of the Association. This happy outcome may be ascribed to a number of causes. Among these may be mentioned the carefully prearranged programs of the sectional committees; the continuity of the meetings, which now run from Monday to Friday without interruption by excursions, etc.; the joint meetings of Sections C and E with the American Chemical Society and with the Geological Society of America, respectively; and the accessions of fresh enthusiasm from the younger members of the Association. The presence and participation of a number of foreign guests added greatly also to the interest of the sessions. The presence, likewise, of a number of past Presidents of the Association was an inspiring feature which ought to be more prominent in the future than it has been in recent years.

As usual, the labors of the Council were wearisome, consuming about eighteen hours per day throughout the week, and leaving but little time for science to those charged with official duties. Some constitutional amendments whose object is to shorten and simplify the business affairs of the Association were adopted. Other changes looking

toward the same end must be considered, doubtless, in the near future, especially in connection with the question of the relations of the Association to the vigorously active affiliated societies.

The election of Professor F. W. Putman to the presidency of the Association was the highest tribute that could be paid him for his long and indefatigable labors as Permanent Secretary. The cordial unanimity of this election was fitly supplemented by the hearty acceptance of the graceful invitations of Boston to hold the semi-centennial meeting of the Association in 1898 in that city. All interested in the advancement of science in America should aim to be present at this next meeting. The Association has a great work to perform, and every friend of science should aid that work by his presence and good fellowship at the meetings even should he not contribute to the formal proceedings.

On Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, August 16th-18th, the American Mathematical Society and the American Society for the Promotion of Engineering Education held their meetings at Toronto. The spacious accommodations of the beautiful buildings of the University of Toronto were placed at the disposal of the societies, and the University authorities, individually and collectively, were most gracefully attentive to the needs and pleasures of the delegates. The rapid growth and the productive activity of these societies—each now counting more than 200 members, and each printing 300 to 500 octavo pages of proceedings—are at once surprising and gratifying. Their history, which cannot be entered

into here, is similar to that of the Geological Society of America. Their work is in many respects allied to that of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and a closer affiliation with the latter through mutual concessions seems to be the logical and desirable outcome of existing conditions. The meetings held at Toronto were characterized by the well digested contents of the papers presented and by the clearness of exposition shown by the authors. Much interest was given to these meetings also by the presence of a number of foreign guests and members of the societies.

On the afternoon of Wednesday, August 18th, the British Association for the Advancement of Science was welcomed to the Dominion of Canada, to the Province of Ontario, and to the City of Toronto, by the Governor-General, the mayor of the city, and other officials. In these ceremonies the intense patriotism of the jubilee year and the devotion of our British cousins to the work of their Association were alike pleasantly and prominently manifest. On the following evening Sir John Evans, President-elect of the meeting, read his address, printed in a recent issue of this JOURNAL, before a large and brilliant audience. The formal addresses of the Sectional Presidents were given during the forenoon of Thursday, after which the sections proceeded to the presentation and discussion of less formal communications. Daily or more frequent sessions were held by the various sections, and the meeting continued until August 25th. The well-planned excursions and social events con-

tributed greatly to the enjoyment and profit of all.

Delegates from the United States were present in large numbers and participated in the proceedings of this meeting of the British Association. Many of them were courteously invited to sit with the sectional committees and to join them in their deliberations. The formation of new and the renewal of old acquaintanceships, and the free interchange of thought thus afforded, made the meeting seem, to quote the language of the admirable address of Sir John Evans, like a 'family gathering in which our relatives, more or less distant in blood, but still intimately connected with us by language, literature and habits of thought, have spontaneously arranged to take part.'

In its management of business details the British Association presents some instructive points of contrast with our own organization. Without entering here upon a discussion of these points, it may be useful to mention three wherein the British Association appears markedly superior to the American. The first of these is the absence, at the summer meetings, of repeated and prolonged sessions of the Council, or governing body. Secondly, no sessions affording opportunity for miscellaneous debate by members in general are held. The entire energy of the members in attendance may thus be turned toward the object of the Association—the advancement of science. Thirdly, there is the advantage which comes from the greater freedom and powers of the sectional committees. These virtually control the proceedings of their respective sections at any meeting, and the work

of a section goes on with the vigor and effectiveness which characterize our independent or affiliated societies. In addition to these administrative matters, one cannot help noting the greater enthusiasm of our British kin for science and for scientific men, and the larger proportion of attendance at their meetings of their best men. With them the meeting of the British Association is one of the most important events of the year. With us, widely separated over a continent, there is less opportunity for the cultivation of enthusiasm and greater difficulty in coming together; but who shall say that these are insurmountable obstacles in the way of a worthy scientific zeal and enterprise?

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*INTERNATIONAL AMENITIES AT DETROIT  
AND TORONTO.*

IN accordance with action taken at Buffalo last year, members of the British Association for the Advancement of Science attending the meeting of the American Association at Detroit were made honorary members of the latter body for the 1897 meeting. Perhaps a score of British and Continental scientists availed themselves of this privilege; several of them took part in the work of the Sections, joining freely in discussion and in some cases participating also in the labors of the presiding officers; and it was a general opinion that the presence of these distinguished representatives of science from over seas contributed materially to the success of the Detroit meeting. Especially noteworthy, as an indication of the comity between the two Associations, was the presence of Professor A. B. Macallum, the Local Secretary of the British Association for the Toronto meeting, who came specially to extend in person the courtesies of this body and to make arrange-