

SCIENCE

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FRIDAY, AUGUST 11, 1899.

THE COLUMBUS MEETING OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE.

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MSS. intended for publication and books, etc., intended for review should be sent to the responsible editor, Professor J. McKeen Cattell, Garrison-on-Hudson, N. Y.

AS SCIENCE has already announced, the 48th Annual Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science will be held from the 21st to the 26th of the present month, under the presidency of Professor Edward Orton, at Columbus, Ohio, in the buildings of the Ohio State University. By certain members of the Council at the Boston meeting last year it was thought that the acceptance of the invitation from Columbus, involving the rejection or postponement of the acceptance of an urgent invitation from Philadelphia, was hardly wise in view of the fact that they hoped that with the Boston Anniversary Meeting a period of renewed prosperity would begin with a series of large and enthusiastic meetings. Nevertheless, the vote in favor of Columbus showed that a large majority of the members of the Council were impressed by the arguments presented by Professor B. F. Thomas, who laid the claims of Columbus before the meeting, and by those of ex-President Mendenhall, who also spoke in favor of Columbus. The fact that a meeting has never been held before in that city was brought out, and the function of the

Association embodied in its name and which concerns itself with the *advance* of science in different parts of the country seemed to be the deciding argument. From present prospects those who feared that to meet at Columbus would mean a small and unenthusiastic attendance are likely to be agreeably surprised. The preliminary programs of Sections A, B, F, G and I, all that have been published in advance, show sufficiently long lists of important papers; the announcements from the Local Committee show great interest and good organization, and we are informed by the Permanent Secretary that the nominations of new members are rapidly coming in and that the advance payments of dues are much more numerous than in previous years. An organized effort has been made by the Local Committee, comprising all the teachers in scientific branches in the State University and other prominent persons in Ohio, to interest and attract especially the scientific workers of the Central States. This is a region filled with universities, colleges and other institutions of learning, yet in the past it has not been properly represented in the Association. In point of membership Massachusetts takes the lead, followed by New York, District of Columbia and Pennsylvania, Ohio ranking as fifth with only 99 members as against nearly 400 resident in the State of Massachusetts. That a national association of the broad scope and aims of the A. A. A. S., should draw one-fifth of its membership from the State of Massachusetts seems paradoxical at this time, although 25 years ago it was quite to be expected. It is greatly hoped that the present movement to interest the

Central States to a much more marked degree will be successful and will have a permanent effect.

In a similar editorial published a year ago we sketched briefly the career of the Association, showing that beyond doubt it has been of incalculable value to American science, and considering briefly some of the causes of the change in its relation to the science of the United States during the past 15 or 20 years. The greatest of these causes has been, without doubt, the organization of so many special societies which have diminished the interest in the old Association. Times and conditions have a habit (and it is generally a good habit) of changing. The American Association of 30 years ago did its work and did it well, but it must accommodate itself more and more to changing conditions. It has attempted to do this, as we showed last year, by an increase in the number of its Sections, and very lately by its effort to attract to it as affiliated societies the larger and stronger of the new organizations of special character. Does not the experience of the past few years bring us to the logical conclusion that the Association is bound in future to become more and more a central organization around which will rally annually the best of the special societies? That absolute harmony may exist under these conditions is shown conclusively by the experience of the American Chemical Society and the Geological Society of America, both of which have the custom (prescribed in the by-laws of one of the societies and becoming a permanent fixture with the other) of holding a summer meeting with the Association. Nothing could be more harmoni-

ous or more mutually helpful than the joint meetings which have been held for the past three years of Section C of the Association and the American Chemical Society. Far from being a loser by the founding of this society, the Association has profited by it in no small degree. Is not this an indication of what may be done and, in fact, of what will be done with other sections and other societies not limited geographically?

Reference has been made to the fact that membership in the National Academy of Sciences has destroyed to a great degree the interest which certain of the most prominent men of science in the country once felt in the American Association. That this was and is still true cannot be doubted, but we trust we are not mistaken in saying that we think that we can see signs of a change. Especially since the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science at Toronto, so much has been said in American scientific circles of the importance of the attendance of prominent men of science at the meetings of the British Association as a factor in its great success that prominent Americans cannot fail to have appreciated the point, and surely the large attendance of prominent men at last year's meeting is an indication of a revival of interest on the part of this class, even when we consider that the Boston meeting was an anniversary of great importance.

Apropos of the British Association we are reminded of the editorial published in the *American Naturalist* for January, 1899, under the title 'The American vs. the British Association for the Advancement of Science: A Comparison.' In this edi-

torial were compared the membership, the invested funds, the average attendance, the expenses and the sums devoted to research grants of the two Associations, naturally much to the advantage of the British Association. The main explanation pointed out was the geographical one—the wide extent of our own country as compared with that of Great Britain. The remedies suggested were either to break up the American Association into Atlantic, Mississippi and Pacific branches or else to make the meeting so interesting and valuable that members will attend them in spite of individual expense. Rightly enough, the last remedy was the one chosen as preferable, and the first step to bring this about was considered to be the determination of the best scientific men of the country to attend the meetings at a sacrifice of time and money. With this also we agree as well as with, in the main, the other suggestions of the editor of the *Naturalist*. We are of the opinion, however, that in his comparison of the two Associations the writer of the editorial too greatly favored the British Association.

In point of relative attendance at the meetings it must be noted that the proportion of members who attend the meetings of the American Association is quite as great as a rule as is the case with the British Association. The very large numbers recorded at the meetings of the latter Association are due in the main to the large numbers of associates and ladies who pay fees and in this way become the principal financial support of the Association. Thus in the year of largest attendance of the British Association, at the Manchester meeting in 1887, when 3,838 persons regis-

tered and paid fees, 1,985 were associates, 493 were ladies and 92 were foreigners, making a total of 2,570, and leaving but 1,268 actual members of all sections. Assuming the total membership to have been 5,000 the attendance at the largest meeting was only about 25 per cent. of the membership, which brings it to about the average attendance at the meetings of the American Association.

This, however, does not bear seriously upon the main question, except as showing that the American Association by comparison is not in such bad condition as might be supposed. Moreover, it might be indicated that there is a very large fluctuation in the attendance at the meetings of the British Association, as, for example, take the four years prior to 1898: At Oxford, in 1894, 2,321; at Ipswich, in 1895, 1,324; at Liverpool, in 1896, 3,181; at Toronto, in 1897, 1,362. Glancing over the table of attendance, in fact, it seems plain that there is a fairly constant attendance of actual members; that the fluctuations are due to the associate class, and that the large numbers and the large sums of money are gained by meeting in large centers of population. The financial support of the British Association, therefore, depends not only upon its prestige, but upon the work of the Local Committees in charge of the individual meetings and upon the custom of inviting contributions by way of associate memberships.

As to the minor and detailed suggestions in the *Naturalist's* editorial, the reports of the Permanent Secretary submitted to the Council meetings of the American Association in December, 1898, and April, 1899,

indicated that all the points mentioned are receiving proper consideration and that reforms have been inaugurated which will result in a very considerable saving of the annual expenses of the Association. For example, a new printing contract has been made whereby the cost of printing will be reduced about one-third, and the items of office hire and janitor's salary have been done away with.

Two points connected with the meetings which have been frequently criticised, and which have been instrumental in preventing the attendance of a considerable number of men who ought to attend, are (1) the interruption of the scientific work of the Sections by excursions and social features, and (2) the time of the year when the Association meets. A well known member of the Association says in a recent letter: "For those who are really in earnest about the work of the Association I believe another great defect is the prominence given to junketing. To busy men, and men especially anxious to present the results of a long investigation, it seems trivial to break up a session of the Association to go off on a clam bake or something." This criticism is a well founded one and is appreciated by the Council, and, in fact, at the spring meeting a resolution was adopted requesting the Local Committee at the Columbus meeting to arrange that no excursions or social features should be planned to begin before 4 o'clock in the afternoon, the all-day excursion being relegated to Saturday at the end of the meeting, thus leaving five solid working days for the sessions of the sections. The other criticism, concerning the time of year when the meeting is held,

is one which has frequently been discussed both in the Council and before the Association. It is true, the weather is apt to be warm the third week in August, and it is true that many Eastern college men dislike or are unable to interrupt their vacations abroad or at the seashore or mountains when their fall terms do not open until late in September or the 1st of October. It is true, also, that many members, both college men and those connected with the government surveys and investigating bureaus, are unable to interrupt their long field trips to out-of-the-way portions of the country. On the other hand, however, many of the Western colleges and most of the normal and high schools, from which institutions the Association derives many members, constituting a class in which it ought of right be especially strong, begin the fall term about the 1st of September, and to fix the meeting time at a later date would prevent their attendance. There are also obvious objections to a winter meeting on the part of perhaps a majority of the members of the Association. That college men from a comparatively limited section of the country can hold successful meetings during the winter holidays has been abundantly shown by the experience of the American Society of Naturalists, the Society of Morphologists, and the kindred organizations which meet together each year at that time. The experiment of midwinter meetings of an individual Section of the American Association in connection with the organizations just mentioned has been tried successfully, and there is no strong reason why it should not become a custom. Another alternative which has been suggested is to hold the

meeting in late June or early July. The National Educational Association meets at about that time, but draws largely from a rather different class of workers. It might, however, be worth while for the American Association to try the experiment of such a change of date.

Looking over the ground as a whole, it seems to us that the American Association even in its present condition is a good and sound working body of scientific men. Its aims are admirable, and its policy is adjusting itself to rapidly changing conditions. No one denies that it can be improved, but this improvement must naturally be of rather slow growth, and depends on the active interest of the scientific men of the country in its objects, their appreciation of all it could do, and their determination to help in its work.

THE INTERNATIONAL CATALOGUE OF SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE.

REPORT FROM COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY.

PRESIDENT SETH LOW, LL.D., COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY—*Dear Sir*: The committee appointed by you beg to report on the plans for an International Catalogue of Scientific Literature as follows:

We regard the establishment of such a catalogue as one of the most important contributions that can be made to the advancement of science, and greatly appreciate the efforts of the Royal Society to carry it into effect. We think that all institutions and all men of science should do everything in their power to perfect the arrangements for the catalogue and to promote its efficiency.

We submit herewith discussions of the several schedules of classification from professors of this University engaged in teaching and carrying out investigations in the different sciences. We do not as a commit-