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THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION AND ITS AFFILIATED BUREAUS.

A LETTER from Professor Franz Boas concerning the Bureau of American Ethnology, published in this issue of SCIENCE, calls attention anew to the unsatisfactory status of the bureaus of the Government under the supervision of the Smithsonian Institution. The anomalous relations which the National Museum has long sustained to the Smithsonian Institution were considered at length in SCIENCE, N. S., Vol. V., No. 106, January 8, 1897. The conclusions reached in that number of the journal are summed up in the following paragraph:

"There is no logical connection between the Smithsonian Institution and the National Museum. The museum is a most important institution; it is now well established; its maintenance is demanded by the people, and it will thrive under a competent director, responsible only to Congress or to the head of some department under which it could properly be placed. The usefulness of the Smithsonian Institution will be increased by the diminution of burdensome administrative duties which were never contemplated in its original

scheme, and for the existence of which there can be no reasonable excuse. Its legitimate work is too important to be interfered with by demands which can be met in ordinary channels, and if such wide departures from its early policy continue to be forced upon it by ill-considered legislation, there is reason to fear that its splendid career during its first half century will not be repeated in the second."

Subsequent events have not only justified these conclusions, but they now appear to be emphasized to an unexpected degree by the action of the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution with regard to the Bureau of American Ethnology. This organization, like the National Museum, originated in the Smithsonian Institution, and, as in the case of the museum, has long been maintained by annual appropriations from the Government. It has performed an invaluable service to science in preserving the natural history of the rapidly vanishing native races of this continent and has given promise of development into one of the most important branches of public service. Naturally, like the National Museum, the Bureau of Ethnology has come to occupy a definite field of its own and has grown quite beyond the need of the fostering care of the Smithsonian Institution. During Major Powell's directorship of the bureau it attained a quasi-independent status in spite of the obviously bad plan of a double-headed administration, by which the director of the bureau was responsible to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and the Secretary to the Government.

But now it would appear that the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution has decided to relegate the Bureau of Ethnology to the subordinate position of a branch of the museum. If this be the case, and it seems impossible to interpret the recent action of the secretary in any other way, we can not help regarding the step thus taken as a step backward. For the bureau has not only done work which has commended itself to the Congress of the United States, but it has done work which has commended itself in a high degree to the consensus of opinion of expert ethnologists and anthropologists at home and abroad. Since the reasons for the Secretary's procedure in this case are not evident, a prompt investigation by Congress and by the regents of the Smithsonian Institution would seem to be called for.

There is another aspect of this matter which demands criticism. Quite apart from the particular personalities involved, it would appear that the Secretary has registered a blow with scientific precision directly at the merit system by appointing as 'Chief' of the bureau another man instead of the Ethnologist in Charge, whose position, abilities and record for effective work in the bureau led most anthropologists and ethnologists of the country to expect him to succeed Major Powell in the directorship. Such blows have been struck commonly enough, as every one knows, in the past, by political secretaries of the various departments of the Government, but they have rarely come from distinguished men of science. Those who would like to keep prominent positions in the govern-

ment scientific bureaus open for raids from politicians and opportunists will make effective use, doubtless, of this latest precedent in their favor.

But what, it will be asked, is the remedy for such blunders in the administration of government scientific work? Have we nothing better to suggest than destructive criticism? The remedy in the present instance is plain. The Bureau of American Ethnology should be put on an independent footing; that is, it should be directly responsible to Congress for the conduct of its work; and the National Museum should speedily go the same way. During the first half century of its existence the Smithsonian Institution rendered the highest service to American science and to the public weal by assisting in the development of—perhaps one might justly say by originating and developing—the Weather Bureau, the Geological Survey and the Fish Commission; and its influence was hardly less potent in promoting the scientific work of the Naval Observatory and the Coast and Geodetic Survey. As soon, however, as the merits of these organizations were recognized by the Government, it was the policy of the Smithsonian Institution to turn to other fields of work; and the verdict is unanimous that this policy was the wisest one to pursue by 'an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men.'

The case under consideration raises also the question whether there is any way to improvement in the mode of selecting heads of the bureaus doing scientific work for the government. It appears that hitherto, as a rule, far less pains have been taken in choosing such heads than our scientific societies take in choosing a president or a secretary to represent them professionally and before the public. Indeed it has frequently happened in the past that men of no scientific standing, or of small professional reputation, have been placed in charge of important scientific work. But scientific men are largely responsible for this, for their silence has often given assent to corrupt practices and to unworthy appointments in the public service. It is a duty of scientific men and of scientific societies to look into these matters, and to see to it that science is not degraded by the pretenders who always stand ready to make a personal use of the prestige won by the industry and the persistence of the eminent. It is especially the duty of scientific societies to make their influence felt in all such matters. They may not always be able to give the best advice, but they are much more likely to give good advice than place seekers and appointing officers. The standard for appointment to prominent positions in government scientific work should be higher than that in any other branch of the public service. To obtain this end our societies can do much if they so will. No man of science can now afford to ignore the advice they are able to give on important questions of public moment; and the time ought to arrive presently when their counsel on all such questions will be welcomed and appreciated by society at large.