

SCIENCE

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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 1903.

THE ST. LOUIS MEETINGS.

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THOUGH nearly a year is to elapse before the American Association and affiliated bodies will meet in St. Louis, in next winter's convocation week, it is time for all who are interested not only in making this meeting a success but in welding the union of popular and technical scientific interests that was begun at the recent Washington meeting, to bestir themselves, that the good start that has already been made may not be lost.

St. Louis has long enjoyed the reputation of being a hospitable city, in which visitors are sure of good treatment, and it has the distinction of possessing one of the oldest scientific organizations of the country, in its Academy of Science, which was founded by Engelmann and his associates in 1856, struggled through the agonies of a border city in the Civil War without a cessation of its activity, and throughout has maintained the high standard with which its scientific publications were started. Its Washington University, incorporated in 1853, through the public spirit of Eliot, which has struggled against a variety of discouraging conditions without ever abating the ideals of scholarship

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on which it was founded, has recently attracted attention as the recipient of numerous gifts which at length put it in position to take rank among the leading institutions of the country. Through the gift of Shaw, the city possesses, in the Missouri Botanical Garden, one of the most attractive public collections of plants in the country and a young but most hopeful center of research. The city, arranging for a great exposition, which is to open only a few months after the scientific meetings, has awakened to the need of purging itself of the attaint of bad municipal administration, which it has shared with other cities and of putting itself into twentieth century condition for its guests. There is little reason to doubt that ample and adequate provision will be made for the largest scientific gathering that can be held next winter, and if all the local educational and scientific interests are not much advanced by the inspiration that it will afford, the meeting will have failed of one of its prime objects.

The scientific interests of the country are capable of as great advancement at this meeting as at any that has yet been held. There was a time when they were all fully represented at the meetings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and when the persons interested but not directly engaged in scientific work were sure to see at those meetings the leaders in every field of research. That body, however, was organized quite as much for the promotion of popular interest in science as for the interchange of knowledge between those who are directly

advancing the latter, and it is always irksome to listen to known facts when one would rather learn of new discoveries. With the growing complexity of science and the increase in the number of investigators having at their disposal ample facilities for the publication of their discoveries, there has developed a disposition on the part of many of the older men to stay away from the association meetings, or to attend them rather for the social and other advantages attending large gatherings than for what they could learn or impart to others in the field of their own work. This has changed, to a considerable extent, as the younger men have forged ahead in their professions so as themselves to take place as leaders, but even as this has come about there has been a marked disinclination on the part of many of these very men to present their best work to the association or to travel to any considerable distance for the interchange of ideas, when they could organize in smaller numbers near home for purposes most closely connected with their own interests and needs. Out of this grew the meetings of the American Society of Naturalists, the membership of which is based upon professional attainments rather than mere interest in science, and the bodies of kindred aims and standards that quickly affiliated with it for the holding of winter meetings, usually restricted to the vicinity of the Atlantic seaboard.

It was a most commendable purpose which caused the American Association for the Advancement of Science, with its large popular as well as professional member-

ship, to try the experiment of meeting in the winter season, in the hope that in this way the seceding professional interests might be held, while the affiliation of all the organized scientific bodies promised a power for the advancement of every interest concerned such as nothing but combination of forces could give.

In many respects, the recent Washington meeting, the first held under the new plan of the association, was the most successful and satisfactory meeting yet held in this country; but sight should not be lost of the fact that it was an experiment, not only on the part of the association, but of all the organizations that met with it, and it was scarcely to be hoped that these should not find that something in efficiency in the promotion of their individual aims had been sacrificed for the advancement of the collective interests represented. It must be conceded that the balance can not yet be struck in such a way as to show conclusively that the new plan is better than the old one. On the other hand, it is evident that such a balance should not be struck until the experiment has been carried further, and much of the conflict of interests can be avoided by the closest cooperation of the officers of the affiliated societies in the earliest stages of the preparation for the program.

It is urged on these officers, therefore, that they come together without loss of time and combine their several tasks in such a manner as to provide for a program for the St. Louis meeting which shall combine the maximum of breadth and strength with the minimum of conflict of interests.

For the most efficient realization of this end, it is almost imperative that the meeting places of the different sections of the association and of the affiliated societies be closer together than proved possible in Washington, and it is to be hoped that the St. Louis committee, when organized, will spare no effort to arrange for ample meeting places for all the bodies that meet in connection with the association, as well as for its own section, in contiguity to each other, as well as conveniently situated with reference to the hotels at which most of the persons in attendance at the meeting are to stay.

That the Plant Morphologists and Physiologists and other organizations whose constitutions or precedents prescribe a limited territory within which meetings are held, may not feel warranted in setting aside these restrictions, is possible and beyond the field of extraneous criticism, although it is sincerely to be hoped that they will decide to meet within their own territory next winter only after the most careful consideration of the aid that their presence in St. Louis can afford in the effort to unify all interests. As now organized, with eastern and central branches, the American Society of Naturalists has become a truly national body, justifying its name, and will doubtless meet at St. Louis. It is to be hoped that the professional societies of national scope which have usually affiliated with it will unite with the American Association next winter, for a further trial of the plan of affiliation.

We need a national society for each of the sciences, and while these societies may

to advantage be organized in branches, an annual meeting of national character should be held. There is much to be said for holding the national meetings in convocation week and in selecting other times for the meetings of the branches and more local societies and academies. There are also good reasons for holding the meetings of all national societies at the same place. Local arrangements can be made once for all, reduced railway rates can be obtained, provision can be made for joint meetings of overlapping sciences, and men of science in different departments can make and renew acquaintance. The national societies do not relinquish in the slightest degree their individuality and autonomy by meeting with the American Association. The association has indeed proved itself ready to leave to the special societies the special programs. The American Chemical Society and the section for chemistry have for years held joint meetings without friction. When the new section of physiology and experimental medicine was organized the special programs were explicitly left to the special societies, the section proposing to confine itself to addresses and discussions which concern more than one science. At the recent Washington meeting action was taken by which all special papers in geology may be presented before the Geological Society of America. Similar plans for union have been arranged in the cases of other sciences, and a natural evolution will leave to the national societies the presentation and discussion of special research, while the sections of the association will aim to coordinate the sciences and

present their advances in a form intelligible to all.

The center of scientific population and of scientific activity is no longer on the Atlantic seaboard. If we have national meetings they must sometimes be held in the central and western states. There is a general sentiment that the association and the national scientific societies might with advantage meet once in three years at Washington, once in three years in an eastern city and once in three years in a central or western city. The recent meeting at Washington was certainly successful from every point of view. It is to be hoped that all men of science will unite in making the meetings next year at St. Louis and the following year at Philadelphia equally representative of the scientific work and interests of the whole country.

THE SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION.

THE board of regents of the Smithsonian Institution held their annual meeting on January 28. The time was so fully occupied with routine business that there was no opportunity for adequate discussion of important questions concerned with the policy of the institution. An adjourned meeting was consequently called for March 11, when questions of administration will be considered. There is undoubtedly a widespread impression that the Smithsonian Institution is not accomplishing as much for the diffusion and increase of knowledge as it did in its earlier years. It is easier to criticize than to outline a constructive policy; but scientific men should certainly unite in the latter course.