Free lunches are a burden on the local committee that no visiting member should wish to impose; scattered lunches interfere greatly with the sociability of the meeting; distant lunches take up too much time. A light table d'hôte lunch should, therefore, be provided at a moderate price in a good-sized and well-ventilated room near the place of meeting, every day while the sessions last. Separate small lunch tables are preferable to a single long table; service is much simplified by having the dishes on a table at one end of the room, where each member may quickly help himself and then withdraw to enjoy the lunch with a group of friends. The less the formality and the greater the freedom of movement, the better for the real enjoyment of the noon hour.

Formal dinners, such as the affiliated societies not infrequently hold and at which one has to sit in one place for three or four hours, are likely to be tiresome to one's neighbors. Informal smokers, with a light supper served from a side table and plenty of little tables at which groups may easily form and break up, afford much better opportunity for meeting and chatting with old and new friends. Besides, the dinners seem necessarily to involve the conventionality of after-dinner speaking, in which one is in danger of grieving his friends with wide-of-the-mark efforts at humor. The smokers are not yet habitually given over to that form of festivity.

Finally, a few remarks as to general sessions. Most of them are tedious. There seems to be a supposed necessity that the association shall be welcomed by some representative local authority, and that some officer shall respond to this address in a preliminary general session; but it would be interesting to try the experiment of meeting once without these formalities, in order to see if science were any the less advanced thereby. This unconventional plan would at any rate have the advantage of allowing the council to arrange three or four, instead of only two, periods in which the vice-presidential addresses could be distributed, thus making it possible for them to be heard by a much larger number of members than is now the case; and this is certainly desirable, for many of the addresses are of broad interest and should attract large audiences. As to the brief general sessions every morning of convocation week, they are often very thinly attended; it must be but a small pleasure to the president and the secretary of the association to officiate at these listless gatherings. Indeed the sectional lists of papers are now so long that time can ill be spared for daily general sessions. The announcements that have been customarily made at the general sessions—for example, the hour and place of an excursion, or the names of new members—can be much more effectively made at the sectional meetings or in the daily programs. The final general session, at which the officers for the ensuing year and the place of the next meeting are voted upon or announced (whichever practice may now be followed) and in which cut-and-dried votes of thanks are passed in perfunctory fashion, have become lifeless affairs, thanks to the efficient work of the council. Few members would be afflicted if even this final general session were replaced by printed announcements. The two general sessions in the evening, to hear the retiring president's address and the general scientific lecture, are on the other hand of real value in advancing science, and should be maintained.

The intention of all these suggestions is to make it possible for those who attend the meetings of the association to spend their time most effectively and comfortably. Conventional formalities, bad air and distracting gymnastic efforts at opening windows, insufficient room and time for social intercourse are unnecessary hindrances to the best enjoyment of convocation week; and there is no sufficient reason why many or all of these hindrances should not be removed.

W. M. Davis.

Cambridge, Mass.,
February 25, 1903.

THE POLICY OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE.

I have attended many meetings of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and have watched with great interest the progress that has been made—espe-

cially during the past three years. An able standing committee looks after its policy, and notwithstanding the large increase of members, this policy is to advise reducing the size and value of the proceedings by printing only the addresses of the president and vice-presidents, with list of officers and members and a few other items, to the end that more money may be accumulated, that it will earn more interest and enable the society to give a very few persons a small portion of the cost of engaging in some research.

Not many months ago SCIENCE contained a large number of interesting communications by way of gentle reminders as to how the trustees of the Carnegie Institution could best use the funds soon to be at their disposal. This was a kind and thoughtful service and no doubt highly appreciated by the trustees. Among these gentle hints was named the pressing need of means for publishing worthy articles such as might not be published by any of the numerous journals or might not find a place in the proceedings of any of the learned societies.

When the *American Naturalist* was established in 1868, I am sure the editors were not troubled to find room for all worthy articles in the entire field of botany and zoology, including some that bordered on geography and geology. Workers in these broad fields were comparatively few and far between. In these days, universities and colleges have established many courses attracting a large increase in students, requiring numbers of teachers, some of whom devote a portion of their time to original work. The U. S. Department of Agriculture employs many; the state experiment stations many; bureaus of geology, ethnology, and meteorology and others are growing rapidly.

I dare not attempt to name the journals and transactions that are issued from time to time.

It is getting to be the plan for most universities to publish each from one to four or more periodicals devoted to as many special departments of learning, soon to find that the members of the faculty, their fellows and advanced students, without any outside help, write enough papers or nearly enough to fill all the pages of these journals.

The programs of the meetings of the American Association are filled with valuable papers, at least if they are not valuable it is the fault of the committees whose duty it is to inspect the list before reading.

One of the reasons sometimes advanced for omitting to print these papers in the *Proceedings* of the association is that any papers that are worthy will be sought by the editors of some scientific journals. We have now reached a period when this is far from true. The value of a paper can not be measured by its popularity.

At the meetings of the American Association we hear papers read and we are interested in them—some we can not hear, owing to numerous conflicts of programs. For myself I make a memorandum of those I hope some day to be able to read, but by some hook or crook I seldom get them.

In days past I have often looked in the *Proceedings* for some article important to me, to find an abstract of a few lines only, or rarely a reference to some publication where it has been printed.

I feel confident that if we had a full canvass, a large majority of the members would be glad to see these papers printed in the proceedings of the American Association. For printing papers, it is true we have SCIENCE, a magnificent publication, but we see even in this there is not room for all.

Every few months our attention is called to some new means of support for worthy investigators—and liberal support. I need not enumerate them. The fees that the American Association is able to pay for research are very trifling. Why not use all the funds that henceforth accumulate, up to a certain specified amount, to defray the expenses of printing and *illustrating* first-class reports? What better use could be made of the money?

If I am not mistaken, one reason for organizing some of the 'affiliated' societies was that the members could publish the papers read at their meetings. I have known a number of instances in which itinerant societies for worthy purposes have economized to save a

fund, the interest of which might serve the means of partial support, but through some oversight a large portion of the original fund was dissipated. I think our fund is as large as it should be, perhaps larger. I shall be surprised if some of the conservative and substantial fellows and members of the American Association for the Advancement of Science do not come out in support of the views here expressed.

W. J. Beal.

Agricultural College, Mich.,
February 20, 1903.

ABUNDANT HONORARY DEGREES.

To the Editor of Science: In *Bulletin* No. 12, Volume III., issued by the University of Missouri, is a review of the manifold achievements of the university, especially those of benefit to the state of Missouri.

Along with other items appears the statement that 2,869 degrees have been conferred 'for work done.' 'Of honorary degrees 152 have been conferred.' Figured into percentage the number of honorary degrees becomes nearly 5.3 per cent., or more than one honorary degree for every twenty regular degrees. I think Missouri is to be congratulated upon the extraordinary proportion of eminent men connected with her university, and I can not help wondering why I am so ignorant as never to have heard of the names even of many of those of the honorary 5.3 per cent. class. I wonder less, perhaps, than might be expected because the custom of bestowing honorary degrees on unknown people is almost universal among American colleges and universities.

Is it not time to raise a universal protest against this habitual debasement of the highest academic honor? All of our universities sin grievously in this respect, and give honorary degrees to soldiers, politicians and many other classes of worthy people who can not present the slightest claim to scholarly eminence.

When we consider how much more many a little-known scholar does for the world than many celebrated soldiers and politicians, it seems proper that the practice should be reversed. I venture, therefore, to propose: (1) That we all strive to restrict the bestowal of honorary degrees exclusively to scholars and investigators, who alone have any claim to them, and (2) that we petition the national government to make all eminent physicists honorary generals, all eminent chemists honorary admirals, all eminent naturalists honorary governors, and all members of the National Academy honorary senators.

C. S. M.

Boston, February 23, 1903.

SHORTER ARTICLES.

THE SACRAL SPOT IN MAYA INDIANS.

In 1901, while at Tekax, Yucatan, making measurement of the Mayas of that district, the parish priest told me that it was commonly believed that every pure-blood Maya Indian had a blue or purple spot upon his back, in the sacral region. He said that this spot was called *uits,* 'bread,' and that it was an insult to a Maya to make reference to his *uits.* To satisfy the curiosity of the priest, and my own, I examined a boy of ten years and two men, all of pure Maya blood. No one of the three presented any trace of a sacral spot, and I concluded that the common belief, if it had any basis, must relate to an infantile spot such as has long been known to occur in the Japanese, Eskimo, etc. Having no opportunity then to examine Maya babies, I determined to watch for the sacral spot among the infants of such tribes as I might later visit.

In my last journey to Mexico, just ended, I expected to see babies among six Indian populations—Aztecs, Zapotecs, Tzotzils, Tzendals, Chols and Mayas. From changes in my plan I really came into contact with the Aztecs and Mayas only. Aztec friends in whom I have confidence, in the states of Pueblo, Mexico and Tlaxcala, agreed that Aztec babies do *not* have a sacral spot; I made no personal examination.

In the town of Palenque, Chiapas, I examined all the *little* babies of the town—not a heavy labor, as the town is small. The people here call themselves Mayas, but claim to be closely related to the Chols. Probably the population is a mixture of the two peoples, who are closely related in language, and