

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