THE CONFERENCE OF NEUROLOGY AND VERTEBRATE ZOOLOGY OF CORNELL UNIVERSITY.

AT the conference of the department of neurology and vertebrate zoology at Cornell University, February 7, Alfred C. Weed, '05, presented the results of his study of the Brazilian Siluridæ or cat-fishes in the museum. They were collected in 1870 by Charles Frederick Hartt, the first Cornell professor of geology and paleontology; he was a pupil of the elder Agassiz, whom he accompanied on the Thayer expedition in 1865; in 1870 he organized the Morgan expedition from Cornell University, and in 1878 died in Brazil of yellow fever. Among the numerous valuable specimens obtained by Hartt and his associates were ninety siluroids. Some years ago they were sent for identification to Professor C. H. Eigenmann, of the Indiana University, with the privilege of retaining some duplicates and describing the new species. There were found two new species, described by Kindle in 1894 as *Hassar wilderi* and *Hemiancistrus longipinnis*. Of the latter, through inadvertence, but one example was sent. In the Cornell museum, in addition to a mounted specimen that had been mounted so as to display the tufts of interopercular bristles and the tail, 'obliquely trancated, the lower lobe produced,' Mr. Weed has found two alcoholic examples; one will be sent to Dr. Eigenmann and the other to the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Cambridge.

BURT G. WILDER.

THE AMERICAN CHEMICAL SOCIETY.
NORTHEASTERN SECTION.

THE fifty-eighth regular meeting of the section was held on Friday evening, February 24, in the Lowell building, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, with President Norris in the chair. About seventy-five members were present.

Mr. Charles A. Kraus, of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, gave an experimental lecture on 'The Chemistry of Liquid Ammonia Solutions,' in which he described the solubility of various bodies in liquid ammonia which possesses a high solvent power for many substances, especially those containing carbon, with many of which it gives brilliant colored solutions. Electrolytic dissociation in ammonia solutions was discussed, and it was shown that ammonia was a much weaker electrolytic agent than water, the ions traveling 2.8 times faster in it than in the latter solvent. The alkali metals sodium and potassium are very soluble in NH_3, and the solutions conduct electricity like a metallic conductor.

ARTHUR M. COMEY,
Secretary.

DISCUSSION AND CORRESPONDENCE.

LITERARY PRODUCTION ABOVE FORTY.

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: Your making available, by quotation in the last issue of SCIENCE, the precise form of Professor Osler's much discussed 'obsessions' concerning the comparative uselessness of men above 40 years of age suggested an inquiry into the period of production in the lives of American men of letters, literature being one of the fields of achievement from which, Dr. Osler believes, we could well spare the work done by men above 40.

Even in poetry, where there might be especial reasons for the view, the case is doubtful. Bryant, indeed, wrote his most noted poems before 40, but wrote others quite as good at 70. Poe and Lanier died at 40 and 39, so their evidence is inconclusive. But Longfellow wrote 'Evangeline' at 40, 'Hiawatha' at 48, and 'Miles Standish' at 51; Whittier wrote 'Snow Bound,' his best and most characteristic poem, at 59; Whitman had done but little before his first considerable volume at 41. Lowell, alone of the more noted American poets, produced practically all of his best verse before 40; practically all of his best prose was written afterwards.

In prose, everything goes to disprove an age limit of 40. Except Jefferson's draft of the 'Declaration of Independence' (written at 33), Irving's 'Sketch-Book' (at 36), Thoreau's 'Walden' (at 37), Cooper's best novels, and, for the reason given above, all of Poe's prose, almost every notable piece of American prose was written after its author had reached 40. Some came much later—Edwards's 'Freedom of the Will' at 51,

Franklin's 'Autobiography' after 51, and Irving's 'Alhambra' at 49. Hawthorne began his series of great romances with 'The Scarlet Letter' at 46. Mrs. Stowe wrote 'Uncle Tom' at 41. Mark Twain produced 'Innocents Abroad' before 40, but 'Tom Sawyer' and 'Huckleberry Finn' considerably later. Lincoln delivered the 'Gettysburg Address' at 54, Webster his 'Reply to Hayne' at 48. Prescott wrote the 'Conquest of Mexico' at 47; Bancroft's 'History' occupied him from 34 until 75. Motley wrote the 'Dutch Republic' at 42; Parkman did not begin his series of volumes on 'France and England in North America' until he was 42. The first and the second series of Emerson's 'Essays' appeared at 38 and 41, respectively. Dr. Holmes wrote the 'Autocrat' at 49, Dr. Hale, 'The Man Without a Country' at 46. John Fiske did his best work, as Mr. Stedman has done his, after 40. Mr. Howells had scarcely made a beginning of his characteristic work before 40; Mr. James had made a good beginning, but the most and the best of his works have come later.

Indeed, if one were to generalize at all from this data concerning works notable in themselves and most characteristic of their authors, the conclusion for American literature would not be that no work of the first rank had been done by men above 40, but that the period of life conspicuous for superior production was between 40 and 50, and that, as Bulwer-Lytton suggested, real maturity seldom comes before the age of 35.

Clyde Furst.

Columbia University.

Production and the Modern Use of Carbonic Acid.

To the Editor of Science: Referring to Science for January 27, there appears on page 151, a brief extract of a paper by John C. Minor, Jr., presented to the New York Section of the American Chemical Society on December 9. The title of this paper, as given, is the 'Production and Modern Use of Carbonic Acid.' In the abstract, however, there is no reference to carbonic acid; the paper appears to deal entirely with carbon dioxide, and I suppose this is another case of the common misuse of this term. I would suggest that you make some effort to correct this prevalent error, because if we should want to talk about the real carbonic acid, there would be no way of conveying the meaning intended, unless the chemical symbol be used, because as it is, CO_2 has monopolized for itself two names.

A. Bement.

Mont Pélée?

Although nothing is commoner than instances of mistaken etymology, it rarely happens that a single name admits of so many interpretations as does 'Mont Pelée sive Mont Pelé.'

Having gone through in my own mind all the possibilities of the name, from that of the Hawaiian goddess, with which I started, to that of Pelée = bald, a good name for a bare summit, I have come at last to believe that it is simply the Gallicized form (Pélée) of the Greek Peleus, the son of Æacus and father of Achilles—*Mount Peleus* has a likely sound and needs no explanation of its gender. The form Pélée for Peleus is found in Littré.

Harris Hawthorne Wilder.

Smith College.

Special Articles.

Natural Mounds or 'Hog-Wallows.'

The paper of Mr. A. C. Veatch reported in Science, No. 530, p. 310, is of much interest to those acquainted with the natural mounds or hog-wallows of California and Oregon. Such mounds are especially abundant along the east side of the San Joaquin valley in California, where they cover hundreds of square miles, and extend from the valley floor, where they are most abundant, up the slopes of the foot-hills to an elevation of more than five hundred feet. The underlying rocks vary from Pleistocene gravels, sands and clays to granites, schists and folded paleozoic slates. I have never found them, however, in the sandy river bottoms. In height they range from one foot to four feet, and in diameter from ten to more than fifty feet. They are equally abundant in eastern Oregon and in