

ABSTRACTS AND THE ZOOLOGICAL RECORD

BRITISH zoologists take a deep interest in the large scheme for the preparation and publication of biological abstracts explained to many of us this summer by President McClung and Dr. Schramm, and further discussed at the Toronto meeting of the British Association. I do not doubt but that, so far as it may be within our powers, we shall do our best to assist it. But we are in anxiety on several points.

The annual output of zoological papers is very large and abstracts of them, if sufficiently detailed to be of real use, will occupy a space that may surprise the managers of the scheme. Many papers, moreover, relate to several subjects, such as systematic zoology, ethnology, embryology, anatomy and physiology, and will require either separate abstracts or a complex system of indexing. If, from necessity or from policy, a selection is to be made, omissions which seem of no importance now may be much regretted in future. As an example, I may recall the well-known oblivion which buried Mendel's work for many years because its importance was unrecognized at the time. We are also in special anxiety as to the practical possibility of abstracting purely systematic work.

In any case it will take some years before the new scheme can be in full working order, its range defined, its personnel selected and trained, and its qualities judged. In our opinion it would be disaster were *The Zoological Record* to be crushed out of existence until it could be seen how far the international abstracts made it unnecessary, suggested a new form for it (such, for example, as limitation to systematic zoology and geographical distribution), or came into a cooperative scheme with it.

Our fears have a present and a historical justification. Already some institutions have refused to support *The Zoological Record* on the ground that abstracts will suit them better. When "The International Catalogue of Scientific Literature" came into existence, its mere appearance nearly halved our sales, although in the opinion of many the zoology volume of the catalogue was inferior to the *Record*. Fortunately I was able, after much persuasion of reluctant colleagues, to save the *Record* by arranging a provisional amalgamation between it and the zoology volume of the catalogue on terms which were to the advantage of both enterprises and left us with the option to continue the *Record* if the international catalogue broke down.

The international catalogue did in fact break down, whether the causes were, as I think, the inertia of its system, or, as some think, the circumstances of the war. The Zoological Society of London, desiring to preserve the continuity of an annual issue which has

proved of increasing use to zoological science since 1864, resumed the whole burden, and has produced the volumes for the years 1915 to 1921 inclusive at an actual net loss of over £3,000 for six of these and an estimated loss of over £600 for the seventh (1921).

But the Zoological Society of London is a private corporation, receiving no aid from any public funds. My colleagues on its council felt that they had no right to shoulder the burden of zoological bibliography alone to the detriment of other scientific calls on the funds of the society. We made it known, therefore, that although we were prepared to regard an annual loss of £500 as our contribution, we could not continue to publish *The Zoological Record* unless we were assured of the necessary additional support from other zoological institutions and zoologists. Further, we made it known that if we received donations in excess of the loss beyond our own contribution of £500 for the year 1922, we should carry forward that balance to the credit of the succeeding volume in addition to another donation of £500 from our own funds.

We actually received £684 in donations in addition to our £500, and the cost of printing was less than we had anticipated so that we have been able to carry forward approximately £275 towards the volume for 1923. This volume, which is now going through the press and will be issued complete early in 1925, will almost certainly be larger than that for 1922, but with our own donation, the balance carried forward and the efforts of other British societies we shall probably be able to make both ends meet.

I desire to state, however, that the United States of America has so far contributed only a total of approximately £107 of which the large proportion of £35, has come from two individuals—my friends Dr. T. Barbour and Dr. Henshaw of Cambridge, Mass.¹ Is it too much to ask that zoological institutions and zoologists of America should together contribute say £250 a year for the five volumes 1924–1928 inclusive—just one half what this single society is prepared to find? It is not much to ask. If this can be done, I have little doubt but that other British institutions will be able to guarantee the remainder of the deficit and so secure the continuity of a valuable aid to zoological science during the period in which the system of abstracts is being established and give time to see whether the new system will make the *Record* unnecessary, or whether it is possible to arrange a scheme of efficient cooperation and economical division of labor.

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P. CHALMERS MITCHELL

¹ Dr. Barbour has increased his subscription to £50 in the hope that this will lead to increased support from America.