

EXPLORING AND COLLECTING EXPEDITIONS

APROPOS of Dr. Cockerell's very timely and appropriate remarks on expeditions in the October 27th number of *SCIENCE*, I should like to call attention to the wonderful opportunities for the increase of our knowledge of Cryptogamic plants, especially fungi, in the regions visited by various exploring and collecting expeditions. Unfortunately, these opportunities for some reason are usually neglected. Our present knowledge of this group of Cryptogams is very scanty and incomplete, and no very satisfactory monographic work can be done until much more material is available from the many little-known regions of the world. Very rarely do we find an experienced mycological collector included in the personnel of an expedition. Sometimes a botanist is added, but he is usually interested primarily in the flowering plants, and though he may desire to include the fungi and

other lower plants, it is impossible to cover such a broad field in a satisfactory manner. A single person devoting all his time to the collection of fungi would find more than he could do in most regions, and the addition of a mycologist to a collecting expedition, even though it were a purely botanical one, would add greatly to our collection and to our knowledge of the distribution of the fungi. This should be done in the interests of economy and efficiency, as the addition of a mycologist to the personnel of an expedition would add comparatively little to the expense and would contribute much toward the advancement of our knowledge of the fungi of the world. It is to be hoped that in the interests of the advancement of this branch of science the organizers of exploring or collecting expeditions will give serious consideration to this matter.

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THE EIGHTH GENERAL CONFERENCE ON WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

ON October 3, 1933, at the Quai d'Orsay, Paris, in the historic "Clock Chamber," there assembled, under the presidency of the Minister of Commerce and Industry of the French Republic (substituting for the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was detained at Geneva), 48 delegates representing 29 of the nations taking part in the Metric Convention (Convention du Mètre), this being the inaugural session of the Eighth General Conference of Weights and Measures.

These general conferences have always been presented with a lengthy and diversified program. They are remarkable assemblages of diplomats and savants, exceptionally open-minded both to the necessities of international organizations and to the most complex questions of pure science. They settle these questions either by accepting or rejecting proposals submitted to them. Acceptance is sometimes made conditional, but the conferences can not give detailed study to technical questions.

On this occasion, the general conference, after having received the report of the International Committee upon the work accomplished at the International Bureau since the last session, gave its sanction to the values of all the national prototype meters whose first periodic verification has just been completed. It also approved the values of three prototype kilograms. The record of exchange of geodetic tapes between the International Bureau and various national laboratories was presented, as well as researches upon materials suitable for the formation of new standards of

mass. The conference also received a statement of the studies made upon luminous radiations, but when requested to give its approval to the principle of substituting a luminous wave-length for the platinum meter bar prototype, it very prudently only consented to submit this question to the study of the international committee, in view of the complexity and controversial nature of the proposal.

A few distinct errors and editorial ambiguities, which existed in the text on international scale of temperatures, voted by the preceding conferences, were carefully rectified.

Electrical units have recently entered into the province of the bureau, which has prepared a report on their first comparisons. These have led to the expression of a mean value for the ohm and the volt with relation to the various national standards.

The conference approved an important report recommended to it by the Advisory Committee on Electricity; namely to substitute in the near future electrical units derived from the absolute CGS units in place of the "international units." In order to meet the views of the International Commission on Illumination, the conference created, in connection with the international committee¹ an Advisory Committee on

¹ The present membership of the International Committee of Weights and Measures is the following: Messrs. Volterra (Italy), *president*; Cabrera (Spain), *secretary*; Chatelain (U. R. S. S.); Guillaume (International Bureau); Isaachsen (Norway); Janet (France); Johansen (Denmark); Kargatchin (Yugoslavia); Kennelly (United States); Kösters (Germany); MacLennan (Canada); Nagaoka (Japan); Posejpal (Czechoslovakia); Ros (Switzerland); Sears (Great Britain); Statescu (Roumania); Zeeman (Netherlands).