

DISCUSSION

INTERNATIONAL UNION OF BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

FROM the record, it would appear that biologists are the least internationally minded of American scientists. At any rate the biologists are the only group who have not adhered to the appropriate International Union. This is perhaps a matter of surprise in view of the facts that a Union of American Biological Societies comprising 25 different organizations has been formed and is functioning effectively in the production of *Biological Abstracts* and that international congresses of botany, zoology, pathology, entomology, genetics and the like have been held at intervals for many years. The botanists, in particular, ought to be interested in a permanent organization, because the old International Botanical Congress was dissolved in 1915. A fourth congress held at Ithaca, N. Y., in 1926, a fifth at Cambridge, England, in 1930 and a sixth to be held at Amsterdam in September, 1935, continue the series in name only. There is no permanent organization, and each congress is reorganized by the botanists of the country that acts as host. The hosts are under no compulsion to recognize interim committees that may have been authorized in a sectional meeting of a previous congress, although a committee on nomenclature, including surviving members of the pre-war committee, does function by common consent. This lack of continuity from congress to congress represents a distinct loss to science not only because international cooperation is not encouraged—it is in fact discouraged—but also because of the considerable expenditure of time and energy on the part of scientists in the sterile business of effecting reorganizations. The discouragement to progress lies in the fact that interim committees are not at work on problems that from their very nature can be forwarded best if at all by international cooperation. Programs are made up by an organizing committee in one country rather than by the international groups that are intimately acquainted with the currently vital problems of a particular field. It is almost inconceivable that the subject of nomenclature should be handled in a congress without the guidance of a permanent committee that functions continuously.

The fact that microbiologists, geneticists, pathologists, ecologists and others maintain international organizations is sufficient evidence that such congresses are needed. About the only questions involved are (1) whether these groups should meet separately or whether artificial lines should be ignored and all biology be brought in for group discussions, and (2) whether the large number of groups should each meet separately or whether they should join under the

leadership of the International Union of Biological Sciences and hold international biological congresses.

The objection often raised to large gatherings of scientists is not particularly important in this connection. In the first place, only biologists would be in attendance and in the second place there is no particular point to finishing off a convention in the shortest possible time. Let the sessions extend over a fortnight if there is any occasion. It is to be hoped that enough new things of international significance are found out in the realm of biology so that once in five years a period of 12 or 14 days is not too long for the proper discussion of the advances made.

The following countries are now adherents of the International Union of Biological Sciences: Belgium, Czechoslovakia, France, Great Britain, Holland, Italy, Japan, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, Switzerland. There is no reason to believe that the absence of Austria, Germany or U. S. S. R. from this list is more significant than the absence of U. S. A.

In recent months at least two societies (Botanical Society of America and American Phytopathological Society), representing about 2,000 individuals, have filed resolutions with the chairman of the Division for Biology and Agriculture of the National Research Council favoring early adherence to the International Union.

An extraordinary session of the Union is scheduled to be held in Amsterdam on September 1, 1935, to consider amendments to the statutes. A joint session of the Union, Section of Botany, and the Botanical Congress will be held on Wednesday of the same week. It is practically certain that at the joint session Professor Went will propose, as he did at Ithaca in 1926, that the two bodies merge. Such a fusion is a logical step and is likely to be voted. The Botanical Congress would thus become a permanent and continuing organization, with a central bureau subsidized by the governments of the adhering countries. The statutes of the Union are so comprehensive that the various sections which now exist or may be set up enjoy almost complete autonomy. Under the circumstances, any biological organization in U. S. A. that sponsors international congresses might well consider the advantages of the International Union as the medium for accomplishing the purposes of such gatherings. Needless to say, American botanists, who are confronted with the immediate problem of becoming eligible to participate in the joint sessions of the Union and the congress in September next, will appreciate the support which other biological organizations could give. Doubtless the Division for Biology and Agriculture of the National Research Council would welcome expression of opinion about the advisability

of adhering to the Union. If strong reasons exist for remaining out of the Union, unquestionably the division would welcome such information, as would also the 2,000 botanists who are now disposed to enter.

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HEVEA RUBBER TREES IN FLORIDA

THE Hevea or Para rubber tree of Brazil (*Hevea brasiliensis*), the species that is cultivated extensively in the East Indies, has been introduced experimentally into southern Florida, where the coconut palm, mango, avocado, sapodilla and other strictly tropical plants are being grown. Some of the rubber trees have grown rapidly, and have produced fertile seeds, so that the first generation of "native-born" Heveas is in its second year. A single stunted Hevea tree at Palm Beach is the only known survivor of an earlier introduction, at the end of the last century, by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, and has shown notable resistance to unfavorable conditions. It was broken off near the ground by the fall of another tree in the hurricane of 1928, but the stump has remained healthy and new branches have developed.

Although the native habitat of Hevea is in the Amazon valley, which lies along the Equator, the susceptibility to injury by cold weather appears to be rather less than that of the Castilla rubber trees from Central America and Mexico. Many tropical plants are damaged in cool periods, even in regions where frosts do not occur, but no such tendency has been noted with Hevea, even in the young plants, many of which have continued to grow through the winter. The seasonal leaf-fall of the older trees, which is a regular habit of Hevea in the tropics, may assist the adaptation of the species to the Florida conditions. In addition to Hevea and Castilla, the rubber experiments that are being conducted at the Plant Introduction Garden at Coconut Grove include the Ceara rubber tree of Brazil (*Manihot glaziovii*), the African rubber tree (*Funtumia elastica*) and the Assam rubber tree (*Ficus elastica*), which also are thriving and seeding under the Florida conditions.

The seedlings of the Hevea tree are notably specialized for forest undergrowth conditions and have very thin leaves. Protection of the young trees against the strong trade-wind breezes of the coast districts was found necessary, and the roots must reach permanent moisture, but the older trees are relatively hardy. The most normal and rapid growth has been in pockets of the limestone reef formation below Coconut Grove, though practical tests of production possibilities are not to be made under such conditions. The first requirement for adequate testing is that supplies of native-grown seed be available for planting in many localities, so that the general range of adaptation may be learned and permanent groups of trees

established where soil conditions prove favorable, to give a basis of selection. The factor of selective adaptation may be emphasized on account of the very wide range of individual diversity in Hevea.

The extent to which it will be desirable to utilize Hevea or other tropical rubber trees in southern Florida no doubt will depend upon the efficiency of production that can be attained, and upon the need that may be felt for developing new industries or of protecting ourselves against military emergencies and commercial exactions. A limiting factor at present is the denuded state of much of the interior, but with the fire hazards removed and the natural forest covering restored, the tropical reclamation might extend over half the peninsula. Desert conditions are approached in the open fire-swept country during the dry season of the winter and early spring, with the exposed sand losing heat rapidly after sunset and the dry cold air inducing frost temperatures in moist places by surface evaporation. Water that is being drained from Lake Okeechobee and higher levels farther north could be diverted for controlling fires and irrigating the tropical districts in the dry season, if large-scale developments of rubber or other tropical resources were undertaken.

O. F. COOK

BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY

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"SLEEP" AGGREGATION IN THE BEETLE, *ALTICA BIMARGINATA*

As an addition to our comparatively limited knowledge of "sleep" aggregations in insects the following notes may be of value.

On July 29 and 30, 1934, while camping on a small stream near Missoula, Montana, I found large clusters of this species collected on trunks of alder trees, close to the stream. The weather was intensely hot, with maximum temperature at Missoula of 99° F., on the 29th, and a strong breeze from the southeast.

The beetles were gathered in dense clusters mostly on the leeward side of the alders in long vertical rows, occasionally one being on top of the others. For the most part they were quiet, but an occasional "sleep walker" would leave his comrades to crawl up the trunk and then down again.

I removed a lot and threw them on the ground. Here they ran aimlessly about until reaching some blades of grass up which several of them climbed to reach an alder trunk, which they ascended and wandered up and down for a time until coming into contact with other beetles, when they gradually came to rest close to their fellows.

When a wandering beetle made contact with one at rest, the latter frequently turned about as if to repel (?) the intruder, while the antennae of both were in active motion. They would then come to rest together