

Centennial Celebration, AAAS—A Preview

Edmund W. Sinnott, *President*

THE PROGRAM FOR THE ANNUAL MEETING of the American Association for the Advancement of Science for 1948, which is to be held in Washington next September, has been developed in recent months by the Centennial Policy Committee of the Association and is now nearly complete. This meeting will be unique in three respects:

First, it will celebrate the Centennial Anniversary of the Association. The year 1848 will be remembered for many events, but not the least of these was the first meeting, of what was to grow into the great organization we know today. At this meeting, held at Philadelphia in the fall of that year and lasting from September 20 to 25, about 60 papers and communications were read. The Association then had 461 members, which included all the leading American scientists of the time. It is fitting that, as the Association enters its second century, we should mark this birthday with a meeting which will be particularly memorable.

Second, it will be held in September. Many years have passed since the annual meeting was convened at any time other than the Christmas holidays, and it will be interesting to see how successful this experiment proves to be. The advantages of a Christmas meeting are numerous, but it also has certain difficulties, and many of our members have often suggested that we try some other date. The period between Labor Day and the opening of most colleges seems to be a particularly favorable one and has been chosen for the Centennial. It is particularly appropriate for such a meeting to be held in the Nation's capital, and September has the added advantage that only at this time can a large gathering be accommodated in Washington.

Third, and most important, the character of the meeting will be different from any other in the Association's history. During these four days there will be none of the usual programs, with hundreds of scientific papers presented in the sections and the affiliated societies, such as have distinguished our annual gatherings in the past, but we shall hold instead a new type of program consisting of two major parts—a series of symposia and another of addresses—both by speakers especially invited to present them.

Symposia have often been held at our meetings and seem to be a particularly appropriate sort of program for the Association to sponsor. In these days of intense specialization, when scientists must take

part in the activities of a large number of societies, each devoted to the development of a single field of inquiry and research, there is a growing danger that men of science will lose sight of the progress being made in other fields than their own and thus fail to achieve that breadth of outlook which is essential for sound scientific work. In the last century this was relatively easy to gain, since science was organized more simply and possessed a much smaller body of knowledge. Today, symposia are often presented by groups of men in the same general field, but there are far too few opportunities for scientists in quite different fields to come together and discuss a common problem. In the meetings of our Association it is no longer possible to accommodate all the host of scientific men in America, who necessarily must gather at other times and places for much of the interchange of ideas which is so necessary for progress. Our meetings, however, do offer ideal opportunities for the sort of symposial programs which I have mentioned and which, in the few cases where they have been tried, have already proven very stimulating. It may be that we shall want to devote more and more of our annual gatherings to such programs and that this will prove to be one of the major services which the Association in its second century can render to the advancement of science.

For this Centennial Meeting, at least, the program will in large part consist of such symposia. Fifteen of these are being organized and will be held on the mornings of Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, September 14, 15, and 16, five concurrently on each day. To each symposium three distinguished scientists, chosen from different fields, will contribute a paper. Since the subject will be approached from these diverse viewpoints, care will be taken to coordinate the three papers in such a way that they may present an integrated treatment of the topic. At the conclusion of each symposium there will be discussion and comment by several scientists chosen for their familiarity with the topic.

Among the wealth of interesting and important scientific problems it has been most difficult to select a limited number for treatment in this way, and many members of the Association will doubtless wish that the Committee had made other choices. The 15 which have been decided upon, however, are all of high significance, and their discussion by the group of scientific men who have undertaken this task should prove

a memorable event. There is no space here to mention more than a few of them. The important problem of the world's sources of energy, for example, will be discussed by authorities in the fields of atomic energy, photosynthetic energy, and petroleum. Few problems in biology are now being so actively studied as that which involves the relation of genes and cytoplasm in inheritance and development, and this will be discussed by investigators who approach it from the point of view of genetics, of biochemistry, and of cytoplasmic analysis. The question of food and nutrition will be considered by authorities in world agriculture, in the science of nutrition, and in the psychology of food habits. The great problem of human educability will be approached by an educator, a psychologist, and an authority on child development. The upper atmosphere will be discussed by an astrophysicist, a meteorologist, and a student of cosmic rays. The many manifestations of waves and rhythms in nature will be dealt with by a student of supersonics, by one of "brain waves," and by a seismologist. The 15 symposia and the men who are to take part in them will be presented briefly in successive issues of *Science* during the coming weeks.

On the evenings of these three days there will also be given a series of addresses, four concurrently on each evening, by 12 distinguished scientists. These lectures will present significant scientific problems and will particularly stress the contribution made to their solution by men from many nations, thus making evident the international character of science itself. Indeed, the theme of the Centennial, manifest in the symposia but particularly emphasized in these addresses, will be "One World of Science." In a day when there are so many disruptive influences at work in the world, surely one great service of science to mankind is to show that cooperation among men of many nations, a goal so necessary and so earnestly desired, has actually been taking place between scientists for many years and is still actively practiced. This emphasis on world unity and friendly cooperation between scientists everywhere should be one of the most fruitful contributions of the Centennial of our Association.

The choice of topics for these lectures and of the men to give them was also most difficult. They cover a wide area and will be described more fully later.

"Population Problems," "The World of Isotopes," "Bird Migration," "Human Frontiers," and "Giant Machines for Research" are a few of the fields which eminent men of science will discuss. These contributions should be notable ones.

The Centennial Celebration will be opened on Monday evening, September 13, when it is hoped that President Truman will welcome the members of the Association and their friends at a great gathering. The retiring president of the Association, Professor Harlow Shapley, will deliver his address at this time and will strike the Centennial keynote as he speaks on "One World of Astronomy."

These four days will not all be spent in listening to programs. The many scientific agencies of the Federal Government and the universities in and around Washington will hold "open house" for visitors throughout the week. Every afternoon and all of Friday have been left free from formal engagements so that members of the Association and other visitors can take advantage of this unusual opportunity to meet scientists of note, to visit their laboratories, gardens, and museums, and to become more familiar with the greater center of scientific activity which our national capital now is. The leisurely pace of this Centennial week, in such contrast to the crowded and hectic days of our usual annual meetings, will give to our members and friends ample chance to meet and talk with their colleagues and thus to give and receive the intellectual stimulation which is the product of personal conference and the basic reason for all scientific gatherings.

In addition to the Association's meetings during Centennial week, there will be a considerable series of scientific programs held under the auspices of the sections and the affiliated societies in or near Washington and either before or after the general meeting.

The Centennial Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science will be a great one, both as to numbers in attendance and as to character and significance. Details of program, arrangements, and accommodations will be published in due course. It is hoped that everyone who can do so will take advantage of this opportunity to participate in one of the most notable events in the history of American science.

