19 February 1960, Volume 131, Number 3399 **SCIENCE**

SCIENCE, which is now combined with THE SCIENTIFIC MONTHLY, is published each Friday by the American Association for the Advancement of Science at National Publishing Company, Washington, D.C. The joint journal is published in the SCIENCE format. SCIENCE is indexed in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*.

Editorial and personnel-placement correspondence should be addressed to SCIENCE, 1515 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington 5, D.C. Manuscripts should be typed with double spacing and submitted in duplicate. The AAAS assumes no responsibility for the safety of manuscripts or for the opinions expressed by contributors. For detailed suggestions on the preparation of manuscripts and illustrations, see *Science* **125**, 16 (4 Jan. 1957).

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Annual subscriptions: $8.50; foreign postage, $1.50; Canadian postage, 75¢. Single copies, 35¢. Cable address: Advancesci, Washington.

Footlights and Foot-Pounds

In magnitude of preparations, complexity of operations, number of persons involved, and climactic quality, any large scientific meeting ranks high among other, comparable human activities. The uniquely complex Christmas meeting of the Association, which its own pressroom once described as the "world series of science," might be compared with the staging of a large-scale theatrical production.

The story line is born, and eventually there is a "book"; headliners and others are considered for leads and bit parts, then signed up for the cast; the physical facilities are booked; the playbills go out, and tickets (registrations) are sold, both in advance and at the door; finally, projection equipment and props are mobilized. At last, the "first night" arrives—the house lights dim, the footlights go on, and the audience hushes; in that moment of keen expectancy, everything must go right!

But AAAS meetings have no second nights. Another, not insignificant, difference is that there are scores of "first nights" (the programs) crowded into five and one-half days. And a perhaps poignant difference is that those who produced the programs and organized the meeting will write their own critiques!

An increasing number of those who attend AAAS meetings, however, are impelled to comment, generally in complimentary terms. From such unsolicited observations it is indicated that these registrants have come to realize that the preparations for the Association's annual meeting—and the actual operations connected with it—do add up to a substantial output of energy on the part of many people.

Even those who comment may not appreciate, however, the amount of thought, planning, correspondence, and persuasion that more than a hundred section and society secretaries and program chairmen have contributed. Editing, composing, and printing the General Program requires the almost undivided attention of one AAAS office and one devoted printer during two fall months. Shortly before the meeting opens, the committees on physical arrangements (which install lanterns and provide volunteers to operate them) and local public information become very active.

In the days and hours immediately before the meeting, the Association's office and the pressroom are activated; exhibit booths are erected; large crates and innumerable small cartons are delivered and unpacked, and their contents displayed; the session rooms are cleaned, and chairs arranged. During the meeting, more than a thousand authors deliver their papers, short or long; boards, committees, and councils meet; the registrants commingle and commune, often late into the night. Whether this collectively great expenditure of energy be measured in dynes, ergs, joules, or foot-pounds—and here, Section M's valuable programs on systems of units could help—the sum total, if it could be computed, would be impressive.

The expenditure of all these foot-pounds for the Chicago meeting was well worth while. As the reports in this issue indicate, the 126th AAAS meeting was notable for the uniformly high quality of its programs and exhibits, for the general smoothness of its operations, and for its good fellowship. Those who made the programs possible and those who participated have earned the thanks of the Association. They also have the satisfaction of knowing that, quite literally, they have helped science to advance.—RAYMOND L. TAYLOR, *AAAS*