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AMERICAN MATHEMATICS IN THE PRESENT WAR¹

By DR. M. H. STONE

PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN MATHEMATICAL SOCIETY

THE topic of my remarks this evening is a rather serious one to take up after a dinner so pleasant and so friendly as the one we have all been enjoying. Moreover, I fear that the tone of my discussion can not be altogether gratifying to our professional pride, since the history of American mathematics in the present war has been in many respects a story of frustration. I believe, however, that we should all look at the record at this moment when the urgency of our national cause gives every detail of that record the fullest possible significance—and yet at a time when the inevitable note of protest can in no sense be interpreted as obstructing positive achievements on the part of those charged with the ultimate responsibility. The fact is that important lessons can be

¹ This paper represents the final version of an address delivered on August 13, 1944, before the American Mathematical Society at its summer meeting in Wellesley, Massachusetts.

drawn from a recital of the record; and this is the time to draw them.

The history of American mathematics in the present war is complex and can be approached in a variety of different ways. I was rather at a loss to choose among them until finally the circumstances of this essay into historical expression made it clear to me that the most satisfactory plan would be to trace the sequence of events against the time-scale of the war itself. With this point of view in mind I spent part of the afternoon in drawing up a chronological table which I propose to follow this evening.² With all the cross-links displayed, I must confess that my chart is reminiscent of a topologist's nightmare!

Many of you will recall our summer meeting in Madison five years ago. That meeting began only a few hours after the invasion of Poland. The long-

² See the chart presented on page 533.

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