SCIENCE.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 1884.

COMMENT AND CRITICISM.

THE AMERICAN association for the advancement of science borrowed its constitution, in large measure, from the British. Yet, while it is evident in the nature of things that the same rules cannot answer for two countries differing so widely in geographical extent, one weakness of the American, as compared with the British society, lies in its lack of an efficient organization in the interim between two meetings, and the necessity that the non-permanent members of the standing committee should be chosen from and by the members present at one of the annual gatherings. This deficiency has been emphasized by the visit of the British association on this side of the water, and by the proposal for an international association of some sort.

This leads us to draw the attention of those interested to one or two features of the recent Montreal meeting, which might well be adopted by the American association, and would require no alteration of the constitution. One is the grouping of papers in each section, so that those of a similar character are read together, eliciting a better discussion, freer from discursiveness, and at less cost of time; another is fixing set subjects for discussion on some topics of interest, to be opened by designated members; a third is the daily disposal of the entire schedule, no matter how much the papers have to be abbreviated or the session prolonged, so that each day's programme is fresh. The most important of all is the appropriation of grants of money to committees for special scientific work during the year, the grants this year amounting to over £1500.

THE GROWTH of the American association, during the past five years, warrants the belief that such grants are entirely within its disposal, if it will simply reverse its plan of printing papers in full. We believe that only five of the numerous papers read at Montreal are to be printed *in extenso;* such papers having to be recommended by the sectional committees, and approved by the general committee. In our own association, the matter is completely within the control of the standing committee, which, by adopting a similar policy, might soon bring the association into possession of a permanent fund of fifty thousand dollars, — such as the British association now enjoys, — instead of leaving it to fulfil but half its mission on its paltry investment of a couple of thousand dollars. At present, the American association is expending more than four thousand dollars a year in printing; while the British association, with twice the membership, and an average presentation of twice as many papers, prints no bulkier a volume, and less than half of it is made up of members' papers. The avenues of publication in America are now ample enough for all papers of permanent value.

IT HAS been justly held, that the meeting of the British association in Canada would produce a direct stimulus to science in the dominion. The association itself has evidently determined that it shall. Welcomed with the utmost cordiality, fostered by the government, and receiving the marked attention of the governor-general, it has raised, among its own members, a science-scholarship fund for McGill University, — probably to be devoted to civil engineering, — has been the occasion of a gift of fifty thousand dollars for a public library in Montreal, and has passed a series of resolutions pointedly calling the attention of the Canadian government to two important duties to science and humanity which it has hitherto neglected, — a proper system of tidal observation along its extended coasts, for the benefit of navigation; and systematic researches upon the native tribes of half a continent.

ETHNIC problems have a natural interest for the American people. Their great task is to fuse together the life of many lands, — to bring political and social union out of the widest diversities that the races of men afford. They follow a true instinct in giving time and public money to such problems. The bureau of ethnology is doing an admirable work in gathering the history of our departing aborigines. There is, however, another field of labor, — one not yet fairly entered on, either by private students or by the ordered phalanxes that are marshalled in the cause of science by the bureaus of the federal government. As the indigenous savages were forced towards the setting sun by the plough-driving Aryans, the shore was crossed by another savage race, the African, that has come to stay for all time in our fields.

There can be no question that the African in the United States presents us with the greatest and most interesting experiment that has ever been tried by civilized man upon a lower people. Around this race have gathered a host of problems of the utmost importance to pure science, and of infinite interest in that field of nature called sociology, into which science is with such difficulty making a slow and blundering way. Out of the very numerous inquiries that should be made in this field we may note the following, that are at the moment, perhaps, the most important because they concern matters that need to be studied at once. *First* among these is the question of the origin of our American negroes. There is a great deal that still can be gathered concerning this question. No close observer of the negro race in this country can fail to have noticed the wide diversity of type masked behind the deceiving uniformity of hue. *Second*, we have the problem of the physical and mental change that has come over this people since their removal to America. *Third*, the effects of climate in different parts of the United States upon these black races, — effects on shape, liability to disease, longevity, etc. What to do with and for the negro, and how to do it, is the question of all questions most immediately and imperatively before us. We best begin to deal with it by making a scientific study of him.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

**** Correspondents are requested to be as brief as possible. The writer's name is in all cases required as proof of good faith.*

The initiation of deep-sea dredging.

In a recent number of *Science* (July 18), Mr. Rathbun is rather severe upon European naturalists for their supposed ignorance of the fact that the Gulf-Stream dredgings carried on by the Corwin, under the superintendence of the late Mr. Pourtalès, were commenced in 1867, the year before the first British expedition in the Lightning; and he speaks of Mr. Pourtalès' report of December, 1867, as having been 'utterly ignored' by European writers.

It is quite true that no reference was made to this report in the historical account of the subject which formed part of the preliminary report of the dredging operations of the Lightning, presented to the Royal society by Dr. Carpenter on Dec. 17, 1868; for the bulletin of the Museum of comparative zoölogy, which contained Pourtalès' report, had not then reached him. The correspondence between Dr. Carpenter and Sir Wyville Thomson, which led to the cruise of the Lightning (published as an appendix to Dr. Carpenter's report), was carried on in entire ignorance of the fact that Pourtalès had dredged down to a depth of three hundred and fifty fathoms a twelvemonth before. In fact, it was only after their return in September, 1868, that they heard for the first time of the work done by Mr. Pourtalès in May of that and of the previous year. But a short account of it, received from Prof. A. Agassiz, was quoted by Dr. Carpenter; and reference was given to a fuller notice of Mr. Pourtalès' results in Silliman's journal for November, 1868.

It will be seen, therefore, that Dr. Carpenter, far from ignoring the researches of Mr. Pourtalès in the Corwin, fully recognized their priority to those carried on in the Lightning during the autumn of 1868. He could not well refer to a document, which, though published a year previously, had not yet come into the hands of British naturalists, and consequently could not receive from them the credit which Mr. Rathbun says has been denied it. But Mr. Pourtalès' dredgings were noticed in the same number of the proceedings of the Royal society as were those of the Lightning; and I do not well see how their value could have been more fully recognized, considering what was then known about them in this country.

I freely admit, however, that in 'The depths of the sea,' the book to which Mr. Rathbun so pointedly refers (though without naming it), it is stated that the dredgings of Mr. Pourtalès were 'commenced' in 1868. This is one of several minor inaccuracies which are unfortunately to be found scattered through the work; and, however much they are to be regretted, it must be remembered that at the time it was written the author was in bad health, with his time fully occupied by his professorial duties, and by the preparations for the cruise of the Challenger, which commenced almost before the book was in the hands of the public. In fact, the later chapters, which contain the erroneous reference to the date of

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