

county institution has a claim upon the county residents. The foundation and maintenance of local museums is distinctly a part of the work of the local societies; in so far as these museums can be utilised for educational purposes, they have a claim to support from the County Councils, and in a few cases such support has actually been given. We note with satisfaction that the London County Council in the estimate for the expenditure by its Technical Education Board for the ensuing year has allocated a certain sum to "museums." The county of Essex is, we believe, unique in having attached to its Technical Instruction Committee a certain number of representatives of the local society. In agricultural and maritime districts where technical instruction centres round the sciences which are more particularly cultivated by the local societies, there is no reason why there should not always be co-operation between these societies and the County Councils. If such co-operation is at present the exception rather than the rule, it is because the local societies have not made their influence as intellectual powers felt with sufficient force. Let these societies knit up their scattered units, let their amateur workers be educated up to the necessity for carrying on systematic instead of casual observations, let them court the respect to which their labours entitle them by putting forth good evidence of activity, and they may play a far greater part in the scientific development of this country than has hitherto fallen to their lot. R. MELDOIA.

CAMPHOR.

CAMPHOR is not the exclusive product of any one natural order, genus, or species; but what is more remarkable, of closely allied species of camphor-yielding genera—one species possesses the secretion, while no trace of it is found in another. Although several kinds of camphor are articles of commerce, little, if any, reaches this country, save that obtained from *Cinnamomum camphora* (*Camphora officinarum*), a member of the laurel family, and of the same genus as the tree whose bark furnishes the spice called cinnamon. Like many other natural products of which scientific research has multiplied the applications, camphor is becoming dearer and scarcer, and the question has arisen, How is the supply to be maintained equal to the demand? The bulk of the camphor imported into Europe comes from Japan and Formosa, and comparatively little from China. This is the product of *Cinnamomum camphora*, and Dr. E. Grasmann has published¹ an interesting account of this tree, both from a scientific and commercial standpoint. He has rather overweighed his article with second-hand information respecting laurels generally and those of Japan in particular, which, as might be expected, is inaccurate in some details. Disregarding these, we find much that is interesting concerning the camphor-tree itself, which is one of the noblest objects in the forests of eastern sub-tropical Asia. It attains gigantic dimensions, surpassing all other trees of the Japanese forests, at least in girth of trunk if not in total height. Dr. Grasmann gives the recorded dimensions of various notable trees, but what is more to the point, he also gives measurements made by himself. A tree in the neighbourhood of the town of Miyazaki, Oyodomura, measured in 1894, was 14.80 metres in circumference at 1.30 m. from the ground, or 4.48 m. in diameter, and it was 35 m. high. There is an illustration of this giant reproduced from a photograph. Concerning the distribution of the camphor-tree in Japan, the author states that it grows naturally in Kinshin up to about 34° lat., and scattered in favourable situations some 2° farther north, the extreme limit being 36° 24'. It is abundant in the island of Formosa, and also occurs in the Tsusima and Luchu groups. On the mainland of China, according to Dr. Grasmann, it inhabits the coast region from Cochin-China to the mouth of the Yangtze-kiang, and it may be added that it is now known to extend westwards at least as far as Ichang in the central province of Hupeh. From Dr. A. Henry's notes accompanying his specimens in the Kew Herbarium, it appears that the wood is in great request, but no camphor is extracted; and Consul Playfair reported the same from Pakhoi, Kwangtung, in 1883. Indeed the camphor industry would seem to be at present very limited in China, although the tree is common and widely spread. The little that is exported is

mostly from the province of Fokien, but the amount is increasing in the same measure as the production is decreasing in Japan. In the latter country something has been done to maintain the supply, but Dr. Grasmann holds that the present rate of planting is wholly inadequate. He urges the importance of increasing the plantations to the greatest possible extent, inasmuch as every part of the tree is useful, from the roots to the young shoots and leaves. Even the fruit is employed in the preparation of tallow. In Formosa camphor distilling has been carried on in the most recklessly extravagant manner imaginable. It is suggested that Japanese rule in the island may put a stop to such disastrous waste.

With regard to the increasing price of camphor, it has been stated in various publications that this is due to its being used in the manufacture of smokeless powder. In reply to inquiries on this point, Sir Frederick Abel wrote to the Director of Kew in November last as follows:—

"Any increase of demand, involving a rise in the price of camphor, is not due to its application as a constituent of smokeless powder. That material was used in the earliest days of the manufacture of a successful smokeless powder for artillery and small arms; but its employment was soon demonstrated to be attended with serious practical disadvantages, and its application for the purpose can therefore not be said to have been other than experimental, and of no great importance, even at that time, as affecting the market value of camphor. This substance has, however, been used extensively for many years past, and no doubt in continually-increasing quantities, for the conversion of collodion cotton into the material known as celluloid, which is applied to the manufacture of imitation ivory, tortoiseshell, horn, and a great variety of purposes."

As Dr. Grasmann observes, the greatest enemy of the camphor-tree is man, and in Japan large trees are eventually killed through the felonious nocturnal grubbing of their roots. Some birds are fond of the fruit and seed, and the caterpillar of *Papilio sarpedon* feeds on the leaves; but, except to young plants, they cause comparatively little damage. Apart from the wanton destruction of trees, the probability of the supply of camphor being maintained is seriously diminished by the fact that the tree grows but slowly in its early years. At the same time it colonises freely, and is now naturalised in several countries, notably in Madagascar, where, according to Dr. Meller, in a note accompanying a specimen in the Kew Herbarium, it was abundant as long ago as 1862, and was much used for building purposes.

Next in point of importance in producing camphor is *Dryobalanops aromatica*, a tree belonging to the Dipterocarpeæ, and inhabiting Borneo and Sumatra. The formula of ordinary camphor is $C_{10}H_{16}O$; of Borneo camphor, $C_{10}H_{18}O$; and the latter can be artificially prepared from the former. Borneo camphor is deposited in clefts and hollows of the wood, and has simply to be taken out; but it is comparatively rare, and exceedingly dear, bringing eighty times more, according to Grasmann, than ordinary camphor. Nearly the whole production is imported into China, where it is esteemed beyond the ordinary camphor, and used as incense.

Blumea balsamifera (Compositæ), a shrubby plant exceedingly common in tropical Asia, yields a kind of camphor by distillation. Hainan is the principal seat of the industry, but the crude article is refined at Canton, whence there is an annual export of about 10,000 pounds. No doubt this source of camphor could be much more extensively utilised.

Members of various other natural orders, notably the Labiatæ, yield essential oils of the same composition, and having the same properties, as camphor. Menthol is an example.

W. B. H.

URANIUM.

THE introduction of the electric furnace by M. H. Moissan as an instrument of research, has opened up many new fields of work; among which the preparation of those metals whose oxides had been looked upon as irreducible by carbon, is not the least interesting. Three years ago the metal uranium was obtained in this way, and in a recent number of the *Comptes rendus* (May 18), M. Moissan gives a more complete account of the preparation and properties of this metal. The metal was isolated by three methods, by the action of sodium at a red heat upon the double chloride of sodium and uranium, $UCl_4 \cdot 2NaCl$,

¹ "Der Kampferbaum. Mittheilungen der deutschen Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens in Tokio," vi. pp. 277-315, with illustrations. 1895.