

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES AND THE
BRITISH ASSOCIATION.

THE circumstances under which the International Conference on Terrestrial Magnetism and Atmospheric Electricity met at Bristol, and its relations to the British Association, were fully described in the address of the President which we have already published. The success of the Conference leads to the hope that similar arrangements may be made in future with regard to other international reunions which may be held in this country.

The number of such gatherings is increasing, but, useful as they undoubtedly are, they make serious inroads on the summer vacation; they diminish the few short weeks which, when the necessary holiday has been taken, can be devoted either to research or to preparation for the work of the next session; and lastly they necessarily compete with, and injuriously affect, each other.

Thus it is unquestionable that the fact that physiologists foregathered in Cambridge shortly before the meeting of the British Association was one of the causes why at Bristol physiologists were conspicuous by their absence. Last year the number of British geologists who visited Canada was relatively small, as they could not be in the Caucasus and on the shores of the Pacific at the same time.

It may be impossible to prevent such meetings from interfering when they are held in different countries and when two nations are the hosts, but everything that is possible should be done to prevent it when the gatherings take place in the same summer and in the same country. Steps have recently been taken in this direction. Conferences of zoologists and physiologists were held simultaneously in Cambridge, and the Conference on Terrestrial Magnetism was affiliated to the British Association. This latter plan could not be adopted if the number of persons attending an International Conference was so large that, if the Conference were held simultaneously with the meeting of the Association, it would overtax the receptive capacity of a great town. Such cases are comparatively rare, and in others the aid of the Association is so valuable, that it may be hoped that the precedent now set will be followed frequently.

The conditions of a successful International Conference are interesting and important questions to discuss, an adequate attendance of British and foreign scientific men, and well arranged opportunities for social intercourse. Taking the first two for granted, and dealing therefore only with the last, it is well known that an elaborate scheme of entertainments and excursions is most generously and even lavishly provided by the locality in which the British Association meets. These were, and probably always would be, thrown open to members of an International Conference meeting together with and recognised by the Association. If the number of those attending the Conference was sufficiently large to justify the wish to have some special entertainments—it may be a dinner or an excursion—reserved for them alone, this could no doubt be arranged at a cost to the promoters of the Conference much less than that involved in the holding of an independent meeting. The British Association thus possesses ready-made machinery for the reception and entertainment of foreigners, which would have to be created anew for each independent Conference. On the other hand, no small part of the elaborate preparations for the meeting of the Association is now too often devoted to the entertainment of persons whose interest in science is little more than a hardy annual which blossoms in August or September, and requires a stimulating treatment of cheap excursions to bring it to maturity. No harm would be done to the Association, and good would result in many ways if these were in

part replaced by distinguished foreign visitors and their English *confrères*. The authorities of the Association have shown a praiseworthy readiness to vary their arrangements so as to grapple with new conditions. Though nominally a department of Section A, and working most harmoniously with the officers of that Section, the International Magnetic Conference was practically at liberty to manage its own affairs, and was in no way hampered by red-tape. The Permanent Committee, appointed not by the Association, but by the International Meteorological Conference at Paris in 1896, was added *en bloc* to the Committee of Section A, and was allowed unfettered control of the Magnetic Department of that Section.

If the authorities of the Association are thus wisely liberal in future, there is no reason why at least the smaller International Conferences which take place in this country should not meet in alliance with the British Association.

If a Section can for one year coexist with an almost independent department, there is no reason why similar temporary arrangements should not be adopted on a more extensive scale, should occasion so require. The promoters of the Conference would be saved a great deal of trouble and even of expense. The cost to the Association and to the locality would be no greater than it is now. The persons entertained would be genuine scientific workers. The meetings of the Association would gain in interest and prestige, while at most of the places where the Association meets there would be no difficulty in providing space for several additional Sections if such subdivision were necessary.

The experiment which has been tried this year on a small scale was a complete success, and it is desirable that those who may have the management of International Congresses in future should be fully aware of the readiness which the Council of the British Association has displayed to make the great organisation which it controls as useful as possible. They have much to give, and on this occasion they gave it freely; while, on the other hand, the Association gained both in the interest of its proceedings, and in the usefulness to science which is the object of its existence.

NOTES.

THE seventeenth Congress of the Sanitary Institute was opened at Birmingham on Tuesday, and will continue in session during the remainder of this week. On Tuesday afternoon Sir Joseph Fayer, Bart., the President of the Congress, delivered an address, in which he surveyed the progress of preventive medicine during recent times; and in the evening the Lord Mayor opened a great exhibition of appliances, machinery, food products, and the like, which is the usual feature of the Congress, and lasts a month. On Wednesday municipal representatives, medical officers of health, sanitary engineers, sanitary inspectors, and ladies held conferences and discussed papers. Thursday and Friday are to be devoted to sectional work, and there are two important lectures, one to the Congress, and one to the general public. Among the topics to be discussed are the relations of medical officers to vaccinal legislation, the milk supply, water analysis, bacteria and infectious disease, hygiene in dress, and the decrease in the birth-rate.

THE death is announced at Paris of M. Gabriel de Mortillet, the eminent anthropologist.

THE annual exhibition of the Royal Photographic Society was inaugurated by a soirée held on Saturday last, September 24.

AT the meeting of the Entomological Society of London, on October 5, a paper by Mr. F. Merrifield, "On colouring of pupæ of *P. machaon* and *P. napi* caused by exposing the pupating