

South-Eastern Union of Scientific Societies.

THE twenty-eighth annual congress of the South-Eastern Union of Scientific Societies was held at Maidstone on May 30-June 2 inclusive. Dr. Alex Hill occupied the presidential chair, in succession to Sir Charles F. Close. The headquarters of the Congress were at the Museum, where members were given every convenience by the curator, Mr. J. H. Allchin, and the assistant curator, Mr. H. J. Elgar.

The Mayor opened the meetings by welcoming members and delegates at the Town Hall, where the ancient maces and charters were exhibited and described by Mr. W. H. Day, one of the secretaries, and Mr. W. Dale. Visits followed to various ancient buildings in the town, of which the town possesses a large number. All Saints' Church was visited by more than a hundred members, and was described by Mr. Dale. The church was built in 1395 by Archbishop Courtenay and, although renovated in the last century, remains in practically its original condition, showing in its fine, delicate and lofty columns and its windows the best of the perpendicular characteristics. A very fine set of the original oaken sedilia, with elaborately carved canopies, were seen, and about a score of ancient miserere seats in the choir, which when tipped up have a small seat beneath, giving a sort of rest for tired singers and others. Hard by is the Archbishop's Palace, a stately Elizabethan building, now used as a welfare centre, with wainscoted rooms and old carving. The interesting building known as the tithe barn, with external stone staircase, was also seen. Near at hand and completing the group of ecclesiastical buildings is the massive gateway to the old monks' college, while all were close to the slope leading down to the Medway, much used in early days for travel and transit. The refectory of the Guild of Corpus Christi, in Earl Street, dating from the fourteenth century, was next visited. As a fine piece of mediæval architecture, it deserves a better fate than to be used by a brewery for the making of barrels. It is in dilapidated condition, but the fine roof and the beautiful windows give an idea of its former magnificence. It has a dole window. For nearly three centuries it was occupied by the Grammar School until 1871. Another party of members visited at the same time the bacteriological and chemical laboratories of the Kent County Council, under the guidance of Dr. C. Ponder and Mr. F. W. F. Arnaud.

Dr. Alex Hill's presidential address was on "Antipodean Flora," and in this he gave some interesting facts of the mimicry practised by certain plants observed by him during his journey round the world. Reference was made to the possibility of the isolation of the Australian flora having been accomplished by the dividing-up and the shifting of the land-masses of the Indo-Australian continent in accordance with what has come to be known as Wegener's theory. The means by which eucalyptus and other trees adapt themselves to a rainfall of 8 or 9 inches were described. Exploring the caves at Yallingup, the root of a jarrah tree was met with which had gone down 120 feet in search of water.

The morning session of the second day of the meeting was devoted to botanical papers, and Sir David Prain spoke on "The Story of some Common Garden Plants," the potato, the artichoke, and others being dealt with. A paper by Mr. Robert Paulson on the "Fungus Root" followed. In the afternoon three excursions were arranged. Geologists went to the Aylesford gravel pits and to a Kentish Rag quarry. Botanists followed Dr. A. B. Rendle on an

enjoyable ramble, while a large party visited Allington Castle, by permission of Sir Martin Conway. A castle is thought to have occupied the site in Saxon times, and to have been demolished by the Danes prior to their traditional defeat at Aylesford. Owned by Harold Godwin's brother, Ulnoth, it passed into Norman hands and was rebuilt. As it appears to-day, it is for the most part the work of Sir Stephen de Penchester, who fortified it in the reign of Edward I., in about 1281. Tudor additions were made. The famous Sir Thomas Wyatt was once the owner, and as leader of the rebellion to oppose the Spanish marriage of Queen Mary, he suffered the usual fate on its failure. Tennyson lays the first scene of the second act of "Queen Mary" in the court of Allington Castle. In the evening the Mayor and Mayoress (Councillor and Miss Wallis) received the Union in the Museum.

The third day was devoted to papers in connexion with the Regional Survey Section. Mr. Victor F. Branford gave an address on "The Natural and the Social Sciences," a paper which will later be printed in full. A lecture by Mr. F. W. F. Arnaud on "Vitamins" reviewed the history of the discovery of these elusive bodies and showed the present position of our knowledge of the subject. Botanical and archaeological excursions followed. The famous Coldrum burial-place was visited, and a description given by Mr. W. H. Cook. Halling burial-place followed, where the site was shown from which the only Aurignacian skeleton found in this country was exhumed, and where true implements of that culture were found. In the evening a lecture by Mr. Reginald A. Smith, of the British Museum, was delivered on "Prehistoric Man in Kent." The most ancient remains, those found by Benjamin Harrison, of Ightham, are well represented in the Maidstone Museum.

On the morning of the last day of the meeting, a masterly address was given by Prof. E. B. Poulton on "Recent Advances and Discoveries in the Study of Entomology." The afternoon was devoted to visiting various megalithic remains in the district. The "Countless" Stones proved of great interest. They consist of about twenty large and small stones, and appear to be the thrown-down remains of more than one dolmen, or, as was suggested, of a double row of standing stones. Some of them are sarsens, but the majority are apparently Greensand or Wealden sandstones. An old record was found, showing that they were thrown down by a farmer by the aid of gunpowder towards the end of the eighteenth century. Kits Coty House was next seen, and a description given by Mr. W. Dale. The "house" is fenced round and is now safely looked after by the Office of Works. The stones are probably sarsens and have been shaped to the necessary requirements of the builders. Discussion ensued as to the origin of the name the dolmen bears. The guide-book derivation from Catigern was not thought quite satisfactory. It is said that a shepherd named Kit made it his dwelling, and it may once have been Kit's Cottage. The so-called White Horse Stone was then visited, another sarsen about which some fantastic romance has been weaved. A noticeable point about these megaliths is that they bear many cup-shaped hollows, but geologists agree that these may be due entirely to weathering. *Helix lapicida* was found on the White Horse Stone.

The Congress was very successfully carried through, and the local secretaries, Messrs. W. H. Day and J. W. Bridge, were congratulated upon the arrangements they had made.