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The Genetics Congress

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THE GENETICS CONGRESS

MICE and men reported from Edinburgh after the Congress (JOURNAL OF HEREDITY for September 1939) but since then there has been silence, as far as getting into the record any details of the Congress. On account of the disruption to trans-Atlantic travel caused by the declaration of war between England and Germany, September 3, the American delegation to the Congress was considerably delayed in getting back. Only two failed ultimately to return, Dr. and Mrs. F. W. Tinney of the Division of Farm Crops of the University of Wisconsin. They were among about a dozen members of the Congress who took passage on the ill-fated *Athenia*. Just how they were lost is uncertain, but there is reason to believe they may have been on the lifeboat which was struck by the propeller of one of the rescue ships.

Several other members of the American party were on the *City of Flint*, which left Scotland about the same time as the *Athenia* and which picked up some two hundred survivors of that disaster. The *City of Flint's* next voyage carried it to Murmansk and nearly to Germany, as well as to the front pages of the newspapers for many days.

After the Congress a number of the American members crossed to the Scandinavian countries and took ship from

there, so that the last of them did not return for over a month after the Congress had adjourned.

It has not been easy to get those who did go to tell in detail just what happened at the Congress. No one person was able to cover all of it, and the tension under which it was conducted added a further mental hazard. Dr. R. A. Emerson, the official American delegate appointed at the 1932 Congress, has kindly given us his impressions. A statement by the Secretary-General, and later President, Dr. F. A. E. Crew is also quoted in part from *Nature*, for September 16, 1939. This details some of the difficulties and gives the formal actions taken at the Congress. A supplement to *Nature* (London) devoted to the Genetic Congress was published on November 11, 1939. This contains summaries of the activities of each of the eight sections into which the subject matter was divided. Most of these were prepared by the section Secretaries or recorders, so that a complete statement is available regarding practically all of the meetings of the Congress. Publication of the *Proceedings* was planned, but no recent announcement regarding this has been received. The President and General Secretary is in the British Army, and genetical work at the University of Edinburgh has largely been suspended.—Ed.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE SEVENTH INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF GENETICS

R. A. EMERSON

THE Edinburgh Congress was planned and held under conditions of extreme difficulty. Professor F. A. E. Crew, general secretary of the Congress, and his collaborators in Scotland and the British Isles in general deserve unstinted commendation for the way they planned and carried on to the end when they could not know from one week to the next during the whole last

year whether a congress could be held at all. Those of us upon whom rested the responsibility for the success or failure of the Ithaca Congress in 1932 felt that the depression, which hit us after our preliminary plans had been made, was an almost insurmountable difficulty. But, compared to the year-long uncertainty in the Europe of 1939, our difficulties were minor ones.

It is a pleasure, in this brief account, to commend heartily the statement made by Dr. Otto L. Mohr of Oslo, Norway in opening the first plenary session of the Congress. Dr. Mohr was chairman of the international committee elected at the Ithaca Congress. It was no easy task so to phrase an opening address as to facilitate the harmonious association of representatives of European countries already practically at each others' throats. The Ithaca Congress made no mistake in electing Dr. Mohr.

The Edinburgh Congress exhibited most of the good and a few of the bad features of such congresses. There were many papers of real importance. As one of the older members, I am bound to say that these were presented for the most part by the younger workers who had new and worthwhile things to report. Also, as is usual, there were papers that might well have been omitted. Every congress has that problem to contend with and solves it or fails to solve it as was done at Edinburgh and at Ithaca. If papers are not accepted their authors will not attend. If the success of a congress is measured in terms of the number of members who attend, and if the possibility of publishing the proceedings depends on the number of paid memberships, the problem is a real one. Now that the decision has been reached to make the publication of proceedings a wholly voluntary matter resting with the local council, some of these problems may, perhaps, be avoided. It might be well

in future to admit to the program only such papers as present new and worthwhile results. This might well limit membership correspondingly, but if no volume of proceedings is to be published, the need of a large paid membership would be less. Noteworthy papers would undoubtedly be accepted for publication in regular channels, and it might well turn out that the suggested change in plan would encourage attendance of many who would prefer to find out what is new and important rather than to rehash their own old materials and ideas.

Many exhibits of compelling interest were available for study at the Edinburgh Congress. They were given adequate space in well lighted rooms. The committee in charge left little to be desired in the way of installation and care of the exhibits. The exhibits would, however, have been a more effective part of the program if provision could have been made for their demonstration at stated hours.

I still marvel at the ability of the local council of the Edinburgh Congress to plan and to carry to a successful conclusion such a gathering at such a time. At best such an undertaking involves a tremendous amount of work. Having to revise—in fact, to reorganize—the whole program at the last moment, as was necessary at Edinburgh, required work *plus* determination to bring the Congress to a successful conclusion no matter what the odds against it. And it *was* carried to a successful end!