Future International Ophthalmological Co-Operation

At a general meeting of the recent Convention of English-Speaking Ophthalmological Societies the re-establishment of International Ophthalmological Congresses on the pre-war basis was considered.

The President of the Convention, Mr. E. Treacher Collins, described how in 1922, at the International Congress of Ophthalmology held in Washington, he had presented an invitation on behalf of all the ophthalmological societies of Great Britain and Ireland to hold the next Congress in London in the year 1925. This invitation was accepted with the provision that the Congress was to be strictly international, and that the German language should be an official language amongst others.

A general committee, consisting of representatives of the inviting societies, then formed an executive committee empowered to make arrangements for the Congress on these lines. It issued an announcement in the ophthalmological journals of different nations that: "Invitations would be sent to the principal ophthalmological societies or other representative bodies in every nation, asking them each to nominate a delegate to the Congress who would be responsible for promoting its interests in the country which he represented, so as to endeavour to make it a great reunion of all those interested in ophthalmology throughout the world."

Later the Committee was informed that the Société française d'Ophthalmologie, the Société d'Ophthalmologie de Paris, and the Société belge d'Ophthalmologie had passed resolutions to the effect that they felt themselves unable to participate in a Congress if Germans were invited.

The Committee then announced that to proceed with the Congress under these circumstances, would in its opinion, tend to perpetuate a schism in the ranks of ophthalmology and militate permanently against the progress of the science which all desired to promote. The Committee, therefore, reluctantly decided to postpone the Congress.

The present Convention of English-Speaking Ophthalmological Societies had been inaugurated as an entirely separate and independent departure.

The question now before the meeting was, he said, whether anything could be done to promote further international intercourse in ophthalmological matters there and now.
Dr. Lucien Howe then proposed a resolution, seconded by Dr. Ring, which after much discussion and some amendment, was passed *nem. con.,* and read as follows:

"Resolved that this Convention of English-Speaking Ophthalmological Societies hereby empowers its President, Mr. E. Treacher Collins, to appoint a standing committee of five of which he shall be chairman. The duty of this committee shall be to obtain such co-operation as is possible from representatives appointed by the various National Ophthalmological Societies in the promotion of an International Ophthalmological Congress."

In the course of the discussion, the President being invited to express his own views on the resolution said: "Ophthalmology was one of the first branches of medicine to institute International Periodical Congresses, its first International meeting having been held in Brussels in 1857. The records of its different meetings in different parts of the world were of a most inspiring character and he hoped he might live to see another meeting conducted on similar lines. At the conclusion of one International Congress, in accordance with its rules, it was the custom, after having fixed a place for the next meeting, to nominate a provisional committee with powers to make all further necessary arrangements. In connection with the abortive meeting which was planned to have been held at St. Petersburg in 1914 no such committee could be appointed.

He thought it was most desirable that a committee should be now appointed who should, so to speak, hold a watching brief. He would much rather that the initiative in the matter should have been left in other hands than his, but if it were the general wish of the meeting he would endeavour to carry out the onerous duty to the best of his ability."

Some discussion took place as to the date at which any future Congress should be held, but it was generally agreed that nothing definite could be fixed at present and the matter should be left for consideration by the committee.

A large section of those present at the meeting were of opinion that if a body of delegates representing different national ophthalmological societies could be formed, there were other matters which might be referred to it for consideration, besides the re-establishment of international congresses.

It was proposed by Dr. Lucien Howe, seconded by Dr. Campbell Posey, and carried, that: If such a body were formed it should be asked to consider:

(a) The aiding or initiating of measures likely to prevent the dissemination of diseases of the eye, and the lessening of hereditary blindness.
(b) The establishment of uniform methods of recording the results of visual tests and other methods pertaining thereto.

(c) The interchange of ophthalmological literature.

The President, in his opening address to the Convention, laid stress on the importance of international co-operation for the elimination of eye disease. He pointed out that the Red Cross Societies with their International Committee were the first formed international associations dealing actively with medical matters. Instituted primarily only for aiding armies in the field and prisoners of war, their work had been extended to deal with epidemics and other disasters. The new International League of the Red Cross Societies, founded in 1919, is devoted to a peace-time programme of preventing disease, mitigating suffering, making known new medico-scientific knowledge and co-operating relief work.

The health department of the League of Nations is also undertaking useful investigations with the view of checking the spread of diseases.

Of late years in different countries, and notably in this country by the Council of British Ophthalmologists, efforts have been made to establish uniform methods of conducting and recording tests of vision. The desirability of methods of this sort becoming adopted internationally is unquestionable.

At the International Congress at Washington in 1922 a committee was appointed to consider, "The standardization of methods of perimetry." It has drawn up an interim report which the general meeting of the Convention considered might most appropriately be handed over to the body of delegates from various national ophthalmological societies when formed.

The literature of ophthalmology grows and will continue to grow with increasing rapidity. Anyone who contributes something of value is anxious that his communication should receive world wide recognition. Anyone investigating a subject is anxious to ascertain as easily as possible what has been done in connection with it by previous writers. For these two reasons the establishment of year-books containing as complete and as full an epitome of ophthalmic literature as possible are of the greatest value.

If, by international co-operation, such an authoritative work could be published, containing an epitome of the ophthalmological literature of all nations, and translated into three different languages, it would have a wide circulation and prove an inestimable boon to all ophthalmologists.