

notice on the Hydrographic Department which appeared in NATURE, vol. xxii, p. 86, on the grounds advanced by him in the first paragraph of his letter.

Our readers will scarcely receive Lieut. Temple's statement that that department has deliberately given dangerous publicity to errors. This would be contrary to the traditions, and certainly to the interests, of any public office connected with the practical and working world. But however this may be, is not the Hydrographic Department pursuing a prudent course in causing a revision to be made of Lieut. Temple's compilation by another authority? In the interests of navigation we think it is; for on a great stretch of coast like Norway, which, from its sinuous and broken character, can be reckoned by thousands of miles of sea-board, it is clearly inadvisable that dependence should be entirely placed on the efforts of one individual.

We are the more confirmed in this belief from a significant letter which lately appeared in the *Shipping and Mercantile Gazette* and in the *Daily News* from the Royal Norwegian Geographical Survey Office, dated Christiania, the 16th inst., written, as the writer alleges, "in order to correct the erroneous statements contained in Mr. Temple's paper (read at the Society of Arts) respecting the charts and descriptions of the Norwegian coast now existing."—ED.]

### Curious Electric Phenomenon

AT about 4.30 p.m. this day a severe thunderstorm with a deluge of rain came up from the north-west and lasted about an hour. At 5.30 my wife was standing at the window watching the receding storm, which still raged in the south, just over Leicester, when she observed, immediately after a double flash of lightning, what seemed like a falling star, or a fireball from a rocket, drop out of the black cloud about 25° above the horizon, and descend perpendicularly till lost behind a belt of trees. The same phenomenon was repeated at least a dozen times in about fifteen minutes, the lightning flashes following each other very rapidly and the thunder consisting of short and sharp reports. After nearly every flash a fireball descended. These balls appeared to be about one-fifth or one-sixth the diameter of the full moon, blunt and rounded at the bottom, drawn out into a tail above, and leaving a train of light behind them. Their colour was mostly whitish, but one was distinctly pink, and the course of one was sharply zig-zagged. They fell at a rate certainly not greater than that of an ordinary shooting star. I have never witnessed a phenomenon of this kind myself, but my wife is a good observer, and I can vouch for the trustworthiness of her report.

F. T. MOTT

Birstal Hill, near Leicester, June 22

### Meteor

ON Friday, June 11, at 8.5 p.m., while the sun was still shining, I saw due east as near as I could judge, and about 30° above the horizon, a bright white meteor pass across about 10° or 12° from right to left with a slight downward course. Two or three hours later I saw a small one take a parallel course, but the other side the zenith.

W. ODELL

Coventry, June 14

### Minerva Ornaments

DURING a recent visit to England I spent a considerable time in the Museum at South Kensington, and Dr. Schliemann's collection of antiquities was one of the objects in that museum which I was most desirous to see.

I should like to call attention to one point in regard to this collection of relics. Among others I saw a number of flat rounded pebbles, which, by chipping at the middle on both edges, have been brought into something like the shape of an hour-glass. These are marked "Minerva Ornaments." There are several other relics, the titles on which seemed to me to be, speaking within bounds, somewhat imaginative; such, for example, as the small pieces of gold plate on the *πλεκτή ἀναδέσμη*, or headdress, where Dr. Schliemann sees the owl's head and two large eyes, "which cannot be mistaken"; but to name these flat pebbles "Minerva Ornaments" seems to trespass not a little beyond the due limits of the imagination when applied to science.

Stones of precisely the same shape and size, and cut in the same way, are common in this country, where Minerva was "an unknown goddess" before the arrival of the Christians. They

are picked up on the banks of the rivers, and when placed in collections are ticketed "net-sinkers." I cannot doubt that Dr. Schliemann's "Minerva Ornaments" are only Trojan net-sinkers formed as those of the aboriginal inhabitants of this country, because the savage mind seems to have run in the same channel all over the world.

E. W. CLAYPOLE

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### A Snake in Kensington Gardens

I WAS considerably surprised this evening at finding the lifeless body of a snake about one hundred yards to the south-east of Kensington Palace. A policeman informed me that he had killed it there last Thursday as it was rapidly moving over the ground. The head and neck had been utterly destroyed, most likely by stampings of the policeman's foot, but the remainder of the body was perfect. In length it was about twenty inches, the body, from the thickness of a little finger, gently tapering to a tail ending in a fine point. Regular scales, brownish-black in colour, clothed the back, the scales along the sides being yellowish-green. A distinct fringe, or prolonged fin, stiffly standing erect, of about one-quarter of an inch in height, ran down the centre of the back, in colour the same as the rest of the body in that region. I trust this description may enable some of your readers learned in snakes to identify the species. Then I would ask, Is this animal a native of these parts, or had it been introduced, or had this specimen most likely escaped from captivity to meet with its untimely end?

J. HARRIS STONE

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### THREE YEARS' EXPERIMENTING IN MENSURATIONAL SPECTROSCOPY

BY A NEW HAND THEREAT

IT was in 1876 that the experimenter,<sup>1</sup> of whom the following notes have been requested, clearly perceiving that it would not do any longer, even in his private work, to be content with merely a little direct-vision, ready-made, purchased, spectroscope and the few scale points offered by reference to lamp-flame lines—set about making up a tolerably large spectroscopic instrument to satisfy his own ideas, wants, and aims.

Now the leading desire with him herein, was, in suitable return for H.M. Government having then recently changed the locality of his official residence from a low, sunk position, where and whence little but other houses could be seen, to an elevated site half-way up the northern side of the Calton Hill, commanding an excellent view of the northern, north-eastern, and north-western horizons, together with the best and brightest parts of almost all auroral displays, whenever they occurred—it was his desire, as a decorous and appropriate tribute, to render some respectable spectroscopic account (over and above anything that the Royal Observatory, Edinburgh, and its more purely astronomical instruments could do) of those sometimes nocturnally luminous, but generally fitful, evanescent, and not yet fully explained, phenomena of the skies, the *Aurora Polares*.

To this end the nascent spectroscope, mounted before a window in an upper chamber, assumed the form of a large flat telescopic box, almost five feet long, two broad, half a foot deep, supported on a stout alt-azimuth stand, with powerful screw motions. The box carried a gathering telescope in front, whose objective, as well as those of the internal collimator and inspecting telescope, were, like those of a "night-glass," large, *i.e.*, 2.2 inches in diameter; and short, *i.e.*, 17 inches, in focal length. An extensive and easily read scale for any prism's minimum deviation positions, and a long, but very easily worked, micrometer-screw motion for the telescope eye-piece were supplied, also an illuminated pointer. An electric reference spectrum of hydrogen lines above and below the fiducial central zone of the field of view was caused to be ever

<sup>1</sup> Prof. Piazzi Smyth, Astronomer-Royal for Scotland.