

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

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## Huxley's Review of the "Vestiges of Creation."

IN the "Life and Letters" of Charles Darwin (vol. ii. p. 189), Mr. Huxley wrote:—"The only review I ever had quails of conscience about, on the ground of needless savagery, is one I wrote on the *Vestiges*."

Can any of your readers inform me where Huxley's review of the "Vestiges of Creation" was published? I imagine it to have been written about 1853-54.

FRANCIS DARWIN.

Botanical Laboratory, Cambridge, February 13.

## Birds attacking Butterflies and Moths.

PROF. POULTON has asked me to recall any observations of my own of the attacks of birds upon butterflies. Unless one makes a note at the time of occurrence it is seldom one can recall to mind any particular instance of the kind, although it is not so rare as it appears; but of the two following instances I have still a vivid recollection. The first occurred during the beginning of August 1892, near Wokingham, Berks.: I was chasing a Clouded Yellow (*Colias edusa*, Fabr.), the first seen of the autumn brood, so that I was all the more eager to capture it, when much to my chagrin a Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa grisola*) darted from a fence and caught it. The other observation was made during the summer of 1897 and deals with one of our common moths, which I am aware are more frequently attacked than butterflies. Whilst proceeding along the Cowley Road, Oxford, I saw a House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), making frantic efforts to capture a noctuid moth which seemed to be a Turnip Moth (*Agrotis segetum*, Schiff.). The peculiar way in which the moth seemed to roll over and over in the dusty road and the eagerness of the sparrow, together with the loud chirping which it kept up all the time, caused quite a small knot of spectators to assemble to watch the apparently unequal contest, and when at last the moth baffled its pursuer and flew away there was an audible murmur of applause.

22 Southfield Road, Oxford.

A. H. HAMM.

HAVING seen some correspondence in the last two numbers of NATURE on birds attacking butterflies, I think the following may be of interest.

Early in June, 1900, when fishing at Belleek, co. Fermanagh, I noted on several evenings very heavy "hatches" of one of the larger sedge flies (*Phryganea* sp.), locally known as the wall-fly. On these evenings large numbers of gulls would come in from the coast, four miles distant, and steadily hawk up and down the river and neighbouring meadows, taking the fly eagerly. Subsequently, when the May fly was "up" on Lough Erne, it was common throughout the day to see flocks of gulls similarly employed, and this habit was so well known to many of the local gillies that it was no uncommon thing to fish first that part of the loch where the birds were busiest. A friend of mine—a good field naturalist—informs me that he has frequently seen sparrows, and on one occasion a greenfinch, catching butterflies which, so far as he remembers, were cabbage whites.

C. G. SELIGMANN.

St. Thomas's Hospital, February 14.

As this subject is again interesting your readers, I would repeat that both my gardener and myself have independently observed robins capture and swallow the large cabbage white butterfly.

HOWARD FOX.

Rosehill, Falmouth, February 18.

## King Og's Bed.

I SEE that Mr. Wells, in his interesting discourse on "The Discovery of the Future," mentions "a sort of bed of King Og, to which all expressions must be lopped or stretched." We are told in Numbers that King Og had an iron bedstead, which was 9 cubits long and 4 cubits broad. But I cannot find that he put his bedstead to the use suggested by Mr. Wells. Is it possible that this gentleman's memory is at fault, and that he is confusing King Og with the ancient Greek robber Procrustes, who was

accustomed to torture his captives by stretching them if they were too short for his bed, and by lopping off portions of their legs if they were too long to fit the bed?

T. B. S.

Edinburgh, February 10.

"T. B. S." is quite right. I regret very much that I did not verify my quotation. A confusion of Og's bed and the lopping propensities of Adoni-Bezek seems to have decayed to the likeness of Procrustes. I have lived in this error for years. I have often used the image of King Og's bed in conversation and, I think, in published matter. No one has ever detected my slip, and it is by no means impossible that I am the centre of propagation of a mistake that will turn up again.

H. G. WELLS.

## The Severn Bore.

DURING the past three years I have been observing the bore on the Severn, and have taken several measurements of the leading wave, or "head" as it is called here, as well as of the speed of the stream.

The river at Newnham being considerably wider than it is at Stonebench, where Dr. Vaughan Cornish made his observations, or at the Denny, where Mr. Whitmell was stationed, the phenomenon is not so remarkable—the speed is less and the height is lower.

Unluckily, since February 12, 1899, the heads for some reason or another have been comparatively low; none have since that date attained to 4 ft. 2 in., the height then measured. I was fortunate to obtain a photograph, which was published in the *Graphic* of February 18, 1899, but owing to the lack of light, for the best bores come up early in the morning, the plate was underexposed.

The popular idea of the height is greatly exaggerated; 6 ft. is stated to be not uncommon when a south-west wind is blowing, but during last September the maximum measured by me was 2.1 ft. and the speed 5.2 miles per hour (330 yards in 2 mins. 10 secs.).

Mr. Whitmell refers to the sound of the approaching bore being audible for some distance. It is a weird and grand sight during the moonlit September evenings to see the white line of foam advancing up the long stretch of river above Newnham, and the sound of the approaching mass of water is heard for more than a mile away, long before anything is to be seen.

Whatever may be the safety of a small boat on the upper reaches, it is not considered safe to be in a boat when the tide comes up here, and not many years ago two fishermen were upset with their boat and drowned below Awre.

The increase of speed above Newnham is always attributed to the narrowing of the stream and to the greater steepness of the banks, but neither here nor at the Denny have I ever seen anything approaching to seventeen miles per hour.

There is another phenomenon to be seen at Newnham which does not occur higher up, namely the formation of "racers," or series of waves caused by the flowing of the rapid current over the sandbanks. These "racers" occur in rhythmical order as the channel fills up, and at some few minutes after the head has passed, lasting only for a short time at any one spot, ceasing as soon as the water has reached a certain depth; they are violent in their action, and leave a record behind them in the shape of an alteration in the configuration of the sandbank over which they have surged and boiled whilst the water in midchannel rapidly but smoothly rises in level.

E. W. PREVOST.

Newnham, February 15.

## Squilla desmaresti.

SHORTLY after the publication of my note in the *Journal* of the Marine Biological Association, on the appearance of this stomatopod in the North Sea, I received a specimen from Mr. W. W. Dunlop, who informed me that it had been taken off Selsea Bill. Further inquiry resulted in my learning that it was taken "about the second week in April last year." Some three or four other specimens have lately been taken in the neighbourhood, where it was till now unknown.

It would be well to call attention to this fact soon, so that fishermen may try to find out if last year's appearance was extraordinary, or the result of better or luckier observation.

I may point out that an element in the case is the temperature of the water.

F. JEFFREY BELL.

British Museum (Natural History)