

p. 416, to show that a mixture of Ferndale dust and air is probably explosive, but the Ferndale dust mentioned in my papers and book is from the anthracite seams, and it is generally admitted now that anthracite dusts and air are *not* explosive *when unmixed with firedamp*.

I think readers of NATURE will agree that it is not permissible to quote half a paragraph when the rest of it amplifies.

JOHN HARGER.

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We take exception to Dr. Harger's statements, in the quotation which he gives from p. 78 of his book, that "dust explosions" such as Altofts "always proceed *against* the current of air," and that, "as a rule, the branch of an ignition which travels with the air-current fails to develop violence."

The explosion at Altofts travelled to a distance of more than a mile in No. 1 chain road in the same direction as the air current had been previously travelling, and produced a greater amount of wreckage in that heading than in any other part of the mine. It did not reach the faces at any point, nor did it enter the return airways, for the reasons plainly set forth in Proc. Roy. Soc., vol. xlii., p. 174.

In our experience explosions are invariably found to have penetrated into the faces wherever there has been an uninterrupted train of coal-dust leading to them; and they have, as a rule, failed to pass through the return airways where the latter have not been recently used as haulage roads, and where, consequently, the coal-dust has become mixed with a large proportion of shale dust. For instance, the composition of a sample of dust taken from the return airways at Altofts Colliery after the explosion was as follows:—

	Per cent
Moisture ... ..	4.40
Volatile matter other than moisture ...	10.37
Carbon (estimated) ... ..	15.64
Ash ... ..	69.59

The experiments since made, both at Altofts and Liévin, have shown that dust of this quality is incapable of propagating an explosion.

The reference to Proc. Roy. Soc., vol. xxviii., p. 416, in the review, was not intended to show that a mixture of Ferndale dust and air "is *probably explosive*," as Dr. Harger suggests, but that return air does not contain too little oxygen or too much carbon dioxide to prevent its ignition when mixed with coal-dust even of the same quality as that of Ferndale. There are no anthracite seams in Ferndale Colliery; all the seams consist of steam coal of high-class quality.

THE REVIEWER.

#### Error in the Smithsonian Physical Tables.

I HAVE just discovered a very awkward error in Table 47, p. 35, of this valuable publication. The table is headed "Least Squares," and gives the values of the probability integral. To illustrate the error, an example will be best.

For argument 0.53, the table gives 0.55494, but this is really the value for the argument 0.54, and the same error runs throughout the table. An easy way to correct it is to increase by 0.01 each of the figures in the horizontal line heading the table.

My copy is dated 1896, and I do not know if the mistake has been set right since.

I am reminded that some years ago I wrote to NATURE to suggest that all discovered errors in tables should be sent to some official scientific body, which should annually publish corrections of them.

C. T. WHITMELL.

Hyde Park, Leeds, May 22.

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#### ANTHROPOLOGY IN WEST AFRICA.<sup>1</sup>

WE welcome a report by Mr. N. W. Thomas on the people of the Awka district, Ibo country, Southern Nigeria. Mr. Thomas is the Government anthropologist and has already given us an interesting report on the Edo-speaking people.

The present report is divided into three parts; the first treats of the law and customs of the people, the second is a dictionary, and the third contains proverbs, narratives, and vocabularies.

The most interesting to the general reader is undoubtedly part i. In chapter ii. Mr. Thomas gives some most interesting demographic facts and figures. Referring to infanticide, he says:—

In addition to this legal infanticide (the exposure of twins) . . . I have more than once heard that the first-born of every woman is killed; my informants were Roman Catholic missionaries, who certainly know the native and his ways, and my own statistics seem to bear out the statement.

This is very interesting, and bears out the principle common, evidently, to most West Africans, that the first-born belongs to the owner of the family (*i.e.* the dead father). He, as head of the family, is worshipped by his son, grandson, great-grandson, and great-great-grandson. He (the dead one) has need of followers in dead man's land, and claims this toll in exactly the same way as the owner of a goat will claim its first-born from the farmer who is looking after it for him.

The genealogical tables are of great interest, and, in spite of the fact that the number of wives to one husband varies from four to eight, "the proportion of boys to girls in the births was fifteen to eleven." But there are more grown-up females than males. Taking the statistics for living males and females among the Ibo (1218 males to 1340 females), we can only conclude that the mortality among boys is greater than among girls or that this majority is largely composed of widows. That husbands in such a country should have four to eight wives must deprive a great number of men of the luxury of a wife. Many chiefs tacitly acknowledge this want and have appointed females in each town or village to supply the need. But in spite of this precaution young bachelors are constantly committing adultery. Men with one wife in this district account for 760 male and 787 female children, men with four wives for 137 male and 113 females. This chapter is most instructive to those who are interested in the question of polygamy *versus* monogamy.

Chapter iii. is entitled "Religion," and, written by such a master of anthropology as Mr. Thomas, is a lesson to all students of religion in Africa. Those of our readers who have followed the development of this great colony will not have forgotten the suppression of the so-called juju at

<sup>1</sup> "Anthropological Report on the Ibo-speaking Peoples of Nigeria." By N. W. Thomas. Part i., Law and Customs of the Ibo of the Awka Neighbourhood, S. Nigeria. Pp. 161+xx plates. Part ii., English-Ibo and Ibo-English Dictionary. Pp. vii+391. Part iii., Proverbs, Narratives, Vocabularies, and Grammar. Pp. vi+199. (London: Harrison and Sons, 1913.)