

The "English Cyclopædia"

IN answer to Nemo's letter in your issue of August 11, I do not wish to prolong the correspondence. An index will be added as soon as possible to the Natural History Supplement, in which cross references will be given. I am not the editor of the "English Cyclopædia," but I was

EDITOR NATURAL HISTORY SUPPLEMENT

Holly-berries obnoxious to Birds

ALLOW me to thank Mr. Hart for his remarks on my note, with reference to this subject; and, at the same time endeavour, as briefly as possible, to explain my meaning more fully.

I take it that a holly-tree, standing in a favourable situation for the growth of young plants, and bearing its berries until perfectly ripe (and I noticed a tree loaded with berries on August 1st), would stand a better chance of propagating and increasing that variety than a tree which has been robbed of all its berries by birds during the preceding winter. I am quite aware that the local distribution of some plants is, in a great measure dependent on birds; but, with regard to holly-berries so disseminated by the migratory thrushes, &c., the great majority would be deposited on arable or pasture land, where the young plants would be speedily eradicated by the plough or scythe, and consequently the parent tree would stand a worse chance of propagating itself from seed, than the variety from which the berries had fallen on ground adapted to their growth. Perhaps Mr. Hart will kindly point out where this hypothesis is "so different" from the theory of Messrs. Darwin and Wallace; a theory with which I, as well as most working zoologists, entirely agree.

East Woodhay, Aug. 8

HENRY REEKS

Solar Spots

I EXTRACT the following from NATURE of 28th July, p. 267:—"Mr. T. W. Backhouse, of Sunderland, reports that in May there was a remarkable case of a Solar Spot making a revolution round another. It occurred with respect to the two largest spots of a group which was half way across the northern zone, on May 9th. The smaller spot was south of the larger on the 7th at 3^h, but preceded it on the 12th at 21^h, the line joining the two spots having rotated through an angle of 80° or 90° in 5½ days."

It is interesting to observe that the direction of this rotation, from south to east, is the same as that in which cyclones rotate in the earth's northern hemisphere; in the southern hemisphere they rotate in the opposite direction. This coincidence gives some support to the theory of the solar spots being produced by cyclones.

JOSEPH JOHN MURPHY

Old Forge, Dunmurry, Co. Antrim, Aug. 6

Noises Caused by Fish

YOUR issues for May 12 and 19, 1870 contain sundry notices of noises supposed to be produced at sea by various fish. The localities are mostly tropical. But it is not necessary to go so far afield for examples of the noises in question. While on board a steamer at anchor for two or three days in the Tagus off Lisbon in the spring of 1869 (April), I heard noises of the kind referred to, which were attributed by the ship's officers to a fish (whose name I now forget), the sound being produced, it was asserted, only at particular states of the tide. Disposed to consider the explanation a mere sailor's "yarn," or superstition, I did not give to the subject the attention it may have deserved.

Perth

W. LAUDER LINDSAY

The Kingfisher's Meal

RETURNING from my morning's round on a pleasant summer's day, I observed a kingfisher perched on a hazel bough close to a pretty little trout-stream; my attention was instantly aroused, for one does not often see these pretty creatures, even during prolonged country excursions, in such a position; and moreover his attitude was peculiar—perfect stillness, with an inclination of the head to the left pinion—just the posture in fact that I have seen a fatally wounded bird take previous to dropping from its resting-place; indeed so close was the resemblance that I ex-

pected every moment to see the bird I was watching drop into the water, believing it to have been wounded; guess my astonishment when the supposed invalid was seen to dart with amazing swiftness into the curling stream, rise, and continue its rapid flight without apparent interruption, to the rails surrounding a hay-stack close by, where I saw it making most energetic movements of the head and neck, and first became aware, from observing a silvery, glittering, and writhing little fish in its beak, that, instead of being ill as I supposed, and suddenly determined on trying the effects of a bath, he was actually at dinner. After gorging this lively mouthful, the active and dexterous little fisher-bird returned to his hazel bough looking quite as invalid as before; but now I was aware of his intentions. "Natura est dux optima."

PHILALETHEIAN

Ancient Egyptian Forests

A NOTE in the *Academy* for July speaks of ancient forests now turned to chalcedony, e.g. at Cairo, thus indicating a profuse vegetation in former days.

Let it not be forgotten that the hieroglyphs represent Egypt as the "land of trees," Khem having been the god of gardens. On the Rosetta stone Egypt is indicated by "a tree and the sign of land" (*vide* Wilkinson's Ancient Egyptians, ii., 184-7). It seems that the destruction of trees is an unvarying accompaniment of dense population.

A. HALL

Poisoning by *Ceanothe crocata*

IN your comments on the rapidly fatal poisoning case, recorded by me, where a man and cart-horse quickly died after eating a small portion of the roots of this plant, you remark "it seems strange that the horse, as well as the man, should not have rejected a plant of so acrid and suspicious a flavour." Now the flavour of the root of this plant is known to be mild and pleasant, and not acrid. I can confirm the truth of its mild taste from experience, as I have twice eaten portions of the root for experiment: the taste is intermediate between that of a turnip and the stalk of celery. The poison did not act as an irritant, but the deaths resulted from paralysis of the heart.

WORTHINGTON G. SMITH

BARON HUGEL

THE death is announced of Baron Charles Hügel, well known as a scientific explorer and a cultivated man of letters. He was born 25th April, 1796, and, after completing his education at Heidelberg, was for some time engaged in the wars in the early part of this century between Prussia and France, and in 1814 he took part in the triumphal entry into Paris. In 1824 he relinquished military pursuits, and returning to Vienna, entered with great earnestness into the study of Natural Science, for which he had always shown a decided taste. For many years he studied assiduously, preparing himself for an expedition he had planned round the world. In 1831, on the 2nd of May, he set sail from Toulon, and was away six years. His ship was fitted out with every appliance for a scientific voyage, and in all the various localities he visited in Asia, Africa, and the then unknown field of Australia, he amassed large and valuable collections. These were, on his return, purchased by the Austrian Government, and to them the Vienna Museum owes its great importance, especially in the botanical treasures he had so lavishly accumulated.

The materials he brought back with him, and the abundant notes he had taken, were utilised in several elaborate scientific publications, such as Endlicher's "Plants of the Swan River District (Australia)," and Heckel's "Fishes of Cashmere."

The baron also delivered two learned and interesting addresses to the meeting of German Naturalists in 1838 and 1843, and besides these he sent many valuable scientific papers, especially on botany, to the Vienna scientific publications.