

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.

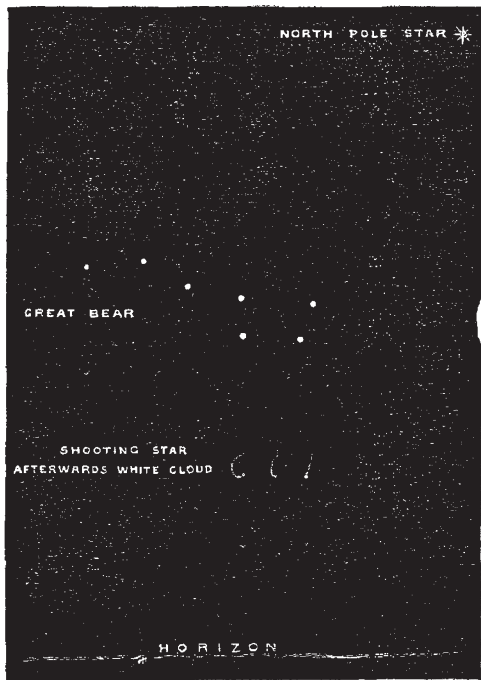
He is also the author of two works in German, "The Basin of Cabul" (Vienna, 1851), and "Cashmere and the Empire of the Sikhs" (Stuttgart, 1840).

For many years he continued to take a very active part in all the scientific progress of his native country and of Italy. At the time of his death, in his seventy-fifth year, he was Austrian Minister at Brussels.

THE METEOR OF AUGUST 15

WE have received descriptions from several correspondents of the remarkable meteor seen on the evening of August 15 over the north of England and Ireland and south of Scotland, to which we referred in our last number.

A correspondent from Portrush sends the following description and sketch:—"At 8.50, on August 15, when stars of first magnitude were only faintly visible, a shooting star was seen in the north-west. I have shown its position in the heavens in the accompanying sketch. It was observed to leave behind it a white thin cloud which



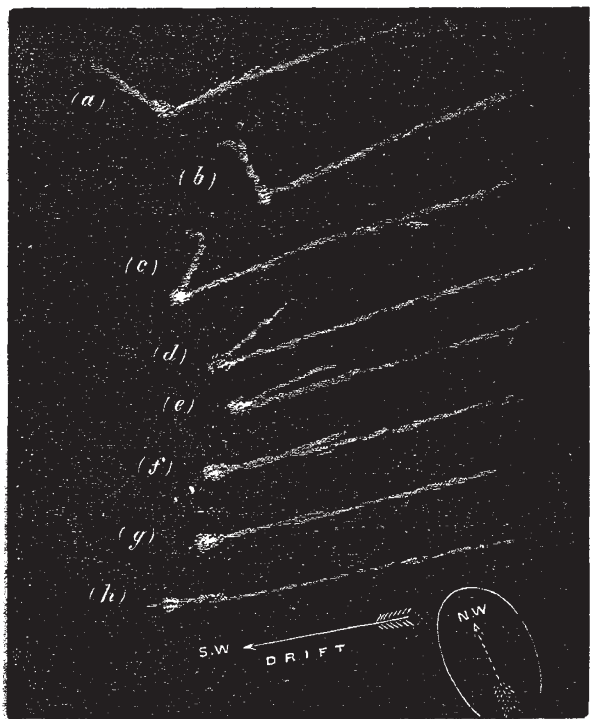
Shooting star, 8.50 P.M., August 15.—N. N. W. 25 deg. above the horizon, left behind it a streak of white cloud, which was clearly visible for ten minutes, drifting with the wind.

drifted a little to the west, and altered its shape from a straight line to a crescent. It was evidently illuminated by the light of the setting sun, and disappeared gradually in ten or fifteen minutes. Was the white thin streak of cloud, vapour, or dust? I observe by the newspaper that this cloud was seen in the neighbourhood of Belfast some forty miles distant, from which I infer that the phenomenon took place at a considerable altitude."

At Dunbar it is described by an observer in the following language:—"A remarkable atmospheric phenomenon was witnessed at Dunbar on Monday night. The phenomenon was first seen about a quarter before nine o'clock, and at that time it was more than half-way up the northern horizon. When first observed it had the appearance of a ball eight or ten inches in diameter, of a bright sparkling white colour tinged with blue, hanging suspended in mid-air. The colour, indeed, throughout was much the same as that of a star of the first magnitude. From the

head or ball there issued a tail of the same bright colour, apparently three or four yards in length, and pointing in a north-easterly direction. By-and-by, however, a second tail seemed to branch off from the middle of the first one, at an angle of forty-five degrees, thus giving to the tail of the figure a cleft or forked appearance. This second tail seemed to come and go, being occasionally detached for a few seconds, sometimes indeed being lost sight of altogether, then suddenly coming into view, and appearing to unite again. The phenomenon lasted with little variation for fully twenty minutes, and then proceeded very slowly in a south-westerly direction."

At Kirkbank, near Burntisland, it presented the following appearance:—"A brilliant shooting-star appeared in the north-west on a bright evening sky, and darted out of sight northwards. Its path was precisely that of a body obliquely reflected from an air-cushion. It left a trail like a nebulous haze. At the point of reflection a vivid spot remained, and fainter trails before and behind; corresponding to head or ball and tails noticed at Dunbar. The nucleus drifted towards south-west, and the branches gradually folded together behind, all disappearing as a



faint streak. Duration estimated fully ten minutes, terminating about 9.5 P.M., as Dunbar notice has it." The successive aspects were sketched by the writer and annexed.

And at Arran the appearance presented appears to have been very similar:—"On Monday night about half-past nine o'clock, there was a peculiar manifestation of what appeared to be electrical agency in the sky, at Whiting Bay. At that hour a bright light was seen to flash out from the north-west, near the horizon. It suddenly spread upwards in the form of a long ribbon, the upper half of which afterwards doubled down, when the whole assumed a horse-shoe form, and then gradually faded away. The sky was at the time perfectly clear, and a number of stars were visible, but the brightness of the meteoric appearance completely outshone them."

We should be glad to receive further descriptions of this remarkable meteor from some of our astronomical correspondents.