

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his Correspondents. No notice is taken of anonymous communications.]

The Isolation of St. Michael's Mount

MR. PENGELLY, in a letter addressed to you, and printed in your journal of Jan. 12, 1871, complains of my having ascribed to him a belief in the extreme antiquity of the Cornish language which he does not hold now, and which he did not hold at the time when he delivered his first lecture "On the Isolation of St. Michael's Mount," at the meeting of the British Association at Birmingham in 1865. He declines to be responsible for any notices or report of his lecture that I may have seen in some newspaper or journal.

All I can say in my defence is that even while the meeting at Birmingham lasted, I received not only newspaper reports, but letters from friends who had heard the lecture, and who asked me in great dismay whether it was possible that a Cornish name, such as *Cara clowse in cowse*, meaning "the hoar rock in the wood," could have existed in so called prehistoric times.

The question discussed at the meeting, so far as I could understand it from letters and the official short report in the Transactions of the British Association, was this, whether St. Michael's Mount was severed by encroachment or subsidence. Those who held the former view required 20,000 years, those who held the latter were satisfied with a smaller number of years, though I could not find out exactly what that number was. Both parties maintained that Cornish must have been spoken in Cornwall before the severance of the Mount took place, because only before that severance could the Mount have been called *Cara clowse in cowse*, "the hoar rock in the wood."

What I wanted to show was simply this, that neither party could properly avail itself of the linguistic argument, whether for positive or negative purposes. If the Mount was severed 20,000 years ago, it would not follow from the name *Cara clowse in cowse*, "the hoar rock in the wood," that Cornish was spoken at that distant time; nor would it in the least follow from that name that the severance could not have taken place until Cornwall was occupied by Celtic speaking tribes. The linguistic and geological evidence can in no wise be brought to bear upon each other.

If I said that "Mr. Pengelly has somewhat modified his former opinion," all I meant was that in his second paper he himself seems much less inclined to trust to the linguistic and legendary evidence. But if in his letter to you he says that the point of his argument was that the hypothesis of insulation by encroachment without subsidence could not be admitted because it led to an untenable philological conclusion, this shows that the old leaven is still at work. If the facts which I collected in my essay on the Insulation of St. Michael's Mount are right, that hypothesis would lead to no untenable philological conclusion whatever, for the simple reason that the name *Cara clowse in cowse*, or "hoar rock in the wood," referred originally to Mont St. Michel, in Normandy, if not to Mons Garganur in Apulia, and does not occur in Cornwall before the 16th, or possibly the 15th century of our era.

If I have in any way misrepresented the exact geological reasoning of Mr. Pengelly, all I can do is to plead the ignorance of a layman, and to ask his forgiveness.

Oxford, Jan. 23

MAX MÜLLER

Earth-Currents

IN Mr. W. H. Preece's communication concerning the earth-currents which occurred on the 24th and 25th of last October in England, published in your issue of the 3rd of November, just come to hand, he says: "This is only a sample of what occurred simultaneously all over England, and probably the globe."

The following few extracts from the Log of the Madras-Bombay Lines show what was taking place out here:—

"Oct. 24, 22 hours, working Bellary with great difficulty. Severe lightning taps on instrument every now and then."

"Oct. 25, 8 hours, strong earth-currents at times.—17 hours to 17.45 hours, very strong earth-currents.—22 hours, working Bombay with frequent stoppages, owing to strong earth-currents and failure of signals." Such is the character of the log throughout the 24th and 25th of October.

The direction of the Madras-Bombay Lines (nearly east and west) would account for the fact of the earth-currents being so strongly pronounced in them.

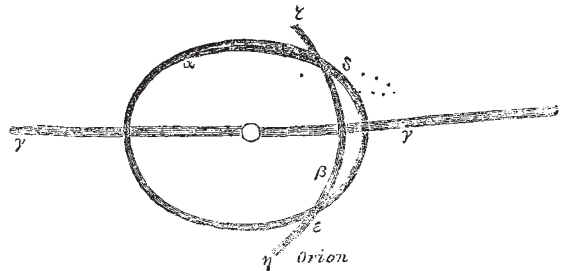
R. S. BROUGH,
Assistant Superintendent of Government
Telegraphs in India

Lunar Bows

A REMARKABLE phenomenon was visible at Liverpool from 7.30 to 7.45 P.M., on Wednesday, 4th inst.

The moon was nearly full at an altitude of 45° or 50°, just above Orion, the sky was covered with a slight mist sufficiently dense to obscure all stars except those of the first magnitude, though here and there some of the lesser were visible.

There appeared three lunar bows or halos— $\alpha \beta \gamma$ in sketch. α was nearly but not quite a perfect circle, having a slight tendency to an oval; it was complete. β was an excentric cutting α at points



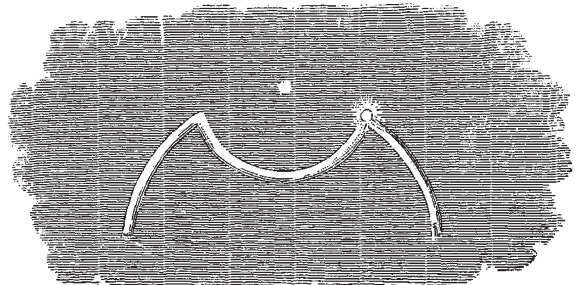
δ and ϵ , and was incomplete, only having about 90° of its circle visible, being lost to sight at ζ and η . γ had the zenith for its centre, cutting the moon; its circle was complete, intenser in the western sky and dimmer at its nearer proximity to the moon, thus forming a belt round the whole heavens, cutting off the upper portion.

I venture to consider these interesting sights worthy of a space in NATURE, as they took up so large a space in the heavens.

Liverpool

F. J. J.

ON Wednesday evening, January 4th, while the frost still lasted, there appeared, about 7.25 P.M., two brilliant halos, of which a sketch is forwarded. Neither was perfect in outline. The greater spread out literally from the smaller, and made a circuit of the heavens, so that if an observer stood with his back to the moon, there was seen facing him in the N.W. an inverted lunar rainbow—to all appearance. This enormous arc scarcely seemed a part of a circle on account of the great size: the zenith



was about its centre. After meeting the smaller halo it was scarcely visible, but it produced would have passed through the moon's disc. At the point of intersection towards the east, a faint paraselene appeared.

When this singular sight was seen, there was but little cloud in the sky. The blue was, however, rather turbid. The prismatic colours were tolerably distinct in the inner arc. The diameter of the large circle was about 50°. There has been a considerable amount of rain and snow since the appearance.

SAMUEL BARBER

Aigburth, Liverpool, Jan. 9