distribution of leaves around the stem. The latter part of this valuable paper consists of an attempt to show that the modes of phyllotaxy which result from the use of the different forms of the fraction are either directly serviceable to the plant by affording the best distribution, either for absorbing the sap from the roots or for exposing it to the action of air and light, or have been so at some period of the ancestry of the plant, when its structure was of a simpler character. The typical or unique angle of the theory of phyllotaxy the author regards to be the goal towards which the special forms tend, by the action of the principle of natural selection, rather than as the origin of the spiral arrangements.   A. W. B.

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 Law of Total Radiation

IN NATURE for April 25 Captain Ericsson attacks the calculation of Pouillet as to the sun's temperature, as being founded on an erroneous law of radiation. Had he contented himself with saying that the extension of Dulong and Petit's law so far beyond its experimental foundation to temperatures approaching that of the sun was "mere theory," and inconsistent with his own experiments, his position might have been impregnable. But not satisfied with this, he goes on to question the applicability of Dulong's law even below the boiling point of mercury, and asserts that Newton's law is much nearer the truth. The only objection that he gives to the method of the French experimenters is that they erroneously confuse the *surface* temperature of their thermometers with the average temperature of the contained mercury. The observed radiation is really due to the first, though attributed to the second. Now, without asserting that the objection is entirely without force, I submit that, if Newton's be the real law of radiation, it is impossible in this way to account for the observations.

In the first place, if the rate of cooling for a body at a variable temperature t, surrounded by another at a fixed temperature t_0, be proportional to $t - t_0$, it follows from the theory of exchange (than which there are few things better established) that the radiation between two bodies at any temperatures t, t', is proportional to $t - t'$. The rate of cooling of the thermometer contained in an enclosure would thus depend only on the *excess* of temperature, in flat contradiction to Dulong's observations. Nor would this result be altered, even though the material of the thermometer were so badly conducting in relation to its size as to allow the surface temperature to fall considerably below that of the interior. Whatever may be the relative temperatures after a given time of a system composed of a conducting mass, originally at a uniform temperature of 100°, surrounded by an enclosure maintained at 0°, the same after the same time will be the differential temperatures of the corresponding parts of another similar system, whose interior mass had originally a uniform temperature of 200°, with a case maintained at 100°. In fact, according to Newton's law, and with a constant conductivity, the superposition of any constant temperature over the whole system alters none of the conditions.

If it be objected that in the interior of a thermometer heat is distributed, not merely by conduction, but is convected by currents in the mercury, even this, I believe, will make no difference. The convection currents are a consequence of differences of density, and these are approximately proportional to the differences of temperature. The addition of a constant temperature to the whole alters nothing.

Judging from the evidence at present before us, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that within the limits of Dulong's experiments Newton's law of cooling cannot be even approximately true. If Capt. Ericsson, by bringing forward fresh experiments, and by proving the fallacy of old ones, can establish the truth of Newton's law, he will lay Science under a great obligation. Speaking as a mathematician, I could even wish him success.

With regard to high temperatures it seems certain that Dulong and Petit's law fails ; for it is impossible to believe that the sun is no hotter than 1,500° Cent., at least if the estimates hitherto made of terrestrial temperatures are substantially correct. It must be remembered, however, that according to Fizeau the sun is only about 2½ times brighter than the electric arc, which does not even imply a higher temperature ; because, while the sun must give us nearly the whole radiation due to his temperature, the electric arc is probably transparent.

J. W. STRUTT

Terling Place, Witham, April 29

Solar Halo

THIS morning, at 9.20, I observed a strongly-marked halo round the sun. Roughly extemporising a sextant with a post-card and paper-vector, I took three observations on the semidiameter, and found the mean to be 22°·6. So I conclude this to be the ice-halo, whose deviation is 23°, being formed of hexagonal crystals. Two facts render the halo noteworthy—(1) the morning (after a heavy gale from the south) was exceptionally warm ; (2) the halo exhibited the extreme colours in the proper order. I am told halos do not exhibit colours. Surely they ought to ; and if not, why not ? Let some of your readers answer me this. The halo was visible till nearly 10 o'clock.
Bournemouth, April 26   C. M. INGLEBY

Help us to save our Birds

ALL praise be given to those who have made a stand for the preservation of British birds. With a spirit of patience they have had to encounter the crass prejudice that sometimes saturates even the rural mind, and to prove that if the small bird takes its toll from, it also greatly assists in preserving the store of, the farmer. They have had to combat the sporting instincts of the excited townsman, so joyous with his escape from the smoky labyrinths of his brick-built prison that even a feathered shuttlecock would almost seem like game. Last and greatest feat, they have had to question the right to worship the national idol—gain, and to teach people, that even if, by the wholesale slaughter of feathered tribes, some persons scraped up gold, still that occupation, however praiseworthy, was against the general good. Truth at last dawned on the mind of the people, and so Parliament shielded, amongst other fowl, the pretty kittiwake from destruction, and preserved fashionable women from one more barbarism.

Those who have thus worked to educate the public need not rest on their oars for lack of employment, let them look farther afield, let them fearlessly step across national boundaries, and lend their strength to assist in arresting the impending destruction of many species of the most beautiful and interesting orders of animated nature in any quarter of the globe.

New Zealand, so long left by science to slumber on the calm bosom of the Pacific, has disclosed, amongst her birds, forms that have surprised the naturalist as much as they have excited the speculation of the philosopher. The remains of birds, of orders other than the gigantic Struthiones, giving us hints about strange *lost* forms of animal life that have lingered in these islands, perchance, almost to our own times, are now and then exhumed from the hidden shores of swamp and morass. We raise a cry for help in behalf of the mass of birds that yet remain *near* us (we had almost said *with* us), in the hope that the attention of naturalists in Europe may be called to the peril of extermination that hangs over many interesting indigenous species. For the preservation of our birds we require some assistance from abroad, our time is so crowded with occupations of many kinds, that without some pressure from without, little attention would be likely to be paid to the subject. This is said not without reason, not without some experience ; in 1868, in Parliament, the writer tried to secure the conservation of our magnificent forests, a resolution was passed by the House to that effect, official inquiries were made ;—*cui bono ?* Our forests are now being damaged and destroyed, where not protected by climate, in so ruthless a manner, that no further evidence is needed to prove our wasteful style of settlement. Will not some one having authority in such matters speak a word in due season for our birds ? I believe nearly every living species that we number could be preserved with proper care. If that is a fact, is it not interesting enough to naturalists to induce them to stimulate us to efforts more likely to give better results than our present legal enactments?