

the Sponges of such strikingly beautiful ones as belong to the genera *Euplectella*, *Holtenia*, &c., though, indeed, some allusion is made to these in the chapter on the geographical distribution of marine life. But perhaps we have said enough to show that while the subject of this work is a good one, it might easily have been treated by a writer more familiar with it in a better, a more original, and a more comprehensive manner. E. P. W.

#### OUR BOOK SHELF

*The Theory of Evolution of Living Things.* By Rev. G. Henslow. (Macmillan and Co.)

SCIENTIFIC men cannot but feel how false is the stimulus given to that form of literature of which the above-named work is an example. If considerable pecuniary reward is offered for the production of treatises in favour of any theory, or of the mutual compatibility of any two or more different doctrines, the work will undoubtedly be produced, however inaccurate the theory, or however dissimilar the doctrines. That mistaken enthusiasm which led to the production of the Bridgewater Treatises and the establishment of the Actonian Prize, has resulted in the publication during the last year of two Actonian prize essays, the former of which, by Mr. B. T. Lowne, we noticed on a previous occasion, whilst the latter is the one under consideration. The present author's treatment of his subject is much that which would have been adopted by Paley if he had been living at the present day. Several previously accepted axioms are shown to be incompatible with the existing position of biological science, and their weakness is well brought forward. Other considerations of modern development are introduced, and it is in these that the difficulty of combining the two doctrines appears. For instance, the origin of moral evil is said to be "the conscious abuse of means, instead of using them solely for the ends for which they were designed." But on evolutionary principles, it can hardly be said that there are means for designed ends, because that peculiarity in an organ which is of service is the only one retained, inasmuch that if the delicate sensitiveness of the conjunctiva of the eye were to prove of more value to the individual than its sight, the power of vision would most probably become lost at the expense of the developing tactile organ. "The continual effort of beings to arrive at mutual and beneficial adjustments" is said to be a great principle of nature; does not the term "struggle for existence" imply something very different from this? Again, that "animals and plants do not live where circumstances may be best suited to them, but where they *can*, or where other animals and plants will respectively let them live," is quoted by the author as an instance of Nature falling short of that absolute degree of perfection which may be conceived as possible; however, there cannot be many who think a locality a suitable residence, in which they are prevented from taking up their abode, or perhaps entering, by the animals and plants which inhabit it. In other places similar weaknesses may be found in the argument adopted. In one thing Mr. Henslow has done great good: he has shown that it is consistent with a full dogmatic belief, to hold opinions very different from those taught as natural theology some half century and more ago.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

##### Transfer of the South Kensington Museum

I AM glad to see that an effective opposition is likely to be made to the ill-advised proposal of the Government to place the

South Kensington Collections under the control of the fifty irresponsible Trustees of the British Museum.

In common with many other naturalists I had always hoped that the national collections of natural history, when removed to the new buildings in South Kensington, would be freed from the rule of the Trustees and placed under a responsible director. The memorial of which I enclose a copy, and the republication of which would, I think, be opportune at the present juncture, will serve to show that I am by no means alone in believing that such a change would be beneficial to Science.

It would seem, however, that the Government, so far from acceding to our views, have resolved to proceed in exactly the contrary direction, and to increase the power of the Trustees. I can only hope that we may succeed in preventing them from carrying this retrograde measure into effect.

P. L. SCLATER

44, Elvaston Place Queen's Gate, Nov. 17

"Copy of a Memorial presented to the Right Hon. the Chancellor of the Exchequer

"To the Rt. Hon. the Chancellor of the Exchequer

"Sir,—It having been stated that the scientific men of the metropolis are, as a body, entirely opposed to the removal of the natural history collections from their present situation in the British Museum, we, the undersigned Fellows of the Royal, Linnean, Geological, and Zoological Societies of London, beg leave to offer to you the following expression of our opinion upon the subject.

"We are of opinion that it is of fundamental importance to the progress of the natural sciences in this country, that the administration of the national natural history collections should be separated from that of the library and art collections, and placed under one officer, who should be immediately responsible to one of the Queen's Ministers.

"We regard the exact locality of the National Museum of Natural History as a question of comparatively minor importance, provided that it be conveniently accessible and within the metropolitan district.

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"London, May 14, 1866"

##### Deep-sea Soundings and Deep-sea Thermometers

WILL you allow me to reply to a letter from Messrs. Negretti and Zambra that appeared in vol. viii. p. 529, in reference to my Casella-Miller Deep Sea Thermometer, in which they accuse me and the late respected Dr. Miller of "plagiarism."

I presume, by this remark, that they intend to convey the idea of their own introduction having been imitated, because they state also that "their thermometer is identical in every respect except in size." Without venturing to trespass upon your valuable space by now going into more detail to prove the con-