

ON THE DYNAMICAL EVIDENCE OF THE
MOLECULAR CONSTITUTION OF BODIES*

II.

LET us now return to the case of a highly rarefied gas in which the pressure is due entirely to the motion of its particles. It is easy to calculate the mean square of the velocity of the particles from the equation of Clausius, since the volume, the pressure, and the mass are all measurable quantities. Supposing the velocity of every particle the same, the velocity of a molecule of oxygen would be 461 metres per second, of nitrogen 492, and of hydrogen 1844, at the temperature 0° C.

The explanation of the pressure of a gas on the vessel which contains it by the impact of its particles on the surface of the vessel has been suggested at various times by various writers. The fact, however, that gases are not observed to disseminate themselves through the atmosphere with velocities at all approaching those just mentioned, remained unexplained, till Clausius, by a thorough study of the motions of an immense number of particles, developed the methods and ideas of modern molecular science.

To him we are indebted for the conception of the mean length of the path of a molecule of a gas between its successive encounters with other molecules. As soon as it was seen how each molecule, after describing an exceedingly short path, encounters another, and then describes a new path in a quite different direction, it became evident that the rate of diffusion of gases depends not merely on the velocity of the molecules, but on the distance they travel between each encounter.

I shall have more to say about the special contributions of Clausius to molecular science. The main fact, however, is, that he opened up a new field of mathematical physics by showing how to deal mathematically with moving systems of innumerable molecules.

Clausius, in his earlier investigations at least, did not attempt to determine whether the velocities of all the molecules of the same gas are equal, or whether, if unequal, there is any law according to which they are distributed. He therefore, as a first hypothesis, seems to have assumed that the velocities are equal. But it is easy to see that if encounters take place among a great number of molecules, their velocities, even if originally equal, will become unequal, for, except under conditions which can be only rarely satisfied, two molecules having equal velocities before their encounter will acquire unequal velocities after the encounter. By distributing the molecules into groups according to their velocities, we may substitute for the impossible task of following every individual molecule through all its encounters, that of registering the increase or decrease of the number of molecules in the different groups.

By following this method, which is the only one available either experimentally or mathematically, we pass from the methods of strict dynamics to those of statistics and probability.

When an encounter takes place between two molecules, they are transferred from one pair of groups to another, but by the time that a great many encounters have taken place, the number which enter each group is, on an average, neither more nor less than the number which leave it during the same time. When the system has reached this state, the numbers in each group must be distributed according to some definite law.

As soon as I became acquainted with the investigations of Clausius, I endeavoured to ascertain this law.

The result which I published in 1860 has since been subjected to a more strict investigation by Dr. Ludwig Boltzmann, who has also applied his method to the study of the motion of compound molecules. The mathematical investigation, though, like all parts of the science of probabilities and statistics, it is somewhat difficult, does not appear faulty. On the physical side, however, it leads to consequences, some of which, being manifestly true, seem to indicate that the hypotheses are well chosen, while others seem to be so irreconcilable with known experimental results, that we are compelled to admit that something essential to the complete statement of the physical theory of molecular encounters must have hitherto escaped us.

I must now attempt to give you some account of the present state of these investigations, without, however, entering into their mathematical demonstration.

I must begin by stating the general law of the distribution of velocity among molecules of the same kind.

* A lecture delivered at the Chemical Society, Feb. 18, by Prof. Clerk-Maxwell, F.R.S. (Continued from p. 359.)

If we take a fixed point in this diagram and draw from this point a line representing in direction and magnitude the velocity of a molecule, and make a dot at the end of the line, the position of the dot will indicate the state of motion of the molecule.

If we do the same for all the other molecules, the diagram will be dotted all over, the dots being more numerous in certain places than in others.

The law of distribution of the dots may be shown to be the same as that which prevails among errors of observation or of adjustment.

The dots in the diagram before you may be taken to represent the velocities of molecules, the different observations of the position of the same star, or the bullet-holes round the bull's-eye of a target, all of which are distributed in the same manner.

The velocities of the molecules have values ranging from zero to infinity, so that in speaking of the average velocity of the molecules we must define what we mean.

The most useful quantity for purposes of comparison and calculation is called the "velocity of mean square." It is that

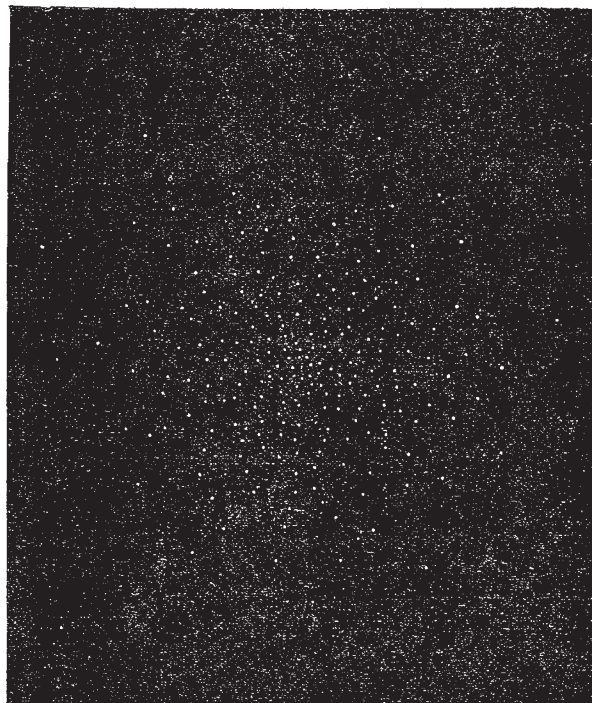


Diagram of Velocities.

velocity whose square is the average of the squares of the velocities of all the molecules.

This is the velocity given above as calculated from the properties of different gases. A molecule moving with the velocity of mean square has a kinetic energy equal to the average kinetic energy of all the molecules in the medium, and if a single mass equal to that of the whole quantity of gas were moving with this velocity, it would have the same kinetic energy as the gas actually has, only it would be in a visible form and directly available for doing work.

If in the same vessel there are different kinds of molecules, some of greater mass than others, it appears from this investigation that their velocities will be so distributed that the average kinetic energy of a molecule will be the same, whether its mass be great or small.

Here we have perhaps the most important application which has yet been made of dynamical methods to chemical science. For, suppose that we have two gases in the same vessel. The ultimate distribution of agitation among the molecules is such that the average kinetic energy of an individual molecule is the same in either gas. This ultimate state is also, as we know, a state of equal temperature. Hence the condition that two gases

shall have the same temperature is that the average kinetic energy of a single molecule shall be the same in the two gases.

Now, we have already shown that the pressure of a gas is two-thirds of the kinetic energy in unit of volume. Hence, if the pressure as well as the temperature be the same in the two gases, the kinetic energy per unit of volume is the same, as well as the kinetic energy per molecule. There must, therefore, be the same number of molecules in unit of volume in the two gases.

This result coincides with the law of equivalent volumes established by Gay Lussac. This law, however, has hitherto rested on purely chemical evidence, the relative masses of the molecules of different substances having been deduced from the proportions in which the substances enter into chemical combination. It is now demonstrated on dynamical principles. The molecule is defined as that small portion of the substance which moves as one lump during the motion of agitation. This is a purely dynamical definition, independent of any experiments on combination.

The density of a gaseous medium, at standard temperature and pressure, is proportional to the mass of one of its molecules as thus defined.

We have thus a safe method of estimating the relative masses of molecules of different substances when in the gaseous state. This method is more to be depended on than those founded on electrolysis or on specific heat, because our knowledge of the conditions of the motion of agitation is more complete than our knowledge of electrolysis, or of the internal motions of the constituents of a molecule.

I must now say something about these internal motions, because the greatest difficulty which the kinetic theory of gases has yet encountered belongs to this part of the subject.

We have hitherto considered only the motion of the centre of mass of the molecule. We have now to consider the motion of the constituents of the molecule relative to the centre of mass.

If we suppose that the constituents of a molecule are atoms, and that each atom is what is called a material point, then each atom may move in three different and independent ways, corresponding to the three dimensions of space, so that the number of variables required to determine the position and configuration of all the atoms of the molecule is three times the number of atoms.

It is not essential, however, to the mathematical investigation to assume that the molecule is made up of atoms. All that is assumed is that the position and configuration of the molecule can be completely expressed by a certain number of variables.

Let us call this number n .

Of these variables, three are required to determine the position of the centre of mass of the molecule, and the remaining $n - 3$ to determine its configuration relative to its centre of mass.

To each of the n variables corresponds a different kind of motion.

The motion of translation of the centre of mass has three components.

The motions of the parts relative to the centre of mass have $n - 3$ components.

The kinetic energy of the molecule may be regarded as made up of two parts—that of the mass of the molecule supposed to be concentrated at its centre of mass, and that of the motions of the parts relative to the centre of mass. The first part is called the energy of translation, the second that of rotation and vibration. The sum of these is the whole energy of motion of the molecule.

The pressure of the gas depends, as we have seen, on the energy of translation alone. The specific heat depends on the rate at which the whole energy, kinetic and potential, increases as the temperature rises.

Clausius had long ago pointed out that the ratio of the increment of the whole energy to that of the energy of translation may be determined if we know by experiment the ratio of the specific heat at constant pressure to that at constant volume.

He did not, however, attempt to determine *à priori* the ratio of the two parts of the energy, though he suggested, as an extremely probable hypothesis, that the average values of the two parts of the energy in a given substance always adjust themselves to the same ratio. He left the numerical value of this ratio to be determined by experiment.

In 1860 I investigated the ratio of the two parts of the energy on the hypothesis that the molecules are elastic bodies of invariable form. I found, to my great surprise, that whatever be the shape of the molecules, provided they are not perfectly

smooth and spherical, the ratio of the two parts of the energy must be always the same, the two parts being in fact equal.

This result is confirmed by the researches of Boltzmann, who has worked out the general case of a molecule having n variables.

He finds that while the average energy of translation is the same for molecules of all kinds at the same temperature, the whole energy of motion is to the energy of translation as n to 3.

For a rigid body $n = 6$, which makes the whole energy of motion twice the energy of translation.

But if the molecule is capable of changing its form under the action of impressed forces, it must be capable of storing up potential energy, and if the forces are such as to ensure the stability of the molecule, the average potential energy will increase when the average energy of internal motion increases.

Hence, as the temperature rises, the increments of the energy of translation, the energy of internal motion, and the potential energy are as 3, $(n - 3)$, and e respectively, where e is a positive quantity of unknown value depending on the law of the force which binds together the constituents of the molecule.

When the volume of the substance is maintained constant, the effect of the application of heat is to increase the whole energy. We thus find for the specific heat of a gas at constant volume—

$$\frac{1}{2J} \frac{\rho_0 V_0}{273^0} (n + e)$$

where ρ_0 and V_0 are the pressure and volume of unit of mass at zero centigrade, or 273° absolute temperature, and J is the dynamical equivalent of heat. The specific heat at constant pressure is

$$\frac{1}{2J} \frac{\rho_0 V_0}{273^0} (n + 2 + e)$$

In gases whose molecules have the same degree of complexity the value of n is the same, and that of e may be the same.

If this is the case, the specific heat is inversely as the specific gravity, according to the law of Dulong and Petit, which is, to a certain degree of approximation, verified by experiment.

But if we take the actual values of the specific heat as found by Regnault and compare them with this formula, we find that $n + e$ for air and several other gases cannot be more than 4.9. For carbonic acid and steam it is greater. We obtain the same result if we compare the ratio of the calculated specific heats

$$\frac{2 + n + e}{n + e}$$

with the ratio as determined by experiment for various gases, namely, 1.408.

And here we are brought face to face with the greatest difficulty which the molecular theory has yet encountered, namely, the interpretation of the equation $n + e = 4.9$.

If we suppose that the molecules are atoms—mere material points, incapable of rotatory energy or internal motion—then n is 3 and e is zero, and the ratio of the specific heats is 1.66, which is too great for any real gas.

But we learn from the spectroscope that a molecule can execute vibrations of constant period. It cannot therefore be a mere material point, but a system capable of changing its form. Such a system cannot have less than six variables. This would make the greatest value of the ratio of the specific heats 1.33, which is too small for hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, carbonic oxide, nitrous oxide, and hydrochloric acid.

But the spectroscope tells us that some molecules can execute a great many different kinds of vibrations. They must therefore be systems of a very considerable degree of complexity, having far more than six variables. Now, every additional variable introduces an additional amount of capacity for internal motion without affecting the external pressure. Every additional variable, therefore, increases the specific heat, whether reckoned at constant pressure or at constant volume.

So does any capacity which the molecule may have for storing up energy in the potential form. But the calculated specific heat is already too great when we suppose the molecule to consist of two atoms only. Hence every additional degree of complexity which we attribute to the molecule can only increase the difficulty of reconciling the observed with the calculated value of the specific heat.

I have now put before you what I consider to be the greatest difficulty yet encountered by the molecular theory. Boltzmann has suggested that we are to look for the explanation in the mutual action between the molecules and the ætherial medium which surrounds them. I am afraid, however, that if we call in

the help of this medium, we shall only increase the calculated specific heat, which is already too great.

The theorem of Boltzmann may be applied not only to determine the distribution of velocity among the molecules, but to determine the distribution of the molecules themselves in a region in which they are acted on by external forces. It tells us that the density of distribution of the molecules at a point where

the potential energy of a molecule is ψ , is proportional to $e^{-\frac{\psi}{\kappa\theta}}$ where θ is the absolute temperature, and κ is a constant for all gases. It follows from this, that if several gases in the same vessel are subject to an external force like that of gravity, the distribution of each gas is the same as if no other gas were present. This result agrees with the law assumed by Dalton, according to which the atmosphere may be regarded as consisting of two independent atmospheres, one of oxygen, and the other of nitrogen; the density of the oxygen diminishing faster than that of the nitrogen, as we ascend.

This would be the case if the atmosphere were never disturbed, but the effect of winds is to mix up the atmosphere and to render its composition more uniform than it would be if left at rest.

Another consequence of Boltzmann's theorem is, that the temperature tends to become equal throughout a vertical column of gas at rest.

In the case of the atmosphere, the effect of wind is to cause the temperature to vary as that of a mass of air would do if it were carried vertically upwards, expanding and cooling as it ascends.

But besides these results, which I had already obtained by a less elegant method and published in 1866, Boltzmann's theorem seems to open up a path into a region more purely chemical. For if the gas consists of a number of similar systems, each of which may assume different states having different amounts of energy, the theorem tells us that the number in each state is proportional to $e^{-\frac{\psi}{\kappa\theta}}$ where ψ is the energy, θ the absolute temperature, and κ a constant.

It is easy to see that this result ought to be applied to the theory of the states of combination which occur in a mixture of different substances. But as it is only during the present week that I have made any attempt to do so, I shall not trouble you with my crude calculations.

I have confined my remarks to a very small part of the field of molecular investigation. I have said nothing about the molecular theory of the diffusion of matter, motion, and energy, for though the results, especially in the diffusion of matter and the transpiration of fluids are of great interest to many chemists, and though from them we deduce important molecular data, they belong to a part of our study the data of which, depending on the conditions of the encounter of two molecules, are necessarily very hypothetical. I have thought it better to exhibit the evidence that the parts of fluids are in motion, and to describe the manner in which that motion is distributed among molecules of different masses.

To show that all the molecules of the same substance are equal in mass, we may refer to the methods of dialysis introduced by Graham, by which two gases of different densities may be separated by percolation through a porous plug.

If in a single gas there were molecules of different masses, the same process of dialysis, repeated a sufficient number of times, would furnish us with two portions of the gas, in one of which the average mass of the molecules would be greater than in the other. The density and the combining weight of these two portions would be different. Now, it may be said that no one has carried out this experiment in a sufficiently elaborate manner for every chemical substance. But the processes of nature are continually carrying out experiments of the same kind; and if there were molecules of the same substance nearly alike, but differing slightly in mass, the greater molecules would be selected in preference to form one compound, and the smaller to form another. But hydrogen is of the same density, whether we obtain it from water or from a hydrocarbon, so that neither oxygen nor carbon can find in hydrogen molecules greater or smaller than the average.

The estimates which have been made of the actual size of molecules are founded on a comparison of the volumes of bodies in the liquid or solid state, with their volumes in the gaseous state. In the study of molecular volumes we meet with many difficulties, but at the same time there are a sufficient number of consistent results to make the study a hopeful one.

The theory of the possible vibrations of a molecule has not yet been studied as it ought, with the help of a continual comparison between the dynamical theory and the evidence of the spectroscopist. An intelligent student, armed with the calculus and the spectroscopist, can hardly fail to discover some important fact about the internal constitution of a molecule.

The observed transparency of gases may seem hardly consistent with the results of molecular investigations.

A model of the molecules of a gas consisting of marbles scattered at distances bearing the proper proportion to their diameters, would allow very little light to penetrate through a hundred feet.

But if we remember the small size of the molecules compared with the length of a wave of light, we may apply certain theoretical investigations of Lord Rayleigh's about the mutual action between waves and small spheres, which show that the transparency of the atmosphere, if affected only by the presence of molecules, would be far greater than we have any reason to believe it to be.

A much more difficult investigation, which has hardly yet been attempted, relates to the electric properties of gases. No one has yet explained why dense gases are such good insulators, and why, when rarefied or heated, they permit the discharge of electricity, whereas a perfect vacuum is the best of all insulators.

It is true that the diffusion of molecules goes on faster in a rarefied gas, because the mean path of a molecule is inversely as the density. But the electrical difference between dense and rare gas appears to be too great to be accounted for in this way.

But while I think it right to point out the hitherto unconquered difficulties of this molecular theory, I must not forget to remind you of the numerous facts which it satisfactorily explains. We have already mentioned the gaseous laws, as they are called, which express the relations between volume, pressure, and temperature, and Gay Lussac's very important law of equivalent volumes. The explanation of these may be regarded as complete. The law of molecular specific heats is less accurately verified by experiment, and its full explanation depends on a more perfect knowledge of the internal structure of a molecule than we as yet possess.

But the most important result of these inquiries is a more distinct conception of thermal phenomena. In the first place, the temperature of the medium is measured by the average kinetic energy of translation of a single molecule of the medium. In two media placed in thermal communication, the temperature as thus measured tends to become equal.

In the next place, we learn how to distinguish that kind of motion which we call heat from other kinds of motion. The peculiarity of the motion called heat is that it is perfectly irregular; that is to say, that the direction and magnitude of the velocity of a molecule at a given time cannot be expressed as depending on the present position of the molecule and the time.

In the visible motion of a body, on the other hand, the velocity of the centre of mass of all the molecules in any visible portion of the body is the observed velocity of that portion, though the molecules may have also an irregular agitation on account of the body being hot.

In the transmission of sound, too, the different portions of the body have a motion which is generally too minute and too rapidly alternating to be directly observed. But in the motion which constitutes the physical phenomenon of sound, the velocity of each portion of the medium at any time can be expressed as depending on the position and the time elapsed; so that the motion of a medium during the passage of a sound-wave is regular, and must be distinguished from that which we call heat.

If, however, the sound-wave, instead of travelling onwards in an orderly manner and leaving the medium behind it at rest, meets with resistances which fritter away its motion into irregular agitations, this irregular molecular motion becomes no longer capable of being propagated swiftly in one direction as sound, but lingers in the medium in the form of heat till it is communicated to colder parts of the medium by the slow process of conduction.

The motion which we call light, though still more minute and rapidly alternating than that of sound, is, like that of sound, perfectly regular, and therefore is not heat. What was formerly called Radiant Heat is a phenomenon physically identical with light.

When the radiation arrives at a certain portion of the medium, it enters it and passes through it, emerging at the other side. As long as the medium is engaged in transmitting the radiation

it is in a certain state of motion, but as soon as the radiation has passed through it, the medium returns to its former state, the motion being entirely transferred to a new portion of the medium.

Now, the motion which we call heat can never of itself pass from one body to another unless the first body is, during the whole process, hotter than the second. The motion of radiation, therefore, which passes entirely out of one portion of the medium and enters another, cannot be properly called heat.

We may apply the molecular theory of gases to test those hypotheses about the luminiferous æther which assume it to consist of atoms or molecules.

Those who have ventured to describe the constitution of the luminiferous æther have sometimes assumed it to consist of atoms or molecules.

The application of the molecular theory to such hypotheses leads to rather startling results.

In the first place, a molecular æther would be neither more nor less than a gas. We may, if we please, assume that its molecules are each of them equal to the thousandth or the millionth part of a molecule of hydrogen, and that they can traverse freely the interspaces of all ordinary molecules. But, as we have seen, an equilibrium will establish itself between the agitation of the ordinary molecules and those of the æther. In other words, the æther and the bodies in it will tend to equality of temperature, and the æther will be subject to the ordinary gaseous laws as to pressure and temperature.

Among other properties of a gas, it will have that established by Dulong and Petit, so that the capacity for heat of unit of volume of the æther must be equal to that of unit of volume of any ordinary gas at the same pressure. Its presence, therefore, could not fail to be detected in our experiments on specific heat, and we may therefore assert that the constitution of the æther is not molecular.

J. CLERK-MAXWELL

SOCIETIES AND ACADEMIES

LONDON

Royal Society, Feb. 18.—“On the number of Figures in the Reciprocal of each Prime Number between 30,000 and 40,000,” by William Shanks. Communicated by the Rev. Dr. Salmon, F.R.S.

“On the Nature and Physiological Action of the *Crotalus*-poison as compared with that of *Naja trifidians* and other Indian Venomous Snakes,” by T. Lauder Brunton, F.R.S., and J. Fayer, M.D.

It appears that there is little difference between the physiological effects of the crotaline or viperine, and the colubrine virus. The mode in which death is brought about is essentially the same in all; though there are evidences, even when allowing for individual peculiarities, that the action is marked by some points of difference sufficiently characteristic, to require notice in detail.

We have already expressed our belief that death is caused by the cobra-, *Daboia*-, and *Hydrophis*-poison, 1st, through its action on the cerebro-spinal nerve-centres, especially on the medulla, inducing paralysis of respiration; or 2nd, in some cases where the poison has entered the circulation in large quantities and has been conveyed more directly to the heart, by arrest, tetanically in systole, of cardiac action, probably owing to some action on the cardiac ganglia; 3rd, by a combination of the two previous causes; 4th, by a septic condition of a secondary nature, and which, being more essentially pathological in its bearings, the details were not considered suitable for discussion here.

There is reason to believe that death is caused in the same way by the *Crotalus*-poison also; and it appears, from the experiments recently performed in Calcutta by Dr. Ewart and the members of the Committee appointed by Government upon *Pseudechis porphyriacus*, or the black snake, and *Hoplocephalus curtus*, or the tiger-snake of Australia, that their virus causes death in the same manner. These reptiles had been sent from Melbourne to Calcutta for the purpose of investigation and comparison. (*Vide* Committee's Report, p. 58 *et seq.*, Appendix.)

But though the actual cause of death is essentially the same, the phenomena which precede and accompany it differ in some degree according to the nature of the poison, the quantity and site of the inoculations, and the individual peculiarities of the

creature inoculated, as may be seen in the experiments herewith recorded.

The condition of an animal poisoned by the rattlesnake-venom, then, essentially resembles that of one subjected to the influence of the colubrine or viperine poison of Indian snakes:—

Depression, hurried respiration, exhaustion, lethargy, unconsciousness, nausea, retching, and vomiting.

Muscular twitchings, ataxy, paralysis, and convulsions, the latter probably chiefly, though not entirely, due to circulation of imperfectly oxygenated blood, the result of impeded respiration, and, finally, death.

Hæmorrhages or hæmorrhagic extravasations and effusions, both local and general, occur in all varieties of snake-poisoning.

But we observe (and in this our observations are in accord with those of Weir Mitchell) that there is a greater tendency to both local and general hæmorrhage and extravasation of blood and of the colouring matter of the blood, especially as observed in the peritoneum, intestines, and mesentery, and also probably to a more direct action on the cord than in poisoning by either cobra or viper.

The viscera and other tissues after death are found congested and ecchymosed, and in some cases to a great extent, seeming to show that either a preternatural fluidity of blood or some important change in the vessels, favouring its exudation, has occurred.

Several experiments were made on the physiological action of the virus of the rattle-snake, with the view of comparison with that of the cobra and *Daboia*.

We are indebted to Dr. Weir Mitchell, of Philadelphia, for a supply of the virus. He was good enough to send about six grains of the dried poison of *Crotalus*—the species not named, but it is believed to be of *Crotalus durissus*.

It has the appearance of fractured fragments of dried gum-arabic and of rather a darker yellow colour, but otherwise resembling the dried cobra-virus sent from Bengal.

There were no very marked differences to be observed in the action of the poison except in the energy with which the cobra exceeded the *Crotalus*.

It appears that the direct inoculation of large doses of the virus, whether viperine or colubrine, into the circulation have the power in some cases of annihilating almost instantaneously the irritability of the cord and medulla, as in others they have of arresting the heart's action.

The local as well as the general effect of the cobra- and *Crotalus*-poisons, *i.e.* colubrine and viperine, is to cause hæmorrhage, ecchymosis, and sanguinolent effusions into the areolar tissue, not only at the seat of inoculation and its neighbourhood, but also in the mucous membranes and other vascular parts. It is obvious also that the *Crotalus*-poison acts more energetically in this respect than the cobra-poison, and that this is perhaps one of the most marked distinctions between them.

Cobra venom is a muscular poison, and the gastrocnemius of a frog immersed in a watery solution of it contracts immediately upon immersion, and loses its irritability very much sooner than one placed in pure water.

In our experiments cobra-poison appeared first to stimulate and then to paralyse the motions of cilia from the mouth of a frog.

It arrests very rapidly the movements of infusoria and of the cilia upon them, but the cilia upon the mantle of a fresh-water muscle continued to move for many hours in an extremely strong solution of dried cobra-venom. In the case of white blood-corpuscles no very distinct action was observed. When applied to a piece of *Vallisneria spiralis* it appeared to have almost no effect, for the motion of the granules within the cells continued with undiminished rigour for two hours afterwards.

Feb. 25.—“On the Forms of Equipotential Curves and Surfaces and Lines of Electric Force,” by W. Grylls Adams, M.A., Professor of Natural Philosophy and Astronomy in King's College, London.

The paper contains an account of certain experimental verifications of the laws of electrical distribution in space and in a conducting sheet, such as a sheet of tinfoil. When two battery poles are attached to any two points of an unlimited plane sheet, or to two points on the edge of a circular disc, or if the disc be bounded by arcs of circles passing through the two battery poles, the lines of force and also the equipotential curves are circles. The equipotential circles have their centres on the straight line joining the battery poles, and the lines of force pass through these poles. In any limited space, whether in the plane or in