

Mr. Abbay, the rock is limestone, as is proved by its being largely quarried and burned. Moreover, the patena soil in Ouvah is not of the ordinary worthless quality, at any rate in the opinion of planters owning portions of it, as they frequently assert that it is as good as the jungle soil of Dimbula, and the neighbouring districts. What truth there is in this I cannot say.

Further, though cleared forest land when abandoned usually runs into "chena," I could show Mr. Abbay, if he were to return to Ceylon, as I wish he would, cases in which it has run into patena. The Dimbula cricket ground is a case in point.

Pendleton, Manchester, April 17

E. HEELIS

Cumming's Electricity

In a passage from my "Introduction to the Theory of Electricity" which you quote in a review of the work in NATURE, vol. xv. p. 526, occurs a very unfortunate misprint of the word *of* for the word *on*, which seems to have misled your reviewer, and I therefore beg a few lines to correct it. The passage in question is the statement of Prop. 8, p. 203, which ought to have been written: "In computing the potential on any closed circuit we may substitute for it any closed circuit which is obtained by projecting the given circuit by means of lines of force."

In defence of this phrase I may perhaps be allowed to point out that the definition of potential quoted by the reviewer as that of Sir William Thomson is not the definition of potential but of *electrostatic potential at a point*, which is given at p. 45 of my book. The phrase potential on an electrified body in a field of electrical force is, I hold, perfectly legitimate, denoting the work done against electrical forces in moving the body (supposing all electrification undisturbed by the movement) to an infinite distance out of the field.

The case in point, however, refers to electro-magnetic potential and the potential on the closed circuit really represents the work done in carrying the circuit against magnetic forces out of the magnetic field.

The phrase suggested in your review—induction through the circuit—I had purposely avoided as liable to be confused with ordinary "magnetic induction" in a mass of magnetic iron, or with the "self-induction" of the circuit, or even with the induced current produced by the movement of the circuit, while the phrase potential on the circuit is at once suggestive of its own meaning and clear from any ambiguity.

Rugby, April 19

L. CUMMING

Remarkable Papuan Skull

I WISH to call your attention to a remarkable Papuan skull which Prof. Mantegazza showed at the last meeting of the Anthropological Society of Italy. The upper jaw contained very distinctly no less than four molars and two canine teeth on each side, all the molars being well developed.

Unfortunately the lower jaw is missing, but if it corresponded with the upper jaw, as we may justly presume—the whole skull not showing any abnormality of structure—the total number of teeth would amount to forty. There are cases recorded of negro-skulls showing three, four, and five supernumerary teeth, but eight is certainly an extremely rare occurrence.

It would be interesting to know whether museums or collections in England contain any similar specimens. J. E. Z.

Meteor

ABOUT 10.50 P.M. on the night of Monday, the 16th inst., the sky being cloudless and the young moon just setting, I observed a remarkable meteor in the northern heavens. It originated near to the star γ Cephei, and travelled towards the eastern horizon, its path forming an angle of about 35° with the perpendicular. The head, two or three times as large and bright as Venus, was bluish, and left a trail of yellowish light. I took it at first for a falling rocket, whose ascent I had not noticed; but its transient existence, its sudden extinction without noise or sparks, and the straightness of its path, with only a slight zig-zag, but no curve, preclude that explanation I think.

Leicester, April 17

F. T. MOTT

OUR ASTRONOMICAL COLUMN

THE U.S. NAVAL OBSERVATORY, WASHINGTON.—Under the title "Instruments and Publications of the United States Naval Observatory," the superintendent has circulated a series of

photographs of the instruments at present in use in that noble astronomical institution. They are taken by the heliotype process, and comprise (1) the mural circle, mounted in 1844, aperture 4'1 inch; the transit instrument, 5'33 inch aperture, mounted in the same year, and placed in the same room beside the mural circle; the smaller equatorial, mounted in 1844, with which so much good work has been performed, aperture 9'62 inch; the transit-circle, by Pistor and Martins, Berlin, which was mounted in 1866, the aperture of the object-glass 8'52 inch, and the focal length 12 feet 1 inch; a general view of the grand 26-inch refractor, of 32 feet 5'8 inch focal length, mounted in 1873, and one of the most powerful telescopes in the world; the clock-work, &c., of this magnificent instrument is shown on a separate plate. Brief descriptions accompany these heliotypes, and in addition are drawings made with the 26-inch equatorial of the nebula in Orion, the omega nebula, the annular nebula in Lyra, and the planet Saturn. Some account of the foundation of the observatory and a list of its publications from 1845-76 precede the brief description of the instruments of which views are presented.

NEW VARIABLE STAR.—A recent number of M. Leverrier's *Bulletin International* contains a notice from MM. Henry respecting a variable star in Virgo, which they state has been under observation for some time. The period is about seven months, and the limits of variation 8m. to 14m.; at present it is near a maximum. The position for 1877° is in R.A. 12h. 27m. 32'2s., N.P.D. 93° 44' 37".

EARLY OBSERVATION OF SOLAR SPOTS.—In our popular astronomical works the Chinese are not usually credited with the observation of spots upon the sun at a distant date. Gaubil, however, records from the Chinese annals that on May 7, 826 black spots were seen on the sun's disc, and again on April 21, 832. There are, indeed, few phenomena which are not noted by this observant people, or rather by their watchful astronomers; yet, strange to say, the zodiacal light is amongst them. And it is singular that while Kepler's star of 1604 is duly recorded, the Chinese annals have no reference to the similar object in 1572, with which the name of Tycho Brahe is commonly associated.

COMET 1877 III.—The comet discovered by M. Borelly at Marseilles, on April 14, appears to have been detected three or four nights earlier by Mr. Lewis Swift, of Rochester, New York, who is already the independent discoverer of more than one of these bodies. We say three or four nights earlier, for although the telegram forwarded to Europe through the Smithsonian Institution dates the observation on the night of April 11, the rough place there assigned agrees more nearly with the computed position for the previous midnight. In circular No. xxv. of the Imperial Academy of Sciences at Vienna, are elements by Dr. Holetschek, from the first three nights' observations, which it is remarked have "a very great resemblance to those of the comet of the year 1762." The following orbit has been calculated by Mr. Hind from the first complete observation at Marseilles, on April 14, one at Mannheim by Prof. Schönfeld, on the 16th, and a third at the observatory of Mr. J. Gurney Barclay, at Leyton, on the 19th. For the sake of comparison the elements of the comet of 1762, calculated by Burckhardt, after a new reduction of the Paris observations, are annexed.

	COMET 1877 III.	COMET 1762.
Perihelion Passage (G.M.T.) ...	April 26°9501	May 28°3345
Long. of Perihelion	102 45 51	104 2 0
" Ascending Node	345 53 18	348 33 5
Inclination	77 8 56	85 38 13
Perihelion Distance	1'01089	1'00905

The motion is direct. It will be remarked that the only material difference is in the inclination of the orbits to the ecliptic. The comet of 1762 was discovered in the Netherlands, by Klinken-

burg, on May 17, and was observed by Messier and Maraldi at Paris until July 2. When first seen it was just visible to the naked eye. The interval between the perihelion passages is 114.91 years, and with such period of revolution, with the other elements of 1762, the descending node would fall about 0.27 from the orbit of Mars and the ascending node at a radius-vector of 3.35, or in the region occupied by the minor planets; thus the difference of inclination will not be easily explained on the supposition of identity of the comets, though it must be remarked that elements of the present comet founded upon the first few days' observations may be open to more sensible correction than is usually the case.

"THE OBSERVATORY, A MONTHLY REVIEW OF ASTRONOMY."—There is ample room for the new astronomical periodical, which has been launched by Mr. Christie, the First Assistant of the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, under the above title, during the last week. Its aim is to present in a popular form a general survey of the progress of astronomy and to afford early intimation of recent advances. Such a publication ought to be well supported in this country, where astronomical amateurs are in great force. The first number holds out good augury for the future; amongst the contents are a report of the proceedings at the last meeting of the Royal Astronomical Society, proceedings which are not detailed in the *Monthly Notices*, where the discussions following the reading of papers are, as a rule, ignored, but which, as everyone knows who has been in the habit of attending the meetings of our scientific societies, are frequently the most interesting feature in the evening's proceedings; and we hope this point will not be lost sight of in the new periodical. There is an article on the photographic spectra of stars, a subject known to have lately much occupied the attention of the president, by whom it is furnished; the first part of a contribution from Mr. Gill, on the determination of the solar parallax; remarks on the nebular hypothesis, by Mr. Darwin, being an account of an inquiry intended to suggest a cause which may fill up a hiatus in the theory, and an outline of the results of Dr. von Asten's [researches on the motion of Encke's Comet, recently communicated to the St. Petersburg Academy; also, ephemerides for physical observations of the moon and of Jupiter, by Mr. Marth, whose assistance in this direction deserves the high appreciation of observers. We will further express the hope that accuracy of typography may characterise the future numbers of Mr. Christie's publication; it is most important that this should be the case if the confidence of the practical astronomer is to be secured for it, and we are induced to offer this suggestion from remarking one or two inaccuracies in the first number, as on p. 4, where the search for an intra-mercurial planet by the Rev. S. J. Perry is dated in April instead of in March, and on p. 27, where Mr. Swift's discovery of the comet subsequently found by M. Borrelly, is erroneously referred to April 5, which was the date of discovery of the previous comet.

THE NEBULÆ—WHAT ARE THEY?¹

BEFORE the announcement of Mr. Huggins's discovery of the presence of bright lines in the spectra of nebulæ, it was generally, if not universally, accepted as a fact that nebulæ were merely stellar clusters irresolvable on account of their great distances from us. This view had become impressed on the minds of many of our greatest observing astronomers in the progress of their work, and is one therefore which should not lightly be abandoned.

It appears to me that Mr. Huggins's observations instead of being inconsistent with the view formerly held by astronomers, are rather confirmatory of the correctness of that view.

¹ On a Cause for the Appearance of Bright Lines in the Spectra of Irresolvable Star Clusters. Paper read at the Royal Society by E. J. Stone, M.A., F.R.S., Her Majesty's Astronomer, Cape of Good Hope.

The sun is known to be surrounded by a gaseous envelope of very considerable extent. Similar envelopes must surround the stars generally. Conceive a close stellar cluster. Each star, if isolated, would be surrounded by its own gaseous envelope. These gaseous envelopes might, in the case of a cluster, form over the whole, or a part of the cluster, a continuous mass of gas. So long as such a cluster was within a certain distance from us the light from the stellar masses would predominate over that of the gaseous envelopes. The spectrum would therefore be an ordinary stellar spectrum. Suppose such a cluster to be removed further and further from us, the light from each star would be diminished in the proportion of the inverse square of the distance; but such would not be the case with the light from the enveloping surface formed by the gaseous envelopes. The light from this envelope received on a slit in the focus of an object-glass would be sensibly constant because the contributing area would be increased in the same proportion that the light received from each part is diminished. The result would be that at some definite distance, and all greater distances, the preponderating light received from such a cluster would be derived from the gaseous envelopes and not from the isolated stellar masses. The spectrum of the cluster would therefore become a linear one, like that from the gaseous surroundings of our own sun. The linear spectrum might, of course, under certain circumstances, be seen mixed up with a feeble continuous spectrum from the light of the stars themselves.

It should be noticed that, in this view of the subject, the linear spectrum can only appear when the resolvability of the cluster is at least injuriously affected by the light of the gaseous envelopes, becoming sensibly proportional to that from the stellar masses, and that in the great majority of such cases it would only be in the light from the irresolvable portions of the cluster that bright lines could be seen in the spectrum.

The changes in form which would be presented to us by such a nebula might be expected to be small. These changes would depend chiefly upon changes in the distribution of the stellar masses constituting the cluster. It has always appeared to me difficult to realise the conditions under which isolated irregular masses of gas, presenting to us sharp angular points, could exist uncontrolled by any central gravitational mass without showing larger changes in form than appear to have been the case with many of the nebule. In my view of the nature of nebulæ this difficulty no longer exists.

THE RACES AND TRIBES OF THE CHAD BASIN

ON this subject a most valuable paper has been contributed to the last number of the *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Erdkunde* by Dr. G. Nachtigal, one of the few living writers entitled to speak with authority on the ethnography of Sudan. While the great problems now being rapidly solved in the portion of Africa lying south of the equator are almost exclusively of a strictly geographical nature, those still awaiting solution in the northern half of the Continent are on the contrary mainly of an ethnological character. The reason of this pointed difference is very obvious. Although there are vast regions south of the line still unexplored, enough is already known to warrant the conclusion that what remains to be there discovered is peopled by the same great race holding almost exclusive possession of the parts already opened up by the spirit of modern enterprise. With the sole exception of the extreme south-western corner, occupied by the Namaqua and Cape Hottentots, and of some districts also in the south still haunted by a few straggling Bushman tribes, the whole of Africa from the equator southwards would seem to be the domain of what is now conventionally known to philologists as the Bantu