

and from the equator to the poles—channels which will not intersect or interfere with one another, except when affected by disturbing causes.

One possible cause of change in this direction of least resistance or normal channel in the case of the south-west wind of these latitudes may possibly be a shifting of the thermal pole. Suppose, for instance, we have any reason to surmise that the centre of greatest cold is now on the American side of the true North Pole and at another time on the Asiatic side, we have at once a satisfactory explanation of observed variations in the prevalent direction of the main channels of the water-laden winds of the northern hemisphere.

I will now as briefly as possible state my reasons for suspecting that such is actually the case.

Since 1873 the south-west winds have prevailed very considerably over the average in Europe, and as a natural consequence we have had continued floods all over the west of this continent. In Asia, during the same period the water-laden winds have been fearfully under the average, the rainfall during the last three years having been about nine inches below the average of the previous half-dozen. Famines, of course, have been the result.

If my theory is correct we should expect to find that the thermal pole has been situated during the last three or four years on our own side of the North Pole.

Now in 1872 Capt. Hall, of the *Polaris*, saw unmistakable signs of an open polar sea where Capt. Nares, in 1875, saw nothing but a vast wilderness of ancient ice. In a former letter of mine which appeared in NATURE (vol. xv. p. 116) I attempted to reconcile these apparently conflicting observations on the supposition that this palæocrystic wilderness is in reality a vast floating island of ice some hundreds of miles in diameter. I called to mind Sir E. Parry's disappointing experiences in 1827 in the *Hicla*, when, after a toilsome journey northwards on what he believed to be the main pack, he found he was after all drifting southwards; whereupon he concluded his supposed main pack must be a loose floe of immense extent.

Is it not equally probable, to say the least of it, that he was on the main pack—on the palæocrystic island—and that he caught it on the move towards our shores of the Arctic Sea?

Be this as it may (and it is merely a suggestion) it is certain that five years later occurred the terrible famine of 1832 in India, and five years is just the time required, according to Dr. Hunter, for the effects of the proximate cause of drought (whatever that may be) to attain its maximum, according to the law of the "multiplication of effects."

Although I have examined the records of the winds at the Meteorological Office, I will add nothing more, as I fear I have already exceeded my proper limits.

WORDSWORTH DONISTHORPE

#### Yellow Crocuses

A LETTER in NATURE (vol. xvi. p. 43) calls attention to the destruction of the flowers of the yellow crocus by the sparrow. I have for many years been a cultivator of the crocus, both yellow, white, and purple; this spring they flowed abundantly, the white and purple blooming undisturbed, the yellow picked and torn. My gardener and I talked the matter over but could find no solution of the problem. As this has been my experience in former years, and the fact is now corroborated by general experience, can no naturalist discover the reason, or must it still be left a secret in the bosom of pert little *Fringilla domestica*?

A. H.

#### Complementary Colours

IN connection with this subject, which was referred to in Mr. Terrill's letter in NATURE for May 17, perhaps the following homely way of illustrating the fact that the combination of two complementary colours produces white may interest your readers. If a tumbler of beer be held in front of the green glass shade of an ordinary reading lamp, it will be found on looking through the beer at the shade that the tumbler appears to be filled with an almost colourless liquid.

J. ROMILLY ALLEN

#### Chromatic Aberration of the Eye

THERE is a slight inaccuracy in your report of my communication of May 12th to the Physical Society, wherein I am made to affirm that a blue object and a red object cannot both be in focus at once unless the blue object be the more distant. The next sentence of your report, and indeed the whole tenor of my communication imply the reverse condition, that the blue rays

should come from the less distant source. The dispersion of the eye takes place in the same sense as its refraction; hence the adjustment of the eye to focus may be the same for blue rays proceeding from a body near the eye as for red rays proceeding from an indefinitely distant luminous source; as, indeed, Fraunhofer proved half a century ago.

S. P. THOMPSON

University College, Bristol, May 25

#### A Correction

PERMIT me to explain that the subject of my note, read at the last meeting of the Astronomical Society, was not my chart of 324,912 stars, though I had occasion in the course of it to mention that chart. My note referred in reality to a paper read at the preceding meeting, and relating to the general subject of the distribution of stars in space.

RICHARD A. PROCTOR

#### DR. PHILIP P. CARPENTER

WE regret to announce the death at Montreal, in his fifty-eighth year, of Dr. Philip P. Carpenter, formerly of Warrington, one of the most scientific conchologists of our time. Taking up this pursuit, in the first instance, merely as a recreative occupation, he was led by his friend, Dr. J. E. Gray, who saw his remarkable aptitude for it, to make it one of the principal objects of his life; and he brought to it a mind trained in those scientific habits which prevented him from ever becoming the mere species-monger, whilst specially delighting in that study of minute detail which is required for the true determination of specific types and their geographical distribution. It was well observed by Dr. Hooker, in his introductory essay to the "Flora of New Zealand," that "a wider range of knowledge and a greater depth of study are required to prove those dissimilar forms to be identical, which any superficial observer can separate by words and a name;" and this wide range of knowledge and thoroughness of research were the essential characteristics of all Dr. P. P. Carpenter's conchological work. The opportunity having occurred to him more than twenty-five years ago, while residing at Warrington, of studying a large collection of shells formed at Mazatlan, in California—after Mr. Cuming had selected from it what he considered the new specific types, which he caused to be described by Mr. C. B. Adams—Dr. P. P. Carpenter was impressed with the fact that Mr. Cuming had left behind him those *intermediate* forms, the study of which would prove that many of his supposed species are mere varieties; and having brought the importance of such study before the Zoological Section of the British Association, he was requested to prepare a report on the present state of our knowledge with regard to the mollusca of the west coast of North America, which was published in the *Transactions* of the Association for 1856, and at once took rank as a most able and conscientious work. A Supplementary Report on this subject, marked by the same "wide range of knowledge and depth of study," was published in 1863. Besides these, several monographs, prepared by Dr. P. P. Carpenter on particular groups of shells in the Cumingian Museum, were published in the *Zoological Proceedings*. So high was the reputation which his Reports acquired for him among American naturalists that he was invited by Prof. Henry of the Smithsonian Institution at Washington to assist him in the arrangement of its national collection of shells; and having been led in 1865 to take up his residence in Montreal, he was subsequently engaged in similar work for other museums in the Northern States. He soon acquired in the city of his adoption the character he had left behind him in Warrington, of being ever ready for any kind of philanthropic labour; and especially distinguished himself by his untiring advocacy, through evil as well as good report, of the sanitary reforms which he saw to be greatly needed. There is reason to believe that the typhoid fever which brought his useful life to a close was engendered in the foul air of the building in which he was accustomed to carry on his scientific work.