

Society of Arts have resolved to give the projected conference their most cordial support, should an executive committee be formed. The Council have promised to accommodate such a conference in their rooms, and to undertake the publication of Proceedings, &c. Here therefore is a nucleus around which a practical project may well form itself, and following on this step I hope soon another may be taken. Allow me through your columns to thank my various correspondents for their support and suggestions.

Glasgow, March 29

JAMES PATON

In your last number "Academicus" dogmatizes thus, "Conferences are not required, but proper salaries for the curators." He leaves us quite in the dark, however, as to where the proper salaries are to come from. Now I presume that a conference would be the best means of ascertaining the existing state of local museums and of eliciting suggestions for their improvement.

I beg therefore to propose that the subject should be brought forward at the next meeting of the British Association, to be held at York.

J. ROMILLY ALLEN

#### "Herschel and Cameron's Practical Astronomy"

I RECEIVED not long ago by post a pamphlet bound, rather takingly, in red cloth wrapper, with gilt letter title, stamped largely diagonal-wise on the side; which title consisted of these words—"Herschel and Cameron's Practical Astronomy." The title-page assigns the authorship to one "Alex. Mackenzie Cameron," and adds "Revised throughout by Capt. John Herschel, R.E., in charge Astronomical Branch of the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India."

I will not waste your space by describing the contents; but as I am wholly and entirely guiltless of any knowledge whatever of the work, and as the use of my name inside, and of my patronymic outside (the intention of which is obvious), are alike unauthorised, I trust you will grant me so much as is necessary to protest formally against so daring a piracy.

Collingwood, March 20

J. HERSCHEL

P.S.—I transmit the work for your satisfaction. Please consign it to the waste basket.

#### Meteor

A BRILLIANT meteor was seen here at 7.57 this evening. Course nearly north to south, passing near  $\zeta$  Ursæ Majoris, and disappearing suddenly nearly over  $\delta$  Leonis. Colour greenish white, like burning zinc, with trace of a reddish train, but no track visible afterwards.

Hampstead Heath, N.W., March 29

B. W. S.

#### The Audiphone

I HAVE received a number of letters on this subject which I cannot reply to singly. So far as my own experience goes any audiphone is a total failure in about two-thirds of the cases of deafness.

The essential difference between my own form and the others is that mine is light, cheap, does not require to be held with the hand, and, for musical purposes, gives the correct timbre or quality of tone. Colladon's form especially gives a very harsh, rough quality, and is offensive to a musician; the same objection applies also to my own, made in thin sheet metal; and for this reason birch veneer is preferable to any other material I have tried. I have no intention of making them for sale, but in case of any difficulty in obtaining or making one I will forward any required for 2s. 6d. each, which is about the cost of making. The only trouble is in obtaining a curved surface on which the wood can be fastened whilst wet. My first were made by wetting the veneer, fastening it in a curve with strings and bent pins and allowing it to remain until dry. The surface should then be varnished, first with shellac in spirit and afterwards with the same to which a small quantity of ivory black is added. The natural colour of the wood is unpleasant, as it makes the user look like a dog on a hot day, *i.e.*, as if he had his tongue out a considerable distance.

The amount of deafness does not appear to be of any importance. I know cases of totally deaf people who can hear perfectly

with a small audiphone, and others of only partial deafness in which it is a complete failure.

THOS. FLETCHER

4, Museum Street, Warrington

#### A COMET OBSERVED FROM H.M.S. TRIUMPH

CAPT. A. H. MARKHAM, R.N., of H.M.S. *Triumph*, the flagship on the Pacific Station, reports that a comet was observed during the voyage from Payta in Peru, to Manta on the coast of Ecuador. The *Triumph* left Payta on February 7. The comet was first seen on the evening of the 7th at about 8 o'clock. The nucleus was distinctly made out, bearing south-west at an altitude of  $7^\circ$  above the horizon. The tail, a long-spreading one, was not very brilliant, but could be clearly traced to an altitude of  $35^\circ$ , the observed termination bearing about south-south-west. The whole phenomenon subtended an angle with the horizon of about  $70^\circ$ . It was situated in the constellation of Argo Navis, and the direction of the tail was in a line almost equidistant between Sirius and Canopus. It set at about 9.30 p.m.

On the next evening it was again seen at about 8 p.m., but nearer the horizon, which proved that it had been travelling with extraordinary rapidity. Although the nucleus was closer to the horizon than on the preceding evening, the altitude of the end of the tail was  $40^\circ$ , showing that it had increased in size. Clouds banking up to the southward prevented Capt. Markham from observing the time of setting. On the 9th, the third evening of observation, it was very hazy, but the tail could still be seen, resembling the streamer of an aurora, in the same position as on the two previous evenings. At the same time a bright luminous patch was observed immediately under Canopus.

#### SOCOTRA

THE following letter has been forwarded to us for publication:—

"Gollowan Bay, Socotra, February 16

"MY DEAR SIR JOSEPH HOOKER,—Just a line to say how I am getting on; we reached here on the 11th. The Sultan has not yet turned up, but we expect him soon. The *Seagull* could not go round to Tamarida, but put in here at the west end of the island; she leaves again to-day.

"All my things are now landed and my encampment is close to the shore. I have to wait here for the Sultan in order to get camels from him.

"The island is well worth examination. I have already over 150 species of plants besides some birds, lizards, and insects. The flora is splendid. All my plants have been collected within a couple of miles of my encampment. Some lovely Orobanchas and Dodders, Stapelias, other Asclepiads, *Aristolochias*, *Adenium* in thousands, and plenty of *Rubiaceæ*. I stick about here for some time, as I may as well do one little bit thoroughly before taking a rapid run over other parts.

"My collector has taken to the animals, and I intend to make him look after them. The geology of the island is curious: granite, diorite, and limestone being all mixed up in a most perplexing way. There is plenty of water, but not sufficient surface soil for much cultivation here. My companion from Aden has unfortunately had a touch of some fever, but is now better.

"Excuse this short note, but I did not expect the *Seagull* to go so soon, and I have a lot of specimens under way which will not keep.

"I am well, and expect great results, and if hard work will produce them they ought to be obtained.

"Sincerely yours,

"BAYLEY BALFOUR

"P.S.—Letter just come from Sultan ordering sheiks here to give me camels and men and everything I want."