

## Foamballs

To artificial snowballs and mudballs will you permit me to add an experience of foamballs. We were staying at Biarritz in early spring, and one morning on going down to the beach we found it covered with such balls. A strong wind was blowing off the bay, which caught the wave-crests, and threw off little masses of foam. These, though quite small at first, accumulated, and, in some cases, conglomerated as they rolled inland, until they gradually attained a size of two to three feet in diameter; and as many of these balls of various sizes were drifted along by the wind, they presented a most singular appearance. This was made more curious by some of the town dogs catching sight of the objects, and taking to cheyving them along the sand, until a sort of steeplechase was established. Every now and then a dog would overtake and dash into a flying sphere, only to find it, to his manifest disappointment, of a very unsubstantial character. The beach was covered far and wide with the debris of the broken balls.

Guildown, March 31

J. RAND CAPRON

## Meteor; the Transit; the Comet

As you have on previous occasions deemed it of sufficient interest to record notices of striking meteors observed, I send you an account of a singularly brilliant and unusual form which appeared here about half-past 8 p.m. on the 29th inst.

I happened to be looking at a portion of the sky a little below the constellation "Orion," that is to the southward and eastward, when suddenly a brilliant meteor became apparent. Unlike ordinary meteors, it did not move, at least to my vision; it simply increased in size and brilliancy, till it appeared like a fine "Roman candle" or "blue light," intensely blue, and emitting rays at about two hundred yards' distance. It appeared to illuminate the country with a pale blue light.

It disappeared as suddenly as it came. Could its stationary appearance and increasing brightness have been caused by its approaching me in a direct line? I have thought so.

I saw the transit of Venus splendidly from my hilltop, through my binocular, an ordinary hand-telescope, and even with the naked eye, protected of course in each instance by coloured glass.

The comet also was a glorious object for several weeks. It was first seen here on September 23. I noticed very plainly the dark line near the right edge of the tail, as if there had been a fold in a luminous substance; that was the idea that the appearance gave me. Fig. 3, p. 610, vol. xxvi. of NATURE, most resembles what we saw here, but the shadow, or dark part, from the V-like incision at the end, should be longer and darker.

Not being a scientific observer, I did not trouble you with any notices of either, feeling sure you would have plenty.

British Consulate, Noumea, January 31 E. L. LAYARD

## Ticks

CAN none of your readers be prevailed on to take up the study of the Ixodes (Ticks), of which there are several British species? I feel sure their life-history, if fully worked out, would prove both interesting and instructive, and might throw some light on a mysterious and deadly disease amongst cattle and sheep, which prevails extensively in Scotland, and in some districts in England. It is a curious fact that Ixodes are almost invariably, if not always found infesting sheep where this disease prevails, and it becomes an important question whether their presence is merely a coincidence, from the rough coarse natural grasses forming a congenial habitat, or whether they are not the carriers or inoculators of vegetable or other poison. I should be very glad to give further information to any one disposed to take up the study.

W. E. L.

## Ignition by Sunlight

"M." MAY like to have the following case:—I went once at sunrise (at Kishnagar, Bengal) into my coachhouse, which opened east. I saw smoke ascending from the tops of the two carriage lamps. I jumped hastily to the conclusion that my syce (groom) had been using the carriage candles illegitimately, and taxed him. His defence obliged me to examine closer, and to see that the two wicks had been ignited to smouldering point by the horizontal rays of the sun condensed by the parabolic reflectors

at the backs of the lamps. A notable enough example of Indian heat, was it not?

W. J. HERSCHEL

Collingwood, March 31

WHEN driving along the Beaumaris Road on Tuesday last at half-past three, I observed smoke issuing from the top of one of the carriage lamps. I stopped to examine the cause, and found that the reflector had concentrated the sun's rays on the wick of the candle lamp and caused it to smoulder.

Rhianva, Bangor, April 2

EDMUND H. VERNEY

## Mimicry

REFERRING to Mr. Stokoe's letter in NATURE, vol. xxvii., p. 508, and to his remarks on the defective vision of the Teleostei as proved by the very poor imitations of insects which are sufficient to enrap them, have not bats and swallows—animals of certainly more than normal acuteness of vision—been hooked on several occasions by the flyfisher?

H. J. MORGAN

Exeter, March 31

## Braces or Waistband?

CAN you or any of your readers answer the following:—Which method of suspending the trousers is the least interference with nature—their suspension from the hips or from the shoulders, the wearing of braces, or a tight waistband?

R. M.

March 16

SINGING, SPEAKING, AND STAMMERING<sup>1</sup>

## II.—SPEAKING

IN the first lecture the musical and emotional side of human utterance; in the second, the colloquial and intellectual aspect of speech was adverted to. Speaking in modern times, and in England especially, is a more neglected art than singing. Even in Shakespeare's days there must have been a state of things not very dissimilar; for he makes Dogberry, who always manages to state the wrong proposition, say, "Readin' and writin' come by nature," and there is a quaintly satirical passage in that graceful and ethereal play, the "Midsummer Night's Dream," which goes straight to the point. Theseus, in commenting on the Clown's blunders of diction, says:—

"Where I have come, great clerks have purposed  
To greet me with premeditated welcomes;  
Where I have seen them shiver and look pale,  
Make periods in the midst of sentences,  
Throttle their practised accents in their fears,  
And in conclusion dumbly have broke off,  
Not paying me a welcome."

It cannot be too often reiterated that speech is essentially an acquirement, and that it must be learned. At first, indeed, it is picked up by imitation in early childhood, and later on in life is commonly neglected and left to take its chance; though much can be done with little labour to correct defects both of this and of the handwriting, the two first things by which a man's intellectual status is judged of. It is unlike singing, in that pleasant and articulate speaking does not require the gift of a musical organ, but is open to all alike. There exists, however, in some quarters a prejudice against fluent speaking. Ineffableness is held to indicate grasp of thought; taciturnity to be the cloak of profundity. This would be correct if fluency were to supersede accuracy; but such an antagonism is by no means necessary, or it would reach its natural limit in the case of the sailor's parrot, which "could not talk, but thought the more."

Some other hindrances to correct speech require passing comment. In the first place its acquirement is too much mixed up with recitation and dramatic representation. Neither exaggeration nor servile imitation produce good speaking, the one salient feature of which is natural—

<sup>1</sup> Abstract by the Author of three Lectures at the Royal Institution, by W. H. Stone, M.B., F.R.C.P. Continued from p. 510.