involving towards the end of the last century the removal of the old and erection of the present tower, which, due to this increase, is now very much in the same relative position as its predecessor of 1792. This local accumulation runs northward to "Romney Hoy" but is accompanied beyond this again northward by a constant struggle to preserve the sea frontage right up to Hythe.

Take the Royal Military Canal, twenty miles long, as the base of a triangle running out ten miles seaward therefrom, with two inclined sides of ten miles and fourteen miles, or twenty-four miles of sea margin in all; of this we have on the west side eight miles of stationary or receding shore, thence two miles to the "Ness," and northward of it four miles, or six miles in all of local increase, and northward again ten miles of stationary or receding shore.

Now under these conditions who is to fix, and on what principle, the landward boundary of what may be termed the "live beach," and is it not this very material (not grass-grown or covered as it ultimately becomes by vegetation) that lies most temptingly for removal?

A very tentative advertisement has recently been displayed at the Charing Cross terminal station of the South-Eastern Railway offering sea-beach or shingle for sale. J. B. REDMAN
6, Queen Anne's Gate, Westminster, S.W., May 28

Sheet Lightning

SOME people never see lightning; I have met one lady who cannot, and have heard of other instances. The question suggests itself, consequently, whether the duration of a flash of lightning is sufficient to produce a visible image on the retina or whether the image is only produced after successive reflections in the eye itself, which might be too few to produce such an image in the case of people with very dark eyes; if the latter is the case, this would go far towards accounting for the difficulty there is in deciding as to the character of sheet lightning as far as any optical test is concerned, but would indicate the possibility of further light being thrown on the subject by photography.

Ripon, May 24

N. W. TAYLOR

[WE never heard of any one (except blind people, of course) who could not see lightning, nor have we any idea how the colour of the iris (or reflection either) can have to do with it. As to the duration and visibility of a flash, see NATURE, vol. xxii. pp. 340-41. As to "summer lightning," the following statement from Prof. Tait's lecture on Thunderstorms (NATURE, vol. xxii. p. 438) may be of interest:—"I have said nothing of what is commonly called *summer lightning*, which is probably, at least in a great many cases, merely the faint effect of a distant thunderstorm, but which has also been observed when the sky appeared tolerably clear, and when it was certain that no thunderstorm of the ordinary kind had occurred within a hundred miles. In such cases it is probable that we see the lightning of a storm which is taking place in the upper strata of the atmosphere, at such a height that the thunder is inaudible, partly on account of the distance, partly on account of the fact that it takes its origin in air of small density." We know that Prof. Tait speaks from having himself seen what he here describes, which shows unquestionably that (*on some rare occasions*) its source is really above our heads, and not (as is the general rule) a thunderstorm of the ordinary kind several miles off.—ED.]

Curious Nest-building—"Scarecrows"

THERE is an old house at Whetstone at which a robin lately built its nest in a singular position. The gate in the garden wall, opposite the door, is opened from inside by a servant, when the bell rings. To do this she goes to a little hole in the wall close by the gate, and pushes along a small bell-pull handle in the line of the wall (the motion very slight). In the space behind this handle, and evidently scanty for the purpose, a robin built its nest, and it is now filled with little birds, which stretch out their yellow gaping beaks when one pushes the handle. The case is the more curious in that the master of the house, fearing inconvenience on both sides, had the nest twice removed when in course of building; but the robin persisted, and was ultimately allowed. A little way along from this gate is an old disused pump, the front of which opens on hinges. Round the vertical rod of this pump a tom tit has laboriously built up a pile of twigs and various scraps, quite filling the body of the pump

for about a foot in depth; and on the top is the nest proper, with six or seven eggs. The handle is never moved by any one. The bird apparently enters at the hinge.

While on this topic I would ask, Has any systematic study been given to the question of scares for birds? I recently sowed some grass and clover seed on a lawn, and, to scare the sparrows, stuck up some bits of wood, with square pieces of paper, attached with string to flutter in the wind; but from the occasional position of sparrows on the lawn, I suspect the radius of action of these scares was decidedly limited. Are birds most scared by still effigies of persons, or by sight of movements apart from such imitation, or again by sounds, as in a scare I saw lately, where pieces of glass were hung so as to clink together?

Finchley, May 29

M.

Ground Ivy

I SHOULD like to know if a peculiarity I often see in the position of the stigmas in the pistillate form of this flower is generally observed. Instead of the stigmas opening up and down from the style as usual in Labiates, they often diverge to right and left across the flower, and the style also often curves forward, so as greatly to facilitate cross-fertilisation as it seems to me. If I am right this slight change may be of interest as a step towards dioeciousness. I found this peculiarity in 291 out of 531 flowers with abortive stamens which I looked at; the stigmas opened in the usual way in 85, while in 141 one stigma was vertical and one horizontal; 14 cases were doubtful. In some unopened buds, the stigmas already diverged horizontally. For comparison I looked at 418 perfect flowers, and here, while the stigmas of 360 opened as usual, only 15 spread horizontally; 34 had one stigma vertical and one horizontal, and 9 cases were doubtful.

Geldeston, May 22

S. S. DOWSON

Meteor

I HAVE just seen a very splendid meteor (at 10.40 p.m.). I watched it during about thirty seconds, in which time it traversed the heavens from about the point south-east nearly to that of north-west, where it burst. Its path was nearly parallel to the horizon, probably approaching it at an angle of about 5 degrees. When first seen it appeared nearly yellow as to colour, with a very fine tail, but just before it broke up the colour changed to white, and the fragments reminded me very much of some "magnesium stars" fired from a rocket. No doubt you will have a quantity of communications concerning this meteor. I wondered whether any one else had noticed this appearance.

Filston Hall, Shoreham, Kent, June 3

A. HALL

WASPS (L. C.).—Thanks; but there is nothing new in your observations.

MIMICRY (DR. KESTIVEN).—The occurrence is perfectly well known. It is probably *Uropteryx Sambucana*. You have mistaken the anterior for the posterior extremity.

RECENT ORNITHOLOGICAL WORKS¹

TO those who imagine that British ornithology is worked out, and that there is nothing left to do in this well-worn field, we commend the study of the present book, as presenting us with a delightfully fresh view of an old and familiar subject. The author is already well known to the public from his admirable books of Siberian travel, but it is only his private friends who have been aware of the devotion to this favourite branch of science which has characterised Mr. Seebohm for many long years, when most people imagined him to be absorbed in business in the north of England. Brief excursions to points of interest on our own coasts, snatched in intervals of scanty leisure, succeeded in after years by more important expeditions to Greece and Asia Minor, the River Petchora, the Yenisei, &c., have given him an acquaintance with field-ornithology which is surpassed by few of his contemporaries, while the fact that the dry details of literary research have no terrors for him is proved by the

¹ "A History of British Birds, with Coloured Illustrations of their Eggs." By Henry Seebohm. Published by the Author, 1883.