

“. . . 23 Juli, 1883

“Verehrter Herr College,—Ihre freundliche Gesinnung gegen mich, ermunthigt mich, Ihnen folgenden Fall vorzutragen, mit der Bitte möglichst viele Ihrer Herrn Collegen und, wenn Sie es für gut halten, auch die Presse davon in Kenntniss zu setzen.

“Ich hatte schon öfter aus England Briefe erhalten von Candidate für irgendwelche . . . Professur mit der Bitte ein Zeugniß ueber ihre Leistungen anzustellen. Ich habe, da mir diese Art der Bewerbung, wie sie in England leider gebräuchlich ist, im höchsten Grade zuwider, meist derartige Schreiben gar nicht beantwortet. Neulich erhielt ich nun aber einen Brief aus . . . von einem gewissen . . . der an Schamlosigkeit Alles uebersteigt, zum Mittel der Bestechung greift. Es klingt unglaublich, aber Herr . . . ist so schamlos, mir als Preis für ein Empfehlungsschreiben *Geld anzubieten*. Damit Sie sich selbst davon ueberzeugen können, sende ich Ihnen das Original mit der ergebensten Bitte mir dasselbe nach gewonnener Einsicht bezw. Abschrift, wieder zurückzusenden. Eingelegt war eine Anweisung auf 1 guinea! Letztere sende ich heute ohne Brief recommandirt an . . . zurück. Ich habe Beider hier meinen Freunden gezeigt und werde auch vor Zeugen die Rücksendung der Anweisung auf 1 Guinea vornehmen.

“Ich glaube, verehrter Herr College, dieser Fall ist dazu angethan, weiteren Kreisen mitgetheilt zu werden, um zu verhindern dass ein solch erbärmlicher Mensch wie . . . etwas die Stelle in . . . erhalte. Ihnen im voraus für Ihre Mühe dankend mit vorzüglichster Hochachtung.

“Ihr Ergebenster, . . .”

I imagine that all Englishmen on reading the above will, like myself, be filled with shame that any one speaking our tongue should have laid himself open to such a rebuke.

At the same time it seems to me quite possible that Prof. C.'s view of the matter is unduly severe and indeed unjust. I do not know Mr. A. B. personally, and am quite ignorant of what character he bears; but I can conceive that he has fallen into this disgrace through a clumsy attempt to carry out to its logical conclusion our English system of testimonials. He can hardly have thought that so distinguished and successful a man as Prof. C. could be *bribed* to say something handsome by a post-office order for *one guinea*; and he cannot be so ignorant as not to be aware of the just pride which all Germans feel in the integrity and honour of their professoriate; it is quite open for us to suppose that he was really offering Prof. C. a *fee for a professional service*. And really when you come to think of it, this is a point of view for which something may be said. Only last week, in talking to a colleague about testimonials, I asked him how many testimonials he wrote on an average a week. He replied that he thought *not more than a dozen or fifteen*. In fact when a man, especially one who has spent some years in teaching, has acquired a certain reputation in science, the tax upon his time and energy for the skilful composition and writing of appropriate testimonials amounts during his lifetime to a something which, converted at the market value of his powers into pounds, shillings, and pence, would appear no mean sum.

Now—and this is the kernel of the matter—no one would grudge time spent in assisting a deserving man to get into a place for which he was fitted; but our testimonial system has nowadays reached such dimensions that only a few of the testimonials written have this end in view. I am writing freely, because this is a very serious matter, and one which I have much at heart; I therefore do not hesitate to say, what indeed is well known, that great skill has been reached by many in the art both of writing and reading testimonials. Many testimonials are framed after that well-known formula for acknowledging the receipt of pamphlets which runs as follows:—“Dear Sir,—I beg to thank you for the valuable pamphlet which you have so kindly sent me, and which I will lose no time in reading.” And I heard the other day a testimonial praised because it showed the electors whom not to elect.

Surely the time has come to consider whether this plague of testimonials (for it is hardly less) cannot in some measure be stayed. At all events, cannot in higher places at least some steps be taken to mend matters? When such a post as a professorship is vacant, it is the duty of the electors to make themselves acquainted with the manner of man wanted and to find him; our present plan lays upon all persons connected with the subject of the chair the burden of trying to enlighten the electors as to the claims of this or that candidate. A passage in Prof. C.'s letter shows how degrading the Germans think our method; and it is not agreeable to Englishmen to read such

passages. Yet every one who has had to struggle for a post with testimonials must feel that such criticisms are just, and that the process is one distasteful to a right-minded man. And it is also unnecessary. I, for one, would rejoice to see the German system of a “call” introduced into our professorial elections; but if we cannot obtain this, let us at least do away with testimonials. In the recent elections at the University of Cambridge, the following significant phrase occurred in the announcements of the vacancies: “testimonials, *if any*, to be addressed, &c.”; and as a matter of fact, in the cases of the four chairs recently filled up on the new system, the man chosen in each case had sent in no testimonials. Why cannot this be done in all elections to professorial chairs? Where, as may sometimes be the case, the candidates are previously not all thoroughly known, the electors, by reference, formal or otherwise, can easily make themselves acquainted with their relative merits; and indeed, as I just now said, it is their duty to make such inquiries, and not simply to collate, interpret, and form their decisions on the curious documents which we call testimonials.

Hence, though I venture to send this communication to NATURE for the purpose of making an example of Mr. A. B.'s post-office order for one guinea, I cannot help thinking that he, though sinning, is also sinned against, and that our system of testimonials is to be blamed as well as he. M. FOSTER

Birds and Cholera

YOU ask in one of your “Notes” (p. 329), what can be the cause of birds leaving a locality before the approach of cholera? The following anecdote may be of interest, but I of course cannot vouch for its having any real connection with the subject. It must have been in the summer of 1848 that I was invited to meet a party at my uncle's house in the Close at Salisbury, on the occasion of the visit of the Antiquarian Society. On arriving I found the cholera raging, and the party put off. There were in the house only the gardener and his wife, whom, having been previously servants to my father, I had known from my childhood. The gardener told me that, just before the outbreak of the disease, the man whose duty it was to oil the vane upon the spire had made his annual ascent (of 404 feet), and had perceived a foul scent, which, it seems, had not been noticed below. The inhabitants connected this with the appearance of the epidemic shortly afterwards. Birds might no doubt be affected by such a circumstance. O. FISHER

THIS has been remarked before. It is recorded of the great outbreak of cholera at Salisbury in 1849—can any of your correspondents say where?—that an officer recently from India, happening to make the ascent of the Cathedral, exclaimed suddenly, “I smell cholera!” Immediately afterwards the outbreak followed, when it was observed that the birds (swallows are especially in my remembrance) had fled the neighbourhood. If these two incidents are to be trusted, it can scarcely be doubtful that there is a connection between them. HENRY CECIL

Bregner, Bournemouth, August 6

YOU will find a very interesting but rather sceptical paper on the supposed connection of birds leaving towns with invasions of cholera (NATURE, vol. xxviii. p. 329), by Pfarrer Häckel of Windsheim, in the monthly journal, *Der zoologische Garten* (Bavaria), September, 1873 (vol. xiv. p. 328), published by the Zool. Gesellschaft of Frankfurt-on-Main. D. Wn.

Freiburg, Badenia, August 4

Animal Intelligence

SEVERAL remarkable instances of intelligence in animals have been given in recent numbers of NATURE. Possibly the following instance of reasoning power in an elephant may not be without interest:—Some years ago I was ascending the lower part of the Darjeeling Hill Road, in the Himalaya Mountains, from Terai. At a certain part of the road, where we met a string of bullock carts, the outer few feet was encumbered by a long flat-topped heap of small rounded boulders, piled there to be broken up for road metal; from the outer edge there was a steep, almost precipitous, slope. On the inner side of the road was a small drain, and then a few feet of comparatively level ground between the drain and the slope above. The carts just mentioned were of the usual kind, the body (constructed of bamboo) about