

recent of the electrical inventions, Mr. Munro has tried to accomplish a well nigh impossible task. That he should have been perfectly successful in his endeavour is hardly to be expected; nevertheless he has produced a book which a person unacquainted with electrical science may read with pleasure, and from which such a person may learn what wonders are accomplished by the aid of electricity, and in a general way how this powerful and subtle agent does its work.

The first thirty-one pages, in which the author gives so much of the theory of electricity as may be necessary to enable any one to understand his descriptions of the inventions which follow, form without doubt the weak part of this book. In describing the effect of grouping thermopiles and elements in series, the author seems to have confused electromotive force with current strength, for he says that with such a combination a powerful current equal to the sum of the elementary ones will circulate in the connecting wire. The short chapter on induction is likely to cause in the mind of a person unacquainted with electrical science some confusion between stational and current induction.

With the fourth chapter a description of the inventions begins, and here it may be said that the book proper begins. The chapters on the telegraph and telephone and all the inventions which depend on the telephone are excellent, the general principles being so clearly given as to be readily understood. The theory of the dynamo is too difficult for an essentially popular book, and here, as in one or two other places, the author has wisely refrained from leading his readers into a sea of complexity from which they could with difficulty have escaped, but has carried them over with an agility worthy of a conjurer. The remaining chapters, which deal with lighting, transmission of power, heating, and plating, are written in a popular style, and will no doubt be read with interest.

C. V. B.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his correspondents. Neither can he undertake to return, or to correspond with the writers of, rejected manuscripts. No notice is taken of anonymous communications.]

[The Editor urgently requests correspondents to keep their letters as short as possible. The pressure on his space is so great that it is impossible otherwise to insure the appearance even of communications containing interesting and novel facts.]

Professor Henrici's Address at Southport

MR. J. J. WALKER, in his letter printed in your last number (p. 515), draws attention to the works of Chasles, and I am glad that he has thus given me an opportunity of saying a few words about the relation in which the writings of this great geometer stand to those of the German geometers mentioned in my address.

I am fully aware that his works are well known in England, and so I believe are those of Poncelet and others. But the study of the works of Chasles does not give as complete a view of the variety of methods invented and results obtained on the Continent as might be expected from the author of the "Aperçu Historique" (1837). In that brilliant work he regrets himself that he does not understand German, and does not therefore give an account of what was done in Germany by "Steiner, Plücker, Möbius, &c.," and it seems that he always remained ignorant of it. At all events he did not fill up those gaps in his important "Rapport" of 1870. In much of his own work contained in his "Aperçu" he had been anticipated by Möbius and Steiner, and his "Géométrie Supérieure," which appeared twenty years later than Steiner's "Entwickelungen," and twenty-six years later than the "Bary-centrische Calcul," by Möbius, and which is, I believe, in England considered the chief book from which to learn modern Continental geometry, must not be taken as a standard of what at the time of its publication was known in Germany.

With regard to the arithmetic, I beg to point out that I only judge from my experience as an examiner. The methods of

abbreviating calculations with decimals must have been known long before De Morgan, I fancy, but that is a very different thing from having them introduced as an important part of the teaching of arithmetic in schools.

The manner in which a large number of candidates worked examples at the London University Matriculation Examination startled me considerably, especially as I noticed that the process of working decimals described in my address was used by candidates who otherwise gave evidence of really sound knowledge and good teaching.

O. HENRICI

The New Comet

THE new comet (Pons) was seen here last night in the 6-inch equatorial, its place closely corresponding to that of the ephemeris contained in the recent *Dun Echt Circular*.

In the comet eyepiece it was large, round, and faint, with no tail and but little trace of central condensation. It might, in sweeping have been taken for a nebula, having very much that look. I could not see it in the 2-inch finder, and though fairly visible in the comet eyepiece (power 35), a very little mist that came up rapidly obscured it.

J. RAND CAPRON

Guildown Observatory, Guildford, October 2

The Genus "Simotes" of Snakes

IN the report of the Committee appointed by the British Association for the investigation of Timor Laut, given in at Southport during the recent meeting, I find that among the snakes discovered by me one has been described as a new species of Simotes, and is noted as being of "special interest, as no species of the genus had hitherto been previously known to occur eastward of Java." In the *Proceedings of the Zoological Society* for the year 1864, p. 180, a species of Simotes, *S. australis*, was described by Gerard Krefft, from Port Curtis, Australia, as being "the first Simotes discovered in Australia."

Aberdeen, October 1

HENRY O. FORBES

Floating Pumice

REFERRING to a note in the last number of NATURE (p. 532), giving an account of a steamer's having encountered vast quantities of pumice in the Indian Ocean, it may be of interest to record that after passing, in the R.M.S. *Quetta*, the Straits of Sunda on July 9 last (having sailed close under the then active Krakatoa), we traversed a continuous field, unbroken as far as the eye could reach, of pumice, every day till the evening of the 12th, when our position must have been six hours (\pm 60 miles) to the west of our noon position, $93^{\circ} 54'$ E. long. and $5^{\circ} 53'$ S. lat. Capt. Templeton assured me that there was, singularly enough a current against us all the way from the Straits of one-third of a mile per hour. There can be no doubt that this pumice came from Krakatoa, and possibly also that mentioned by the steamer in your note last week. The pumice knobs were all water-worn, and a few had barnacles of about one inch in length growing on them. It will be recollected that the eruption first broke out on May 22 and 23.

Aberdeen, October 1

HENRY O. FORBES

"Elevation and Subsidence"

IN the number of NATURE for September 20, Mr. W. F. Stanley (p. 488) requests references to where it has been considered that the sinking on the coast of Greenland is due to the weight of inland accumulation of ice. If Mr. Stanley has only so lately as the present year advocated this opinion, though doubtless the idea has arisen independently with him, he certainly has no right to consider himself the originator of it, which he seems disposed to do. So far as I am aware the priority is due to Mr. T. F. Jamieson (*Quart. Journ. Geol. Soc.* vol. xxi. 1865), who attributed the subsidence, which is universally conceded to have occurred during the Glacial period, to the enormous weight of snow resting on the land, considering that if the interior of the earth on which the crust rests is in a state of fusion, a depression might take place from a cause of this kind; and then the melting of the ice would account for the rising of the land which seems to have followed upon the retreat of the glaciers.

Unaware of this proposition, in 1871 (President's Address, *Proc. Liverpool Geol. Soc.* 1871-72; *Geol. Mag.* vol. ix. 1872) I in the same way ascribed the subsidence of the land during the Glacial period to the combined weight of snow and the boulders