

tion to bring certain questions of metaphysics within the scope of scientific inquiry. That any one should have rejected the current method of metaphysics in favour of a geometrical investigation into the nature of God and existence, cannot be otherwise than significant to persons who seek to determine the psychological problem of the nature of consciousness by physiological means. Hence it is that there are some students who think that, if any philosophy were possible, it were that of Spinoza, and others who say that in the work of Mr. Spencer and Prof. Clifford they find the inheritance which Spinoza left behind him.

Mr. Hale White has done his difficult work well. The translation is executed with great care, and the style of the original has been reproduced with some success. That English readers of Spinoza have entertained very loose notions of his real teaching has been due in no small measure to the very inaccurate translation which has hitherto passed current. The present volume should do much to improve the popular conception of Spinoza's system.

At the risk of repetition of what has already been insisted on in these columns, it is right to contrast the position of the naturalists who accept Spinoza's application of scientific methods to metaphysical questions, with the procedure of Kant and those who are currently described as Neo-Kantians. It is the more desirable to revert to this topic because, although there is much complaint that the Neo-Kantians do little (if anything) more than repeat Kant's criticism of the naturalist (or, as he would have described it, dogmatic) doctrine, there is but little evidence that this criticism has been considered, much less met. People go on reasoning upon the old lines about the relation of mind to body and of God to the world as if Kant (to borrow a phrase from another branch of learning) had never obtained a rule calling upon them to show cause why there should not be a new trial of all such questions. It cannot be sufficiently borne in mind that at the present time there are only two courses open in this reference to conscientious thinkers. Either they must abstain altogether from the discussion of an increasing number of problems which are suggested by scientific inquiry, or they must be at the pains, however irksome, to master the nature of the sceptical doubts which Kant brought to bear upon the possibility of these problems. And it may be added that to single them out for elimination is not so easy a task as might be supposed. Probably the real reason why the study of Spinoza's ethics is attended with so much difficulty is that the extraordinary instinct which guides men of the highest genius in inquiries in new and unknown regions raised doubts in his mind which the investigations of Kant subsequently exhibited as the consequences of a more profoundly sceptical point of view. That difficulties arise when men reflect upon the nature of God was for Spinoza, as for Kant, due to the impossibility of reasoning on such matters as if they were ordinary facts of experience. In Spinozism the geometrical method culminated in the abrupt cessation of thought of this kind, just as in Hume empiricism ended in the paralysis of speculation. Had Spinoza pressed his distinction between different kinds of knowledge further, his system must have become in a greater or less degree sceptical in its tendencies—sceptical

in the sense in which Kant was sceptical as a preliminary to reconstruction, or in which, to take the case of a very recent scientific writer, the late Prof. Clifford was a sceptic when he completed his analysis of experience with his theory of ejects. The difference between the three cases is that Kant clearly saw the origin and nature of the difficulties raised by himself, and made the inquiry the preliminary to a radically different discussion of the issues raised in philosophy and science alike. It were well if the fact were less left out of account that the rule obtained by Kant for a new trial of these issues has never yet been discharged.

R. B. HALDANE

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.]

The Krakatoa Eruption

THE Council of the Royal Society has appointed a Committee for the purpose of collecting the various accounts of the volcanic eruption at Krakatoa, and attendant phenomena in such form as shall best provide for their preservation and promote their usefulness.

The Committee invite the communication of authenticated facts respecting the fall of pumice and of dust, the position and extent of floating pumice, the date of exceptional quantities of pumice reaching various shores, observation of unusual disturbances of barometric pressure and of sea-level, the presence of sulphurous vapours, the distances at which the explosions were heard, and exceptional effects of light and colour in the atmosphere.

The Committee will be glad to receive also copies of published papers, articles, and letters bearing upon the subject.

Correspondents are requested to be very particular in giving the date, exact time (stating whether Greenwich or local), and position whence all recorded facts were observed. The greatest practicable precision in all these respects is essential.

All communications are to be addressed to

G. J. SYMONS,
Chairman Krakatoa Committee
Royal Society, Burlington House, W., February 12

The Remarkable Sunsets

THE following facts in reference to the unusual sunsets, as witnessed in the United States, will I hope be of sufficient value to your readers to justify an insertion in the pages of NATURE.

The place from which I write is 1063 feet above sea-level, 40° 48' 47" N. lat. and 81° 53' 37" W. long. from Greenwich. The main features of the exhibition here have been the crimson glow—the first and after-glow, with other accompanying colours, closely corresponding with those in England and Europe. Hence I need not occupy your pages with a special description.

I have on record seven cases, nearly all the weather would permit me to see. These occurred on November 27, December 9, 10, 25, and 28, and on January 13 and 17.

The first and second glow have extended in two or three instances, though faintly, to the zenith, and the first has occasionally been reflected on the eastern sky. On December 28, the most brilliant exhibition in the series, an arch was formed in the east, the colours red and yellowish green, very soft, and much blended. The crimson glow on the sky flooded the western sides of buildings with an unearthly light, and cast faint shadows across the snow. The appearance of the after-glow, when the sun had reached a certain angle in its decline, favours the view that it is a reflection of the first. If this be true, it is not neces-