

causal connection between parasitic Bacteria and infectious diseases, especially in warm-blooded animals, and on diseases caused by Bacteria in the lower animals and in plants. The work will be very useful to all who may wish to obtain "a general view" of this important subject. It has been well translated, and we may note that a valuable list of publications relating to Bacteria is given at the end of the volume.

Mattie's Secret. By Émile Desmaux. (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1887.)

THIS book is evidently a French work very well translated into English. It is practically a book of delightful gossip, touching on many important points of science; while theoretically it is a pleasing story of a sister who devotes her time to her little brother driven from school and books by approaching blindness. The scientific part opens with the explosion of fire-damp, and goes on to the history of coal, how it is found, in what shapes; and then to the coal-mine itself, how the work is done, and the precautions which have to be taken. Next follows the history of diamonds, what they are, how they are shaped into different forms; and then comes graphite manufactured into pencils. The history of beer here follows, how it is prepared, and its use. Then the author explains torpedoes and torpedo-boats, how they are worked, and the method of launching the torpedo. Glycerine, dynamite, and gunpowder, their dangerous properties, and how they are prepared, are next referred to, and this is followed by an introduction to the phenomena of sound.

The book contains a hundred good illustrations showing the different scientific processes, and it is thoroughly interesting throughout.

The question arises whether fairy tales of science are not as interesting to children as fairy tales of the ordinary description. The author is evidently of this opinion, and we are inclined to agree with him.

A. L.

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.]

Politics and the Presidency of the Royal Society.

YOUR leader of last week reminds me not a little of one of those days that begin somewhat brightly but end with a thunderstorm. As a Fellow of the Royal Society, I fail to see what our President has done to incur the reprobation of the writer of this article. I will take in order the two charges brought against him. Of these, the first is that he became President of the Victoria Institute, the second being that he has allowed himself to be returned as member of Parliament for his own University.

I do not fancy the writer means to assert that the predecessors of Prof. Stokes, more than one of whom held strong views connected with theology, virtually laid these aside during their tenure of office. At any rate, they gave ample expression to them both before and after this tenure. I gather that the objection rather is that Prof. Stokes, during his tenure of office, became President of another Society—the Victoria Institute. Now, Sir, I can see at once an objection to the President of the Royal Society being at the same time President of any of the other scientific Societies, such as the Astronomical, the Physical, the Chemical, or the Zoological. But I confess I fail to see any objection to his taking office in a Philosophical Society, which treats of subjects not really connected with science.

It may perhaps be thought that the Victoria Institute was

deficient in breadth of view, and I think that until lately it was open to this objection. But I have reason to think that Prof. Stokes has infused into it a better spirit, and his admirable opening address to this Society has, if I mistake not, appeared in your columns.

In this address he acts entirely the part of a peacemaker, endeavouring to show that the conclusions of science cannot be held to come into collision with what may be regarded as the essential truths of the Christian religion. It is probable that a minority of Fellows of the Royal Society may believe that certain scientific doctrines have disposed of the claims of Christianity. Must, therefore, the President be precluded from going to church during his tenure of office? Unquestionably the going to church implies taking part in a public action about which the opinions of the Fellows could be divided.

It is in truth exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to formulate a principle which shall extinguish the peculiarities of one individual while it leaves untouched the field around him representing the rights and privileges of others. The thing was tried once before in the time of Darius the Mede, but the results of the experiment were not of an encouraging nature.

I come now to the second and most important charge against our President. And here I confess I cannot help being a little amused at the writer's dread that the President will be hunted out of his scientific chair at all inconvenient hours, and driven to his seat at St. Stephen's by one of the Whips of the House. And I confess that I am equally amused at the thought of the Royal Society suffering the fearful political degradation depicted by the writer, entertaining as I do the most complete confidence in the integrity of this Society. I grant freely that under ordinary circumstances it is undesirable that the President of the Royal Society should enter the House of Commons. But these are no ordinary times, and we are now engaged in a struggle that means more than mere party warfare.

I do not wish to introduce politics into these pages, but I may state that in my opinion, and I think I may say in that of many Fellows of the Royal Society, the question just now is one between law and anarchy. But in a state of anarchy, what will suffer more than knowledge? In such a state will there be leisure to investigate—leisure even to dispute? And if this be so, should not Culture, which is more threatened than anything else, raise her voice in the Legislature and do what in her lies to prevent this deplorable consummation?

Surely it is this grave question, rather than any wish to represent the every-day interests of science, that has induced our President to enter the House. He has chosen to be an Englishman first, and a man of science afterwards. Who will blame him for this?

BALFOUR STEWART.

THE able article which appeared in your last number (p. 49) under the title of "Politics and the Presidency of the Royal Society," raises a question of such magnitude, not only in its relation to science, but also to many other branches of human activity, that I trust to your courtesy and impartiality to give me an opportunity of briefly indicating some considerations calculated to lead to a conclusion different from that at which the writer of the article in question has arrived.

The Royal Society is composed of members who differ from one another in their views on political and many other subjects; nay, more, of men who differ from one another in their views on many scientific subjects. Their devotion to the advancement of natural knowledge is the common ground on which they meet.

The political opinions of our President are entirely unknown to us officially, and it may confidently be asserted that he is as highly esteemed and valued as President by those among us who may happen privately to differ from him widely in politics as by those who entertain similar political opinions to his own. His action in political matters concerns us as little as his opinions. No doubt we should be concerned if he were to undertake any duties of so engrossing a kind as to prevent him from fully discharging the duties of President, but we should be so equally if the additional work were not political.

It is conceivable, though we will hope not very likely, that at some future time the Society might have to return a member to the House of Commons; the Society would then be in a similar position to that in which several of our Universities are placed; the arguments used by the writer of the article might then be applied.

Our President cannot, however, be supposed to have entered