

A Dictionary of Place-Names. By C. Blackie. Third Edition, revised. (London: John Murray, 1887.)

EVERY teacher of geography knows that the derivation of place names never fails to excite the interest of intelligent scholars. It is satisfactory, therefore, that there should have been a demand for a third edition of Mr. Blackie's excellent book, in which he presents in plain and simple language many of the most suggestive results established by students of topographical etymology. The work has been carefully revised, and in its present form ought to be of service to many a "general reader" and tourist, as well as to schoolmasters and their pupils. Prof. J. S. Blackie contributes to the volume an introductory essay, in which he offers, in his lively way, many useful hints as to the spirit in which the study of topographical etymology ought to be pursued.

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 Supposed Earthquake in England.

FROM the inquiries which have been made it is now ascertained that the loud noise—as of an explosion—heard over so wide an area on the morning of November 20, and referred to by Mr. Worthington G. Smith in your issue of last week (p. 127), was due to the breaking up of a large meteor, which crossed the north of Herts from east to west, upon a line of which the extreme points are approximately Saffron Walden, in Essex, and Swindon, in Oxfordshire. The meteor was seen by one observer from Hertford, and probably it would have been generally noticed but for the foggy state of the atmosphere. I have undertaken to investigate this matter as far as Herts is concerned, and shall be very much obliged to any of your readers who can give me assistance if they will send a note of their observations, especially as to the direction from which the shock they experienced appeared to reach them. H. GEORGE FORDHAM.

Odsey Grange, Royston, Cambridgeshire, December 12.

The "Umbria's" Wave.

IN NATURE, vol. xxxvi. (p. 508) you published some details from Mr. W. Watson about the wave which struck the *Umbria* in mid-Atlantic. Having heard of two similar cases, and being in possession of the details of one, I have made the following comparison.

Comparison of the "Umbria's" and the "Faraday's" wave.

| | <i>Umbria.</i> | <i>Faraday.</i> |
|------------------------------------|---|-----------------|
| Date | 26.7.87 | 14.2.84 |
| Hour | 4.40 a.m. | 6.45 a.m. |
| Position of ship { Long. W. | 27° 8' | 27° 53' |
| { Lat. N. | 50° 5' | 46° 11' |
| Ship's speed—knots | about 16 | about 6 |
| Ship's course | { West (probably } { partly South } | E. 18° N. |
| The wave struck | the bow | the port beam. |
| Probable course of wave | { East partly } { North. } { South partly } { East. | |

These two courses if prolonged backwards would intersect at about 30° W. lat. and 50° N. long. This is the very point where the *Faraday*, while laying a cable in 1882, discovered a reef rising about 6000 feet above the bed of the ocean. The *Umbria* when struck was about 120 miles to the east of this position, and the *Faraday* about twice as far to the south-east.

The *Faraday's* wave was seen fully five minutes before it struck, and then like the *Umbria's*, it did considerable damage.

Three life-boats, chart-house, deck-house, and part of the bulwarks were smashed and one of the large buoys carried away.

In his letter Mr. Watson doubts whether this wave was caused by an earthquake, but a few more similar occurrences in the neighbourhood of Faraday's Reef will possibly demonstrate it to be of recent and volcanic growth. C. E. STROMEYER.

Strawberry Hill, November 22.

The Planet Mercury.

THE atmosphere in this country is generally so unfavourable that it is a very rare occurrence to see the planet Mercury even at its greatest elongation from the sun, unless carefully looked for. My experience of the last few days may therefore be worth mentioning. The day before yesterday, at 10 minutes past 7 in the morning, I was in bed at some distance from a window, through which, without directing my attention to it, I saw a star shining with sufficient brightness in the twilight to attract my notice. I raised the window and made use of a large opera-glass, when any doubt I had would have been dispelled even if I had had no previous experience of Mercury, for there was to be seen a small planet with distinct disk some 15" above the horizon—Venus, a magnificent object, being of course visible also. The same thing happened this morning, when I again noticed Mercury, without having him in my mind, before leaving my bed; but this time I was better prepared, and in the course of the next quarter of an hour had shown the planet, in a 3¼-inch telescope, to several persons who saw it for the first time. G. F. P.

Hanworth, Middlesex, December 9.

Meteor.

ON Friday night, about 9.15, a fine meteor, as bright as a star of the first magnitude, was seen in the western sky. It made its appearance at an elevation of 35° west-south west, and disappeared in the west, at an elevation of 20°, leaving no streak. Perhaps some other of your readers might be able to identify the meteor, and thus a clue to its course might be arrived at. If you think this worth inserting, it may interest some one.

Barrow-on-Humber, Hull, December 9. M. H. MAW.

"Fairy Rings."

YOUR article on "Fairy Rings" (November 17, p. 61) speaks of rings of 100 feet in diameter as wholly exceptional. In the parish of Stebbing, in Essex, there is a field containing numerous rings of *Paxillus giganteus*. The largest of these is incomplete, being broken in places by gorse bushes and stopped on one side by a hedge and ditch. Measurement is consequently difficult, but the diameter of the ring cannot be less than 120 feet. At Bunchrew, in Inverness-shire, I once saw the same fungus covering about a rood of ground. The grass all over this was very coarse and dark green in colour, being chiefly *Dactylis glomerata*, but there was no trace of a ring. J. SARGEAUNT.

Felsted, December 6.

Music in Nature.

IN NATURE (vol. xxxvi. pp. 343 and 605) reference was made to melodies of birds, &c. I have often heard in the provinces of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia a bird which sings as clear and accurate a melody as can be given forth by any human songster. It is a small gray bird with double lunas of velvety white on the sides of its head. I do not know its name. The song varies somewhat in different individuals, but always has the same characteristics. The commonest form is as follows:—



Another variety often heard is thus:—

