clouds are seen from here on almost every clear night near the summer solstice. For the last two years special note has been taken of them. In 1887 they were first seen at midnight on June 13, and last seen on July 20; this year their first appearance at midnight was on June 4, and they are still visible every clear night. The clouds are not, as far as I have observed, coloured, but shine with a pearly or silvery lustre. I have seen them at midnight as high as 30° altitude, but they are generally confined to the first 10° or so above the northern horizon. The facts that they vary greatly from night to night in appearance, being sometimes almost absent, and that one or two photographs that have been taken of them show them simply as ordinary cirrus clouds, all seem to indicate that they really are very high cirrus lighted by the sun.

I may add that the upper glows continue to be seen here, though with varying intensity, on every clear night both before sunrise and after sunset, but for the past year no reddish ring or glare has been observed round the sun in the day-time.

Ben Nevis Observatory, July 2.

R. T. OMOND.

Micromillimetre.

THE Council and the Fellows in general meeting have taken into consideration the objection raised by Prof. Rücker to the term micromillimetre.

This term was in use by microscopists long before the British Association Committee formulated their system of nomenclature; but nevertheless the Society are unwilling, on a question of precedence only, to insist upon retaining a word which may give rise to confusion.

The Council have therefore directed the editors of the Journal to discontinue the use of the term "micromillimetre," and to substitute for it that of "micron," which has been in use for as long a time as the former word.

This resolution has been confirmed by a general meeting of the Society, who agree with the Council in thinking that the term "micrometre," proposed by Prof. Rücker, would give rise to considerable confusion from its similarity to "micrometer."

FRANK CRISP,
Secretary.

Royal Microscopical Society, June 21.

A Prognostic of Thunder.

AMONG prognostics of thunder given in books and elsewhere I have never met with mention of what has for years been to me one of the most trustworthy of weather signs, viz. the formation of *parallel streaks or bars*, definite in form but limited in number, extent, and persistence, appearing chiefly in cirrus and cirro-stratus, but also on the surface (apparently) of nimbus. In cirrus they give often almost the first intimation of coming change after settled weather, and are almost, if not quite, invariably followed within twenty four or thirty-six hours by thunder. When they appear on nimbus the interval is much less, but they are not seen, I think, on the thunder-cloud itself. These small patches of definitely marked "parallel bars" are to be distinguished from the more general parallel arrangement which is often seen on a much larger scale, but which has not, so far as my observation goes, any very distinct value as a weather prognostic.

As the thundery season is now on, it would be interesting to have the observation confirmed by others, and the connection of this particular form of cloud with electric disturbance explained. I have no doubt of the fact, and have often, and several times within the present year, pointed out these "parallel bars" to friends who had never observed them, and hardly ever has my prediction of thunder failed to come true. In the very few cases in which thunder has not followed in the same locality, I think I may say that there have never been wanting instances of its occurrence within a moderate distance.

B. WOODD-SMITH.

Branch Hill Lodge, Hampstead Heath, June 29.

Parasites of the Hessian Fly.

ALTHOUGH numbers of these most useful insects were bred last year from puparia of 1886 and 1887, there seemed to be a good deal of doubt among some entomologists as to whether the American species, *Merisus destructor*, had occurred. I bred a

large number of various kinds, four of which appeared to me to agree in every respect as to form, colour, and marking with the description given by Prof. Riley.

During the present month (June) I have bred a very large number of this parasite, specimens of which (both male and female) I sent to Dr. Charles Lindeman, of Moscow, who has just replied that "the specimens of parasites sent, bred in England from the Hessian fly, seem to me to be *Merisus destructor* of Riley, &c." He thus fully confirms my opinion of last year, that the American parasite had occurred here. Early in the spring I bred several other parasites which, I am much inclined to think are *Platygaster herrickii* of Riley; and, if this is correct, it strengthens the opinion that part of the attack came from America.

The damp muggy weather appears to be decidedly favourable for the development of "the pest," the larvæ of which I found at the beginning of this week engaged in weakening the stems of barley; and on June 2 I observed a female Hessian fly ovipositing. The number of eggs laid was 158! Truly a most prolific "pest," requiring both natural and artificial means to check its increase.

F. E. S.

Fact and Fiction.

AS Mr. Grant Allen reads NATURE,—indeed this is evident from a sentence in his novel "This Mortal Coil," now in course of publication in *Chambers' Journal*—he will perhaps be good enough to satisfy my doubts upon the following practical points in electro- and thermo-physics. Firstly, in order to successfully attract a flash of lightning to a tree, is it necessary to bury beneath its roots a Rhumkorf coil? Secondly, do Rhumkorf coils exist which are *without* secondary wires? Thirdly, will an electric discharge ignite commercial petroleum oil?

While it is not undesirable that scientific fact should be imported into modern fiction, it is surely important that it should be fact: loose statements are apt to perpetuate themselves.

Mr. Allen is exceptionally well read and observant, and I am quite at a loss to understand why a simple solution of continuity in that part of his copper conducting wire which was immersed in the petroleum would not as well have served his purpose (if indeed, that purpose could have been effected in the way described), as the elaborate expedient of burying and destroying an expensive piece of apparatus.

Dublin, July.

HARRY NAPIER DRAPER.

The Nephridia of Earthworms.

THE number of NATURE published on June 28 last contains (p. 197) an interesting paper by Prof. Baldwin Spencer, which deals with the excretory system of the gigantic Australian earthworm *Megascolides*. Prof. Spencer promises an extended memoir upon the anatomy of this earthworm, which has not hitherto received more attention than a superficial description. In the meantime the paper in NATURE contains an abstract of the results obtained by the author from his investigation of the nephridia.

This paper is particularly interesting to myself, as I am at present preparing an account of some further investigations into the anatomy of the excretory system of earthworms, which will supplement those already published by me in the *Quart. Journ. Micr. Sci.* (January 1888).

It appears from Prof. Spencer's paper that, as he himself points out, there is a considerable resemblance between the excretory organs of *Megascolides* and of *Perichata aspergillum*, one of the species investigated by me; there are at the same time certain important differences between the two types.

In my paper upon *P. aspergillum* I described only the nephridia of the anterior segments of the body. I have since found that the nephridia of the posterior segments are in some respects different. In both cases, however, the external orifices are more numerous than I was at first inclined to suspect. They are not limited to the area of the segments which lie between the setæ, but are found all over the body, scattered irregularly; they have, in fact, no relation whatever to the segmentation of the body.

The tufts of tubules in the posterior segments of the body are not so abundantly developed as in the anterior segments, where they not only form a layer covering the body-wall and septa but occupy nearly the whole of the coelomic space available.