

The preface to "Geometry of Position," by R. H. Graham, must be consulted for the counterblast in favour of Maxwell's claim to the honour of priority.

A. G. G.

*The History of Commerce in Europe.* By H. de B. Gibbins. With Maps. (London : Macmillan and Co., 1891.)

THE chief defect of this little book is that the author does not bring into sufficient prominence the geographical element in commercial history. What are the geographical conditions which have favoured the growth of particular industries in special localities? And in what ways have such conditions affected the interchange of commodities between one part of the world and another? Mr. Gibbins has not, of course, neglected these questions, but he scarcely seems to have realized that they are of vital importance for the scientific presentation of his subject. On the other hand, his appreciation of the action of historical causes in the development of commerce is excellent; and for a general view of commercial progress his manual will be of much service to students. After an introductory chapter he considers "ancient commerce," by which he means the commerce of the Phoenicians, the Carthaginians, and the Greek colonies. He then deals with the ancient Greek States and Rome as trading communities. Next comes "medieval commerce," in connection with which he has much that is interesting to say about the Italian cities, the Hansa towns, medieval trade routes and fairs, the manufacturing centres of Europe, and other topics. Under "modern commerce" he treats of the commercial empires in the East, the commercial empires in the West, English commerce from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, European commerce in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the industrial revolution in England and the Continental wars (1793), modern English commerce, and the development of commerce in France, Germany, Holland, Russia, and the other European States. The maps are very good, and add considerably to the value of the text. We may also note that the volume includes a useful series of questions on the various chapters, and two appendices, in one of which there is a list of British produce and manufactures in 1840 and 1889, while the other consists of a table showing the present colonial empires of European Powers.

#### 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 intended for this or any other part of NATURE. No notice is taken of anonymous communications.]

#### The Albert University.

THE remarks of Mr. Thiselton Dyer upon the draft charter of the "Albert University" have my fullest concurrence. I have never desired to see such a University as is sketched in that charter set up in London by the side of the existing University. The charter and the general scheme of its proposals never obtained the sanction of the professoriate of University College whilst I was a member of that body; and many of us were as active as circumstances allowed us to be, in opposing its federal principles and bureaucratic tendency. That University and King's Colleges should be united in some way to form a University is one proposition: that the University should take the particular form excogitated by Sir George Young is another. It is well that it should be generally known that the elaborate (and to my mind mischievous) constitution sketched in the draft charter of the Albert University is the product of the devotion and ingenuity of Sir George Young, an active member of the Council of University College.

I was not aware, when I wrote in NATURE some weeks ago on this subject, that the Lord President of the Privy Council had determined to set aside the recommendations of the late Royal Commission, and to hurry through a formal

inquiry into the draft charter propounded by the Councils of University and King's Colleges.

So long as the matter was in the hands of the Commission, this charter, put forward by the Councils of the two Colleges, was merely one of many suggestions as to the proper form which a new or reconstituted University of London should take. It was notorious that the Councils' support of Sir George Young's scheme did not represent the attitude either of the Professors of the two Colleges or of those throughout the country who have special knowledge of Universities and of the best methods of academical organization.

The Royal Commission of 1888 was appointed to inquire "whether any and what kind of new University or powers is or are required for the advancement of higher education in London." The Commission took a large amount of evidence from interested parties—practically none from persons outside the London institutions concerned—and recommended that the University of London should be invited to meet the needs set forth in such documents as the draft charter of the Albert University, by some modifications of its constitution and procedure. In the event of a failure on the part of the University to do this, the Commissioners recommended that the matter should be referred back to them.

My support of the claim of University and King's Colleges to be incorporated as some kind of University has always depended on the assumption that no Commission or other serious authority could possibly accede blindly, and without full consultation of the best authorities in the land, to the scheme embodied in the Albert University draft charter. The Commissioners took, it seems to me, the only rational view of that charter—namely, that it might serve as a suggestion to the University in Burlington Gardens for a reform which would meet, at any rate, some of the objections raised to the existing constitution of the latter body.

Lord Cranbrook, however, seems anxious to hurry on the shelving if not the solution of the University of London question. Instead of referring the matter back to the Commissioners, he takes the matter out of their hands. The Commissioners have never reported in answer to the question set before them. No one knows whether they think any, and, if so, what kind of new University is required in London.

Having failed to settle the question for the time being by such a reform of the University in Burlington Gardens as Mr. Dyer advocates, the Commissioners ought—according to their own recommendation—to have been allowed to proceed further. "It is now ascertained," they would have said, "that the existing University of London will not reform itself in the way we have suggested: what sort of University shall we now recommend, if any?" They might have suggested the coercion of the Convocation of Burlington Gardens by an Act of Parliament; or they might have—after inquiring from authorities in Oxford, Cambridge, Dublin, Edinburgh, and wherever else some understanding of the nature and objects of Universities happens by chance to dwell—recommended the formation of a professorial University in London similar to those of Scotland and of Germany.

I confess that it has always been my hope, though not my expectation, that they would take the latter course. I am sure that if they had proceeded to take the evidence of experts in University matters, and had not attached undue importance to the proposals of competing corporations, they would have found the balance of unprejudiced opinion to be in favour of a "professorial" rather than a "federal" University. The difficulty they would have had to contend with would have been that some of their own body, and nearly every witness whom they lately examined, are very far from having a clear idea as to what are the possible forms of University organization, what the merits and the demerits respectively of the "federal" and the "professorial" scheme as now in practice in Europe. This is obvious enough from the printed "Minutes of Evidence taken before the Royal Commissioners appointed to &c.", which can be purchased of Messrs. Eyre and Spottiswoode for about half-a-crown.

But whatever else the late Royal Commission might have done, I cannot believe that they would have proposed to set up so extraordinary and useless a piece of complicated machinery as the Albert University (of the draft charter) by the side of Burlington Gardens. The draft charter, having failed to reform the existing University of London, ought, one would have thought, to have been torn up.