

British Earthworms.

I ENTIRELY concur with Dr. Hurst's view that the supposed new species, described by the Rev. Hilderic Friend as *L. rubescens* is in reality Savigny's *L. festivus*. I may add a further reason for discarding the term *L. terrestris*, Lin., and substituting *L. herculeus*, Sav., for our common large worm. Savigny himself used "Enterion terrestre" to indicate a worm differing considerably from *L. terrestris*, Lin., in the position and extent of the clitellum; moreover it belongs to the genus *Allolobophora* and not to *Lumbricus* at all.

With regard to the second "new" species, *A. cambrica*, recently described by Mr. Friend, I believe that it is merely a variety of *A. chlorotica*, Sav.

According to the description it appears to differ from the latter species in three points:—(1) colour; (2) extent of clitellum; (3) number of spermathecae.

(1) Now, amongst my collection of British worms I find one, of which a water colour sketch taken from the living specimen closely resembles Mr. Friend's description of the colour of *A. cambrica*. My notes as to size, habits, &c., agree with his description. I have carefully re-examined my specimen, and find that it agrees perfectly with *A. chlorotica*; or, in other words, I find that *A. chlorotica* may vary—as Hoffmeister knew that it did vary—so much as to resemble *A. mucosa*, and I may suggest that it is a mimetic resemblance.

(2) Further, with regard to the clitellum of *A. chlorotica*; in the table given by the Rev. Hilderic Friend, it is stated to cover somites 29–36. As a matter of fact the next somite, 37, is nearly always included. This brings *A. cambrica*, Friend, into harmony with *A. chlorotica*, Sav.

(3) Thus the only differential character left is the number of spermathecae; and I cannot agree to the validity of a new species on this single character; several specimens should be examined to settle the point, as variation in this feature is known to occur.

I take a certain amount of credit to myself for the useful faunistic studies on the earthworms of Great Britain, now being pursued by the Rev. Hilderic Friend, for, if I mistake not, I put him in the way of recognizing their specific characters, and, some years ago, I named for him, with remarks thereon, sundry consignments of some scores of worms which he sent to me for that purpose.

WM. BLAXLAND BENHAM.

The Dept. of Comparative Anatomy, Oxford,
November 21.

Egyptian Figs.

THE accompanying sketch represents an instrument used in Egypt for removing the "eye" or top of the sycamore fig. It is a piece of hoop iron, blunt on one edge and tolerably sharp on the other, and fixed into the end of a stick. The fruit of *Ficus sycomorus*, or "Egyptian fig," seems to be invariably infested with the insect *Sycophaga crassipes*, Westw.; which I am informed by Rev. T. F. Marshall, who has kindly given me the name, is the same insect supposed to effect capriciation in Malta, judging from specimens which I sent him. This fig never produces ripe seed in Egypt, though it has been introduced from the earliest times. Not only are the ancient coffins made of the wood, but it was adopted as the sacred "Tree of Life."



It probably came from Yemen, where Dr. Schweinfurth saw many seedling trees growing spontaneously. The tree bears three crops per annum, in May, June, and August–September. Boys cut off the top of the figs of the first two crops only. Dr. E. Sickenberger, one of the professors in the School of Medicine, Cairo, informs me that the figs have no pleasant flavour until the operation has been performed:—"They then become very sweet, but remain smaller than when not cut open. The object is to let the insects escape. Those that are left become watery and tasteless, and are full of *namoos* or *sycophaga*." In his first description Dr. Sickenberger described the instrument as "a kind of thimble made of iron plate

NO. 1205, VOL. 47]

ending in a spatula like a finger-nail. It is fixed on the thumb of the right hand. The operation is only made on fruits which shall be picked up the following day. The day after the operation the fig is quite ripe. The male flowers in those figs are all aborted, and the females have never perfect seeds. The figs of the third generation are larger, of an agreeable taste, and sweet-centred; but they are not operated upon, only because in August and September, though the trees are much fuller of fruit than in May and June, the people have so much to do at that time. They are seldom sold, and only eaten by the owners of the trees, or else they are abandoned to the field-mice, birds, and dogs, which latter are very fond of them. These *nilg* fruits are full of *sycophaga*."

It will be seen that the instrument he has sent me is of a different shape to the one he describes; and the chief interest lies in the fact that Pliny also describes the process as closely corresponding with this modern method. He even uses a similar term "nail" (*δύναχος*): *πέπτειν οὐ δύναται ἂν μὴ ἐπικινσθῆ; ἀλλ' ἔχοντες δύναχος σιδηροῦς ἐπικινύσουσιν ἃ δ' ἂν ἐπικινσθῆ, τετάρταια πέπτειται* (*Nat. Hist.* xiii. 14). Further, the Prophet Amos describes himself as *bōlās sigmīm*; and the authors of the LXX, writing in Alexandria, appear to have understood the expression and translated these words by *κνίζων σικκάμια*. This is the same verb as that which Pliny uses; so that it would seem to be pretty certain that Amos performed identically the same operation on the figs as is still done in Egypt at this day. It will be noticed that the idea was to ripen the figs. It does not really do this, because there are no seeds; but it does make the fig sweeter. It also liberates the insects, and without doing this the figs would be uneatable. Jerome is the only author, as far as I know, who alludes to "grubs" being inside the fig.

GEORGE HENSLOW.

Iridescent Colours.

THE article "Iridescent Colours" on p. 92 puts me in mind of a notice which I published thirty years ago, while I lived in the United States. It was entitled "Harmonies of Form and Colour" (*Stettiner Entom. Zeitung*, 1862, pp. 412–414), and a portion of it refers to the subject of the above-mentioned article in NATURE, and may be of interest to its readers:—

"A fundamental observation, which proves the influence of the intensity of light upon colour, may be made on some insects of metallic coloration, inhabiting a large area from north to south. About six years ago, while in Southern Russia, I took a walk during sunset, and was struck by the brilliancy of some metallic red *Chrysomela*, abundant in that locality. I found that it was the common *C. fastuosa*, which I did not recognize at once, because in the environs of St. Petersburg, where I lived at that time, it occurs in its metallic-green variety, with an iridescent blue stripe on each of the elytra. Still farther north it assumes a more violet metallic colour. The same is the case with *Chrysomela cerealis* and *C. graminis*. The first of these species is represented in St. Petersburg in the blue variety (*C. ornata*, Ahrens), while the typical variety, occurring farther south, has purple-red metallic stripes. It is evident therefore that the metallic colouring of these wide-spread species is gradually intensified from north to south, in the order of the colours of the spectrum. We may imagine the area which these beetles occupy, like an immense rainbow, reflected from their backs, violet in the north, red in the south; the violet perhaps connected in some way with the magnetic phenomena prevailing in the polar regions. The longicorn beetle (*Callidium violaceum*) undergoes the same variation: violet in the north, blue in central Europe." C. R. OSTEN SACKEN.

Heidelberg, Germany, November 27.

The Afterglow.

THERE has been for three weeks past a very remarkable renewal of the afterglow. There is a quite deep secondary red glow after the stars are fully out. I should say that no such afterglow has been seen since 1886, or three years after the Krakatō eruption. There is also a great extension of the white hazy atmospheric corona around the sun, very marked also around the moon. I am unable, however, to make out any of the pink colour on the outer edge of the haze, which was so char-