

was testing. The effects varied from no deviation or slight, to cases where the needle swung completely round while still a foot or two away. Among the strongest noted were some crags north of Kynance Cove, and some on a headland about a quarter of a mile south of Coverack, both consisting of serpentine. Any one whose holidays take him to a rocky neighbourhood, may find interest in carrying out similar observations.

Cockfield, July 28.

E. HILL.

The Aurora Australis.

THE following report of a brilliant Aurora, seen in the Indian Ocean, will be interesting to many of your readers:—

THE AURORA AUSTRALIS.—When sailing along the Indian Ocean from the Cape of Good Hope to Australia, and in about the vicinity of St. Paul's Island, longitude $76^{\circ} 17'$ east, latitude $4^{\circ} 1' 22''$ south, an Aurora Australis of remarkable grandeur was seen by those on board the ship *Isle of Arran*. Describing it yesterday, Captain Carse said his chief officer and he had a beautiful view of the phenomenon on two nights (April 28 and 29). It was a very fine sight, the streams of light in spraylike form shooting upward for fully thirty degrees, lighting up with wonderful brightness the whole southern part of the heavens. Some very bad weather was experienced by the ship in the locality of St. Paul's. High confused seas prevailed with a strange continuance of easterly winds.—*Herald*, May 23.

No report was received that this was seen in any part of Australia, and I have seen no report that the brilliant Aurora seen in the northern hemisphere on March 30 was seen in this part of the world.

H. C. RUSSELL.

P.S.—I got position and date from Captain Carse.

Absence of Butterflies.

THE most common butterflies—as, for instance, *Pieris brassicae*, *Coleas Rhamni*, *Vanessa Urticae*—were very rare hereabouts this spring too (*cf.* NATURE, vol. I. p. 225), and the same has been observed at Frankfort-on-Maine. As for *Pieris*, this scarcity might have been predicted with certainty last autumn, as, here and at Frankfort, the cabbage-plants in fields and gardens were almost exempt from their usual ravagers, the caterpillars of the said species. If the extraordinary dryness of last year's summer should be connected with these facts, it cannot have acted through the damage done to the food-plants, but must have operated more directly upon the insects themselves.

D. WETTERHAN.

Freiburg, July 28.

A STRANGE LIGHT ON MARS.

SINCE the arrangements for circulating telegraphic information on astronomical subjects was inaugurated, Dr. Krueger, who is in charge of the Central Bureau at Kiel, certainly has not favoured his correspondents with a stranger telegram than the one which he flashed over the world on Monday afternoon:—

“Projection lumineuse dans région australe du terminateur de Mars observée par Javelle 28 Juillet 16 heures Perrotin.”

This relates to an observation made at the famous Nice Observatory, of which M. Perrotin is the Director, by M. Javelle, who is already well known for his careful work. The news therefore must be accepted seriously, and, as it may be imagined, details are anxiously awaited; on Monday and Tuesday nights, unfortunately, the weather in London was not favourable for observation, so whether the light continues or not is not known.

It would appear that the luminous projection is not a light outside the disc of Mars, but in the region of the planet not lighted up by the sun at the time of observation. The gibbosity of the planet is pretty considerable at the present time. Had there been evidence that the light was outside the disc, the strange appearance might be due to a comet in the same line of sight as the planet. If we assume the light to be on the planet itself, then it must either have a physical or human origin; so

it is to be expected that the old idea that the Martians are signalling to us will be revived. Of physical origins we can only think of Aurora (which is not improbable, only bearing in mind the precise locality named, but distinctly improbable unless we assume that in Mars the phenomenon is much more intense than with us), a long range of high snow-capped hills, and forest fires burning over a large area.

Without favouring the signalling idea before we know more of the observation, it may be stated that a better time for signalling could scarcely be chosen, for Mars being now a morning star, means that the opposition, when no part of its dark surface will be visible, is some time off.

The Martians, of course, find it much easier to see the dark side of the earth than we do to see the dark side of Mars, and whatever may be the explanation of the appearances which three astronomers of reputation have thought proper to telegraph over the world, it is worth while pointing out that forest fires over large areas may be the first distinctive thing observed on either planet from the other besides the fixed surface markings.

THE INTERNATIONAL GEOLOGICAL CONGRESS.

THE sixth meeting of this Congress will be held at Zurich, commencing on August 29. The Congress was founded at Philadelphia in 1876, the first meeting being held at Paris in 1878; subsequent meetings have been—Bologna, 1881; Berlin, 1885; London, 1888; Washington, 1891. As one result of discussions at the Paris meeting, committees were appointed in different countries to draw up reports on classification, nomenclature, &c. At Bologna these reports were received and discussed, the greater part of the time being thus spent. An additional committee was then appointed to prepare a geological map of Europe; this work is still in progress, but the committees on nomenclature, &c., have practically lapsed, and but little attention has been paid to such subjects at the more recent meetings. At the Washington Congress a committee was appointed to report on the Bibliography of Geology. Lists of bibliographies for each country were to be prepared, and printed in the report of the Washington meeting; but the volume has recently appeared without such lists. It is hoped that the committee will submit a report on this important subject at Zurich.

Prof. E. Renevier, of Lausanne, is nominated President of the Zurich meeting. He has been an active member of the Congress from the commencement, and the excellent arrangements for the forthcoming meeting are no doubt largely due to his powers of organisation. Prof. A. Heim, of Zurich, is Vice-President; Prof. H. Golliez, of Lausanne, is Secretary; M. C. Escher-Hess, of Zurich, is Treasurer. This apparently exhausts the list of officers of the organising committee, democratic Switzerland dispensing with “president of honour,” “honorary members of committee,” &c., which have largely figured in the lists of previous Congresses, even in that of Washington. Not having such honorary lists upon which to draw for funds, the subscription for membership is double that previously charged, but is even now only 25 francs.

The arrangements made for the Zurich meeting differ somewhat from those of previous sessions. There will be no formal discussion on nomenclature, classification, &c.; but, after transacting general business, the Congress will divide into three sections, meeting simultaneously. The subjects for discussion will be: (1) General and Tectonic Geology; (2) Stratigraphy and Palæontology; (3) Mineralogy and Petrography. Amongst the papers