

Dental Microscopy. By A. Hopewell Smith, L.R.C.P., L.D.S., &c. Pp. 119. (London: The Dental Manufacturing Company, Limited.)

STUDENTS of dental microscopy will find this work a valuable guide to the preparation, observation, and photography of microscopical sections of hard and soft dental tissues. The volume is practical throughout, and is illustrated by eight lithographed plates, from which typical structures may be readily recognised. It should prove of great assistance to workers in dental histology.

Organic Chemistry, Theoretical and Practical. By Prof. J. S. Scarf, F.I.C., F.C.S. Pp. 240. (London and Glasgow: W. Collins, Sons, and Co., Limited.)

WE find no feature which distinguishes this text-book from others "adapted to the requirements of the Science and Art Department, and of the London University." The book may assist students to pass the examinations for which it has been constructed, but it is not a desirable introduction to the science of organic chemistry.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

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The Antiquity of the Medical Profession.

DR. BLACK displays a surprising facility of misapprehension—greater than I should have supposed possible.

The final sentence of his letter runs thus:—"It would seem, then, from history, that the medical profession is quite as old as either that of theology or law."

Now since the first sentence of my essay contains the clause—"In rude tribes it is difficult to distinguish between the priest and the medicine-man"; and since various illustrations are then given of the union of the priestly and medical functions in the same individual; and since it is thereafter shown that this union long continues among early civilised peoples—Egyptians, Babylonians, Hebrews, Hindus, Greeks—it is a necessary implication that, as Dr. Black says, "the medical profession is quite as old as either that of theology or law." For if two professions are at first exercised by the same persons they are necessarily of equal antiquity. So that, strangely enough, Dr. Black points out to me a truth which it is one of the purposes of my essay to teach. I can only suppose either that he did not read the first part of the essay at all, or that before he had reached the end he had forgotten the beginning.

Westerham, Kent.

HERBERT SPENCER.

Halley's Equal Variation Chart.

I HAVE read Mr. Ward's interesting letter on this topic in NATURE of May 30, p. 106. I embrace this opportunity to correct some typographical errors in my letter in the issue of May 23.

No. 974 (4) should be 977 (4).

In foot-note 3, p. 79, the title of atlas referred to should be 'Tabulæ Nautical Variationes Magneticas Denotantes.'

I have compared Mr. Ward's description of his own chart with my notes. He evidently is the lucky possessor of the exceedingly rare Halley chart 977 (4). I should be pleased to have him inform me if the word "Britanniæ" in the dedication is not spelt with two *l's*.

The size of the British Museum copy is about 48 × 57 cm., the shorter dimension being in an east-west direction; it is in a splendid condition.

The earliest mention made of Halley's Equal Variation Chart is found in "Histoire de l'Acad. de Paris," 1701, p. 9. The chart referred to there must be the above 977 (4), of which we now know that two copies exist—the British Museum's and Mr. Ward's.

L. A. BAUER.

The University of Chicago.

The Invention of the Net.

IN your number of February 28 (p. 417), Mr. R. I. Pocock suggests that the observation of a spider's web may have given rise

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to the art of netting. It is of interest to note that the following citation is found in a Chinese cyclopædia: "Yuen-kien Lih-han" (1701, tom. ccccxlix. art. "Chi-chu," 2):—"In 'Pau-puh-tsze' it is said, 'Tai-hau [or Pão-hsi] made a spider his master and knitted nets.'"

In the "Yih-King," the oldest authority that ascribes to Pão-hsi the invention of the net, no mention is made in this connection of spider (see Legge's translation, in the "Sacred Books of the East," vol. xvi. p. 383); but the above-quoted passage of "Pau-puh-tsze" is tantamount to prove such a view, as suggested by Mr. Pocock, to have already occurred among the Chinese in the fourth century, A.D., when the book was written by a Taoist recluse named Koh Hung.

June 17.

KUMAGUSU MINAKATA.

The Bird of Paradise.

I DESIRE to call the attention of your readers to a fashion which in the month of May was at its height in London, and is now much patronised throughout the country. I refer to the wearing in hats and bonnets of a graceful spray of soft fine plumes with drooping or curly tips. These the milliners call Bird of Paradise feathers, the assurance being constantly given that they are *real*. They are often mixed with osprey tips, which, to the shame of womanhood, have so long been in fashion, and are still largely used. I may state on trustworthy authority that during the past season one warehouse alone has disposed of no less than *sixty thousand dozens* of these mixed sprays!

The Bird of Paradise most used in millinery is that obtained in the Papuan Islands and New Guinea. Mr. Wallace, in describing the *Paradisæa apoda*, says:—"From each side of the body, beneath the wings, springs a dense tuft of long and delicate plumes, sometimes two feet in length, of the most intense golden-orange colour and very glossy, but changing towards the tips into a pale brown. This tuft of plumes can be elevated and spread out at pleasure, so as almost to conceal the body of the bird." In his "Oiseaux dans la Mode" of October 20, 1894, M. Jules Forest bitterly deplores the destruction which has been going on during the last decade. He emphasises the fact that it is no longer possible to procure such perfect specimens as were common ten years ago, since the unfortunate birds are so hunted that none of them are allowed to live long enough to reach full maturity, the full plumage of the male bird requiring several years for its development! He further states that "the birds which now flood the Paris market are for the most part young ones, still clothed in their first plumage, which lacks the brilliancy displayed in the older bird, and are consequently of small commercial value." Since January 1, 1892, strict regulations for the preservation of the Bird of Paradise have been in force in German New Guinea, and M. Forest appeals to the English and Dutch Governments to follow their good example.

The common sense of every thoughtful woman must at once tell her that no comparatively rare tropical species, such as the Bird of Paradise, can long withstand this drain upon it, and that this ruthless destruction, merely to pander to the caprice of a passing fashion, will soon place one of the most beautiful denizens of our earth in the same category as the Great Auk and the Dodo.

The women of England are earnestly entreated not to countenance the sacrifice of this bird by encouraging the demand for its precious feathers. Let them resolve to do what they can to prevent the extermination of this "wonder of nature" by stoutly refusing to purchase or wear anything purporting to have once belonged to a Bird of Paradise.

MARGARETTA L. LEMON.

Redhill, Surrey, June 21.

THE TICK PEST IN THE TROPICS.

THOSE living in temperate climates have probably small idea of the virulence of insect and other pests in the tropics. A plague of caterpillars may destroy a season's crop in England, but there is the winter's frost to be passed through before a second attack need be feared. It is otherwise in the tropics. Vegetation is much more luxuriant, and the food supply is permanent; and, when once a plague has obtained a firm foothold,