

highest part of our downs in hot summer days, which always amuses me much, without giving me any satisfaction with respect to the cause of it; and that is a loud audible humming as of bees in the air, though not one insect is to be seen. This sound is to be heard distinctly the whole common through, from the Moneydells to my avenue gate." (Vol. ii. p. 94, Macmillan's edition.)

W. TUCKNELL.

November 30.

Fireball of November 22.

ON November 22, at about 6h. 51m. I observed, in a sky quite overcast, a brilliant prolonged flash quite different to lightning. The whole firmament was illuminated for more than a second with an intensity greater than that which the full moon could have occasioned, and the glow seemed strongest in the south-east. Not a star was visible, but though the origin of the outburst could not be observed, no doubt existed that a fireball of the most brilliant type had fallen.

Mr. R. Sheward's letter from Eastbourne (*NATURE*, November 28, p. 78) affirms this conclusion, and it would be well if he or others who witnessed this striking object would give particulars as to the path it traversed. Appearing, as it did, at a convenient time in the evening, it must have had many observers, though unfortunately in the west of England the sky was veiled in cloud. For purposes of calculation it is not sufficient to have descriptions which merely indicate the general direction of the meteor's flight, as, for example, from east-north-east to west-south-west. We require to know the altitudes as well as the azimuths of the initial and terminal points, or the co-ordinates read from a celestial globe or star chart. A particular account of the path relatively to the stars near would be equally useful.

It is to be hoped that such information will be forthcoming in regard to this splendid meteor, which, from the manner in which it illuminated the clouded sky, must have been a very exceptional object of its class.

At this period in November many large fireballs are directed from the region of Taurus; but it is impossible to say, in the absence of necessary details, whether or not the fine meteor of November 22 last belonged to the Taurid stream.

Bristol, November 29.

W. F. DENNING.

IN reference to the letter of Mr. Sheward in last week's *NATURE*, it may be of interest to mention that whilst talking to a friend in a dark road in this locality on the evening of November 22 the sky at the time being entirely overcast, we were startled by the sudden illumination of the clouds as if by the outburst of a bright light above them. The effect was similar to that which might have been produced by the explosion of a large magnesium shell sufficiently brilliant to illuminate the entire sky. The light appeared suddenly, but faded out gradually, its estimated duration being three seconds. It appeared to me to emanate from a point in the north-east, at an altitude of about 60'. My friend, whose face was turned in the opposite direction, could not localise the outburst, though he remarked that the light suffused the clouds almost equally in the west and south-west. I noted the time as 6.48 p.m., which so nearly coincides with that mentioned by Mr. Sheward, that although so far apart it seems probable that we were witnesses of the same phenomenon.

R. T. LEWIS.

Ealing, W., December 2.

A Joint Meeting of Associations for the Advancement of Science.

MY suggestion for a joint meeting of the British, Australasian, and American Associations for the Advancement of Science at San Francisco in 1897, at some time conveniently near to that of the Toronto meeting of the British Association, published in your issue of October 24, meets favourable reception in the United States and Canada. I have recently received a letter from Sir Wm. C. Van Horne, President of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, and a member of the British Association, in which he says that he will instruct his superintendent to reopen negotiations with other transcontinental roads to secure favourable rates of transportation. Prof. Joseph Le Conte, who has for years given earnest effort to secure a meeting of the Association on the Pacific coast, writes from Berkeley, California: "I will certainly interest myself in your scheme . . . I am glad you are moving the affair so early, and thank you for drawing my attention to it."

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The following is a copy of a letter just received from the Mayor of San Francisco:—

MY DEAR SIR,—

Your communication of October 9, 1895, was received and thereafter forwarded to the Board of Supervisors.

That body, on October 28, 1895, passed a resolution, and it is herein inserted in print.

"Resolution No. 13, 120 (Third Series).

"Resolved—That his Honour the Mayor be, and is hereby empowered and requested to invite the American and Australian Associations for the Advancement of Science to meet in this city in 1897; also, to invite the British Association of the same character to meet said Associations in this city as invited guests, and to that end to take such action as may be proper to arrange for their comfort and accommodation on that occasion.

"And the clerk is hereby directed to advertise this resolution as required by law.

"Board of Supervisors, San Francisco, October 28, 1895."

Pursuant thereto, an invitation is thereby sent to your Society—the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

It is my sincere hope that San Francisco may have the good and rare fortune to receive the visit of all three of these distinguished bodies.

The gathering of the world's chosen scientists is at once recognised as of high importance to our Municipality.

Its citizens will feel honoured in extending a generous welcome to men eminent in the cause of truth, and representing the three great branches of the Anglo-Saxon races.

Should this invitation be accepted, an early notification thereof is requested.

Invitations have been sent to the British and Australian Associations. (L. S.) ADOLPH SUTRO.

Application will be made to Congress at its session, which begins on the first week of December, for an appropriation to assist the American Association for the Advancement of Science towards defraying the necessary expenses of holding a meeting so distant from the homes of most of our members. It is, of course, impossible to foretell what Congress may be willing to do in the matter; but as it has never before been asked to subsidise the Association, we may hope that some appropriation may be secured.

WM. H. HALE.

Brooklyn, November 18.

The Metric System of Weights and Measures.

THE adoption of the metric system in this country can be best effected by first familiarising the people with it for some years. I would suggest that the following would form a good beginning:—

(1) Its adoption by the Post Office. At present the weight of a foreign letter that will go at the minimum rate, must not exceed $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. if posted in England, while 15 grammes are allowed on the continent, which is rather more. The 15 grammes limit should be adopted in England for foreign postage, and 30 grammes for inland postage. Parcels and newspapers should also be charged according to the metric system.

(2) The metric system should be employed by the Meteorological Society and Meteorological Office. At present our weather statistics cannot be compared directly with those published on the continent. The same course should be also followed by other sciences (*e.g.* geology, astronomy, &c.) that still use miles, yards, feet, &c.

(3) Government topographical and geological maps should all bear a scale of metres and kilometres.

There are, of course, many other ways in which the metric system could be brought before the public.

December 2.

JOHN W. EVANS.

"Dendrexetastes capitoides."

DR. FORBES has been kind enough to send me for examination the typical specimen of *Dendrexetastes capitoides* of Eyton, now in the Derby Museum, Liverpool, to which he has called attention in a letter in *NATURE* of October 24 last (*NATURE*, vol. lii. p. 619). I have compared it with specimen *a* of *Dendrexetastes temminckii* in the British Museum, and do not hesitate for a moment to say that they are referable to the same species. Both are from Cayenne, and of the ordinary unmistakable "Cayenne make." But it is quite true that, as pointed out by Dr. Forbes, the cross-bands on the belly, which