

Die orientalische Christenheit der Mittelmeerländer.
By Dr. Karl Beth. Pp. xvi+427. (Berlin: Schwetschke, 1902.)

THE author spent five months in 1901 in the eastern Mediterranean, investigating at first hand, and at close quarters, the institutions, and the practical working of the Greek, Armenian, and Coptic Churches, and of such other fragments of Christian communions as survive in those parts. He is evidently a good observer and quick worker, and was able to elicit much interesting information, meeting everywhere, as he did, with cordial receptions and assistance. The result is a valuable handbook of an ill-explored section of ecclesiology, full of queer sidelights upon mediæval and modern history, and no less upon the workings of the religious instinct under the peculiarly unfavourable conditions which have prevailed in the Levant for so long. The author's personal knowledge of the working of these curious institutions enables him to supply a number of corrections to Kattenbusch's "Lehrbuch," and to confirm and expand the observations of Gelzer, von der Goltz, von Soden, and other recent travellers.

Tales of Sutton Town and Chase, with other Tales and some Sketches. Collected by "Tau." Pp. 86. (Birmingham: Hudson and Son, 1904.) Price 2s. 6d. net.

Two of the narrative poems in this delightful little collection are of more than local interest. One ballad—"The Alchemist of New Hall"—refers to the moated stone mansion of New Hall, where the celebrated Dr. Sacheverell lived at one time. Another poem deals amusingly with a meeting of the Lunar Society, which met in the district in the latter portion of the eighteenth century, and included among its members Erasmus Darwin, Galton, James Watt, Priestley, Wedgwood and Baskerville. To persons familiar with Sutton Coldfield and the neighbourhood, this collection of verses describing in appropriate words and metre some of the stories of "oldest inhabitants" will be read with keen interest; and many others will find pleasure in the quaint ideas contained in this dainty little volume.

The Glamour of the Earth. By George A. B. Dewar. Pp. ix+255; with illustrations by R. W. A. Rouse. (London: George Allen, 1904.) Price 6s. net.

THE true lover of the country will enjoy this book. The author is not addressing the mere seeker after information; and such a reader will regard the volume as diffuse and unsatisfactory. But men who are weary with work and have gone to the country quietly to come into contact with nature, and so secure refreshment and recreation, will follow Mr. Dewar's notes and leisurely observations with sympathy and appreciation. The beautiful pictures by Mr. Rouse add much to the attractiveness of the volume.

Jahrbuch der Radioaktivität und Elektronik. Herausgegeben von J. Stark in Göttingen. Erster Band. 1 Heft. (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1904.)

THIS new magazine or "year-book," devoted to radio-activity and the electric discharge, is promised to appear in four parts yearly. The first part, now under consideration, contains two original contributions, six short summaries of recent work on special branches, and a fairly complete list of the original papers on radio-activity, &c., which had appeared in 1904 up to the date of going to press. The short summaries referred to are preceded by bibliographies, and should prove useful to specialists.

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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.]

* What is Brandy?

WITH regard to the interesting article in your issue of November 3 upon this subject, I trust that I may be allowed to pass a few comments.

There can be no doubt that the word "brandy" originally connoted burnt or distilled wine; its derivation is thus stated in the "Oxford Dictionary" of Dr. Murray as from the Dutch word "brandewijn," old English "brandy wine."

Thus so late as 1719 one D'Urfey, "Pills," v. 23, wrote:—

"I was entertained, with Kisses fine and Brandy wine."

Certain spirits were introduced long before the outbreak of the phylloxera in France under the name of British brandy, still included in certain legal documents under the designation of British compounds, though, as a matter of fact, made more without than within this country. Herein a difficulty arises for those who may have to advise county or borough councils in the administration of the Sale of Foods and Drugs (Amendment) Act, as now interpreted, or those, like myself, who have to deal with cases under the Merchandise Marks Act. For on the one hand an astute chemist could make up a liquid, wholly innocent of grape juice, so that the results, obtained on analysis, were identical with those of a genuine grape-spirit, and on the other, a sample of the latter might, as pointed out in your article, if carelessly distilled be condemned, though innocent.

Again, if a genuine grape spirit, distilled not far from Cognac, were mixed with — per cent. of a spirit, not silent (I omit particular details on the ground of expediency), mere analytical results would be of little avail; such a problem (*credite experto*) requires prolonged research, and the application of methods not wholly chemical.

It is clear that professional tasting, especially by certain specially gifted persons, is a very valuable aid to analytical results and methods of research, yet, as a matter of evidence, it can be regarded only as a question of opinion, based on long experience, rather than as a definite proof.

A Government inquiry would elicit important evidence, and possibly some kind of standard might be arrived at which would not only exclude clever and fraudulent imitations, but also bring the present chaos or *impasse* to a conclusion.

V. H. VELEY.

Oxford, November 5.

YOUR article published under the above heading in NATURE of November 3 raises some interesting points. The writer clearly fails to appreciate any difference between brandy and alcohol, for he says, "if the brandy is being made from damaged wine the rectification must be most carefully conducted, and may have to be pushed to a point that the alcohol is obtained almost pure, that is to say, almost free from *non-alcohol*." Now if brandy is merely alcohol, as is here plainly implied, why produce it from grapes or wine at all? Similarly, why produce whisky from malted barley, or rum from cane sugar? The fact is that the genuine article is, and has always been in history, the product of the pot still. The pot still produces alcohol plus "*non-alcohol*," the patent still pure alcohol. It is true that brandy, whisky, and rum contain alcohol, but the alcohol of the patent still or rectifying still is not whisky, brandy, or rum. Pot still spirit from "damaged" or sick wines would be nauseous and undrinkable, but pot still spirit from wines of repute possesses the qualities which distinguish genuine brandy chemically and physiologically from rectified spirit. It is well known that the effects of pure alcohol on the blood pressure and lymph circulation are modified very considerably by the presence of other constituents in spirits. These other constituents are the "*non-alcohol*" which you describe. To call rectified spirit or patent still spirit brandy is about as reasonable as calling skimmed milk milk. In England the word brandy ought to be confined to a pot still spirit produced from the wine of grapes, and should never be applied to alcohol distilled in a patent still from "damaged wine" or from likely