

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

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The Preservation of Native Plants and Animals.

FROM London papers recently to hand, I see that at the ornithological congress, on the motion of the Hon. W. Rothschild, a resolution was forwarded to the Premier of New Zealand in regard to the importance of taking steps to preserve and protect the birds on the Auckland and Campbell Islands.

It may be of interest to ornithologists in Great Britain to hear that our local scientific societies had already, in May, memorialised the Government to the same effect; indeed, we asked that protection should be afforded, not only to the birds, but also to the flora.

We have likewise forwarded a similar resolution to the State Government of Tasmania in respect of the penguins on the Macquarie Islands.

The resolution, therefore, of the ornithological congress should strengthen the hands of our local institutes, which bodies are keenly alive to the importance of preserving, as far as possible, the fauna and flora of New Zealand.

The Government, too, has hitherto met our requests in a prompt and generous manner. A couple of years ago, for example, the Otago Institute pointed out to the Minister for Lands that sheep were destroying the alpine flora of the Southern Alps, especially in the region around Mount Cook; the Government at once proclaimed the area as a "reserve," and the sheep were banished.

In fact, the Government is remarkably ready to afford any protection that is possible; and the recent proclamation of the whole of the S.W. portion of the South Island—including the Great Lakes, a vast mountainous, forest-clad area, and the famous fjords—as a "national park," and the prohibition of the use of guns and dogs herein, has already had its effect in the increase in number of some of our rare birds.

You will see, therefore, that we out here, equally with naturalists at home, have at heart the interests of our native plants and animals.

W. B. BENHAM.

Otago University Museum, Dunedin, N.Z., August 21.

The Omission of Titles of Addresses on Scientific Subjects.

I VENTURE to ask the attention of "whom it may concern" to the practice in vogue in Great Britain of publishing presidential addresses of scientific societies and of sections of the British Association without any mention of the titles of those addresses. Take, for example, a case quite at random, but just at hand. NATURE of August 17, beginning on p. 368, contains the inaugural address of the president of the British Association with the heading "Part I." On p. 372 of the same number is another presidential address without a title. On p. 378 a third address has no general head, but it has the distinct advantage of four subheads that enable the reader to select at a glance what he wants, and to pass over other matters if he so chooses.

Unfortunately these are not exceptional cases. I have in my library scores of these addresses in the form of separates without a word on the title-page to indicate how they are to be classified in a library. The presidential addresses published in the reports of the British Association are conspicuous examples of this kind of publication. I have taken the trouble to look through these reports from the beginning of the association in 1831 down to 1892, and out of all the addresses of the presidents of the association published in these sixty-one years there are only five that have titles or subtitles. These are the addresses given in 1831, 1839, 1854, 1880, and 1885.

It is easy to see how this absence of title came about originally, but, as seen from this respectful distance, the history of it is nothing to the point. What this busy world wants is help to get at what we are interested in with the least possible waste of time.

This hot haste may seem unbecoming to men of science,

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or perhaps it may appear that we Americans are in too big a hurry—that we are too much impressed with the motto "time is dollars." But we are not spending all our time chasing the dollar; there are many other nimble things that we are trying to keep up with, and one of them is the progress of science in Europe, along the lines in which we are especially interested.

If a member of so young and giddy a nation might venture to make a suggestion to older and wiser people, it would be in favour of requesting or requiring the presidents of the various scientific organisations and sections of the British Association to provide headings for their addresses so that those of us who have not the time to read all these good things may be able at a glance to pick out what we want especially to see. As matters now stand we are compelled, as a rule, to do one of two things—either to let them all go unread—to our great regret and loss—or to wade through pages upon pages of matter which, however valuable it may be, is out of our line and of no especial interest to us. Such titles, headings or subheads as are here suggested would avoid these difficulties. It would not cost much; it would not take much time, and it would save much of ours and some of your own. We appeal to you for sympathy and help.

JOHN C. BRANNER.

Stanford University, California, September 7.

Protective Coloration of the Inside of the Mouth in Nestling Birds.

THE habit shown by many helpless nestlings, of gaping widely when the nest is approached, is usually explained by supposing that the birds are appealing for food. This explanation has always seemed to me inadequate, for nestlings that gape usually have the inside of the mouth brightly coloured, and in some cases marked with conspicuous spots. Moreover, newly hatched nestlings among the Passeres gape if the fingers are snapped just above them, or if the branch bearing the nest is shaken. It seems a fair inference, therefore, that the act of gaping is often, if not usually, an expression of alarm.

In order to test the effect of the widely opened and brightly coloured mouth, I have several times asked young children to touch the edge of the nest or place a finger in the mouth of one of the birds, and from their hesitation or even refusal to obey I am convinced that the conspicuous coloration, by centering attention upon the gaping mouth, tends to protect the nestling from molestation. Mr. W. P. Pycraft thinks that the bright colours and spots are "guide-marks" to facilitate the proper placing of the food in the mouth by the parents. But persons who rear nestlings find no difficulty in feeding them so long as they gape freely, without troubling themselves about placing the food in any particular region of the mouth.

W. RUSKIN BUTTERFIELD.

4 Stanhope Place, St. Leonard's-on-Sea.

Helmert's Formula for Gravity.

ON p. 79 of Everett's valuable "Illustrations of the C.G.S. System of Units with Tables of Physical Constants" (London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1902) the following lines occur:—

"In a Report now printing, which will contain a very full list of results, Helmert adopts, as the most accurate general formula for g reduced to sea level,

$$g = 980.617 (1 - 0.002644 \cos 2\phi + 0.000007 \cos^2 2\phi).$$

... This may be accepted as the best general formula yet put forward."

The formula alluded to was given first by Helmert in his paper "Der normale Theil der Schwerkraft in Meeresniveau" (*Sitzungsberichte der k. Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, 1901, xiv., pp. 332-336), but with a different coefficient, namely,

$$g = 980.632 (1 - 0.002644 \cos 2\phi + 0.000007 \cos^2 2\phi),$$

and it is not reproduced in the report mentioned in the above quotation from Everett, but in a subsequent one (*Comptes rendus des Séances de l'Association Géodésique Internationale*, Copenhagen, 1903, ii., p. 42, Berlin, 1905).

OTTAVIO ZANOTTI BIANCO.

Turin, Via della Rocca 28, September 8.