

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.]

The Racial Problem in Nubia.

It has been objected that the sketch of the history of Nubia given in the article on "The Unveiling of Nubia" in NATURE, April 27, p. 283, does not agree in every particular with the accounts given by Mr. Firth in the sixth Bulletin of the Archaeological Survey of Nubia, p. 8, and by me at the Sheffield meeting of the British Association and in several lectures during the past year.

It must be remembered, however, that the notice in NATURE was a review of the published account of the results obtained by Dr. Reisner during the first season's work of the Archaeological Survey, and it did not come within the scope of the reviewer's task to describe the attempts that have been made during the last three years to throw further light upon the significance of the facts set forth in Dr. Reisner's report.

It may prevent such misunderstanding, however, if a brief statement is made of the bearing of recent investigations upon the meaning of the facts brought to light in Nubia. It is not without significance that the archaeologists, studying in Nubia the handiwork of the ancient people, and the anthropologists, as the result of the examination in England of the remains of the Nubians that have been sent over here, have arrived quite independently and without collusion at the same interpretation of the significance of the story the pottery and the bones respectively have to tell.

Mr. Cecil Firth's statement of the views of the archaeologists will be found in the sixth Bulletin (*op. cit.*).

The working hypothesis that I set up last summer, when all the facts derived from the study of the human remains were being collated for the first time, is not only borne out by the archaeological evidence, but has been found to be in full accordance with all the facts which further detailed study of these ancient Nubian remains has brought to light.

It is now quite clear that in pre-dynastic times there were scattered throughout the Nile Valley, not only in the territory we call Egypt, but also much farther south, many groups of people linked to the pre-dynastic Egyptians by the closest bonds of affinity, and also sharing with them a common cultural inheritance. Until the beginning of the period of the Pyramid-builders no difference can be detected either in the physical characters of the people or their achievements on the northern (Upper Egypt) or the southern (Lower Nubia) side of the First Cataract. But as the marshy territory of Egypt was drained, and the extent of its rich habitable land was thus increased ten-fold, there was a movement of population from the barren country above the First Cataract into the more fertile north.

But when the proto-dynastic Nubians emigrated into Egypt their place in Nubia was taken by the next member of the group of peoples that were scattered serially throughout the Nile Valley like beads on a string. As the result of the first season's work in Nubia, the only obvious explanation of the state of affairs revealed in these Nubian graves of the time of the Ancient Empire—the B-group of the archaeologists—was found in the hypothesis that the original population of Nubia became tainted with negro blood and fell away from the high standard of culture and technical skill attained by their forefathers. The facts then available did not justify any other explanation. But in the light of the fuller knowledge now in our possession, it is evident that the B-group people were not the direct descendants of the A-group or pre-dynastic Egyptian population of Nubia, but the next bead on the string; in other words, they were members of the southern community of kindred people, next in order in the Nile Valley south of Nubia; and there is no reason to suppose that they had lost any cunning possessed by their ancestors, but rather that they had not kept pace with their northern brethren in the advance of the latter in the paths of civilisation. The evidence for this view is

abundant and manifold in kind. I need mention only one fact here—the almost complete absence, among the human remains of the B-group people, of pure negroes, while the whole population is very definitely more negroid than the Egyptians, can only be explained on the hypothesis that the process of admixture took place farther south.

After the time of the Ancient Empire, the next bead on the string—the C-group of the archaeologists—was moved north into Nubia. These Middle Nubians, as we call them, were also obviously akin to the pre-dynastic Egyptians, and their burial customs and pottery were clearly derived from the same source as those of the Egyptians: but it is equally certain that the two populations, the Egyptians and the Middle Nubians, had developed along divergent lines. Moreover, the undoubted specialisation of the physical characters of the people, no less than of their arts and customs, was emphasised by the introduction of an exotic African element into the C-group people. They became more definitely negroid than either the A- or the B-group peoples, and their pottery exhibits, no less clearly than their bones, the influence of the negro.

Mr. Firth summarises the archaeological statement in these words:—"The theory tentatively advanced in the second annual report that the C-group people represent a later wave (greatly modified by Negro influences) of the same race which founded the Pre-dynastic culture of Upper Egypt, is based on certain affinities in burial-custom and pottery-making, and requires the confirmation which a careful examination of the physical character of the human remains can alone give." The human remains have supplied this confirmation, and they did so before we were aware of the fact that Mr. Firth was asking for the support of the evidence they afford.

His further statement that "the connection between the B- and C-groups does not seem to be very close and a comparison of the two would suggest an independent origin of the C-group" may seem to suggest that there was a much wider hiatus separating the Middle Nubians (C-group) from the earlier inhabitants of Nubia than there was to divide the two groups (A and B) of the latter the one from the other. There can be no doubt there was a much greater contrast between the C-group culture than separated those of its forerunners in Nubia: but it is equally certain that the B-group people, interposed both in time and locality between the A-group (distinctively Egyptian) and the C-group (distinctively Nubian), were much more strongly influenced culturally by the higher civilisation of the former than by that of the latter. Thus the Archaic Nubian (B-group) culture has the appearance of being the direct offspring of the Archaic Egyptian (A-group), but the people themselves form a unit as distinct from its forerunner (A-group) as it is from its successor (C-group).

There is a considerable mass of evidence to suggest that, just as the B- and C-groups represent successive waves, respectively, *circa* 3000 B.C. and 2000 B.C., which moved northward in the Nile Valley, the early pre-dynastic people in Egypt were largely reinforced, perhaps about 4000 B.C., by a precisely similar wave or rather concentration of the scattered primitive Nilotic people in the most desirable part of the Nile Valley.

In these notes I have attempted to suggest the present trend of our investigations without doing more than merely hinting at one out of a multitude of varied kinds of evidence indicative of the northerly trend of the Hamites in the Nile Valley, leading to a concentration in Egypt.

G. ELLIOT SMITH.

Manchester, April 29.

Inheritance of Row-numbers in Maize Ears.

It is well known among maize-growers that the number of rows of grain on an ear of maize varies from 8 to 24, or even more, according to the breed; also that in the same breed the number may vary within certain limits, e.g. 8, 10, or 12 in some breeds, 12, 14, 16, or 18 in others and 18, 20, 22, or 24 in yet others. In some breeds the range of variation is even greater than I have indicated, while in others it seems to be more closely limited. In some breeds an ear carrying more than 8 rows is considered untrue to type, but I am not aware that any