LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

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Smithsonian Physical Tables.

THE Smithsonian Institution has just published a new edition of the Smithsonian Physical Tables, corrected and slightly modified from the sixth revised edition. Requests have come from certain educational institutions for separate copies of certain individual tables for the use of students in laboratories. If there is likely to be a considerable demand for such separates, the institution will have them printed on stiff paper and distributed at cost to those who desire them. With the view of ascertaining the probable demand for separate tables, it is requested that readers of NATURE inform the Institution which tables they would desire in separate form, and the number of copies of each they would probably require. All tables for which the probable demand of this kind reaches 100 copies will be reprinted separately.

The tables may be consulted in nearly all the larger libraries.

C. D. WALCOTT,
Secretary.

Smithsonian Institution,
Washington, U.S.A., March 23.

Effect of Tidal Water in an Estuary on the Level of Subterranean Water.

AN artesian well was bored at Portishead last August lined with 8 in. and 10 in. casing, the annular space between the casings being filled with cement, so that the possible ingress of surface waters is avoided.

The well has been in constant use since that date, the water-level standing in the summer about 10 ft. below the surface of the ground, which is only a foot or two above high-water mark. A few days ago pumping from the well was temporarily discontinued. It was noticed that the level fluctuated with the state of the tide. When the tide was out the level of the water was about 4 ft. below the surface; as the tide came in the level of the water gradually rose, until at high tide the well was overflowing.

This behaviour has continued regularly, the rise and fall of level closely corresponding with the rise and fall of the tide.

This affords an excellent example of the weight of the incoming tide water in the Severn estuary, subjecting the underlying strata to pressure and squeezing the water out as if out of a sponge. The water is drawn from strata underlying more than 100 ft. of clayey marl.

JAS. KEWLEY.

Cambrian Lodge, Portishead, March 30.

Is Soap Necessary for Shaving?

At the present time when economy is the watchword, it may be not altogether a waste of time to ask whether soap is necessary for shaving?

The old Romans and Greeks, as evidenced by the statues, were evidently gentlemen addicted to shaving, but, save for a small soap factory discovered at Pompeii, the means of producing soap in those days must have been very limited.

The only conclusion that one can arrive at is that they must have shaved without soap, a practice that is to the present day indulged in by our Oriental Allies, the Japanese, as well as by their neighbours, the Chinese.

Before deciding definitely to discard such a familiar adjunct of the toilet, it might be of interest to inquire why we have been in the habit of using soap for shaving.

The answers to the question received from scientific and unscientific persons are very interesting, culminating in the fascinating one of a barber who thought that the soap propped up the hairs and kept them in an upright position.

Lathering has the effect, when properly done, of reducing the bulk of the soap, and increasing the number of bubbles whereby water is kept in close apposition to the skin by the surface tension.

This is a roundabout way of using water as a lubricant for the efficient and easy passage of the razor across the skin, but once the lubricating qualities of water are recognised as of value in such circumstances it is but a short step to applying the water direct and shaving while the skin is well soured.

This is the method for long in use by the Orientals, and is one that can be thoroughly recommended for trial in this country.

Apart from its economy, the skin is not so liable to irritation, the edge of the razor is not so easily dulled, whilst the whole operation is completed in half the time.

G. ARBOUR STEPHENS.

March 25.

MALARIA AND SANITATION.¹

THE title of this work is somewhat inappropriate as the book deals scarcely at all with many aspects of rural sanitation, but is devoted in the main to what undoubtedly is a very important problem, viz., malaria prophylaxis. It is also not quite evident for what class of reader the book is intended. The book has none of the characters of a text-book or treatise on sanitation, but gives the impression of being written rather for the intelligent layman—we have, e.g., two and a half pages of extract from Lafcadio Hearn's works—were it not that here and there discussions on technical points are recorded at some length, e.g., the identity of certain species of Anophelines. What the book really consists of for the most part is a diary of various sanitary tours made by the author. The outstanding feature of the book is the author's enthusiasm for his subject, and the best portions, for they are the fullest, are those devoted to the sanitary problems that arose at every step in the making of the Panama Canal and the descriptions as to how these difficulties were overcome. Out of eighteen chapters, nine, and out of fifty-six illustrations, thirty-six, are devoted to the Canal.

To malaria in India, on the contrary, the author gives the inadequate amount of only a dozen pages, and these concern the importance of species in determining the prevalence of malaria, a fact fully recognised in India sixteen years ago, which the author confirms from his own experience in the Malay States. The author's work in reducing malaria in Klang and Port Swettenham is well known, but we do not get a clear idea from this book as to how it was done. We know these places were drained, but we should have liked sketch-maps of breeding-places showing the

¹ "Rural Sanitation in the Tropics." By Dr. M. Watson. Pp. xvi+320 (London: John Murray, 1915.) Price 12s. net.