

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

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"Fascination" of Birds by a Snake.

I HAVE just received the following record of an observation made on September 19 by Capt. G. D. H. Carpenter, at Itigi, about 150 miles east of Tabora, on the Central Railway of late German East Africa. Capt. Carpenter's account recalls the behaviour of small birds to a cuckoo or an owl, and suggests that they were "mobbing" an enemy rather than fascinated by it. The observation may supply the clue to the interpretation of all cases of supposed "fascination" by snakes. EDWARD B. POULTON.

Oxford, November 24.

"Yesterday afternoon I witnessed what I have always found difficult to believe, namely, the strange 'fascination' of birds by a snake. I came upon a party of very pretty little finches hopping about among thick dead twigs of a fallen branch on the ground. I came on them quite suddenly from round another bush, and stopped dead when I saw them to watch them. Though I was within a couple of yards they did not fly away, but continued to hop about, all gradually coming closer, and uttering faint chirps. I thought I had never seen such tame birds, and admired their beauty. While looking at the birds I quite missed an Elapine snake, which suddenly attracted my attention by striking at a hen finch just in front of me! It fluttered back a foot or two, and the snake got a mouthful of feathers among its teeth, which seemed to incommode it, for it went down among the thin grass at the foot of the clump of twigs, where I could still see it. The birds none of them made any attempt to get away, but actually several of them, including the one already struck at, hopped further down to get another look at the snake! The latter bird did show some signs of agitation, as every now and then she spread out her tail fanwise and kept on chirping, but still went nearer. However, after a bit the birds flew away one by one, without any excitement, and I crept up and found the snake had gone. I wished I had seen the snake before it struck, to see which way its head was pointing. Of course, I do not believe in the mesmeric theory, but it was *not* a question of a snake pursuing a victim which was too frightened to run away."

Pyrometers and Pyrometry.

I DESIRE to compliment you on the summary in NATURE of November 15 of the recent meeting of the Faraday Society on pyrometers and pyrometry; it is quite the best of the various summaries and accounts published in the technical Press.

With reference to the question of automatic control, I think it is only fair to the English pyrometer manufacturers to say that methods of the kind described by Mr. R. P. Brown, of Philadelphia, have been employed previously, using instruments of English manufacture. In my judgment the present position is rather that the instrument manufacturer is waiting on the furnace user. Heating processes, in the majority of cases, are not so far developed towards standardisation as to make any very extensive call for this automatic control. In the majority of cases an ordinary recording pyrometer, producing its record under the observation of the man controlling the furnace, achieves all that industries at

present require; the shape and slope of the record line give the furnaceman a power of anticipating the temperature change which will take place in his furnace and of altering the firing accordingly.

CHAS. E. FOSTER.

Letchworth, Herts, November 19.

IRON-ORE DEPOSITS IN RELATION TO THE WAR.

THE *Fortnightly Review* for November contains an important article headed "Coal and Iron in War: The Importance of Alsace and Lorraine," which sets forth very clearly an aspect of the European war that has received far too little attention in this country, though its importance has been for some time fully recognised on the Continent. The article consists essentially of a statement as to one of the main causes of the origin of the war, and of a deduction showing the proper nature of the penalty that should be exacted from the originators. The contributory cause discussed is the intense desire of the German plutocratic group, the great German ironmasters, of which such firms as Krupp and the Deutscher Kaiser are representative, to obtain a monopoly of that vast deposit of iron ore which covers so large an area of Central Europe, and is known as "Minette." The writer in the *Fortnightly Review* rests his presentation of the case very largely upon the strong evidence contained in a memorandum submitted on May 20, 1915, by the six leading industrial and agricultural societies of Germany to the Chancellor, in which their requirements and demands in regard to the terms of peace are set forth. The most important of these in the present connection is the demand that Germany should retain possession of the French coast region as far as the Somme, because "by the acquisition of the line of the Meuse and of the French coast the iron-producing district of Briey, as well as the coal-fields of the north and of the Pas de Calais, would be acquired."

The *Fortnightly Review* has done valuable service to the nation in directing attention to this memorandum; if any evidence at all were needed to show that Germany was not forced into this war for self-defence, as Germans are so fond of alleging, but went into it deliberately for the sake of rapine and plunder, this document supplies it to the full, seeing that it specifies in detail the booty of which Germany was deliberately preparing to rob her neighbour, an act of robbery which would certainly have been consummated but for British intervention. The facts as to the importance of the Minette ores are well enough shown in the article referred to, but a full knowledge of all the circumstances makes the case even stronger. In the year 1911 a full account of the Minette iron-ore deposits appeared in the well-known German paper *Stahl und Eisen*, the figures given in which are most illuminating. It is stated that the area within which these ores are workable covers 70,000 to 80,000 hectares, of which French Lorraine possesses 40,000 to 50,000, German Lorraine 27,000 to 28,000, Luxemburg 2500, and Belgium only a