

period, the orbit would suffer cumulative perturbations of the ordinary de and $ed\omega$ type.

Now, considering the eccentricity of Mercury's orbit, it seems quite possible that at perihelion it may sweep up more matter than at aphelion; and, if so, the perturbation caused would be roughly parallel to the minor axis, so that it would give a large $ed\omega$ and a small de . Which is what is wanted.

Perhaps also the fact that the Zodiacal light is best seen from the earth's position early in March indicates that the hypothetical matter extends mainly in the direction of Mercury's perihelion, which corresponds with the position of the earth early in December, for that would be at right angles to the March line of vision.

Probably this idea, in some form or other, has been already mooted by astronomers in connection with Mercury's outstanding discrepancy, and rejected by them on the ground that no sweeping up of matter was permissible which would exert any perceptible influence on the periodic time. It may be questioned, however, whether such minute influence could be recognised, otherwise than by its cumulative sytonic fluctuations, if it had been on the average uniform throughout recent centuries.

March 11.

OLIVER LODGE.

The British Association and the Nation.

MAY I, as an outsider deeply interested in the organisation and use of competent knowledge in the nation's business, thank NATURE for the note in its issue of March 7 on the decision of the council of the British Association to suspend for yet another year the association's corporate life? I do not challenge the opinion of the Cardiff Committee, nor would I criticise the disinclination of the council, when so many of its prominent members are working hard at urgent problems, to hold a meeting of the customary peace type. But why should there not be a meeting suitable to a time of war and of real peril? Would it not be wise to show that the association stands for something in the stress of a great storm? I would respectfully suggest that a two days' meeting be arranged this year in London, and that two things be attempted thereat:—

(1) To elicit authoritative statements, so far as they can be made, of the services scientific men have rendered the country they have done so much to save from extinction, the extent to which these services have been improvised, and the circumstances in which they have been contributed.

(2) To make possible equally cogent statements illustrative of the future dependence of this country upon competent and organised knowledge, and hard and persistent effort on scientific lines, if its people are to be fit for their place and equal to their duty.

Facts are abundant; demonstrators are available; the time is opportune; the audiences are assured.

Imagine the verdict if nothing of this sort is attempted; a verdict passed on its own purpose by the British Association. The material interests can have their conferences—political, financial, industrial. Even the occupational categories can assemble, be voluminously reported and advertised, and pass resolutions of interminable length on matters far removed either from their knowledge or their experience. One interest only—that of competent and ascertained knowledge—the supreme need of an honest white race, fails the nation. Those who know are to be silent!

Will not that be the truth?

I feel certain that a group of students could easily put a different complexion on the matter, and I sug-

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gest that they should be permitted to try. As practically interested in administration, it would be a great privilege to assist in many ways open to me.

If the British Association, by reason of its constitution, finds it difficult to organise such a meeting, are there no other associations or groups of workers who will play their part?

J. J. ROBINSON.

The West Sussex Gazette, Arundel, March 11.

Whales and Seals as Food.

MUCH correspondence has recently taken place regarding the use of whale flesh as food, but the writers, regarding it as an experiment or as a last resort, have overlooked the fact that for centuries it formed a regular diet of the islanders of Scotland. In both the western and northern isles the capture of the round-headed porpoise, or "ca'ing whale," has for long been a systematised industry, whenever opportunity offered, and indeed the earliest evidence of man's presence in Scotland, in Neolithic times, is associated with the demolition of a whale stranded on the shores of the Firth of Forth.

Seals also formed a staple food of the islanders, a slaughter of 200 or 300 being no unusual reward for a visit to Suleskerry, in the Orkneys, or to Haskeir, in the Outer Hebrides, during the eighteenth century. To this destruction is mainly to be attributed the decline of the grey seal in Scottish waters, which made necessary the legislative protection granted in 1914. In Martin's day (1703) the seal flesh was preserved for winter use, but difficulties accompanied the eating of it:—"The Natives salt the Seals with the ashes of burnt Sea Ware, and say they are good Food, the Vulgar eat them commonly in Spring time with a long pointed Stick instead of a Fork to prevent the strong smell which their Hands would otherwise have for several Hours after." It was not only the vulgar who feasted, however, for an innocent make-believe adapted the unusual fare to the palates of the great:—"The Seal, tho' esteemed fit only for the Vulgar, is also eaten by Persons of Distinction, though under a different name, to wit, Hamm."

JAMES RITCHIE.

Edinburgh, March 15.

THE EDUCATION (NO. 2) BILL.

THE course of the debates in the House of Commons on Wednesday, March 13, and on Monday last, when the second reading was taken, augurs well for the passage of the new Education Bill into law. With one or two exceptions, which might in any circumstances have been expected, every speaker accepted cordially the proposals embodied in the measure, and some even went so far as to regret that more drastic changes had not been submitted, having regard to the grave position in which the nation finds itself, not merely from an industrial and commercial point of view, but also in respect of the responsibilities, personal and public, which the coming generation must perforce accept if we are to maintain and enhance our pride of place among the nations of the earth. Nothing is more gratifying to read in the course of an animated and informing debate than the all but unanimous demand from all parties for a better-paid teaching body with a much improved status. Without doubt the Bill is but a tentative measure, far exceeding, however, the most sanguine hopes of ardent