

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

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The Explosion at Bailleul.

THE reports referred to in NATURE of August 28 (p. 511) of the effects observed at Denmark Hill, Norwich, and elsewhere by the explosion of a munition dump at Bailleul at 1.10 p.m. G.M.T. on August 8 suggest that these effects were due mainly to earth tremors caused by the explosion, since the rattling of windows, extending in one case throughout two and a half minutes, is alone mentioned. Here, however, at Harpenden, and also at Luton and Stevenage, an actual sound of a very marked character was heard. The first impression produced in my own case was that a ceiling or heavy picture had fallen in one of the upper rooms, and I at once went round the house to ascertain if that was the case. Everyone in the immediate neighbourhood seems to have heard the noise equally clearly, and it was very generally attributed at first to an explosion of a factory or munition dump four to six miles distant. The noise, which may have lasted two seconds, was preceded by a lesser sound, or perhaps only a tremor, which made one anticipate that something was coming. This, of course, is usual in the case of explosions.

SPENCER PICKERING.

Harpenden, Herts.

British Well-worms.

FROM facts which have recently come to light, I am led to believe that there is a good deal yet to be learned about the Oligochaets which occur in our wells and water-supplies. It is now many years since I directed attention to the occurrence of *Pachydrilus (Lumbricillus) subterraneus*, Vejd., in tap-water and elsewhere. The first well-worm to be discovered in the country was named by me *Diachaeta curvisetosa*. It was afterwards discovered that it belonged to the Haplotaxidae, and is now known as *Haplotaxis curvisetosa*, Friend. In spite of Michaelsen's conclusion to the contrary, this is quite a distinct worm from *Haplotaxis gordioides*, which I have found in this country. Another well-worm, the description of which may be expected to appear shortly in the Quarterly Journal of the Microscopical Society, is *Anagaster fontinalis*, Friend, which has been found in East Anglia. I have notes of other species of worms found in water, including Rhynchelmis, taken in Hampshire, and some which have not been named for want of perfect material. As I am now engaged on the preparation of a monograph of British Oligochaets, it seems very desirable that our knowledge of this branch of the subject should be perfected, and it would be esteemed a great favour if persons who find worms in their wells, pumps, taps, and water-supply would send me the same for identification and record.

HILDERIC FRIEND.

"Cathay," Solihull, August 29.

THE PROTECTION OF OUR "KEY" INDUSTRIES.

IT has long been foreseen that one of the immediate consequences of peace would be to subject this country to a flood of manufactured articles from Germany. It has been known for some time past that German manufacturers were preparing, by every means in their power, to

recover and retain their former hold on our home markets. They were steadily accumulating stocks to be "dumped" in Great Britain on the first possible opportunity. It was a policy of despair, but it was the only policy open to them. The salvation of certain of their industries depended on their being able to thwart, by fair means or foul, the expansion of such of these industries as the exigencies of war had called into existence in this country. Our national welfare, indeed, was bound up in these industries. The country was quick to recognise their importance, and the Government responded to public pressure by the steps it took to foster their initiation and development. Some of these steps were of paramount necessity as war measures, but they had a still wider significance. With the outbreak of war the Empire realised, as never before, that it had in large measure failed to perceive the full importance of the bearing of science upon industry. Owing to a variety of causes on which it is no longer necessary to dwell, we had allowed our chief enemy to take over and gradually to obtain almost exclusive possession of certain "key" industries depending upon the applications of physical science, such as the manufacture of synthetic dyestuffs and drugs, analytical reagents and other chemical products, optical glass and instruments, electrical apparatus and magnetos, etc. We had become wholly dependent upon Germany for a large number of articles comprised under these categories which are absolutely essential to the prosecution of war under modern conditions. It speaks volumes for the innate genius of our race that our men of science and our manufacturers, when thus confronted with a national emergency, should have responded as they did to the country's call. We have not only triumphed over difficulties which at one time seemed well-nigh insuperable, but, as is well known, we have also in many cases bettered the example of our enemies, and certain of our manufactured articles have reached a pitch of excellence which Germany never attained.

This pre-eminence—the fruit of so much anxiety and toil—ought surely to remain with us. Our legislators would be false to their trust if they allowed political expediency and party faction to rob the country of the position it has now gained through the circumstances and fortune of a war which was thrust upon it. The common sense of the nation demands that those industries which we have been compelled by the necessities of this war to establish by a great expenditure of effort and capital, and which are everywhere recognised as no less important in times of peace, should be preserved and fostered. "Never again" has become a watchword. But, even apart from any question of security, the country would be blind to its opportunity if it allowed these "key" industries to fall back into their pre-war condition. The few years of their existence are, however, too short to have brought them into a position of stability. There is an enormous amount of leeway to make up. One