

part of the Empire, but found it was impossible owing to the German monopoly. Shortly afterwards the discovery in Ceylon of thoria and thorianite, with more than 75 per cent. of thoria, and of a monazite which is unusually rich in thoria, first gave British manufacturers a commercially useful independent source of thoria. In 1906 a sudden rise in prices due to German manipulation led to more active search. English manufacturers, according to "Mineral Industry," 1906, p. 586, "hitherto dependent upon German firms for their supplies, now have hopes that the discoveries of monazite and thorianite in Ceylon and the Transvaal will allow them to avail themselves of an opportunity to obtain an independent supply of raw material."

The Imperial Institute wrote to the Government of India urging, in view of the geological similarity to Ceylon, a further search in southern India for monazite sands; and English manufacturers, stimulated by the Ceylon discoveries, joined in the search. The Geological Survey of India was, of course, fully aware of the importance of monazite, and its officers have made interesting additions to knowledge of the Indian occurrences. It was, however, a prospector, representing the London Cosmopolitan Mining Syndicate, who in 1909 found the rich monazite deposits on the coast of Travancore. The opening up of these deposits, with their 46-50 per cent. of monazite, was, however, for a time prejudicial to the English industry; for they fell under German control, and before the War the material was supplied to German firms at 4*l.* a ton, while English purchasers were charged 36*l.* a ton. In face of this competition the Ceylon deposits could not be profitably worked. Similarly, in the United States, which had once produced the world's largest supply of monazite, production ceased in 1913, and, though it was resumed to a small extent during the War, it stopped again in 1918.

The subsequent discoveries of monazite sands by the surveys organised by the Imperial Institute in Northern Nigeria, Southern Nigeria, and Nyasaland, have also proved of no immediate commercial use in competition with the deposits along the coasts of Travancore and Brazil. It was, however, the Ceylon discoveries from 1904 to 1906 which first gave British manufacturers an independent source of thoria—for five tons of thoria and thorianite were sold in England in 1905 at prices up to 1700*l.* per ton—stimulated the search in likely localities in other parts of the Empire, and thus led to the overthrow of the German monopoly.

THE WRITER OF THE ARTICLE.

#### Geological Museum, London.

FOR a considerable time, geologists have been much inconvenienced by the fact that only a portion of the collections in the Geological Museum, Jermyn Street, are now accessible, on account of an enormous structure in the building, said to be supporting the roof. I have just paid a visit to the museum and find that the building is entirely closed, and consequently the maps and specimens I wished to consult in connexion with a local question of water supply are not available, and unfortunately these maps are not in any other Institution. On this account, therefore, I have made a fruitless journey.

In order to avoid doing so again, I got into communication with the office by means of the telephone, and to my surprise was unable to ascertain when it would be possible for any one to visit the building, as I am informed the roof is not safe, and consequently visitors are not permitted. Presumably it does not matter if the roof falls on the members of the staff,

who are still using the building. Surely it should be possible for the public to be informed of the probable date at which the treasures in the museum may again be available.

The Museums, Hull.

T. SHEPPARD.

#### Foot-and-Mouth Disease.

MAY I briefly supplement my letter on this subject in NATURE of February 2? I should like to ask if it is known whether many of the particular grazing-grounds of cattle among which independent outbreaks of this disease have occurred had been re-converted from arable to pastoral land lately; for example, since the intensive crop-production of the War-time? Further, if any such agreement should be apparent, whether any particular crop, or type of crop, more than another had been under cultivation? If information upon these points is available or could be obtained, consideration of the data afforded might, perhaps, yield useful results bearing on the view I have indicated.

I may add, as perhaps worthy of note, that the great outbreak of 1883 followed upon a period of consecutive bad seasons, as a result of which (and of various economic factors) much land had been allowed to go out of cultivation.

H. M. WOODCOCK.

London, February 4.

#### Tubular Cavities in Sarsen Stones.

IN referring to Mr. Carus-Wilson's interesting note on tubular cavities in sarsen stones (March 3, 1923, p. 292) in my letter in NATURE of August 18, p. 239, which Mr. Carus-Wilson comments upon in the issue of September 1, p. 324, my object was to offer a suggestion as to the meaning of similar structures in general, based on observations made in Australia.

The importance of dune accumulation, with its structural features, is, however, so marked along the Victorian and South Australian coasts that its method of invading coastal vegetation, and its application in this respect to ancient geological formations of like character, is well worth emphasising, and has perhaps hitherto scarcely been sufficiently appreciated.

Since Nature works in many different ways, we can often catch the elusive truth by carefully watching "processes"; and because the encrusting of plant stems and roots is such a feature of coastal invasion by sand it is worth indicating this for further observation.

In regard to Mr. Carus-Wilson's question respecting terrestrial evidence sealed up in the limestone, bones of marsupials, such as those of Procoptodon (one of the extinct kangaroos), Phascolomys (the wombat), and Perameles (the bandicoot), are frequently discovered in the older and newer dunes around the coast.

FREDERICK CHAPMAN.

National Museum, Melbourne,  
December 10.

#### An Early Migrant.

WILL you kindly allow me to place on record, as of interest to ornithological readers, that I observed quite clearly a house-martin vigorously flying about yesterday (February 5) near North Acton.

HENRY O. FORBES.

Deanway, Beaconsfield,  
February 6.