

single spot in Boston is said to be continuous for more than fifty years.

While Mr. Paine's bequest is at present chiefly noteworthy as enabling one important institution, temporarily embarrassed, to proceed with its work, and is thus most timely, it is also worthy of remark that it ranks high among specific bequests by scientific men themselves. That they rarely make large bequests, we presume to be no fault of their own, as but few of them ever come into the possession of great wealth, and fewer still are able to accumulate much more than enough to provide respectable support for their families. That Mr. Paine has done much more than this, is evident from the magnitude of his bequest; and it is gratifying to see so deserving an institution as the observatory of Harvard college come into the possession of an endowment copious enough to insure not only the continuance of its remarkable activity during recent years, but a considerable growth into new lines of research.

THE FIAT HAS GONE FORTH that in several of our cities the various telegraph, telephone, and electric-light wires must go underground within a very few months, and in New York a commission is shortly to be appointed to see that the legislative enactments are carried out. There are probably few competent persons, who have carefully and dispassionately considered the subject, who are not satisfied that an attempt to hurry this matter, and subject the wires to a premature burial, is, to say the least, extremely unwise. That it is scientifically practicable to work telegraph and telephone wires for short lengths underground, is unquestionable; but few persons who have not investigated the subject realize the great practical difficulties involved, and the very large expense required to insure satisfactory results. With the high-tension currents used in arc-lighting, additional difficulties are encountered that have not yet been satisfactorily surmounted. That the rapid increase of overhead wires is produc-

tive of much annoyance and danger, is evident to all; and even those most averse to legislation feel that most of the wires must eventually be placed underground. But in this, as in all matters which are still in an experimental stage, the only safe maxim is to hasten very slowly.

A RECENT PUBLICATION of the Society for the promotion of agricultural science—the second made by the society—contains the papers read at the Minneapolis meeting in 1883, and the Philadelphia meeting in 1884, together with a lecture by Dr. J. H. Gilbert on agricultural investigations, and lists of members of the society and of American experiment-stations. Thirteen papers were presented,—seven in 1883, and six in 1884. Some of these are of scientific interest, while it is difficult to see how others serve to advance agricultural science. The object of the society is a most praiseworthy one; but we doubt whether at present enough really scientific work is done in this country in the field of agriculture to render such a society necessary as a means of publication, however useful it may be as a means of bringing together for consultation and discussion those interested in agricultural science.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

*\*Correspondents are requested to be as brief as possible. The writer's name is in all cases required as proof of good faith.*

##### Velocity and sediment.

MR. B. M. HARROD, in his note in *Science* of June 13, says that observations do not confirm the suggestions of Mr. Login as to an intimate relation between velocity and sediment. While stating negations, he might well have added, Neither does observation support the speculative dogmas laid down as fundamental truths by the Mississippi-River commission in its reports; for the Login notion pervades those reports, it having been adopted by Capt. Eads, and Capt. Eads's views having been adopted by the commission.

Mr. Harrod now amplifies a statement of Capt. Brown that the controlling influence of the Missouri over silt movement in the Mississippi is felt at the passes thirteen hundred miles below. As an interpretation of observations, the statement and its amplification are questionable.

Proceeding in his effort to throw the Login-Eads notion overboard, Mr. Harrod cites facts concerning erosion below Cairo to show that the more heavily silt-laden water on the west side of the river is also more active as an agent of erosion than the clearer water on the east side. Would not a muddy subject be clearer, if the idea of erosion as the cause of

silt-laden condition had been suggested, rather than an argument based on the implied converse? The fact is evident, that the water on the west side is more heavily laden because erosion on that side is most active. This, of course, directs the search for the cause of erosion in another direction than the one which those who would fain persuade themselves and others that the improvement of the Mississippi is possible by the principles and methods now employed, would choose to take.

The variations of silt-burden at the mouth of the Mississippi, attributed to the influence of Missouri-River water and the erosions below Cairo, have their final explanation in dynamic conditions which may be local.

The quantity of material delivered by the Missouri into the Mississippi may be nearly equivalent to the quantity discharged by the Mississippi into the Gulf for any period without establishing a presumption of identity; since that quantity is small, compared with the total moved, as the result of erosions of bank and scour in bed, in the thirteen hundred miles between the entrance of the Missouri and the Gulf. No direct evidence has yet been obtained that any particle of sand has ever traversed the thirteen hundred miles without one or many rests; but there is much evidence that transportation of sediment is by intermittent steps, times of rest being far in excess of motion. That the quantity in motion varies enormously in a few miles' distance was shown by the Fulton observations of 1879 and 1880, and the variation in quantity was clearly accounted for by observed local erosions and deposits.

Erosions and the consequent silt movement are due to an excess of energy in the stream (energy is a function of mass and fall or slope) beyond that necessary to overcome bed-resistances, mostly friction. The excess must be expended where it occurs; and the work done in the way of destructive action on bed and bank, and in the transportation of eroded material, measures the excess. The amount of surplus energy varies with time and place; so, also, the work done.

To trace any instance of work to its cause is not possible or necessary. Apprehension of the fact that erosion and silt-transport, with the consequences, — a shifting channel and uncertain elevation of surface for a given volume, — are due to dynamic conditions dependent upon volume of water and its absolute height above sea-level, on the one hand, and the character of channel, its length, form, and material, on the other, will be a safeguard against many errors of interpretation, of which Mr. Harrod's note affords two examples.

ROBERT E. MCMATH.

St. Louis, June 17.

### Korean curios.

I enclose an extract from a letter from Lieut. G. C. Foulke, U. S. navy, of the U. S. legation at Seoul, Korea, in which he kindly gives more exact information in reference to my article in *Science*, vol. iv. p. 172, and also in regard to Prof. E. S. Morse's criticism on said article in *Science*, vol. iv. p. 270.

GEORGE F. KUNZ.

Min Yong Ik is a blood nephew of the Queen of Korea. His father gave him for adoption to Min Thai Ho, who was killed in the conspiracy of December, 1884. He is stated by orientals generally to be by affinity a prince, and so generally titled. The present king and queen have one child, a son, — the crown prince: by Korean rule, Min Yong Ik ranks next to him.

Min Yong Ik's thumb-ring is a *thumb-ring*: it is not in the least like an archery thumb-guard, which I never saw an *officer* have or use on any occasion, nor do they have or use such. Min's jade thumb-ring is one of a class of articles, among which are short strings of shell-beads, pieces of amber, etc., very commonly owned by Korean officers, as many persons use canes at home to occupy the hands to play with.

The gold ornament Min wore was a button indicating his rank: it was (as it must be) attached by a black silk cord to a hair frontal band.

I have heard from many people that at Kurngang San, on the east coast of Korea, were columns of stone more than six times the height of a man. Some said they were crystals; but others (and one eye-witness) do not speak of them as such. Probably the columns below the water in the sea presented that appearance. Most people say there were tree-like shaped stones. Kurngang San is the place spoken of by Prince Min to Mr. Kunz.

Professor Morse is quite correct in saying the social customs of the country would interfere with Min's bringing his wife to America. Min often said he intended to bring her, etc.; but his talk was perfect nonsense, for he never meant it.

### An indian paint-cup.

While searching for Indian remains on an island in the Susquehanna, I found a paint-cup which is somewhat different from the ordinary. In place of a water-worn pebble which has had a natural hollow on one side, — and which is, I believe, the material invariably used, especially in the east, — this is made from a fragment of sandstone, which has been hollowed out entirely by artificial means. Some of the powdered oxide of iron still remains in the cup, and, if moistened, answers very well for a coloring-matter. The site where I found the cup has furnished quite a number of relics, and was very probably the rendezvous of fishing-parties.

HARVEY B. BASHORE.

West Fairview, Penn.

### Premature appearance of the periodical cicada.

The communication of Prof. Lester F. Ward on this subject in *Science* (v. 476) will no doubt surprise other members of the Biological society of Washington as much as it did the undersigned.

Memory of a sound after the lapse of many years is untrustworthy, as a rule; and I was unwilling to accept as an established fact the statement of such an abnormal occurrence, which Professor Ward based solely on such memory. Yet I nevertheless endeavored to give reason for its possibility, there being a vast difference between a possibility and an established fact. Professor Ward then effectually weakened his testimony by evidence of faulty memory as to the season when Cicada septendecim was heard by him when a boy.

His evidence was rejected by me for that reason, and for the further reason, that, upon his own ground of rejecting inexpert testimony in memory of a visual impression as to hybrid oaks, we must reject his inexpert testimony in memory of an auditory impression as to Cicadas. I nowhere pronounced his Virginia observations 'wholly worthless,' nor the occurrence 'impossible as contrary to all canons of entomology.'

Professor Ward, in his private conversation with me, made no attempt to describe the notes of October last, but simply affirmed his recollection of them as similar to those of C. septendecim. His description in *Science* is of one of the notes of the species, and he seems to be ignorant of the fact that Cicada septen-