

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.

Newcomb's 'Political economy.'

IN reviewing my 'Political economy' in the last number of *Science*, Prof. E. J. James makes some pertinent remarks about workers in one field trespassing in another. But his method of dealing with such a trespasser is one to be condemned by all lovers of good morals in criticism. It consists, in brief, in misrepresenting his teachings, and putting into his mouth language which he never used, and doctrines and opinions which he never sustained. His misrepresentations are so flagrant, that I feel it necessary to expose them immediately in the journal in which they appeared.

He represents me as undertaking "to bring order into the reigning confusion," and "to give the subject a recognized place among the sciences by being the first to treat and develop it as a science;" putting this pretentious language in quotation-marks in such a way as to make his readers believe that I used it. I used no such language, and made no such pretensions. The first-quoted phrase is, so far as I can determine, entirely of Professor James's fabrication. In the second quotation he has taken a sentence about the possible future development of economics, and altered it so as to change it into a ridiculous claim made by me for my work. What I wrote was, "The author takes a more hopeful view of the future development of economics than that commonly found in current discussion. He holds that nothing is needed to give the subject a recognized place among the sciences, except to treat and develop it as a science."

It will be seen that Professor James takes the sentence from its connection, and interpolates several words in such a way as wholly to change its meaning and application. I shall not trust myself to characterize this proceeding.

The review tends to strengthen the modest hope, expressed in the preface, that the principles laid down would be accepted as forming a well-ascertained, even if limited, body of doctrine. He does not join issue on a single principle of those referred to, but reverses, perverts, or misapplies my views on nearly every principle which he discusses.

I never asserted that "the individual, in following out his own interest, as he views it, will, at the same time, *always* promote in the most efficient manner the public interest." On the contrary, Book v., § 5, is devoted to showing the error of such a proposition. I have italicized the words in which the misrepresentation consists. Strike out the italicized words, and substitute *as a general rule for always*, and we shall have a different proposition, which I sustain.

"But he is trying to get formulas for a general political economy which shall hold good of present, past, and future societies alike," is an atrocious misrepresentation. The proposition in question is one which my book distinctly combats. Section 25 is wholly devoted to showing its error; and, lest the student should forget, he is again warned against it in the summary at the end of the book (p. 539).

He takes a sentence in which I show one of the compensations for the apparent evils of private ownership of land, and comments on it as if it were my main proposition in dealing with the subject. The

statement that I confuse the labor party with the socialists is perhaps pardonable as being an impression which a hasty and superficial reader might readily receive, from the fact that, owing to want of space, only certain general ideas common to both could be considered. In fine, there is one, and only one, point in which he correctly reproduces the spirit of my teaching, and joins issue with it; and that is, my conclusion about the practicability of socialistic ideas in the present state of society. This subject, however, is not included in that portion of the book which I hoped would meet with universal acceptance.

I wish it clearly understood that I take no exception to the terms in which Professor James characterizes my work. That my ideas are those of a past generation, and my expressions like a voice from the dead; that I am unacquainted with the recent literature of the subject, and ignorant of actual facts in the social organism, — are views which I not only recognize his right to hold and express, but in the expression of which I admire his frankness. At the same time I do not disguise the fact that it would be very interesting to me to know whether Professor James and his school dissent from any of the principles which I lay down as forming the basis of economic science.

S. NEWCOMB.

Whatever may be thought of the general tenor of Professor James's review of Newcomb's 'Political economy,' there are one or two points in it which simply demand correction. In particular, there is a passage in the first paragraph of the review, the injustice of which can only be set right by citing it in full, and along with it the passage in Professor Newcomb's preface of which it professes to be a quotation. Professor James says, —

"Certain it is, at any rate, that if a man who had given the best years of his life to the study of political economy should wander over into the field of astronomy and physics, and undertake 'to bring order into the reigning confusion,' and 'to give the subject a recognized place among the sciences *by being the first* to treat and develop it as a science,' Professor Newcomb would be just the man to administer a severe and deserved castigation."

The paragraph in Professor Newcomb's preface upon which this charge of outrageous pretension is based is the following: —

"The author takes a more hopeful view of the future development of economics than that commonly found in current discussion. He holds that nothing is needed to give the subject a recognized place among the sciences, except to treat and develop it as a science. Of course, this can be done only by men trained in the work of scientific research, and at the same time conscious of the psychological basis on which economic doctrine must rest. To such investigators a most interesting and hopeful field of research is opened in the study of the laws growing out of the societary circulation. If the same amount and kind of research which have been applied to the development of the laws of electricity were applied to this subject, there is every reason to suppose that it would either settle many questions now in dispute, or would at least show how they were to be settled."

Of course, no one would charge Professor James with purposely inserting the words we have italicized, and thus completely altering the meaning of his quotation; but no one can read the paragraph in

Newcomb's preface without seeing the gross and unpardonable carelessness of a reviewer who would interpret it as Professor James did, not to speak of the additional carelessness in writing which led him to so misquote Newcomb's words as to make them explicitly convey the meaning he had falsely assigned to them.

Somewhat more pardonable — if due to ignorance on Professor James's part — is his speaking of Professor Newcomb as 'wandering over into the economic field' at an advanced period in his life. Most people in this country who are interested in economics know that Professor Newcomb has been a student and writer upon economics for the last twenty-five years or more. If Professor James knew this, — however low might be his opinion of the result of Professor Newcomb's studies, — his speaking of Newcomb's 'wandering over into the economic field' is simply inexcusable misrepresentation.

Professor James goes on to say that "there is no evidence in the style of reasoning in this work that the author is at all acquainted with the recent literature of the science either in England or on the continent. One great advance in economic science in the last twenty five years lies in a change of its prevailing method." I, for my part, do not know to what extent Professor Newcomb may be acquainted with the writings of the recent German economists or their English-speaking followers; but, so far as the absence of any effect of their work upon his method of discussion is relied upon as evidence on this head, it is very pertinent to ask Professor James how much of the influence of these writers is discernible in Professor Sidgwick's recent work on political economy. Professor Sidgwick, being unfortunately 'professor in moral and political philosophy,' may be regarded by Professor James as not quite enough a specialist to be cited; but we have his own word for it (in his preface) that, "among foreign writers," he had "derived most assistance from the works of Professors A. Held and Wagner;" and in spite of his having seen the new light, his book professes to be in the main a guarded restatement of the principles of the old masters.

This is not the place to enter into a general discussion of the merits of the new economists who think they have 'exploded' every principle of political economy from which they can show that an erroneous practical conclusion has been drawn, and who freely distribute such adjectives as 'crude,' 'dogmatic,' and 'mazy,' in speaking of any theory which they find has not taken note of every disturbing influence. But it is presumptuous in a member of this school to regard a general adherence to the methods of Mill and Cairnes as evidence of ignorance or incompetence.

It would take too long to show how unfair is Professor James's presentation of Newcomb's treatment of *laissez-faire*. I trust that the correction I made at the beginning of this letter may be enough to render the reader somewhat suspicious of Professor James's fairness and accuracy in representing his author. It may, however, be worth while to re-enforce this suspicion by observing that the last sentence in Professor James's article is entirely and absurdly gratuitous, as Professor Newcomb, in speaking (p. 153) of the government's assuming (an unfortunately chosen expression, I admit) that "the values of equal weights of the two metals have a certain fixed ratio to each other," is simply engaged in describing what governments do when they establish an unlimited bimetallic

system; his discussion of the 'views' both of monometallists and of bimetallicists being reserved for a subsequent portion of the book (which Professor James would seem not to have read) in which he criticises the arguments on both sides without deciding in favor of either.

Baltimore, Nov. 27.

FABIAN FRANKLIN.

The Biela meteors.

The Bielid meteors were observed here in considerable numbers last evening. I am sorry to say, that, having been very busily occupied all day, I had quite forgotten that they were expected, and so was not on the lookout for them at the beginning of the darkness. I suppose that in consequence I probably missed the maximum of the shower, which seems to have occurred very early in the evening.

On going out of my house at 7.15, my attention was immediately attracted by seeing two meteors in the sky together, followed almost instantly by others. While walking the first hundred yards, I saw twelve; and during the whole ten minutes' walk to the Halsted observatory, I counted thirty-six; though the eye was much disturbed by the street-lights, and though for a considerable part of the way the view of the sky was more or less obstructed by trees and buildings. The shower was apparently on the wane, however, and the number per minute diminished pretty regularly. Up to 7.45, about one hundred had been recorded in all; between that time and 8 o'clock, only three or four more were seen, and observation was discontinued.

About half a dozen of the hundred were as bright as stars of the first magnitude; about fifty were of the second and third magnitudes; and of the remainder a considerable proportion were between the fifth and sixth magnitudes, just fairly visible to the naked eye, and only seen when one happened to be looking at the exact place where they appeared. Of course, it is likely that the real number of these faint meteors was much larger in proportion to the brighter ones than the actual observations would indicate. Several of the larger ones left trains which lasted for two or three seconds, never more, and were always red. In no case was the meteor, or its train, of the greenish or bluish tinge which characterizes the Leonids. The tracks were very few of them more than 10° or 15° long, and the motion was rather slow for a shooting star, the duration of flight being usually more than a second, even when the path was not more than 5° long. In a few cases the tracks were decidedly curved or crooked.

The 'radiant' was very well marked, — an oval region about 4° long, north and south, and about 2° wide. Its centre, according to the best estimate I could form, was about 2° north-west from Gamma Andromedae, A.R. 1^h 50^m, δ 43°.5. The determination rests largely upon three nearly stationary meteors, with tracks not exceeding 15' in length, which appeared within the limits of the radiant; but it agrees satisfactorily with the result obtained by plotting fifteen or twenty other tracks in the same part of the sky.

It would seem from this that the radiant is now a little farther east than it was in 1872, when, according to A. S. Herschel (*Monthly notices*, vol. xxxiii. p. 78), its position was A.R. 1^h 41^m.6 (25°.4) and δ 43°.7. In 1872 some of the best observers found evidences of two or more distinct radiants. Nothing of the