from the centre of gravity to the point of attachment of the string shall be three times the distance between that point and the centre of pressure.

— A recently completed iron water-tower, 250 feet high at Sheepshead Bay, near Coney Island, while being tested a few days ago, gave way at the base, and fell, shattered, to the ground when the water reached a height of 227 feet.

— The meeting of the Public health association was closed at Toronto recently. Dr. George M. Sternberg was elected president, Prof. Charles N. Hewitt first vice-president, Prof. C. A. Lindsley second vice-president, and Dr. Irving A. Watson secretary, for the coming year.

— Pretty much the whole of the September number of the *Journal of the Society for psychical research* is devoted to an interesting tale of a 'haunted house.'

— Arrangements are being made at Newcastle-upon-Tyne for holding there a mining, engineering, and industrial exhibition (international and colonial) in 1887, to mark the jubilee year of the reign of the queen.

— Dr. Schweinfurth has, says *Nature*, addressed to all Europeans, especially physicians, residing in Egypt, an inquiry as to whether, so far as they are aware, families of northern origin settling in Egypt do, or do not, die out within three generations, or whether the race is capable of being perpetuated beyond that limit.

— It is stated by the London *Engineering* that a dirigible balloon of colossal dimensions has been for some time in course of construction in Berlin. It is 500 feet in length, 50 feet in diameter, and weighs 43,000 pounds. The propelling power consists of two steam-engines of 50 horse-power each.

— In a recently patented soda-motor, intended for use on street-railways, the process of generating steam is as follows: the caustic soda, which is contained in a reservoir surrounding the steam-boiler, is raised to a high initial temperature by means of jets of burning gas or petroleum, thus evaporating all moisture from the soda. The heat from the soda produces steam in the boiler, which is applied to an ordinary engine; the exhaust steam from the engine is then absorbed by the soda, producing heat sufficient to generate steam, until the soda is supercharged with moisture, when the jets of flame, which in the mean time have been dispensed with, are again ignited to regenerate and reheat the soda. The operation may be repeated continuously. This is a modification of the soda-motors which have been in use several years past in this country and in Europe.

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.*

How astronomers may work.

IN your issue of Oct. 15, I notice the reply of Professor Holden to your comment on his scheme of inviting the leading astronomers of the world to visit Mount Hamilton, one at a time, to use the Lick telescope when not in use by the regular observers. I think Professor Holden is unfortunate in his selection of examples of good work done at high elevations. Each one of his examples might be quoted as an instance where excellent results were gained as the reward of *continuous* work by a skilled observer, using the instrument with which he was most familiar, and in a field of research where his powers of observation were at their best. Probably we should know less than we now know about radiant energy, if Mr. Burnham had gone to Mount Whitney to use the bolometer, in place of Professor Langley and Mr. Keeler. And we may be quite certain Professor Langley would not have added to his reputation, had he gone to Mount Hamilton to use Mr. Burnham's telescope, searching for double stars. Doubtless, many men will be glad to have an opportunity to look through the Lick telescope, to note how familiar objects appear when seen with an instrument of its anticipated perfection and power. But it does not seem possible that any results of scientific value can be obtained from such scrappy, disjointed work as is proposed by Professor Holden. T.

New York, Oct. 19.

Larval amblystomas for laboratory work.

During the past summer I have sent to the Smithsonian institution several hundred living specimens of larval and adult amblystomas. These were to meet the demand for these important forms on the part of special workers, and the biological laboratories both in this country and Europe, a number of them having been sent to M. Chauvin in Germany.

Quite recently, however, I have received a number of other applications from colleges and other points, requesting a few specimens of these animals for their investigations, and for the use of biological students. To meet these latter demands, I send by express to-day an unusually fine lot of some two hundred and fifty living larval amblystomas, and two adults, to Professor Baird, at the Smithsonian institution, Washington, D.C., where, if proper application be made for them, I am assured they will be sent to any point in accordance with the regulations governing the distribution of such material from that institution. R. W. SHUFELDT.

Fort Wingate, N. Mex., Oct. 8.

Polydactylism.

An instructive example of this abnormity was under my observation at about the time Dr. Le Conte published his interesting letter upon the subject (*Science*, Aug. 20), and Mr. John B. Smith of the U.S. national museum, in a subsequent number, added his own observations (*Science*, Sept. 3) in regard to it.

The case I refer to is that of a man (F. G.) living