

should be examined attentively. These, and the outline of the digito-plantar depression, the line which defines the plantar arch, are the data for diagnosis. The conclusions which Dr. Masson draws, are, 1°, the dimensions and the shape of footprints made by the same foot vary with the attitudes taken; 2°, the two extreme and characteristic types are represented by impressions made by the foot in walking and in standing; 3°, the expert called to study the matter of footprints should always take impressions of the foot of the accused in the act of standing and of walking, and should compare only those which correspond with the same attitude; 4°, in connection with the measurements made, one should always consider the points which throw light upon the individual characteristics of the foot.

— We have received the first volume of the publications of the observatory ('History and work of the Warner observatory') founded by Mr. H. H. Warner of Rochester, N.Y., about six years ago, and now well known through its connection with the Warner comet prizes. The volume is published by Dr. Lewis Swift, the director, and gives a description of the observatory (a tower attached to the dwelling of the director) and the instruments, and a list of over four hundred nebulae discovered since July 9, 1883. About two-thirds of the pamphlet are taken up by 'The Warner prize essays.' These are, an essay on 'Comets; their composition, purpose, and effect upon the earth,' by Prof. Lewis Boss of the Dudley observatory; and four essays on the sky-glows, by Professor Kiessling, and Messrs. Clark, Maine, and Bishop respectively. The principal instrument of the observatory is an excellent 16-inch Clark equatorial provided with a filar micrometer and many convenient accessories. Its equipment is to be increased by a spectroscope, to cost \$1,000, ordered from the Clarks. The observatory is also provided with a 4½-inch comet-seeker. Dr. Swift has devoted himself almost entirely to the discovery of new nebulae, and the search for comets, a field in which he has had nearly thirty years' training. It would seem ungracious to comment upon any of the shortcomings of the report; we suggest, however, that the usefulness of the observatory as an astronomical institution might be greatly increased if the director were provided with a thoroughly competent assistant, in order that his own work of discovery may be supplemented by careful study and measurement. It should be noted that Mr. Warner has expended more than \$4,500 in astronomical prizes since Oct. 10, 1880.

— It seems that professors in Italy are chosen by a method that seems to be purely national.

We quote from a recent article by R. Bonghi:— "For those who do not know, I should mention that in Italy the university professors are elected by the system of *concorsi*, for which there seems to be no exact English equivalent, and the particular method adopted has been altered several times, but is now the following: The faculty in which a professor is wanted proposes to the minister five names of ordinary professors of the subject for which a teacher is needed, or of cognate subjects, and if the minister approves of them he appoints them as a committee. To it every native or foreigner who thinks himself adapted for such a chair can send in his *titoli*; that is, his academic degrees and the books he has written. The committee, in a more or less explicit report, judges who is eligible, who not, and who among those considered eligible deserves the first place. Such a judgment presupposes that all the members of the committee should read and ponder carefully the books sent in by the candidates, but the general opinion is that they do not do so. It is commonly supposed that they meet with their minds already made up, and that they are proposed and nominated in such a manner as to insure their coming to the decision which will please either the faculty that proposes them or the minister who nominates them. This may not be true in all cases, but in some it doubtless is. At any rate, the report of the committee is then sent up to the superior council (of public instruction), which has nothing to do but to see that all due forms have been observed; which forms naturally always are observed, unless through some oversight in the drawing-up of the report."

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

##### Left-handedness.

ON p. 148 of the current volume of *Science*, mention is made of Dr. Wilson's view as to the cause of left-handedness.

In connection with this, Dr. Thomas Brown's suggestion in his 'Vulgar errors' (London, 1658) may be quoted. It occurs in the chapter, 'Of the right and left hand.'

"And therefore the brain, especially the spinal marrow, which is but the brain prolonged, hath a fairer plea hereto; for these are the principles of motion, wherein dextrality consists; and are divided within and without the Crany. By which division transmitting nerves respectively unto either side; according to the indifferency, or original and nativity prepotency, there ariseth an equality in both or prevalency in either side."

He does not lay much weight on this, for his conclusion is, —

"And thus have we at large declared that although the right be most commonly used; yet hath it no regular or certain root in nature." B.

Lexington, Va., Feb. 21.