graphical names, their meaning, origin, derivation, etc. As it is desirable that the annual reports should be as complete as possible, and as a large amount of material is scattered through American journals, and particularly through the publications of the State surveys and historical societies, which are difficult of access in Europe, American authors can materially help Professor Egli by sending him copies, or at least the titles, of their remarks bearing on this subject.

— Last autumn an attempt was made, says *Nature*, to bring live cod from Iceland to Norway on board smacks, and six thousand fish were brought over to Bergen successfully. Here, however, many of them died, on account of the basin in which they were kept until the sale could be effected being too small. This year fresh attempts will be made.

— Dr. Asa Gray has been seriously ill for some weeks.

— The second meeting of the International Copyright Association was held in Boston, Jan. 24, President Eliot in the chair. Secretary Estes announced that satisfactory progress had been made in the movement to obtain the recognition of authors' rights in their literary work. A resolution was adopted approving the principle involved in the amendments of the Chase Copyright Bill proposed by the executive committee of the American Copyright League and the American Publishers' Copyright League, and requesting Senator Chase to adopt these amendments, with such verbal changes as may be recommended by the council of this association and adopted by the committees mentioned. A resolution was also passed asking the chairman to appoint a sub-committee to confer with Senator Chase regarding these amendments. After a general discussion, in which Messrs. Houghton, Scudder, Ticknor, Ernst Lothrop, and others participated, the meeting adjourned.

— *Nature* comments on French architects as seeming to attend to the decorative rather than the useful parts of the buildings they design. The architect who designed the new medical school in Paris took so little pains about the distribution of the water-pipes, that in very cold weather the laboratories (chemistry, physiology, bacteriology, experimental pathology, etc.) are wholly deprived of water. Recently the water in all the pipes was frozen, so that not a drop of water was available in a single laboratory. Of course, every one connected with the school complains that work under such conditions is nearly impossible. The new Sorbonne will be a handsome building, but, unfortunately, the work is soon to be stopped owing to lack of money. The ornamental part of the building is finished, but the useful part has not yet been begun.

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.*

Twenty copies of the number containing his communication will be furnished free to any correspondent on request.

The editor will be glad to publish any queries consonant with the character of the journal.

The Snow-Snake.

IN a letter (*Science*, xi. No. 259) pointing out certain errors in an article on Pocahontas, referring especially to two games mentioned therein, Dr. Beauchamp says, "The children indoors were playing at *gus-ha'-eh* (or 'peach-pits'), it is said; but where the peaches came from at that early day is not explained." Yet the doctor fails to give us a hint as to the true rendering of this word, and the proper name of this game. This game was played generally with 'plum-pits,' though sometimes with small pebbles, etc.; but, as the pits were more convenient and symmetrical, they were preferred, and, being used in most cases, they gave their name to the game, namely, 'plum-pits,' or, better, 'pit-betting.'

In regard to the use of the snow-snake among Powhatanic tribes, Dr. Beauchamp remarks that "it is not wise to place a Northern game so far South," evidently wholly oblivious of the fact that 'betting' with the *u-tră-hwĕⁿ'-uĕ* ('snow-snake') was a favorite outdoor sport of the Carolinian and Virginian tribes of Iroquois, — too important offshoots of the family to be overlooked, — and who were situated farther South than the Powhatans. The doctor should have omitted the *r* in his orthography of the word *kă-wher'-ta* (*kă-whe'-ta*), as it does not occur in the speech of the Onondagas of the present time. J. N. B. HEWITT.

Washington, D.C., Jan. 23.

The 'Act of God' Once More.

MR. W. W. Nevin's interesting note (*Science*, Dec. 2) as to the Mexican doctrine of 'fuerza mayor' emphasizes my point. The Roman law having always been, as it still is, the law of continental Europe, it was inevitable that such American colonies as were settled from the continent should retain the doctrine of the 'act of God,' and that when the Spanish brought it to Mexico, and implanted it in a community saturated with superstition, it should have augmented quite as rapidly as its adumbration has waned with us, until even so anticipated an occurrence as the flooding of a river in a rainy season should relieve from the obligation of a contract. But United States capital and energy are speedily civilizing Mexico by building railroads within her territory, and doubtless we may expect a very considerable attenuation of the doctrine at no distant day. I do not think all of *Science's* correspondents share in the good faith of Mr. Nevin. It does not impress me, for example, as in good faith that one of them asks (*Science*, Nov. 25) whether, had a certain car-stove he specifies upset and ignited a certain train, it would have been an 'act of God;' or that another (*Science*, Dec. 16) demands whether I propose that the railways of this Republic be operated by Mexican law. But in good faith, nevertheless, will I answer both these questions. Up to the date of the latest of the five accidents I specified, no practicable means of heating cars had been invented except car-stoves. Steam-pipes from the engine had, indeed, been proposed for twenty years, but no coupler-joint had been perfected, and no means of keeping the steam from cooling, sufficient to overcome the extreme coolable surface of a pipe serving long trains in the severe weather of the mountains, or the low temperatures of the North and North-west, devised. At present, however (stimulated, in fact, by the very casualties I specified at Republic and White River), there are certainly three or four of these contrivances which have been tested and found practicable. Therefore, had your correspondent's stove overturned and partially roasted him, he would certainly have been deprived of the opportunity of asserting that he had been roasted by an 'act of God,' since the company could have availed itself of that particular progress of applied science which had invented a heating apparatus which in case of accidents would not induce combustion of the train. As to the second question, I say, No, and Yes. I proposed no Mexican laws for regulation of our own railroads, but I did question whether an already well-known rule of law limiting the responsibility of the employer for mental conditions of the employee was entirely without bearing upon a certain state of admitted facts. The common law expressly declares that there are possible conditions of an employee's mind which discharge the employer. An employee who, in ejecting trespassers, becomes vindictive, passionate, or wilful, and on that account employs a surplusage of force, so acts at his own and not at his employer's peril. I therefore suggested a question whether an entirely unforeseen and instantaneous absence of mind on an employee's part was any more within his employer's control than a burst of passion.

Again: it seems immaterial to my point that different investigators, tribunals, or commissions may receive different reports of the causes directly forwarding a casualty. A question of precedence between parallel proximate causes is always an exceedingly nice one. Indeed, the only report of a railway accident likely to be substantially unreliable is the newspaper report; and this not necessarily because the newspaper is biassed against the company, but simply because newspapers are at the mercy of their reporters, precisely as railway companies are at the mercy of their employees. The reporter first on the ground takes the impressions of the bystanders, and reconciles them somehow out of his inner consciousness. The only persons present who possess the slightest actual knowledge as to the why and wherefore of the catastrophe are the employees of the company, and they are silent. They have their