which bear on biological studies, New Zealand stands out prominently in all discussions on the subject of geographical biology. It stands as a lone zoölogical area, minute in area, but on equal terms, as far as regards the antiquity and peculiar features of its fauna, with nearly all the larger continents in the aggregate. In consequence of this, many philosophical essays — such, for instance, as Hooker's introductory essay to the early folio edition of the "Flora;" the essays by Hutton, Travers, and others; and also the New Zealand references in Wallace's works — have all contributed essentially to the vital question of the causes which have brought about the distribution and geographical affinities of plants and animals, and have thus been of use in hastening the adoption of the doctrine of evolution.

Much still remains to be done. Both as regards its fauna and its flora, New Zealand has always been treated too much as a whole quantity; and in consequence percentage schedules, prepared for comparing with the fauna and flora of other areas, fail from this cause. It is absolutely necessary not only to discriminate localities, but also to study more carefully the relative abundance of individuals as well as of species before instituting comparisons. The facility and rapidity with which change is effected at the present time should put us against rashly accepting species which may have been accidental intruders, though wafted by natural causes, as belonging to the original endemic fauna or flora. Further close and extended study, especially of our marine fauna, is urgently required. We have little knowledge beyond the littoral zone, except when a great storm heaves up a gathering of nondescript or rare treasure from the deep. Of dredging we have had but little done, and only in shallow waters, with the exception of a few casts of the deep-sea trawl from the "Challenger." When funds permit, a zoölogical station for the study of the habits of our sea-fishes, and for the propagation of such introductions as the lobster and crab, would be advantageous. I observe that lately such an establishment has been placed on the Island of Mull, in Scotland, at a cost of £400, and that it is expected to be nearly self-supporting. With respect to food-fishes, and still more with respect to some terrestrial forms of life, we, in common with all the Australasian colonies, require a more scientific and a less casual system of acclimatization than we have had in the past.

One must talk with bated breath of the injuries that have been inflicted on these colonies by the rash disturbance of the balance of nature. Had our enthusiasm been properly controlled by foresight, our settlers would probably not have to grieve over the losses they now suffer through many insect-pests, through small birds and rabbits, and which they will in the future suffer through the vermin that are now being spread in all directions.

HEALTH MATTERS.

Why the Stomach does not digest Itself.

FROM a new study of this subject Dr. E. Sehrwald announces the following conclusions (*Medical Record*, March 7, 1891): 1. The balance between the alkali of the blood and the acid of the gastric juice does not follow, during life, the law of diffusion, but moves in narrower limits; 2. The self-digestion of the stomach is partly prevented by the alkalinity of the blood, and partly by cell-action; 3. The living epithelium interposed between the blood and the gastric juice prevents their mutual neutralization, and preserves the alkalinity of the blood and the acidity of the gastric juice; 4. By this protection the stomach is spared a great deal of work of secretion and absorption; 5. The protection furnished by the flowing blood is partly due to its alkalinity, and partly to its properties as a nutritive liquid; 6. All influences which arrest the nutrition of the cells of the walls of the stomach may lead to self-digestion and ulceration. The conditions which may be mentioned in this connection are, first, disturbances in the circulation; second, direct injury to the epithelium; and, third, injuries of the trophic nerves.

Cremation and its Safeguards.

The *Lancet*, Jan. 31, 1891, says, "Unfortunate circumstances connected with the death of the late Duke of Bedford have brought into prominence an important question respecting the procedure of the Cremation Society, of which the late duke was a prominent member, in cases of death from other than purely natural causes. It is clear that in the case of the society absolute certainty as to the cause of death, when other than natural, can alone justify the preferential application of its method. It will therefore be interesting to examine the practical value of the safeguards adopted by the society to prevent the chances of fallacy in a matter so important. These are three: namely, (1) the certificate of the medical practitioner in attendance on the deceased during his last illness; (2) a second independent certificate by another practitioner after careful inquiry into the circumstances attending the illness; and (3), should any doubt remain, the evidence afforded by necropsy.

"A further, though possibly less permanent, security exists in the resolution of the society to refuse cremation in any case where the least doubt exists respecting the cause of death. Such doubt, as observed by Sir Henry Thompson, could remain after necropsy only in an extremely small number of cases, and would, in fact, be virtually abolished. Not actually so, however. There still remains a minimum uncertainty; and this, it is apparent, is much greater where certification, even on the very careful system employed by the society, is alone relied upon. The practitioner in attendance might, in spite of diligence and skill, be misled; for example, in a case where the signs of poison were obscurely blended with those of real or supposed disease. In this connection the case of the late Mr. Maybrick is suggestive. Is it, then, to be believed that a second medical testimony, which would be independent of the former, could be relied on to guarantee the difference of opinion which would necessitate an appeal to the coroner? We should rather expect that this latter evidence, divested as it must be of various technical premises which guided the statements in the first certificate, would be at best a carefully weighed and usually confirmatory assertion of moral certainty.

"After all, it is probable that the most reliable safeguard against a too precipitate practice of cremation which we possess is to be found in the resolutions of the society above mentioned. Cremation, therefore, under its present rules, is certainly a valuable means of promoting accuracy in certification. As affording an absolute guaranty of such accuracy, it cannot be depended on, while it must in all cases destroy every trace of morbid or mischievous agency contained in the tissues. While, therefore, we freely admit its practical security against any miscarriage of justice in the vast majority of cases, we cannot admit that it stands in this respect on a level exactly so high as the practice of burial. Moreover, while we also recognize its more absolute and destructive purity in the disposal of infectious dead, we do not see that it possesses any such advantage in comparison with burial in other cases, provided that burial be conducted, as it increasingly is conducted, on a rational or 'earth to earth' system."

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.*

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

On request, twenty copies of the number containing his communication will be furnished free to any correspondent.

The Motion of Storms and High Areas.

THERE was presented in this journal Feb. 27 a short discussion of the origin and motion of waves of heat and cold. I desire to still further discuss this question under an analogous heading. In the previous note it is possible that too much prominence was given to the occurrence of temperature falls in the rear of storms when there were no high areas near. These falls seem to be accompaniments of storms, but are of very limited extent and slight intensity. They seem to be due largely to radiation from the air and earth to the clear sky.

It may conduce to clearness if several propositions are advanced and discussed.

1. *Storms and High Areas have the Same Velocity.* — If this were not so, the one would overtake the other when they were moving along the same line. Of course, there may be such conditions, on any map, in different lines, which have widely different velocities.