

In the same journal of January 26th is an abstract of a Royal Society paper by C. E. S. Phillips, on 'Diselectrification produced by Magnetism.' Foil was cemented on the inner and outer surfaces of a glass tube, and powerful magnet poles were inserted through air-tight flanges. When the tube was exhausted below .2" of mercury, and the inner coating was connected to the positive side of an electrical machine, an electroscope attached to the inner coating showed a rapid discharge on opening or closing the circuit of the magnet. With higher pressures or when the inner coating was negative there was no effect. When the electroscope was attached to the iron of the magnet poles, it indicated that the charge was transferred to these.

F. C. C.

ZOOLOGICAL NOTES.

BIRD MIGRATION.

In a recent issue of the *Proceedings of the California Academy of Sciences*, Leverett M. Loomis gives a fourth part of his 'California Water Birds,' including his deductions from a careful study of their migrations. He concludes that the Shearwaters off Monterey find their position and shape their course by landmarks, and that birds possess no mysterious superhuman faculty for determining direction, or else these same Shearwaters would not have been bewildered in the fog. He also considers that the young are guided from the place of their birth to their winter abode through the experience of the older birds, and that the mere presence of young alone in a locality does not prove that they are migrating independently of the adults, but that older birds have either continued their flight or are migrating farther off. Mr. Loomis sums up by saying that bird migration is a habit evolved by education and inheritance which owe their origin and perpetuation to winter, with its failure of food.

THE STEREOORNITHES AGAIN.

In the December number of *Comunicaciones del Museo Nacional de Buenos Aires*, Senor Mercerat discusses the zoological position of the gigantic birds from the Santa Cruz beds of Patagonia, and considers them as an independ-

ent 'gens' of the suborder Ciconiiformes of Fürbringer. While this is all right, Senor Mercerat unfortunately adds that the Stereoornithes are a degenerate group of birds, but that they have not progressed so far on their downward course as the so-called Ratitae, and that they present numerous characters similar to those of the Carinatae, combined with others peculiar to the Ratitae. What these ratite characters are, aside from the feeble development of the wings, no one has yet satisfactorily explained, and Mr. C. W. Andrews, in his recent memoir on *Phororhacos*, shows very clearly that the Stereoornithes have no kinship with the Ostriches. Size and flightlessness are not morphological characters and have no bearing whatever on the systematic position of the bird. It was a favorite remark of the late Professor Cope that an animal a mile long and an inch wide might belong to the same genus as one a mile wide and an inch long, and this might be paraphrased by saying that a bird with wings twenty feet across might be the nearest relative of a bird with no wings at all.

F. A. L.

THE ASSAY COMMISSION.

THE Assay Commission, which is appointed annually by the President to test the weight and fineness of the coinage of the mints in operation during the preceding year, met at the Philadelphia mint on February 14th. The men whom President McKinley designated to serve for the year 1900 were: Senator John P. Jones, of Nevada; Representative E. J. Hill, of Connecticut; Dr. H. S. Pritchett, Superintendent of the Coast and Geodetic Survey; Professor S. A. Lattimore, of the University of Rochester; Professor H. H. Nicholson, of the University of Nebraska; Dr. J. A. Mathews, of Columbia University; Dr. Cabell Whitehead, Assayer of the Bureau of the Mint; Dr. Marcus Benjamin, of the Smithsonian Institution; Hon. John H. Perry, of Connecticut; Calvin Cobb of Boise, Idaho; Thomas B. Miller of Helena, Montana; Edward Harden, of New York City; E. H. Rich, of Fort Dodge, Iowa, and Francis Beidler, of Chicago. The Commission also includes three ex-officio members, viz., the judge of the District Court of the