

## ELISHA MITCHELL SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY.

AT the 135th meeting of the Society on May 4th, the following papers were read:

'Transit Methods for Laying Sewer Grades': Mr. Wm. Cain.

'Acid Crystallization': Mr. Charles Baskerville.

'The Probable Complexity of Thorium': Mr. Chas. Baskerville.

'The Recent Geological Formations of the Mississippi Valley': Mr. J. A. Holmes.

CHAS. BASKERVILLE,  
*Secretary.*

## DISCUSSION AND CORRESPONDENCE.

## THE LARYNX AS AN INSTRUMENT OF MUSIC.

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: In this week's number of SCIENCE Professor Joseph Le Conte remarks upon Professor Scripture's description of the mode of action of the vocal chords, and quotes from a work of his own to show that the larynx 'cannot be likened to a stringed instrument nor to a reed-pipe,' continuing, 'It is strange that no one has thought to liken it to an ordinary horn; a stage horn, or better, a French horn.'

In Helmholtz's 'Tonempfindungen,' of which the first edition was published in 1862, occurs, under the caption, 'Membranöse Zungen,' the following statement: 'Als musikalische Instrumente kommen nur zwei Arten solcher membranöser Zungen in Betracht, nämlich die menschlichen Lippen beim Anblasen der Blechinstrumente und der menschliche Kehlkopf in Gesänge.'

This is the exact comparison suggested by Professor Le Conte. There follows a minute description of the mode of action of the vocal chords, and of the action of the lips in blowing a horn, which has never needed any improvement or correction. Both these cases are, very properly as it seems to me, classified under reed pipes, the sorts of reeds described being of great variety. The model pictured at the head of the section, for the study of membranous reeds, is certainly, as I think will be admitted by anyone who has made one, a very convincing demonstration of the mode of action of the

larynx. Professor Scripture's elastic cushions are certainly to be classified as reeds.

ARTHUR GORDON WEBSTER.  
CLARK UNIVERSITY, May 17, 1901.

## THE NEW COMET.

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: In SCIENCE for May 3d, page 717, appears an announcement of the discovery of the new comet, to which is added a section, stating that Professor Frost, of the Yerkes Observatory, had observed the comet on the morning of April 27th, just before sunrise. The last number of the *Astronomical Journal* also contains a similar statement, saying the comet was seen by him 20 minutes before sunrise, half an hour afterwards, and 15° north of the sun.

Here at the Naval Observatory two of the computers, and also I, myself, hunted diligently for the comet, both in the morning and evening, for several days after the receipt of the first telegram, and until we had positive information on the direction of motion.

Now that a set of elements of the comet has been received, it is perfectly clear that whatever Professor Frost sighted on April 27th, it was not the comet. On that day the object was 13° south of the sun, and very close to it in right ascension.

Moreover, as seen from the Yerkes Observatory, it would not rise until about 40 or 45 minutes after the sun, as any one can easily demonstrate by computing the place of the comet for that day, the semi-diurnal arc for it and the sun, for Yerkes Observatory, and take the difference between those two quantities.

GEORGE A. HILL.  
NAVAL OBSERVATORY, WASHINGTON,  
D. C., May 16, 1901.

## THE TEACHING OF PHYSIOLOGY IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

ABOUT two years ago I wrote a letter for SCIENCE concerning the text-book in physiology adopted by the State Board and used throughout the public schools of Kansas. Much dissatisfaction has been expressed by the more intelligent teachers of the State, but there is, nevertheless, no redress—the book must be used as a text in every school in the State.