medicinal use. Here we have the same medicinal agent, Iodine, used by people suffering under the same affection in very different and distant parts of the world; and their faith in it founded, no doubt, merely upon their experience of its good effects in the treatment and removal of this disease in those affected by it.

Courtois, a French manufacturer of saltpeter, first isolated iodine in 1812 from the ashes of seaweeds. Although this halogen was itself unknown to the ancients, its therapeutic action was made use of by Roger de Palermo (1180), who recommended the ingestion of seaweeds and sponges as a cure for goiter. Michael Servetus mentioned the value of burnt sponge as a remedy for this condition in Switzerland.

It seems strange that people in different parts of the world, afflicted with enlarged thyroids, should have singled out for use among all the drugs supplied by nature the very one which would prove efficacious, and one wonders how many centuries of trial and error were necessary to confirm the primitive people in their belief in the value of iodine-containing organisms.

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A METEOR FALL

THE Associated Press dispatch of December 16th carries a notice of a meteor which fell at 11 P. M. on Tuesday, December 15, 1925, in a field twenty-four miles southeast of Aberdeen, South Dakota. The press dispatch states that the meteor illumined the landscape with a quivering yellow radiance that changed to bright blue just before the meteor struck the earth.

Correspondence has been published in SCIENCE in the past in regard to the unreliability of personal observations as to the exact location where a meteor fell, and I wish to point out a striking example of this.

At 11 P. M. on Tuesday I was walking along a street in St. Paul on a rise of ground which is very close to the highest point in Ramsey County, Minnesota. Slightly to the north of west I saw a very spectacular meteor fall, and I am convinced that the meteor which I saw fall is the meteor which is noted from Aberdeen, South Dakota. I first noticed it at thirty-five to forty degrees elevation in the western sky and observed it for several seconds before it struck the earth. It had the appearance of a large sky-rocket, excepting in this case it was falling instead of rising, leaving behind it a brilliant path of flame. It appeared to me to fall not more than a quarter of a mile away. As a matter of fact, I hesitated for a moment or more before deciding not to walk over to the place where I thought it fell, and was only deterred from so doing by the fact that no hissing sound accompanied its passage through the air and by the fact that no concussion was heard when it disappeared from sight. The colors were those given in the Associated Press dispatch, a brilliant yellow or orange fading toward the end into a blue.

If the meteor which I saw fall is the one recorded from Aberdeen, South Dakota, it would mean that my estimate of distance of one eighth to one quarter of a mile is an outstanding example of how deceptive one's estimate can be of the location of a meteor fall. In this instance, the meteor fell more than two hundred miles away, but the time, general direction and the color changes are such that I personally believe I saw the fall of the meteor which is recorded in the press dispatch.

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SCIENTIFIC BOOKS

Faune de France. 10. Hyménoptéres vespiformes. 1 (Sphegidae, Pompilidae, Scoliidae, Sapygidae, Mutillidae). By L. BERLAND. Paul Lechevalier, Paris, 1925. (Fr. 45.)

IT would be a fine thing if we could have in the United States something comparable with the *Faune de France,* as projected by a committee of the French Federation of the Natural Science Societies, and as already carried partly into effect. It is the aim of the committee to furnish to naturalists, in convenient form, the means of surely identifying any animal found in France; but not of finding out all that is known about it. The diagnoses are reduced to the essential characters, dichotomous keys, brief bibliographies and abundant text figures are used. Each volume takes up a more or less restricted group, and the introduction to each volume includes such general information about the group as seems necessary.

In general, the distribution of the forms considered covers France, Corsica, Belgium, the Rhine Provinces and western Switzerland. The volumes are well printed, are of usable size and are sold at a cheap price. Twelve volumes of varying prices have already been published, of which six concern groups of insects. I have at hand, in addition to the volume mentioned in the heading, Seguy's "Anthomyidae," Pierre's "Tipulidae" and Chopard's "Orthoptera and Dermaptera," and am greatly impressed with the idea that started the series and with the results as published so far. The United States probably covers too great a territory to make it possible to adopt this admirable plan of the French Federation; but it

would be possible to start a similar series for each of the faunal zones in our territory, to the undoubted delight of all present naturalists, while it would also result in the making of many new students of animal groups.

In the present volume, M. Berland, who is a learned and capable assistant in the great Museum d'Histoire Naturelle at Paris, takes up five families of the fascinating burrowing wasps. Practically all the noted hymenopterists of France have in the past adopted the most praiseworthy habit of donating their collections to the museum of Paris, so that M. Berland had abundant material before him. The wonderful habits of these wasps have been studied with especial zeal by Frenchmen of mark, from Réaumur down to Fabre and Ferton, so that it has been possible for Berland to include with very many of the species brief notes on life history. And in addition to this he gives in his introduction not only a full statement as to habits but presents in tabular form the character of the larval food captured and stored by the adults of the different families and genera. Such a table can not fail to give data on group habits that will be of great comparative value to students of burrowing wasps in all parts of the world. One realizes on glancing at it that on the whole these creatures are undoubtedly of distinct aid to the human species in destroying large numbers of insects that are inimical to our interests.

Although in this very capable introduction Berland shows that he is familiar with the work of the Peckhams on American forms, in the remainder of the volume he seems to ignore the taxonomic conclusions of both American and English authorities. Had I known, when I met him last summer in Paris, that I was to write this little review, I would have quizzed him as to his knowledge of the English-written literature. My learned colleague, Mr. S. A. Rohwer, seems rather exercised that Berland should have used *Ammophila* for *Sphex, Pompilus* for *Psammochares, Elis* for *Campsomeris,* and so on; but in one instance, in a footnote (p. 257), Berland defends his use of *Pompilus* (following the hundred-years-old custom). He adopts the view which even many of the strictest adherents of the rules of the international committee on zoological nomenclature cherish in the back of their minds, that the advantages of holding to the old universally used names *"sont infimes, à côté des perturbations . . . déjà causées dans la nomenclature zoologique."* Dr. Stiles will probably notice this when he reads this number of SCIENCE and will probably labor with me when he sees me next; but, of course, seriously, I am with him and with his international committee.

It must constantly be remembered that this book and the others of the series are primarily handbooks for the identification of the fauna of France, and from this point of view M. Berland has done a most excellent job. Further, he has really gone beyond the handbook idea and has given an admirably condensed summary of all the most important facts known about these most interesting creatures.

An interesting idea suggests itself: Had this excellent book of Berland's been in existence when Fabre was working on these wasps, would the Hermit of Serignan have used it to identify the creatures he was studying in his experimental way? Knowing Fabre's opinion of taxonomists, I fear not; but, according to Ferton and others, it would have been a very good thing if he had.

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The Organization of Life. By SEBA ELDRIDGE. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1925. $4.00.

THE merit of "The Organization of Life," by Seba Eldridge, is that in it masses of the data of biology are treated by one whose training and outlook appear not to be biological but logical, philosophical and metaphysical.

The author's main contention is that many of the facts of living nature presented by professional students in this field can not be fully accounted for without recognizing non-physical, non-material factors. In other words, we have here the resources of formal logic and speculative philosophy marshalled in behalf of the vitalistic school of biologists. Thus concerning the origin of variation in organisms we read: "If non-material factors are operative in vital phenomena. . . . It should be possible . . . to provide a metaphysical foundation for our synthetic theory of variations" (p. 53).

This statement fairly typifies, I think, the standpoint from which the book is written. And the work is done with so much industry, good temper, seriousness and technical skill that not biologists alone but scientists in general might profitably read and ponder well every argument presented.

The portions of vital phenomena taken by the author as specially defiant of explanation on the basis of "chemicals and energies" (a couplet much used in the book) are in the realm of variation and heredity. His discussions of adaptation and his defense of neo-Lamarckian theories may be mentioned as particularly instructive in the way just indicated.

But what he has to say about the different types and the weaknesses of prevailing mechanistic and materialistic conceptions is also worth careful study —as is his critical examination of recent vitalistic conceptions, notably those of Bergson, Driesch and Haldane.