

Sir G. B. Airy, J. Campbell, A. A. Common, G. H. Darwin, Major J. Herschel, E. B. Knobel, G. Knott, A. Marth, E. Neison, A. C. Ranyard, Prof. H. J. S. Smith.

THE gold medal of the Royal Astronomical Society has been presented to Prof. Axel Möller, Director of the Observatory at Lund, in Sweden, for his investigations on the motion of Faye's comet. W. C. W.

WASHINGTON, March 18, 1881.

### MICROSCOPY.

On looking over the Transactions of the New Zealand Institute for 1878, we notice that a Mr. A. Hamilton speaks of having discovered *Melicerta ringens*. It was found in great profusion, on the finely-divided leaves of the *Myriophyllum*. This adds another locality to the wide geographical distribution of this interesting Rotifer.

Mr. Hamilton states that after examining a number of specimens he found the description given by Gosse correct, except that the formation of the pellets was at a much slower rate than that stated by him.

In the same locality were also found organisms which Mr. Hamilton thought to be *Plumatella repens*; they were growing on dead thistles in a swamp in only a few inches of water.

*The American Monthly Microscopical Journal* for March editorially announces the immediate publication of Mr. F. Habirshaw's Catalogue of the Diatomaceæ, also by the editor, a small book based on Professor J. Leidy's "*Freshwater Rhizopods of North America*." The editor's handbook on Adulteration is withdrawn.

In the same number Dr. F. S. Billings gives a long resumé of what is known about "*Trichina*," but seems to offer no new facts; the illustration he offers of "*Fresh trichinous invasion*" (after Heller) is a wretched misrepresentation of free trichinæ.

Any reader desirous of examining living specimens of trichinæ in this condition can obtain them on calling at our office.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

[The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his correspondents. No notice is taken of anonymous communications.]

#### To the Editor of "SCIENCE:"

The development of a peculiar non-nervous tissue in connection with the rhomboid sinus of the lumbo-sacral intumescence in birds, and which is especially well marked at the embryonic period, is I think of some bearing on the recently agitated question of a so-called lumbar brain in the extinct sauranodon. In all amniote embryos that I have studied myself, and of which I can find illustrations in accessible works, it is remarkable that there is a distinct posterior enlargement before the cephalic enlargement is well marked, or the brachial intumescence is even indicated in the medullary tube. This fact may point to the potent influence of some, at one time, deeply engrafted ancestral trait. It is not, I think, necessary or warrantable to go beyond this fact, and the established one of the existence of a non-nervous enlargement at the same region in allied sauropsidæ in endeavoring to account for the peculiarity found in the spinal canal of an extinct saurian genus. The supposition of the existence of anything meriting the designation of a brain elsewhere than in the cranial cavity in any amniote animal would be so fundamentally out of harmony with what we have learned to consider as the normal type of structure, that much stronger evidence than the size of a bony receptacle must be adduced be-

fore it can even be taken into consideration. That the size of a cavity and that of the contained organ are not necessarily in close correspondence, has been alluded to by another correspondent under the initials of B. G. W. I have been struck, in this connection, with the discrepancy between the size of the brain cavity and the brain itself in a two year old hippopotamus, though they corresponded in a young elephant.

Respectfully,

E. C. SPITZKA, M. D.

N. Y. 130 E. 50th Street.

#### To the Editor of SCIENCE:

PARIS, March 5th, 1881.

In bringing before your notice various points which are both novel and interesting, it seems to be my fate constantly to struggle with an *embarras de richesses* represented by a vast combination of phenomena which is forever appearing upon the scientific horizon.

Condensing therefore as much as possible the matter at my command, I will begin with a very trite and commonplace observation; petroleum is a most excellent thing in its way. It is inexpensive and it gives forth a beautiful light. But these advantages, as many know to their sorrow, are more than counterbalanced by the disagreeable habit it sometimes has of exploding. Accidents thus occasioned, frequently prove fatal, as the violence and intensity of the explosion prevent, in most cases, speedy relief being administered to the victims. Besides this, the methods employed are inefficient and usually unsatisfactory.

M. Ichlumberger, whose mind for some time has been occupied with this subject, finally proposes a mode of extinction which is exceedingly simple, and at the same time instantaneous. So confident is he of the efficacy of his plan, that he would like to make a law compelling every one to adopt it who has petroleum in any quantity.

This is his method; Upon every keg or barrel of petroleum, place a moderately large bottle filled with aqua ammoniæ. Should an explosion occur, the shock will shatter the bottle, spread the fumes of the ammonia in the atmosphere, and produce an automatic and infallible extinction of the flames.

This plan can well be recommended to those who make use of petroleum, or who are obliged to superintend the distillation of the liquid. It is only necessary to have within easy access one or several bottles of aqua ammoniæ, whose contents should instantly be scattered upon the petroleum in case it catches fire.

M. Ichlumberger also thinks that this mode of extinction could be effectively utilized in mines where fire-damp is imminent. The ammonia should be put in reservoirs, and so placed that it will be overturned immediately when the explosion occurs. This agent would undoubtedly be more powerful than water, and M. Ichlumberger's idea is worthy of serious attention.

A very peculiar case of poisoning occurred a short time ago at *Puy l'Evêque*, an account of which was sent to the *Académie de Médecine* by Dr. Demeaux. It seems that a family composed of five persons was taken violently ill after having eaten some mushrooms. One of the mushrooms left from dinner was sent by Dr. Demeaux to the *Académie* as a specimen, and upon being examined by M. Chatin, was found to belong to one of the numerous varieties of the *orange-ciguë* species called the *Amanita bulbosa*. Nine-tenths of the mushroom poisoning we hear about is due to this *Amanita* which, on account of its white color is frequently mistaken by the inexperienced and unsuspecting for the harmless mushroom. It is certainly the height of folly for people to run about the woods and fields mushroom hunting, unless they are perfectly familiar with the different species.