

COL. GORDON'S JOURNEY TO GONDOKORO

WE have been favoured with the following remarks concerning Colonel Gordon's journey to Gondokoro.

Colonel Gordon, "His Excellency, the Governor-general of the equator!" arrived at Khartoum on March 13, and had with him a *Pall Mall Gazette* of Feb. 13; he writes on the 17th from Khartoum as follows:—

"At this season of the year the air is so dry that animal matter does not decay or smell, it simply dries up hard; for instance a dead camel becomes in a short time a drum.

"The Nile, flowing from the Albert Nyanza below Gondokoro, spreads out into two lakes; on the edge of these lakes aquatic plants, with roots extending 5 ft. into the water, flourish; the natives burn the tops when dry, and thus form soil for grass to grow on; this is again burnt, and it becomes a compact mass. The Nile rises and floats out portions, which, being checked in a curve of the channel, are joined by other masses, and eventually the river is completely bridged over for several miles, and all navigation is stopped.

"Last year the governor of Khartoum went up with three companies and two steamers, and cut away large blocks of the vegetation; at last one night the water burst the remaining part, and swept down on the vessels, dragging them down some four miles, amidst (according to the Governor's account) hippopotami, crocodiles, and large fish, some alive and confounded, others dead or dying, the fish being crushed by the floating masses. One hippo was carried against the bows of the steamer and killed, and crocodiles 35 ft. long were killed: the Governor, who was on the marsh, had to go five miles on a raft to get to the steamer.

"The effect of these efforts of the Governor of Khartoum is that a steamer can now go to Gondokoro in twenty-one days, whereas it took months formerly to perform the same journey."

Colonel Gordon left Khartoum on March 21, and in his last letter from Fashoda, 10° N., he touches on some of the scenes on the banks of the river—the storks, which he was in the habit of seeing arrive on the Danube in April, laying back their heads between their wings and clapping their backs in joy at their return to their old nests on the houses, now wild and amongst the crocodiles 2,000 miles away from Turkey; the monkeys coming down to drink at the edge of the river, with their long tails, like swords, standing stiff up over their backs; the hippos and the crocodiles. Such scenes to a lover of nature, as Col. Gordon is, doubtless would serve to make up in some measure for the loss of civilised society and comforts.

THE EXTINCT FAUNA OF THE MASCARENE ISLANDS*

THE members of the scientific expedition about to start for Rodriguez should make themselves acquainted with what has already been done towards the working out of its wonderful extinct fauna. We therefore beg leave to call their attention, and that of naturalists in general, to a recent contribution of M. Alphonse Milne-Edwards to our knowledge of this subject, published in the "Annales des Sciences naturelles."

In this excellent memoir M. Milne-Edwards describes the objects disinterred during some researches made in the caverns of Rodriguez under the direction of Mr. Edward Newton, the Colonial Secretary of Mauritius, as also the contents of a small collection from Mauritius itself, made in the same recent formation whence the complete skeletons of the Dodo were lately obtained.

* "Recherches sur la Faune ancienne des îles Mascareignes." Par M. Alph. Milne-Edwards. Ann. Sc. Nat., sér. 5 Zool., t. xix.

The remains described and figured are entirely those of Birds, to the extinct forms of which class the author of this memoir has lately devoted so much of his attention. The most remarkable form thus restored to us is certainly the rail-like bird, apparently allied to the *Ocydromus* of New Zealand, which is proposed to be called *Erythromachus leguati*. This bird is of greater interest, as there can be little question that it is the *Gelinote* of which the old voyager Leguat speaks, as abundant in the island 200 years ago, and as being "grasse pendant toute l'année et d'un goût délicat," although we cannot quite understand how the pectoral muscle can have been sufficiently large to provide much sustenance to the hungry mariners of those days! Besides the *Erythromachus*, M. Milne-Edwards resuscitates species of owls, pigeons, parrots, and herons, and concludes his useful memoir with some pregnant remarks upon the general character of the ancient fauna of the Mascarene Islands.

We trust that the new expedition, soon about to start for Rodriguez, will not fail to succeed in obtaining a much more intimate acquaintance with both the ancient and modern fauna of this remote island.

NOTES

THE annual meeting of the Linnean Society was held on Monday, in conformity with the terms of the charter, when Prof. Busk presided. The following officers were elected:—President, G. J. Allman, M.D.; Treasurer, Daniel Hanbury; Secretaries, Frederick Currey; and St. George J. Mivart. The five members of the present Council recommended to be removed were—Dr. Braithwaite; J. D. Hooker, C.B., M.D.; J. G. Jeffreys, LL.D.; Daniel Oliver; W. W. Saunders. The five Fellows recommended to be elected into the Council in the room of the above were—Major-Gen. Strachey; W. T. T. Dyer; J. E. Harting; W. P. Hiern; J. J. Weir.

THE Annual Report, dated Jan. 31, 1874, of Mr. Gould, Government Astronomer to the Argentine Republic, has come to hand, containing an account of the work done at Cordoba Observatory during the past year. Judging from this and the previous report, and from the amount of encouragement given to Mr. Gould by the Argentine Government, it seems likely that Cordoba Observatory will produce as valuable results as any other observatory in the southern hemisphere. The observations of the stars between 23° and 80° of S.D. have been diligently continued, the heavens for this purpose being divided into a number of zones of convenient size. More than 70,000 observations of stars have in this way been made, and Mr. Gould confidently hopes that by the middle of this year the zone-observations will be completed, by which time he calculates that about 65,000 different stars will have been observed. Besides this a large number of observations for instrumental corrections have been made, besides repeated and careful observations of five or six stars in each zone for the purpose of detecting any errors of observation in the other stars of the zone. A considerable amount of photographic work has also been done, though Mr. Gould has been sadly hampered in this department. A variety of other useful astronomical work has been done at the observatory, which, under Mr. Gould's superintendence and by the liberality of the Argentine Government, is being gradually brought to a condition of great efficiency.

Mr. Gould is also provisional director of the Argentine Meteorological Office, which has been established for only about two years; here also he has set to work in a thorough manner with results that promise well for the future, notwithstanding the difficulties that have met him in the getting together of good instruments. He has endeavoured to collect all the meteorological