

the middle and upper classes, who own the railways, there is certain to be a considerable feeling in favour of a scheme which would be fruitful of so much pecuniary benefit to themselves, and it is well to have it discussed beforehand as thoroughly and as thoughtfully as it is discussed here. It is in useful conservatism such as these that Universities often do their greatest services. They are mints at which the coinage that is passing current in the commoner exchanges of the world may be thoroughly tested. Prof. Jevons offers statesmen and politicians an admirable discussion, luminous with the most practical good sense. Like his colleagues, Prof. Ward is conservative in the sympathies of his essay. We have been engaged for many years in breaking down the venerable theory of the Balance of Power in Europe, and we have been attempting to build up in its stead a sort of Temple of Doctrinarism—sacred to a goddess of international arbitration, who is to be capable of the cure of all international ailments. Prof. Ward applies the touchstone of his comprehensive historical knowledge to both. He is utterly hostile to the doctrine of Spinoza that, as the natural state of man is a state of war, no nation is bound to observe a treaty longer than the interest or danger that caused it continues. But the old treaty basis of the peace of Europe having broken down, "the remedy for the danger accruing with new force to the peace of Europe is to be sought, not in an abandonment of the principle of joint action, but in an enlargement and elevation of it, and in the progress of that enlightenment which, instead of enfeebling, strengthens the common action of men and of states. For it is with nations as with individuals. The cultivated, and by culture enlightened, mind is and must be on the side of progress and peace against that of darkness and conflict. The obscure men, like the unformed nationalities, are at once materials and causes of that which disturbs, unsettles, and retards personal and national and international life. Where the education, and more especially the higher education, of a country is fostered, there lie the best promises of progress and of peace."

We do not attempt any detailed criticisms of the several essays. The subjects chosen by fourteen professors on which to address the world are likely to be reasonably well chosen, and the addresses delivered on them are pretty sure to reward the attention of the reader. They strike us as very well chosen; they sufficiently represent the real variety of teaching and of manner of teaching in the institution; they contain complete and occasionally brilliant discussions of subjects of very considerable general interest. They are the expressions of the inner spirit of a seat of learning in which science holds a higher place than she has usually done, but in which there is the most emphatic and continual protest against the degradation or neglect either of literature or of science. They show a body of teachers full of modern life, and at the same time singularly moderate, truthful, and reverent. Several of the essays are historical studies, and in these cases the reputation of the writer is a sufficient guarantee of completeness. In their collected form the "Essays and Addresses" warrant high hopes of the future of the Owens College. In a sense—perhaps a somewhat too literal sense—it is what it was once

called in a journalistic epigram, the University of the Busy. With its present staff it will certainly continue the tradition which connects the older Universities with the highest learning of the time.

W. J.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Sir John Herschel's Letters

It is known to many through the numerous applications I have made, that a collection of the letters of Sir John Herschel is in progress. For the many and valuable contributions, as well as for the kind and sympathetic expressions which I have been favoured with, I cannot be too ready to express once more my sincere acknowledgment; and when I recall these to mind I hesitate to take any less private step to further the end in view, or, by venturing on a public appeal, to forego the advantage of more direct communication. Several considerations however—which not even your courtesy in allowing this letter to appear in the columns of NATURE would justify me in dwelling upon— forbid me to depend solely on the activity of a single importunate pen. The correspondence in question covers more than half a century. Many of the correspondents were of a former generation, and their present representatives are known to but few. I may instance the names of Davy, Young, Wollaston, —not to mention many continental savans—in illustration of this. Many others, less eminent, but not the less recipients of letters which the student of scientific history will prize as containing the germs of much of the force whose impetus we now feel, were hardly known by name beyond their own immediate circles. Many more, as I would fain believe, who either themselves corresponded with my father, or knew him in his letters to their relations, are even now in possession of such letters, and may not be unwilling to let them be seen. Lastly, I hear too much of autograph collectors not to feel a keen desire to make their instant acquaintance. Have they not devoted themselves to preserving individual letters, no matter how trifling, from the fate which has—alas too often—overtaken others, no matter how numerous, or how valuable!

In my applications hitherto I have been constrained to repress the expectation of immediate publication. I am not at liberty to depart from that now. But that the materials which I may now be permitted to store up will eventually help to form the foundation of such a monument as may be fitting—this requires no student of history to tell us. That it may be amply provided for now, before it is too late, is my chief anxiety. For my time is limited, and I have drawn too many blanks not to feel that every year increases their number, let who will take my place.

I apologise for so long a story, and will only add in the most general terms that I appeal to all who possess, or know of the existence of, autograph letters of Sir John Herschel—no matter how insignificant they may seem, for collation with others can alone supply a true test—but of course with due regard to personal consideration—to communicate with me at once. It is hardly necessary to say that all autograph letters will be returned, and that any restrictions will be attended to.

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J. I. HERSCHEL

Coggia's Comet

YOUR readers may be interested to learn that the light of the comet is by no means strongly polarised. On the 2nd and 4th inst. I examined it with a double-image prism, but could not with certainty detect any difference between the brightness of the two images. I also examined it with a plate of right- and left-handed quartz in the principal focus of the 4-inch telescope and a Nicol's prism packed among the lenses of the eyepiece, but could not detect any traces of colour. With a Savant placed between the eyepiece and the eye no bands were detectable. But on the 6th, about midnight, when the comet was shining very brightly, I could perceive a difference in the brightness of the two images with the double-image prism, indicating polarisation in the plane passing through the sun's estimated place. But I was still unable to detect any traces of polarisation either with a Savant or Biquartz, or with a plate cut from a natural crystal of right- and left-handed quartz giving a band across the field in which the two crystals overlap; a form of polariscope which has been found on other occasions very delicate for faint lights.