

greatly diminishes the electric conduction-resistance which would be produced by polarisation, due to layers of liquid of opposite electrical nature, collecting in contact with the electrodes" (p. 344).

"*Potential and tension.*—Previous to the completion of the circuit and formation of an unimpeded current, the free ends of the polar wires attached to the two metals are charged with the two kinds of electricity in an accumulated or free static condition, and are in a state of *electric potential*, i.e., possessing a capability of doing electric work. These accumulated electricities in the wires may be detected by means of a very delicate electroscope. The free electricities are also in a state of *tension*, constantly tending to escape and unite; and their degrees of tension may be measured by means of an electrometer" (p. 71).

From which it would appear that the difference between potential and tension lies in the fact that the one is to be detected by an electroscope, and the other measured by an electrometer. It would be just as satisfactory a distinction, and would besides have the merit of being true, to say that "potential" is the shibboleth of the electrically unlearned, while "tension" is their refuge at all times.

Over and over again we find such phrases as these:—"If the current to be measured is one of low electromotive force" (p. 73); "a current of less quantity and greater electromotive force" (p. 338); and after we have been expressly told on p. 72 that there is no difference between currents except as regards their quantity per minute, it is surprising to learn that "as a general rule, the greater the electromotive force, and the smaller the quantity of the current, the harder and brighter is the deposited metal" (p. 344).

But it is needless to multiply examples. We have given enough to show how much Dr. Gore has done to mar a really good book by adopting a precedent which, however well followed, is of very doubtful utility. In the present instance it may, perhaps, serve the good purpose of acting as a warning to future practical writers.

We have noticed comparatively few typographical errors. Is it the author, or the printer, or the author's evil genius, or the printer's devil that we have to thank for this bewildering statement on p. 182?—

"Silver may be cleaned in water in which potatoes have been boiled, and a superior polish is thus imparted to them."

OUR BOOK SHELF

Enumeracion de las Plantas Europeas que se hallan como silvestres en la Provincia de Buenos Aires y en Patagonia. Por Carlos Berg. (Buenos Aires, 1877.)

THIS is a very interesting list of European plants introduced by various means into the two above-mentioned countries. It gives the relative abundance of each species and the conditions under which it is found. Altogether 116 Dicotyledons, 30 Monocotyledons, and 8 Cryptogams are mentioned. Of these no less than 108 are common to Britain. As might be expected, the natural orders Compositæ and Gramineæ, each with 20 species, and Caryophyllæ with 12, are the strongest in point of number of species. Many notes are scattered through the twenty-four pages, from which we learn that under such extremely different conditions some of our British plants attain extraordinary dimensions.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his correspondents. Neither can he undertake to return, or to correspond with the writers of, rejected manuscripts. No notice is taken of anonymous communications.]

The Editor urgently requests correspondents to keep their letters as short as possible. The pressure on his space is so great that it is impossible otherwise to ensure the appearance even of communications containing interesting and novel facts.]

Optical Spectroscopy of the Red End of the Solar Spectrum

BEING now, with my wife, on the return voyage from a private spectroscopic experiment on solar light in Lisbon, there appear to be two or three reasons why I should request your leave to send this preliminary note to NATURE before attempting to publish anywhere a full account of what was seen.

As the *first* of these reasons, I may mention that the continual assistance kindly afforded us by M. Oom, the Astronomer-Royal of Portugal, and the several facilities obligingly granted to us, through his intervention, by the Portuguese Government, render an early and hearty acknowledgment imperative. All the more so, too, as the last and most successful series of observations, through four successive days of blazing sunshine, without the smallest speck or suspicion of a cloud anywhere from morning to evening each day, was made in a new suite of rooms recently prepared for the local astronomer's residence in the Royal Park of the Ajuda.

The *second* reason is the pleasing one to confess, that out of four prismatic arrangements tried in the same spectroscope—the one which had the highest dispersion (viz., 32° from A to H) gave also the best and most satisfactory definition, showing thereby such wondrously fine and minute detail amongst close lines as to cause it to be almost invariably employed, and that prismatic arrangement, I am happy to say, was lately made for me by Mr. Adam Hilger, of 192, Tottenham Court Road, London, on his own long-approved plan of three powerful and symmetrical compound prisms, while the eye-piece of the telescope, also by him, was of rock-crystal, and fitted with his peculiar reference line for micrometer mensuration.

The *third* reason is the total contradiction given by the best of these observations to some conspicuous features of the Royal Society's last publication on the red end of the solar spectrum, when seen at a high altitude with their second and most improved "Indian Spectroscope."

Our late Lisbon measures, though made at a station close to the sea-level, were yet, near the noon of each day there, and on a midsummer sun in that latitude, taken through almost the very same thickness of atmosphere, as the Royal Society's, and Mr. Hennessey's high-sun series on the Himalaya Mountains. But those Indian observations having been printed in the *Philosophical Transactions* so long ago as 1874, I should be glad to know whether either the Royal Society or anyone else has published further particulars of the extreme red end of the solar optical spectrum since then. PIAZZI SMYTH,
Astronomer-Royal for Scotland

The Cretaceous Flora of America

NEAR the close of his very interesting lecture "On the Tropical Forests of Hampshire," published in NATURE (vol. xv. pp. 229, 258, 279) Mr. J. S. Gardner says:—"I have great doubts, however, as to the correct position of many of the foreign so-called cretaceous beds. Those of America, from which most of the list of dicotyledons of this period is derived, appear to me, from the character of their fauna, to be rather lower eocene, or at most, filling in the gap between our chalk and London clay. Most of the shells have a marvellously eocene-like aspect, and I take it that the presence of an ammonite, and some few other forms of shells which in England do not reach above the chalk, should not be taken as conclusive evidence of the antiquity of the bed, as, although migrated from our seas, they may very well have lived on in other regions. It is inconsistent to assume that no ammonite lived on in any part of the world to a more recent period than that of our chalk."

From these remarks it is evident that Mr. Gardner is not fully informed in regard to the evidence which exists on the question he has raised; and as the subject is one of great interest, and one which it is necessary should be carefully understood by those