

friend, Sir Charles Macarthy, then Colonial Secretary, my zoological and botanical tastes being well known to the latter.

The conversation turning on plants, the Abbé described a wonderful tree which he had seen, on the leaves of which were impressed thousands of likenesses of Buddha. Nothing was said about "Thibetan characters," nor did he lead us to suppose it grew larger than an ordinary cinnamon-tree (*not bush*), as it grows wild. His description was so detailed that, in spite of the florid language of a French traveller, I at once recognised a plant which grew not uncommonly in our gardens, the leaves of which were often placed in the finger-glasses after repasts, as on being crushed, they imparted a delicious fragrance to the hands. Looking up and catching the eye of our hostess, in which lurked an amused smile, I made the motions of dipping hands in a finger-glass. She instantly caught my meaning, whispered her instructions to the servant behind her chair, and each finger-glass—which useful adjunct to a meal was shortly after placed on the table—contained a leaf or two of what we used to call by a variety of names, such as the "profile laurel," or "figure laurel," or "face laurel."

The face of the Abbé was a picture to behold. "But here it is!" he exclaimed. "Where did this come from?" We then explained that it grew not a dozen yards from where he sat, to his great astonishment, and I fancied not a little chagrin, that his wonderful plant should be so well known and common.

The plant is, I believe a *laurel*. It has flashed across me that it may be a *citron*, but the plant is so well known in Ceylon, that if your contributor, Mr. W. T. Thielton Dyer, wishes to ascertain its name, he has but to write a line to the Director of the Botanical Gardens, Peradenia, who will at once recognise it.

The leaves are broad and pointed, shaped in fact somewhat like the cinnamon. Down each side of the midrib, extending along the veinlets (I write from memory, remember) are patches of pale greenish-yellow, much lighter than the ground-colour of the leaf. These take innumerable fantastic, face-like shapes—always profile—and with the aid of a pin, or point of a dessert-fork, we, in

"Those merry days,
The merry days, when we were young,"

used to put in an eye, and amuse ourselves in trying to find likenesses of our friends and acquaintances. It was a source of much fun among the young people.

The events of that morning were, from a variety of circumstances, deeply impressed on my memory, and I am positive that *then* nothing was said about "Thibetan characters" on the leaves or on the bark, nor of the *great size* of the tree, and the Abbé distinctly recognised the leaves as identical with those he had seen. You will perceive he calls it the "Tree of the Ten Thousand *Imazes*" (the italics are mine). This name would well apply to the "profile laurel," for no two faces are ever alike, but does not include *characters*.

Whether the size of the tree and the "Thibetan characters" grew (in the Abbé's brain?) after he left Ceylon, I do not know. The "real article" seems to have vanished. A bungling attempt to deceive by etching in lilac leaves could easily be detected, but "travellers see strange things"!
E. L. LAYARD

Brit. Consulate, Noumea, New Caledonia, March 5

Sheet-lightning

THE correspondence on this subject (NATURE, vol. xxviii, pp. 4 and 54) can scarcely be said to contribute anything in support of the statement that sheet-lightning and the so-called summer or heat-lightning, are nothing else than the reflection of, or the illumination produced by, distant electrical discharges. The table given in the review (NATURE, vol. xxvii, p. 576) is not a record of instances of sheet-lightning, but only the number of hours, sorted according to the twenty-four hours of the day, in which sheet-lightning or heat-lightning was observed at Oxford during the twenty-four years ending 1876. In constructing the table, all those hours were excluded in which thunder was heard, and also the hour immediately preceding and following the hour of occurrence of thunder. Only those hours, therefore, were included during which any thunder that may have accompanied the lightning was at some distance from Oxford.

It follows simply as a matter of statistics that, if all cases of sheet-lightning are nothing else but the illumination produced by distant electrical discharges, the curve of thunder and the curve of sheet-lightning and heat-lightning should be approximately parallel to each other after darkness has fairly set in. The

Oxford observations show that such is not the case. To make this quite clear we give the results for August only:—

	Thunder.	Lightning.
8-9 p.m.	5	0
9-10 "	3	3
10-11 "	4	6
11-mid.	3	14
Mid.-1 a.m.	2	14
1-2 "	2	12
2-3 "	1	4
3-4 "	0	3

These two sets of figures from 8 p.m. to 4 a.m. furnish two curves quite distinct from each other; and the difference is not to be explained by the degree of facility for recording the observations afforded by each separate hour. It may be added that a similar result is obtained from electrical manifestations in other parts of the globe during the summer months. It is from these facts that it was concluded that no inconsiderable number of the cases of sheet-lightning and heat-lightning are not illuminations produced by distant electrical discharges, but, as suggested by Loomis, are rather to be considered as due to the escape of the electricity of the clouds in flashes so feeble that they produce no audible sound, and they occur when the air being very moist offers just sufficient resistance to the electricity to develop a feeble spark.

THE REVIEWER

Solar Halo

THE following, taken from vol. i. *Philosophical Transactions*, p. 219, may interest your readers, as the phenomenon appears to coincide almost exactly with the one recorded in NATURE, vol. xxviii, p. 30. I omit the illustration, though it corresponds almost exactly with the one in NATURE, except that there were mock suns.

"An account of four suns, which very lately appear'd in France, published in the French *Journal des Sçavans* of May 10, 1666:—

"The 9th of April of this present year, about half an hour past nine, there appear'd three circles in the sky. One of them was very great, a little interrupted and white everywhere, without the mixture of any other colour. It passed through the midst of the sun's *disk*, and was parallel to the *horizon*. Its *diameter* was above a hundred degrees, and its *center* not far from the *zenith*.

"The *second* was much less, and defective in some places, having the colours of a rainbow, especially in that part which was within the great circle. It had the true sun for its center.

"The *third* was less than the first, but greater than the second, it was not entire, but only an arch or portion of a circle whose center was far distant from that of the sun, and whose circumference did by its middle join to that of the least circle, intersecting the greatest circle by its two extremities. In this circle were discerned also the colours of a rainbow, but they were not so strong as those of the *second*.

"At the place where the circumference of this third circle did close with that of the *second*, there was a great brightness of rainbow colours mixt together. And at the two extremities where this *second* circle intersected the *first*, appear'd two *parhelias* or mock suns, &c., &c."

In a note to this account it is stated that "Five suns appear'd the 29 March, A., 1629, at Rome between 2 or 3 of the clock in the afternoon." In the illustration given we find two circles similar to those given in NATURE. It seems that two of these suns "which were in the intersection of two circles, appear'd in that of a circle, which passed through the sun's *diske*, with another, that was concentrick to the sun."

The phenomenon of last week was minus the *parhelia*; can any reason be given for this?
THOS. WARD

Northwich, May 15

IN reply to Mr. Mott's query (p. 30) I beg to say that I measured the halo with a sextant as carefully as possible, and made the semidiameter 25° . [Another halo occurring on the 13th measured $23^{\circ} 20'$.]

With regard to the mock moons, they were perfectly equidistant from the horizon all the time I observed them, and I regret that I did not notice that Mr. Mott had seen them otherwise. I read his letter rather hurriedly and thought the expression "out of place" referred to their position above the moon, and not to a want of parallelism with the horizon. SM.

Temple Observatory, Rugby, May 17