

"Whereas, according to the image in this place, the wild branches are ingrafted into the generous tree, reversing the usual process by which good branches are grafted into wild trees, we are informed by both ancient and modern writers that such a process is practicable in this very tree, the olive, and is often practised in the East. Compare Columella 'De Rebus Rusticis,' v. g." Can this be confirmed? It seems scarcely credible. The question bears on the subject of graft-hybridisation, about which many curious facts are collected in Darwin's work on "Variation under Domestication."

JOSEPH JOHN MURPHY

Old Forge, Dunmurry, Co. Antrim, June 29

Wild Duck and Railways

LAST autumn I visited Canada and made a journey to the extreme west point (then reached) of the Canada Pacific Railway, on which three or four thousand men were at the time employed laying down the rails on the prairie, at the very rapid rate of three or four miles a day, or more than twenty miles a week. There are many ponds and lakelets along the track, which abounded at that season with a variety of ducks—mallard, teal, widgeon, &c.—usually very shy, and not easily approached by the sportsman. Yet these ducks had in the short space of from two to five days become so accustomed to the noisy and (to most of the birds) novel engine moving along, that they remained sitting quietly in the water within easy shot when the train was passing. On my return journey I was sorry to find that this confidence on the part of the ducks was taken advantage of by the conductor and other wretched sportsmen (?) who shot at the poor birds from the platform of the cars whilst in motion, although when they did *kill*—I am glad to say there were more misses than hits—they could not stop to pick up the game. A sportsman, to get equally near to the ducks as they permitted the train to approach them, had to use the cover of the long grass and some artful dodging to attain his object. This quick intelligence on the part of the ducks seemed to me something remarkable, as the senses both of sight and hearing must have been, one would suppose, at first alarmingly affected by the great noisy, smoking monster rushing along their favourite and hitherto usually silent haunts.

JOHN RAE

4, Addison Gardens, June 30

Large Hailstones

A SEVERE thunderstorm passed over Woodlesford, six miles south-east of Leeds, between 3.10 and 4 p.m. this afternoon, proceeding from south-west to north-east. Flashes of lightning during that time were almost continuous. At 3.15 heavy rain began to fall, becoming so thick at 3.25 as to render objects a short distance away almost indistinct; at 3.30 this changed to hail, the stones during the worst period being generally irregular parallelepipeds of ice, with two edges of about one inch each, and the third of one-quarter of an inch. These blocks consisted of hard, colourless, transparent ice, surrounding a central, irregularly-shaped mass of opaque white, small air-bubbles of roughly ellipsoidal shape being ranged round this. The white nucleus was not quite so hard as the exterior transparent coating. The force of collision on the railway line was sufficient to make the masses bound to a vertical height of two or three feet. At 3.45 the hail had moderated, when a few light loose clouds were observed quickly passing from north-east to south-west, and thus directly opposite to the direction of the storm, and at a much lower level.

R. WEBB

June 30

Extinction of Flatfish

I HAVE been advised by Mr. Murray of the *Challenger* expedition to inquire, through your columns, whether the experience of any of your correspondents coincides with mine as to the gradual failure—in some places almost the extinction—of flatfish where whelk-gathering is prosecuted.

MALCOLM MCNEILL

The New Club, Edinburgh, June 30

Garfish

IN March last I was being pulled off from the shore to H. M. S. *Himalaya* in the harbour at Aden, when a fish jumped out of the water over the boat, and in doing so struck the hat of another officer and knocked it into the water. When the hat

was recovered we found in the *hard* felt a slit about four inches in length. Unfortunately the fish escaped, but the impression of those who saw it was that it was some kind of garfish, and that the damage done was inflicted by the beak. It appeared to me to be about ten inches long. It is obvious that had the fish struck my friend in the face or neck, or even in the chest, it might have resulted in a fatal injury.

S. ARCHER

Sheerness, June 29

The "Spirogyra quinina"

CAN any of your readers inform me of any practical method of exterminating, in a lodge or reservoir, confervoid algae, more especially the fine filamentous variety *Spirogyra quinina*?

Hanley, Staffordshire, June 19

FREDK. HAIGH

ACTION OF LIGHT ON INDIARUBBER

IN continuation of the experiments described in NATURE, vol. xxvii. p. 312, two pieces of caoutchouc tube, about 48 mm. long and 7 mm. wide, were introduced on January 23, 1883, into test tubes containing oxygen confined over mercury. One of these tubes was surrounded by a case of black paper, and both tubes were placed side by side in a north window. On June 27 the tubes were examined: in that exposed to light about 17 cc. of oxygen (about three-quarters of the gas the test tube at first contained) had been absorbed, and the india-rubber had become altered, so that on pressing the tube between the fingers superficial cracks were produced. In the other test tube no appreciable diminution of gas had taken place, and the caoutchouc was unchanged, thus fully confirming the results of the former experiments. We may therefore conclude that caoutchouc alters under the combined influence of light and oxygen, but that neither alone produces any effect.

Cooper's Hill, June 29

HERBERT MCLEOD

ON WHALES, PAST AND PRESENT, AND THEIR PROBABLE ORIGIN¹

II.

THOUGH the early stages by which whalebone has been modified from more simple palate structures are entirely lost to our sight, probably for ever, the conditions in which it now exists in different species of whales, show very marked varieties of progress, from a simple comparatively rudimental and imperfect condition, to what is perhaps the most wonderful example of mechanical adaptation to purpose known in any organic structure. These variations are worth dwelling upon for a few minutes, as they illustrate in an excellent manner the gradual modifications that may take place in an organ, evidently in adaptation to particular requirements, the causation of which can be perfectly explained upon Darwin's principle of natural selection.

In the Rorquals or fin-whales (genus *Balenoptera*), found in almost all seas, and so well known off our own coasts, the largest blades in an animal of 70 feet in length do not exceed 2 feet in length, including their hairy terminations; they are in most species of a pale horn colour, and their structure is coarse and inelastic, separating into thick, stiff fibres, so that they are of no value for the ordinary purposes to which whalebone is applied in the arts. These animals feed on fish of considerable size, from herrings up to cod, and for foraging among shoals of these creatures the construction of their mouth and the structure of their baleen is evidently sufficient. This is the type of the earliest known extinct forms of whales, and it has continued to exist, with several slight modifications, to this day, because it has fulfilled one purpose in the economy of nature. Other purposes for which it was not

¹ Lecture delivered at the Royal Institution on the evening of Friday, May 25, 1883, by Prof. Flower, LL.D., F.R.S., P.Z.S., &c. Concluded from p. 202.