

antly illustrated, Prof. Wallace has not forgotten to widen the scope and interest of his very valuable book by copious information as to the products, the agriculture, the cattle, the instruments of husbandry, the habits, and the customs of India. He has placed on record an immense number of facts which must render his book valuable for purposes of reference as well as interesting to the general reader. With reference to the liberal display of photographic representations, executed by Waterston and Sons, the author looks upon them as instructive rather than artistic. The photographs from which they were taken were executed by himself, often under difficulties, but they are none the less accurate, and therefore trustworthy.

With regard to the present arrangement of the book, the first 300 pages are devoted to descriptive matter relating to the cattle and other domesticated animals, the soils, implements of husbandry, and crops of India. Much of the matter may be left by the busy reader, who will find the special views and conclusions of the author reserved for the concluding chapters.

The book is an honest and able attempt to place the peculiarities of Indian agriculture fairly before the British public, and the views of the author with reference to the best methods for developing the agricultural sources of the Indian Empire will, we hope, receive the attention they deserve.

#### OUR BOOK SHELF.

*Incwadi Yama: or Twenty Years' Personal Experience in South Africa.* By J. W. Matthews, M.D. (London: Sampson Low, 1887.)

DR. MATTHEWS left England in 1864, soon after he had taken his medical degree. He settled, in the first instance, at Verulam, in Natal, where he was appointed a district surgeon. Afterwards he became familiar with many different parts of South Africa, and especially with the Diamond Fields, the inhabitants of which twice returned him at the head of the poll to represent them in the councils of their country. He is not a very skilful writer, but any one who will take the trouble to read his long and somewhat elaborate narrative will be rewarded by obtaining a great amount of solid and more or less interesting information. He has naturally much to say about the population of the Diamond Fields, and about the process of diamond mining, and on these subjects he speaks with the authority of one who presents the results of direct personal observation. He has also brought together a good many curious and instructive facts about the native tribes; and his descriptions of scenery, if not brilliant from a literary point of view, at any rate suffice to convey a general impression of some of the districts he has visited. The work will be of considerable service to Englishmen who think of settling in South Africa.

*First Elements of Experimental Geometry.* By Paul Bert. (London: Cassell and Co., 1888.)

THE book of which this is a translation was M. Paul Bert's last work, and, like his earlier books of a similar kind, it is written in a style that cannot fail to interest children. His aim is to go straight to the goal, and, as he tells us in the preface, the goal of experimental geometry in elementary schools is, not a knowledge of the properties of different figures, but the power of measuring objects round about us. By the time the pupil has reached the third or fourth lesson he has learnt how to measure the height of a tree, and by

so doing has done a practical piece of work, and begins to take an interest in the subject.

The book is divided into nine parts, containing in all about forty lessons. The measurement of straight lines, plane areas, solids, lengths of curved lines, &c., are dealt with in the first seven parts; the eighth shows the methods of constructing various geometrical figures and the instruments employed; Part 9 consists of the elements of land surveying and of plan drawing.

The illustrations and diagrams are numerous and well chosen throughout, and the work has been well translated. At the end of the volume exercises have been added for the use of teachers which are not found in the French version, the translator telling us that "the extraordinary character of our table of weights and measures has made it almost impossible to reproduce with the neatness and clearness of the original the numerous examples which are based upon the metrical system."

#### 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 intended for this or any other part of NATURE. No notice is taken of anonymous communications.]

#### The Renewed Irruption of *Syrnhaptes*.

THANKS to your kindness in printing a note of mine a few weeks since (p. 103), I have received from your correspondents a large amount of help in the task I have undertaken; but there is, to me at least, a complete blank as regards observations of *Syrnhaptes* this year in France. It is almost impossible for the invasion to have missed that country, since Italy and Spain even have been visited in greater force than upon any one of the former occasions, yet not a word of the birds being seen in France on the present occasion has come to me, notwithstanding the inquiries I have made of French ornithologists. I would ask such of your readers as may be in that country to send me any tidings they may obtain. In 1863 there were at least a dozen French localities recorded, and in some of them large flocks were seen. I can hardly suppose that it has been otherwise this year.

ALFRED NEWTON.

Magdalene College, Cambridge, July 23.

#### Dr. Romanes' Article in the *Contemporary Review* for June.

My attention has been directed to an article entitled "Recent Critics of Darwinism," by Dr. Romanes in the June number of the *Contemporary Review*. While the anonymous writer of a recent article in the *Edinburgh Review* is rightly exposed for quoting what he believes to be the opinions of men whose writings he can never have read, or at least can never have understood, it is somewhat unfortunate that Dr. Romanes should have fallen into the similar error of not making himself acquainted with views which he professes to express. He states (on page 841) that while Cope, Semper, Geddes, and Seebohm have argued "that any proof of natural selection as an operating principle opens up the more ultimate problem as to the causes of the variations on the occurrence of which this principle depends," Weismann and Poulton, on the other hand, "have not so much concerned themselves with this more ultimate problem." As it is unlikely that Dr. Weismann will have the opportunity of replying to this statement, it is only right to point out that this eminent zoologist has most certainly concerned himself very earnestly with this ultimate problem, and that his original and important theories upon the subject will be found in two of his recent papers, viz. "Die Continuität des Keimplasma's als Grundlage einer Theorie der Vererbung," Jena, 1885, and "Die Bedeutung der sexuellen Fortpflanzung für die Selektions-Theorie," Jena, 1886.

I should not have troubled to write this reply on account of the allusion to myself, and I agree with Dr. Romanes in the