

informed that many of the sensations which he refers to taste are in reality referable to smell, and it is on account of the same ignorance, that the child thinks he is treated irrationally when his nose is held while his castor-oil is being administered to him.

A few facts of this sort will be all that an ordinary reader will carry away from a perusal of this book. The book will be really valuable only to the physiologist who, like Dr. Zwaardemaker, is willing to devote himself to the study of the physiology of smell.

Computation Rules and Logarithms. By Prof. Silas W. Holman. Pp. xlv + 73. (New York and London: Macmillan and Co., 1896.)

THE first portion of this book treats of the way to use logarithms so as to apply no more figures than necessary; the author pointing out that probably one half of the time expended in computations is wasted through the use of excessive number of places of figures, and through the failure to employ logarithms. With this in view, rules are given showing what place tables to employ, and also how many figures to retain to obtain an accuracy of any desired percentage.

That such rules are of high importance may be seen from the fact that the use of five place tables when four would suffice nearly doubles the labour; using six place instead of four nearly trebles it, thus wasting a hundred and two hundred per cent. respectively of the necessary amount of work, and probably a greater proportion of time.

Besides these rules and the usual explanation to the collection of mathematical tables, there is a short treatment on "Notation by Powers of Ten," which, as the author sees, is a method that if taught with elementary arithmetic, it would enormously facilitate the teaching of logarithms; but his "Symmetrical Grouping of Figures" about the unit's place is a departure likely to be received with some degree of conservatism. There is a useful paragraph on the "Habit in Reading off Numbers or Logarithms," which consists in emphasising and grouping the figures in a certain habitual way. The latter part of the book is taken up by a collection of mathematical tables, *e.g.* logarithms, antilogarithms and cologarithms to four places, logarithms to five places, logarithms of the trigonometrical functions, slide wire ratios to four places, &c. The decimal point, usually omitted, has been retained in the tables for facilitating in reading off.

Remarkable Eclipses. By W. T. Lynn. Pp. 52. (London: Edward Stanford, 1896.)

THIS "sketch of the most interesting circumstances connected with the observation of solar and lunar eclipses, both in ancient and modern time," appears at a very appropriate time, since in a little more than two months the general public will be mildly interested in a total eclipse of the sun, for the observation of which in Norway, Japan, and elsewhere, many astronomers are making preparations. Mr. Lynn has contrived to compress a marvellous amount of very readable information in his slender little volume, and as a condensed statement of the history of eclipse observations his essay is admirable. The book is uniform with "Remarkable Comets," and it deserves the same successful career as its forerunner.

The Old Light and the New. By Wm. Ackroyd, F.I.C. Pp. 102. Illustrated. (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1896.)

WE very much question the wisdom of placing this book upon the market. The information on researches with Röntgen rays is very sketchy, while a large portion of the book, dealing with theories of the natural colours of bodies, is nothing more than padding, and is altogether out of place in a volume of this character.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

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A Curious Idiosyncrasy.

A STRONGLY marked idiosyncrasy has lately come to my notice, which should be recorded. A lady of my acquaintance was walking with a relative, Colonel M., when the wife of a tenant addressed her, and described how the hand of her own child had been pinched in a door. Overhearing her story, Colonel M. became quite unwell, so much so as to lead to particular inquiry, which resulted in showing that allusions to any accidents of that kind affected him at once in a very perceptible way. Finally, at the request of the lady, he wrote an account of his peculiarity, which she forwarded to me. Thereupon I corresponded with Colonel M., who slightly revised what he had written, and sanctioned its publication. It is as follows:—

"From my earliest remembrance, and still up to now, any sight of an injured nail in any person, even if a total stranger, or any injury, however slight, to one of my own nails, causes me to break into a deadly cold perspiration, with feeling of sick faintness. But still further; if I chance to hear any one else narrating in casual conversation any injury of this particular sort to themselves or others, it brings on me exactly the same feeling I have described above. So much is this the case, that many years ago, when I was in the prime of life, at a large dinner party, when one of the guests near me persistently chanced to go on talking minutely of some such little accidental injury that had befallen him, I turned very faint, tried all I knew to shake it off, but could not, and presently slid right under the table quite unconscious for the moment. This is the more singular because on no other point am I in the least squeamish. In old days I have seen soldiers flogged before breakfast without its affecting me, though some of the rank and file would be very much upset, and in cases of death, illness, or wounds, I have never experienced, as an onlooker, the sensations I have alluded to above."

I may mention that the mother of Colonel M. had pinched her own finger-nail badly shortly before his birth, and, as is not uncommon in coincidences of that kind, she believed her accident to have been the cause of her son's peculiarity. He writes to me:—

"As a boy I was conscious of this repugnance of mine, but was ashamed of it, and never used to mention it to any one. When I became a young man I one day mentioned it *privately* to my mother, who it appeared had already noticed it in me as a child. She then told me the incident about her own finger, and she and I being both utterly unscientific persons, assumed then and there that my squeamish feelings about injuries to finger-tips must be connected with her little accident."

In reply to further questions, I learn that the injury to the mother, however painful at the time, was not so severe as to leave a permanent mark. Also, that no analogous peculiarity is known to exist among the near relations of Colonel M., of whom he specifies his father, brother, three sisters, nephews and nieces. He has no children.

This anecdote proves, so far as the evidence goes, that a very peculiar idiosyncrasy may spring suddenly into full existence, and need not develop gradually through small ancestral variations in the same direction. It is a more astonishing phenomenon than the equally sudden appearance of musical faculty in a single member of a non-musical family, being very special, and so uncommon and worse than useless that its ascription to reversion, in the common sense of the word, would be absurd. That is to say, it would be silly to suppose a sickly horror of wounded finger-nails or claws to have been so advantageous to ancient man or to his brute progenitors, as to have formerly become a racial characteristic through natural selection, and though it fell into disuse under changed conditions and apparently disappeared, it was not utterly lost, the present case showing a sudden reversion to ancestral traits. Such an argument would be nonsense. But though this particular characteristic is of negative utility, its existence is a fresh evidence of the enormously wide range of possibilities in the further evolution of human faculty.

FRANCIS GALTON.