

*Horizons: At Dawn and at Dusk.* Poems by Colin Tolly. Pp. ix+82. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918.) Price 3s. 6d. net.

MR. TOLLY is clearly a scholar who has been thrown, like so many others, into the brutalities of war, and who heartens himself by writing verses that recall the happier years. But, though he has studied the ancient classics, and also zoology, his manner is not that of a poet, or even of a teacher, seeking in the concise forms of verse the expression of cumulative research. Why, for example, and for what mechanical reason, did the dead Adonis sail "to sea, on springs"? Does the sun "shine" a beam? And will the general reader, who has still so much to learn about ancestral forms of life, really gather anything from the condensed text-book terminology of pp. 49-60? We might, indeed, be pleasantly surprised to "hear the tune" that the Permian reptiles "sang at sundown . . . pregnant with speech and nightingales"; but we cannot believe that, by any process of selection, "Death . . . endowed with brains the victors" in the struggle for existence. The crowded stanzas on the development of religions are not more satisfactory. It is unfair to suggest what Swinburne or Flecker might have made of them; but, even between Olympos and Salonika, Mr. Tolly has caught only the spray of the high and rising wave of war-time inspiration.

G. A. J. C.

*Journal of the Institute of Metals.* Vol. xix. Pp. x+316. (London: Published by the Institute, 1918.) Price 21s. net.

THE latest volume of this useful journal contains several papers of interest. Prof. Carpenter, in addition to his presidential address, in which he deals with the relations between scientific investigation and training and technical practice, contributes, with Miss Elam, a paper on the cause of unsoundness in bronze castings. The subject is a difficult one, and the principal conclusion, confirmed by the experience of others who took part in the discussion, is that the most important factor in ensuring soundness is the proper control of the pouring temperature. The equilibrium between a molten alloy and the gases dissolved in it still remains somewhat mysterious. Die-casting, especially of alloys of high melting-point, has received little attention in technical journals, although it is widely and successfully used in practice, and the paper by Messrs. Rix and Whitaker is the more welcome on that account. By using an aluminium bronze containing iron, excellent results have been obtained with complicated castings. The discussion turns largely on the behaviour of the dies. Aluminium bronze is also studied from the point of view of the hardness of alloys by Mr. Greenwood, and other matters dealt with are the determination of the grain size of metals and the annealing of aluminium. The volume also includes abstracts of metallurgical papers from all sources.

NO. 2547, VOL. 101]

#### 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.]

##### Science and the Civil Service.

IN the article on the above subject in NATURE of August 8, the unsatisfactory method of selecting candidates for Civil Service appointments is very justly emphasised. I desire to make the following suggestion, which will obviate the system of patronage and to a great extent that of competitive examination, both of which suffer from serious inherent defects which need not be discussed.

My suggestion is that each university of the United Kingdom be granted the right to nominate each year one or more candidates (according to the number of vacancies) from its most promising honours graduates. A further selection from among the nominees might, if necessary, be made by some form of oral or written examination.

It is improbable that any university would abuse this privilege and thereby discredit itself by nominating a student who is likely to prove a failure. The experience in the selection of the 1851 Exhibition scholars is a sufficient guarantee of the highly satisfactory results of such a system.

The most promising arts and science men in the country would thus become available for Government appointments, and it is to be hoped that with this choice the science departments of the State will in future be administered by men whose training has not been exclusively classical.

J. B. COHEN.

#### THE ROYAL INSTITUTION: A RETROSPECT.

A RECENT issue of the Proceedings of the Royal Institution contains a reprint of a lecture delivered in its theatre on March 3, 1810, by the then professor of chemistry, "H. Davy, Esq., Sec., R.S." This lecture, as its title-page informs us, was originally published by desire of the managers; it is now reproduced at the suggestion of the Fullerman professor of chemistry. It is entitled "A Lecture on the Plan which it is Proposed to Adopt for Improving the Royal Institution and Rendering it Permanent." To understand the significance of this wording it is necessary to recall some circumstances connected with the early history of the institution.

As conceived by its founder, Benjamin Thompson, a Royalist American who had been created a Count of the Holy Roman Empire by the Elector Palatine of Bavaria, it was intended to be part of an establishment for the benefit of the poor. In 1796 Rumford, who was a practical philanthropist on a pretty broad gauge, and an early worker in what is now styled "domestic science," put forth a

proposal for forming in London by private subscription an establishment for feeding the poor and giving them useful employment, and also for furnishing food at a cheap rate to others who may stand in need of such assistance, connected with an institution for intro-