

irregularities that occur may be ascribed to the large percentage of hydrogen. Iron possessing less hydrogen gave a curve II, in which the weaker accelerations no longer appear, but where the remainder, in consequence of the greater purity of the iron, lie throughout in the neighbourhood of the hundreds on the centigrade scale. At the point of de-magnetisation, about 760°, a gas-absorption takes place, which renders the examination of the higher temperatures difficult, especially as hydrogen is given off. Curve III shows the emission of nitrogen. This occurs first at about 500°, and is afterwards accelerated at about 600°, 700°, 800°, and 900°.

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F. GUNNESON.

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Stockholm, November 15.

**Government Publications and their Distribution.**

THE rules of the Civil Service preclude any expression of my opinion on the economical policy of the Government. Even an official, however, may be allowed to state that the museum reports referred to in the leading article in NATURE of December 29, dull and uninviting though they were even in their best days, greatly help his work, whereas the present skeletons (to use your term) are useless to him.

The attractive appearance and interesting matter of the reports from American museums, which you contrast with those of this country, are perhaps due to the necessity laid on those museums of drawing money directly from individuals, whereas our national museums receive appropriations from the tax-produced revenue of the whole country. So long as the grant from the State is sufficient, the museum can spend its energy better than on appeals to the public; when the grant is reduced, the museum has no funds even for a sprat to catch a whale. In this dilemma we welcome the aid of the Press, both public and technical.

F. A. BATHER.

I TRUST the timely protest made in NATURE of December 29 against the recent action of the Government in restricting the distribution of its publications will meet with the support it deserves. Every scientific worker with any patriotism must long ago have been ashamed at the parsimonious manner in which the world's greatest Government distributes the results of the scientific activities of its various departments. The type, paper, and so-called covers of the publications of the Geological Survey, for example, have been a disgrace to any scientific institution, and now that the valuable work these publications unquestionably contain is to be made even more inaccessible, the time has surely arrived when every one should use his utmost to protest.

Not long ago, on somewhat similar lines, and presumably for somewhat similar reasons, the Government decided that the hand-coloured editions of its geological maps should be increased in price in proportion to the amount of work contained in each map. If this system were logically carried out surely the cost of the preparation of the map, including field work and office work, should have been taken into consideration, in which case probably not a single copy would have been sold. As it is, unquestionably the unreasonable prices charged for these maps has considerably interfered with, if not in some cases entirely stifled, amateur research in certain geological regions, and as such amateur work costs the Government nothing and is invariably placed at its disposal through the media of the publications of the learned

societies, the government department concerned is cutting its own throat by this action.

Writing as one whose work necessitates consulting scientific publications on a fairly large scale, I have been struck by the facilities given for research not only by our American friends, who unquestionably lead the way, but also by most of the countries the publications of which it has been my lot to examine. In every instance there is an anxiety to be obliging, which makes one truly ashamed of oneself when asked to reciprocate in the way of supplying information or publications issued by our own Government.

The journals, magazines, and reports issued by the scientific departments of H.M. Government are of unquestionable value, and surely the value is greater or smaller according to the extent to which they are readily available to the public. Any attempt to curtail their distribution is certainly interfering with the scientific progress which the very issue of these publications would seem to indicate.

T. SHEPPARD.

The Museums, Hull.

**The Gorilla's Foot.**

WITH reference to the correspondence which has appeared in NATURE on the photograph of a cast of a gorilla's foot taken by Mr. Akeley, I should like to direct attention to a possibility which Sir Ray Lankester and Mr. Pocock appear to have neglected, namely, that the particular specimen of gorilla which was the subject of the cast may have had an abnormal foot.

The photograph of the cast is certainly deceptive, inasmuch as the forward position of the great toe gives an erroneous impression of its relation to the other toes, but, notwithstanding this, the foot of this gorilla appears to be distinctly different from the ordinary gorilla's foot, and it is possible that Mr. Akeley obtained by chance an interesting abnormality.



FIG. 1.—Abnormal human foot.

With this I send a photograph (Fig. 1) of a human foot described in a paper now in course of publication in the *Journal of Anatomy*, in which the anthropoid appearance of the hallux is much more startling than the human appearance of the same member in the gorilla's foot of Mr. Akeley.

If such abnormalities occur in the human species we must surely admit the possibility of a similar but opposite abnormality in the anthropoids.

SYDNEY SMITH.

Cairo, December 23.

THE rare condition to which Prof. Sydney Smith directs attention has been regarded as a relapse to a