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In the same journal of January 26th is an abstract of a Royal Society paper by C. E. S. Phillips, on 'Diselectrification produced by Magnetism.' Foil was cemented on the inner and outer surfaces of a glass tube, and powerful magnet poles were inserted through air-tight flanges. When the tube was exhausted below .2'' of mercury, and the inner coating was connected to the positive side of an electrical machine, an electroscope attached to the inner coating showed a rapid discharge on opening or closing the circuit of the magnet. With higher pressures or when the inner coating was negative there was no effect. When the electroscope was attached to the iron of the magnet poles, it indicated that the charge was transferred to these.

F. C. C.

ZOOLOGICAL NOTES.

BIRD MIGRATION.

In a recent issue of the *Proceedings of the California Academy of Sciences*, Leverett M. Loomis gives a fourth part of his 'California Water Birds,' including his deductions from a careful study of their migrations. He concludes that the Shearwaters off Monterey find their position and shape their course by landmarks, and that birds possess no mysterious superhuman faculty for determining direction, or else these same Shearwaters would not have been bewildered in the fog. He also considers that the young are guided from the place of their birth to their winter abode through the experience of the older birds, and that the mere presence of young alone in a locality does not prove that they are migrating independently of the adults, but that older birds have either continued their flight or are migrating farther off. Mr. Loomis sums up by saying that bird migration is a habit evolved by education and inheritance which owe their origin and perpetuation to winter, with its failure of food.

THE STEREOORNITHES AGAIN.

In the December number of *Comunicaciones del Museo Nacional de Buenos Aires*, Senor Mercerat discusses the zoological position of the gigantic birds from the Santa Cruz beds of Patagonia, and considers them as an independ-

ent 'gens' of the suborder Ciconiiformes of Fürbringer. While this is all right, Senor Mercerat unfortunately adds that the Stereornithes are a degenerate group of birds, but that they have not progressed so far on their downward course as the so-called Ratitae, and that they present numerous characters similar to those of the Carinatae, combined with others peculiar to the Ratitae. What these ratite characters are, aside from the feeble development of the wings, no one has yet satisfactorily explained, and Mr. C. W. Andrews, in his recent memoir on *Phororhacos*, shows very clearly that the Stereornithes have no kinship with the Ostriches. Size and flightlessness are not morphological characters and have no bearing whatever on the systematic position of the bird. It was a favorite remark of the late Professor Cope that an animal a mile long and an inch wide might belong to the same genus as one a mile wide and an inch long, and this might be paraphrased by saying that a bird with wings twenty feet across might be the nearest relative of a bird with no wings at all.

F. A. L.

THE ASSAY COMMISSION.

THE Assay Commission, which is appointed annually by the President to test the weight and fineness of the coinage of the mints in operation during the preceding year, met at the Philadelphia mint on February 14th. The men whom President McKinley designated to serve for the year 1900 were: Senator John P. Jones, of Nevada; Representative E. J. Hill, of Connecticut; Dr. H. S. Pritchett, Superintendent of the Coast and Geodetic Survey; Professor S. A. Lattimore, of the University of Rochester; Professor H. H. Nicholson, of the University of Nebraska; Dr. J. A. Mathews, of Columbia University; Dr. Cabell Whitehead, Assayer of the Bureau of the Mint; Dr. Marcus Benjamin, of the Smithsonian Institution; Hon. John H. Perry, of Connecticut; Calvin Cobb of Boise, Idaho; Thomas B. Miller of Helena, Montana; Edward Harden, of New York City; E. H. Rich, of Fort Dodge, Iowa, and Francis Beidler, of Chicago. The Commission also includes three ex-officio members, viz., the judge of the District Court of the

Eastern District of Pennsylvania, Judge McPherson; the Comptroller of the Currency, Hon. Charles G. Dawes, and the Assayer of the New York Assay Office, Dr. Herbert G. Torrey.

The work of the Commission consists in counting, assaying and weighing samples representing the coinage of the mints at Philadelphia, New Orleans and San Francisco. For this trial one one-thousandth of all gold coins and one two-thousandth of all silver coins made during the year are sent to the Philadelphia mint under seal and kept for the meeting of the Commission. The coinage during the past year was larger than ever before and hence the labor of the Commission was increased. The trial pieces numbered over forty-one thousand. The work of the Commission was divided among three committees; the chairman of which, as announced by Mr. George C. Roberts, Director of the Mint were: Counting, Hon. E. J. Hill; Assaying, Dr. H. S. Pritchett; Weighing, Dr. J. A. Mathews. The investigations of these committees serve as a check upon the accuracy of the work at the several mints, as well as upon the Bureau of the Mint in Washington.

SCIENTIFIC NOTES AND NEWS.

SINCE making appropriations in March, 1899, of \$500 to Professor Charles L. Doolittle, and of \$300 to Mr. Henry M. Parkhurst, from the Benjamin Apthorp Gould Fund, a considerable additional amount of income has accrued, for the distribution of which the Directors are prepared immediately to arrange. Applications for appropriations may be made by letter to Mr. Lewis Boss, Albany, Dr. Seth C. Chandler, Cambridge, or to Professor Asaph Hall, Cambridge.

AN item in the Urgency Deficiency Bill, which has now passed both Houses of Congress, makes an appropriation of \$7500, for continuing the biological and economic investigations on the lobster and clam. The investigations deal with the practical aspects of the subject, and it is purposed to carry on the work in all States having clam and lobster fisheries, from Maine to Delaware inclusive.

A COMMITTEE, consisting of Mr. James E. Scripps, Mr. George W. Bates, of Detroit, and

Professor Francis W. Kelsey, of the University of Michigan, was appointed at the annual meeting of the Detroit branch of the Archæological Institute of America, and was instructed to name a general committee to prepare a memorial to be submitted to the next State Legislature on the subject of an archæological survey of Michigan. The present knowledge of Michigan archæology is meagre, and is given in 'The Data of Michigan Archæology,' by Harlan I. Smith, published in the *American Antiquarian* for May, 1896.

THE University of Edinburgh will confer the degree of LL.D., on Eleanor A. Ormerod, the entomologist. The University of Edinburgh has not hitherto conferred an honorary degree on a woman.

WABASH COLLEGE, situated at Crawfordsville, Indiana, has conferred an honorary degree of Ph.D. on Professor Asa H. Morton, professor of romance languages, at Williams College. If Professor Morton has not been consulted in regard to this doubtful honor, he may see fit to decline it.

DR. CHARLES W. DABNEY, president of the University of Tennessee, has received notice from the French Government of his appointment as a member of the Committee on International Awards at the Paris Exposition.

PROFESSOR R. W. WOOD, of the University of Wisconsin, who is now in England, will return to Madison at the end of March after visiting Berlin and Paris.

MR. WILLIAM C. WHITNEY has presented two fine bisons to the New York Zoological Park. One of them is from the herd of the late Austin Corbin at Blue Mountain Park, N. H. The other is from Mr. Whitney's herd at Lennox, Mass.

PROFESSOR E. J. MCWEENY, professor of pathology and bacteriology at the Catholic University of Dublin, has been appointed to the newly created post of bacteriologist to the Irish Local Government Board.

THE trustees of the Philadelphia Academy of Surgery announce that the Samuel D. Gross prize was not awarded on January 1st, as no suitable essay was presented. It will be awarded on October 1, 1901. The prize, the