

Would it be unreasonable to suppose that in the early experimental stages of the art of embalming—corresponding to the epoch with which Prof. Petrie is dealing—similar failures may have occurred, and that such a condition, for example, as Prof. Petrie has described from Deshasheh, where the fibula was upside down (see "Deshasheh," 1898, Pl. xxxvii.), would receive a natural explanation? Such cases are so exceedingly rare that it is idle to quote them as representing the "custom" of the country.

Apart from these rare exceptional cases of secondary burial and embalmers' "faking," all the disturbances of the bones of un plundered graves result from (1) the operation of the force of gravity on bodies falling into decomposition, and (2) the occasional action of rodents moving small bones. That this is so has been conclusively demonstrated by Dr. Reisner in the minute and critical examination of many thousands of burials in Egypt and Nubia. Thus there are very precise and definite reasons for discarding Prof. Petrie's fantastic speculations, and for accepting in their stead the simple and perfectly obvious explanation of the disturbed state of the skeleton in many graves, which he who runs may read.

The phrase "the bones even being broken to extract the marrow" (*op. cit.*, NATURE, p. 401) calls for some further comment. Does it mean that Prof. Petrie is reaffirming his former statement of a belief in the practice of cannibalism (already quoted)? Can he point to one single case where the bones of a prehistoric Egyptian have been broken *post-mortem*, except by grave-plunderers, excavators, or the natural forces of the denudation of the soil and the disintegration of organic matter?

In "Naqada and Ballas," p. 32, Prof. Petrie referred to the forcible scooping out of the marrow as an evidence of cannibalism; but that statement was clearly inspired by his lack of familiarity with the normal medullary cavity of a human long bone and its relation to the cancellous tissue at the ends. But he added, further, that "there were grooves left by gnawing on the bones"—a sure sign of anthropophagy! Dr. Fouquet, who examined M. de Morgan's material of a similar nature, also saw these grooves, but called them "syphilitic ulcers."

Two years ago (*Lancet*, August 22, 1908, p. 521) I was able to demonstrate that the bones of many pre-dynastic Egyptians were certainly gnawed, but neither by man nor the spirochaete: the damage was inflicted by small necrophilous beetles. Although Prof. Petrie no longer refers to these signs of gnawing, he still speaks of the prehistoric Egyptian breaking human bones "to extract the marrow," i.e. presumably to eat it. The whole evidence afforded by excavations in Egypt goes to prove that this statement is pure fiction.

G. ELLIOT SMITH.

The University of Manchester, October 1.

British Marine Zoology.

"THE proof of the pudding is in the eating," and surely Prof. MacBride will admit that whether a biological station is or is not suitable for research must be decided, not by the expensiveness of the equipment, but by observing whether research is being carried on there.

That one station is ten times as large and expensive as another is no advantage and no credit to it unless it is also ten times as efficient. That it is only in such an establishment that Prof. MacBride can "bring research to a successful issue" is, of course, an important personal record, but it might be unsafe to generalise from one such observation.

I am sorry not to be able to agree with Prof. MacBride in the distinctions he draws between the stations equipped for research and others; and I cannot avoid a doubt as to whether he has personal knowledge of the smaller stations of this country.

W. A. HERDMAN.

October 1.

I SHALL gratify Prof. Herdman's curiosity so far as to say that I have worked at more than one small station in this country.

I fully agree that "the proof of the pudding is in the eating," and I am content to leave it to the judgment of

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my fellow-zoologists whether in reviewing the work done at the various zoological stations in this country Plymouth has not justified its superior equipment by the superiority of the original work, both as to quantity and quality, which has been accomplished there.

E. W. MACBRIDE.

Hormones in Relation to Inheritance.

WITH reference to my presidential address to Section D of the British Association, of which a full report appeared in NATURE of September 22, I must rectify an omission by pointing out that the theory of the possible influence of hormones in inheritance was first enunciated by Mr. J. T. Cunningham in a paper in the *Archiv für Entwicklungsmechanik*, vol. xxvi., 1908, entitled "The Heredity of Secondary Sexual Characters in Relation to Hormones, a Theory of the Heredity of Somatogenic Characters." It was through inadvertence that the reference to Mr. Cunningham's paper was not printed in the copies of the address distributed at the meeting at Sheffield.

GILBERT C. BOURNE.

Savile House, Oxford, October 4.

Pwdre Ser.

My friend Mr. Frank Darwin has sent me the following additional information respecting the *Pwdre Ser*.

"The 'Treasury of Botany' says that Nostoc is called 'Falling Stars,' and quotes Dryden (no reference)—

'And lest our leap from the sky prove too far,
We slide on the back of a new falling star,
And drop from above
In a jelly of love.'

"The note is signed M. J. B.=Berkeley, so it may be trusted so far as that it really refers to Nostoc."

T. McKENNY HUGHES.

Ravensworth, Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge,
September 30.

Unemployed Laboratory Assistants.

A NUMBER of lads who have been employed as laboratory monitors in secondary schools, and whom the London County Council are unable to retain in their service beyond the age of sixteen years, have been referred to us by the London County Council with the view of our placing them. Some of them we have already been able to place in suitable employment, but there are still one or two on our books for whom we seek situations.

They all have an elementary knowledge of physics and chemistry. Some have learned glass-blowing and bending, and a few of the applicants have already passed the Board of Education examination in Chemistry (Stage I.). If any readers of NATURE would like to have further particulars of these boys, I should be glad to supply them with information.

GODFREY E. REISS (*Hon. Sec.*).

Apprenticeship and Skilled Employment Association,
36 Denison House, 296 Vauxhall Bridge Road,
London, S.W., October 5.

THE INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR COOPERATION IN SOLAR RESEARCH.

THIS union held a very successful meeting—the fourth since its foundation—on Mount Wilson Observatory, California, during the last week of September, when there was an assembly of nearly forty European astronomers and physicists, who had crossed the Atlantic for the meeting, and many more American men of science. England was represented, among others, by Sir Joseph Larmor, Profs. Newall, Turner, Fowler, and Mr. Dyson. The gathering, representative as it was of all nations actively engaged in solar work, would have been even more so if a number of those who had signified their intention of being present had not at the last moment been pre-