pliant witnesses in support of any theory as to what the primordial religion of mankind must have been? If it were desired to prove that, prior to the advent of Europeans, they were atheists, without any religious ideas or ceremonial usages, we have several excellent witnesses to prove it. We could prove equally well that they believed in a devil only, that they were Dualists, believing in a good and an evil spirit, that they had deified the powers of Nature, that they had arrived at a belief in one God, that they were polytheists, that they believed in ghosts, in the return of the spirits of their friends, in the immortality of the soul, and in the efficacy of prayers and charms. Nay, if it were desired to produce perfectly unprejudiced evidence in favour of the descent of man from some higher animal, Lord Monboddo might have appealed to the Tasmanians. For, according to Mr. Horton, they believed "that they were formed with tails and without knee-joints, by a benevolent being, and that another descended from heaven, and compassionating the sufferers, cut off their tails, and with grease softened their knees."

Dr. E. B. Tylor, F.R.S., the Reader in Anthropology at Oxford, has written a short preface, in which he expresses his general approval of the work.

F. MAX MÜLLER.

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.*]

British Association Procedure.

THERE is one point on which I am unable to agree with Prof. Tilden's letter in your issue of September 4 (p. 456), viz. that concerning the work and constitution of the Sectional Committees. I can only speak in terms of Section A, but I believe that whatever cynical doubt may be expressed as to the utility of the proceedings of the section there is none as to the utility of its proceedings in Committee. Here matters of moment are brought forward, suggestions made, new researches encouraged or the reverse; and here, as Mr. Shenstone implies, younger members become acquainted with those whom they have long revered at a distance. A sectional committee is not, and should not be, a small executive body, but a large, representative, and suggestive body comprising all the real workers in the particular subject present at the year's gathering, and by no means excluding those younger men who, though now retiring and inconspicuous, will have at some future time to take a prominent place.

Prof. Tilden speaks, however, of the demand for election upon the sectional committees.

If there is anything of this sort, and I believe that to some extent there is, it is an abuse to be checked with vigour.

I should like to propose a general agreement that any direct demand or solicitation to be placed on any committee should be accepted as at once disqualifying for that year. But all the more would it be incumbent on accustomed members to see that no real original worker was accidentally excluded from the healthy and stimulating conference with his seniors which these meetings may afford.

OLIVER J. LODGE.

The Mode of Observing the Phenomena of Earthquakes.

Forwarded by Dr. John Marshall.

HAVING seen in NATURE, of the 28th ult. (p. 414), your remarks, on the uncertainty of the evidence to be obtained from a narration of the subjective impression of movements of the earth and surrounding objects, in obtaining information with re-

gard to earthquakes, and that you also remark that, "possibly, some evidence on this subject might even now be obtained," I venture to say that I was in a first storey room of Wickham Place, near Witham, Essex, during the earthquake that occurred somewhat severely in part of Essex a few years back; and that I was sitting against a partition wall, facing a window to the east, during the whole time of its duration. A hill about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles away formed the horizon, the outline of which passed across this window about half way up, from my point of view. I saw this outline apparently rise up to the top of the window, and sink down again, a displacement which, if it had been due to the movement of the hill itself, must have meant a great deal; but although this was really due, no doubt, to the motion of the house itself, yet the appearance was so deceptive that it produced entirely the idea, at the time, on my senses, that it was the hill that moved.

At Guy's Hospital last year, about 14 months ago, while I was in bed, at somewhere about eight o'clock, I fancy, I felt nothing, but saw the other parts of the building, through the windows, sway slowly, and the sight of it gave me a more or less dizzy feeling. There was a friend sitting on the bed at the time, but he felt nothing. Until I drew his attention to the fact that the bed curtains were swaying, he saw nothing of it.

These impressions make me think that such are of no value in a house except to determine very slight shocks.

I made notes at the time of these points, but they are not to hand just now. I scarcely think such evidence can be of any use to you, but on the chance that it may be, I send it.

HAROLD G. DIXON.

Nelson House, Shanklin, Isle of Wight, September 3.

THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION.

SECTION F.

ECONOMIC SCIENCE AND STATISTICS.

OPENING ADDRESS BY PROF. ALFRED MARSHALL, M.A., F.S.S., PRESIDENT OF THE SECTION.

Some Aspects of Competition.

I UNDERSTAND that the function of an opening address to a section of this Association is to give an account of the advances made in some part of the field of study with which that section is specially concerned. The part of our field to which I would direct your attention to-day is the action of competition. We cannot, in the short space of time allotted to us, make an adequate study of the progress that has been made even in this part of our field; but we may be able to go some way towards ascertaining the character of the changes that are going on in our own time in the mode of action of competition, and in the attitude of economists towards it.

I do not now speak of changes in the moral sentiments of economists with regard to competition—though these, also, are significant in their way—but of changes in their mental attitude towards it, and in the way in which they analyse and reason about its methods of action. Of these changes, the most conspicuous and important is the abandonment of general propositions and dogmas in favour of processes of analysis and reasoning carefully worked out, and held ready for application to the special circumstances of particular problems relating to different countries and different ages, to different races and different classes of industry.

This movement may, perhaps, best be regarded as a passing onward from that early stage in the development of scientific method, in which the operations of Nature are represented as conventionally simplified for the purpose of enabling them to be described in short and easy sentences, to that higher stage in which they are studied more carefully, and represented more nearly as they are, even at the expense of some loss of simplicity and definiteness, and even apparent lucidity. To put the same thing in more familiar words, the English economists of fifty years ago were gratified, rather than otherwise, when some faithful henchman, or henchwoman, undertook to set forth their doctrines in the form of a catechism or creed; and the economists of to-day abhor creeds and catechisms. Such things are now left for the Socialists.

It has, indeed, been an unfortunate thing for the reputation of the older economists, that many of the conditions of England