

A Protest.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE AUK:

Sirs:—Having waited until the last moment for the return of Mr. Lucas, who has been absent from the United States since the first of July and thus unable to speak for himself, I wish to enter a respectful but most earnest protest against Dr. Shufeldt's shameful slur on him, printed on page 265 of the last number of this journal. Whatever may be the custom in that part of the world from which Dr. Shufeldt wrote his letter for the July 'Auk,' it is not customary in most places for a person when fairly beaten in an argument to attack the honesty of his opponent with a cry of fraud. The reckless manner in which Dr. Shufeldt flings an untruth at his critic, and then declares that he will not re-open his "case" under any circumstances, might be amusing, perhaps, if both parties to the "case" were children; but in the present instance it is simply contemptible. Mr. Lucas had a right to expect better treatment, especially after the courtesy which he has invariably accorded Dr. Shufeldt, even when, as in the present case, the latter has been obviously and obstinately in error. As Mr. Lucas has already accomplished (*Science*, July 1, 1887, p. 12) what Dr. Shufeldt preferred merely to talk about, namely, the publication of a true copy of Dr. Shufeldt's original figure side by side with his (Mr. Lucas's own tracing of the same) which Dr. Shufeldt claims was purposely mutilated to support a theory), no shadow of this unjust reflection remains where it was so ungenerously cast; and if it envelops its originator it only verifies the old proverb about curses and chickens. It is naturally unpleasant to acknowledge a mistake, but it is not likely to become easier the longer it is delayed. Even silence is preferable, however, to the attempt to defend an untenable position; and when such defence becomes incompatible with strict honesty, common sense allows a man but one course.

I feel that no apology is needed for calling attention to this matter now, for the principle violated lies at the very foundation of all science, and its general disregard would make utterly impossible that interchange of ideas which now constitutes the brightest hope of American ornithologists.

Very respectfully,

WALTER B. BARROWS.

Washington, D. C., August 31, 1887.

The Metric System.

TO THE EDITORS OF THE AUK:—

Sirs: In 'The Auk' of April, 1884, Dr. Merriam presented 'A Plea for the Metric System in Ornithology,' which was editorially endorsed, and a request made asking "all contributors to the pages of 'The Auk' to give their measurements in the metric system."

Since then a few have done so, most of the writers have not, and each issue adds to the burden of inches and hundredths.

Why has not the change been made?

Will you through these pages kindly shed some light on the subject and thus bring it to the attention of the A. O. U.?

It seems desirable to have some fixed arrangement for the convenience of all.

The choice in this locality appears to be for the metric system.

WILLIAM FLINT.

Oakland, Cal.

NOTES AND NEWS.

SPENCER FULLERTON BAIRD died suddenly at Wood's Holl, Mass., August 19, in his sixty-fifth year, after suffering for many months from seriously impaired health. In his death American ornithology has lost its time honored leader, and zoölogical science one of its most powerful and unselfish promoters. Although occupied during the later years of his life with engrossing executive cares attending two of the most important positions of scientific responsibility to which a naturalist could be called—those of Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution and head of the United States Fish Commission—his impress upon American zoölogy is perhaps unequalled by that of any other naturalist, living or deceased. His published works on the mammals, birds, reptiles, and fishes of North America were for a long period of years the standard authorities of the subject, and will always hold the place of classics. His influence upon the progress of ornithology in America is beyond comparison, his work of thirty years ago forming the basis of nearly all subsequent advance. But his influence was by no means restricted to his published writings, he having been the instigator and organizer of ornithological explorations extending throughout the North American continent. To his influence with the government authorities is due the excellent field work done in connection with nearly all the Government Surveys and the Signal Service Bureau, from the first inception of the various Pacific Railroad Surveys to the present time. The immense resources thus gathered into the National Museum have rendered possible the rapid progress in our knowledge of North American birds which has especially marked the last two decades.

In Professor Baird every rising naturalist has found a friend, ever ready to render all possible assistance and encouragement. Many owe to him opportunities for prosecuting distant explorations, or the material for monographic work. His one object, to which he was most disinterestedly devoted, was the advancement of science, and every effort to that end was sure of his generous encouragement. To the American Orni-