

CORRESPONDENCE.

MUNCHAUSEN SUBSTANTIATED.

On one occasion when that illustrious and voracious traveller, Baron Munchausen, was pursuing the enemy into the gate of a fortified town, the portcullis dropped and cut off the hinder part of his horse. Heated by the conflict and the routing of the enemy, he rode to a tank to give the faithful animal some water. The horse drank like the parched earth after a six-months' drought, until the Baron finally looked around and saw the mutilation, and found that as fast as the horse drank, the water ran out of his sliced-off body, and that his thirst would probably never be slaked.

The universal verdict of the reading public for many years has placed Munchausen high upon the long list of writers whose tales are more interesting than true, and yet physiologists tell us that in the simple narrative which I have just briefed the Baron was one of the first to voice a great physiological fact. That is, that while thirst is felt in the mouth and throat, it is in reality a general craving of the whole system, and that no amount of water in the mouth alone will prevent an animal from dying of thirst.

Now, as Munchausen was ahead of his generation as a physiologist, why should we not more patiently search in his works for other truths? Just as we have our investigators and expert interpreters of hidden meanings in Shakespeare and Browning, and the Wagner music dramas, why should not societies be formed for the investigation and interpretation of Munchausen?

All this, however, is theoretical and suggestive, and introductory to the statement that I know of a chain of facts which resemble Munchausen's horse-decapitation story, and briefly and without further plea, the facts are these:

There is a genial little caterpillar which disports itself among the leaves of the Washington shade trees in the month of August, and which is known to its select circle of acquaintances as the fall web-worm. There is also an enterprising green bug of predatory instincts which is called the soldier-bug, and which, afflicted with as strong and persistent a thirst as that of a Kentucky colonel, seeks continually to assuage it by drinking the blood of the fall web-worm. In this gory pursuit, however, the soldier-bug has a strong rival in the wheel-bug, who, if the former is compared to the Kentucky colonel, must be likened for thirst to the Georgia Judge—the

Washington variety. The interests of these two cheerful creatures conflict. Their sanguinary occupations lead them to the same hunting-ground, and sometimes there are not worms enough to go round.

On such an occasion as this a soldier-bug, awaking early with a bad headache and a tremendous desire for a cocktail, found a solitary web-worm, inserted his beak into the wriggling body, as one would put a straw into a brandy smash, and began to suck. At this moment a wheel-bug discovered the pair, and stuck his beak into the back of the soldier-bug, and also began to suck.

There was the soldier-bug in precisely the situation of Munchausen's horse. As fast as he sucked the blood of the caterpillar, it was sucked out of him by the wheel-bug. The observer's sympathy for the web-worm was lost in admiration for the pluck of the soldier-bug and in sorrow for his predicament, until both admiration and sorrow were overcome by the brilliant thought that in this observation was Munchausen substantiated.

CIMEX.

BOOK NOTICE.

"AMERICAN SPIDERS AND THEIR SPINNING-WORK.—A Natural History of the Orb-weaving Spiders of the United States, with Special Regard to their Industry and Habits: By HENRY C. MCCOOK, D. D., author and publisher, Philadelphia, Vols. I. to III., 1889-1894."

It is with pleasure that the nature-loving public congratulates Dr. McCook on the completion of his self-imposed and heroic task,—not alone of five years' duration, but more nearly of twenty-five. The author started out five years ago to give to the world a work on spiders, and he has not only done this, but has also given us a model of patient, conscientious and unprejudiced labour that will stand as a monument to its author long after he has himself laid down his pen and passed to the unknown beyond; he has given to the observer in whatever department of natural science, a standard which he may well follow. Purity, both as to observation and conclusion, is stamped on every page. It is as if he had plunged his cup into the clear, cool mountain stream and handed us, direct, a refreshing draught of the crystal waters. He has evidently not studied spiders in his pulpit, but if there is any other place that he has visited, and whence he has not brought back some