

IV. "On the Blue Colour of the Sky, the Polarization of Skylight, and on the Polarization of Light by Cloudy matter generally." By JOHN TYNDALL, LL.D., F.R.S. Received December 16, 1868.

Since the communication of my brief abstract "On a new Series of Chemical Reactions produced by Light," the experiments upon this subject have been continued, and the number of the substances thus acted on considerably augmented. New relations have also been established between *mixed vapours* when subjected to the action of light.

I now beg to draw the attention of the Royal Society to two questions glanced at incidentally in the abstract referred to,—the blue colour of the sky, and the polarization of skylight. Reserving the historic treatment of the subject for a more fitting occasion, I would merely mention now that these questions constitute, in the opinion of our most eminent authorities, the two great standing enigmas of meteorology. Indeed it was the interest manifested in them by Sir John Herschel, in a letter of singular speculative power, that caused me to enter upon the consideration of these questions so soon.

The apparatus with which I work consists, as already stated to the Society, of a glass tube about a yard in length, and from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 inches internal diameter. The vapour to be examined is introduced into this tube in the manner described in my last abstract, and upon it the condensed beam of the electric lamp is permitted to act until the neutrality or the activity of the substance has been declared.

It has hitherto been my aim to render the chemical action of light upon vapours *visible*. For this purpose substances have been chosen, *one* at least of whose products of decomposition under light shall have a boiling-point so high that as soon as the substance is formed it shall be *precipitated*. By graduating the quantity of the vapour, this precipitation may be rendered of any degree of fineness, forming particles distinguishable by the naked eye, or particles which are probably far beyond the reach of our highest microscopic powers.

I have no reason to doubt that particles may be thus obtained whose diameters constitute but a very small fraction of the length of a wave of violet light.

In all cases when the vapours of the liquids employed are sufficiently attenuated, no matter what the liquid may be, the visible action commences with the formation of a *blue cloud*. I would guard myself at the outset against all misconception as to the use of this term. The blue cloud to which I here refer is totally invisible in ordinary daylight. To be seen, it requires to be surrounded by darkness, *it only* being illuminated by a powerful beam of light. This blue cloud differs in many important particulars from the finest ordinary clouds, and might justly have assigned to it an intermediate position between these clouds and true cloudless vapour.

With this explanation, the term "cloud," or "incipient cloud," as I propose to employ it, cannot, I think, be misunderstood.

I had been endeavouring to decompose carbonic acid gas by light. A faint bluish cloud, due it may be, or it may not be, to the residue of some vapour previously employed, was formed in the experimental tube. On looking across this cloud through a Nicol's prism, the line of vision being horizontal, it was found that when the short diagonal of the prism was vertical, the quantity of light reaching the eye was greater than when the long diagonal was vertical.

When a plate of tourmaline was held between the eye and the bluish cloud, the quantity of light reaching the eye when the axis of the prism was perpendicular to the axis of the illuminating beam, was greater than when the axes of the crystal and of the beam were parallel to each other.

This was the result all round the experimental tube. Causing the crystal of tourmaline to revolve round the tube, with its axis perpendicular to the illuminating beam, the quantity of light that reached the eye was in all its positions a maximum. When the crystallographic axis was parallel to the axis of the beam, the quantity of light transmitted by the crystal was a minimum.

From the illuminated bluish cloud, therefore, polarized light was discharged, the direction of maximum polarization being at right angles to the illuminating beam; the *plane of vibration* of the polarized light, moreover, was that to which the beam was perpendicular*.

Thin plates of selenite or of quartz, placed between the Nicol and the bluish cloud, displayed the colours of polarized light, these colours being most vivid when the line of vision was at right angles to the experimental tube. The plate of selenite usually employed was a circle, thinnest at the centre, and augmenting uniformly in thickness from the centre outwards. When placed in its proper position between the Nicol and the cloud, it exhibited a system of splendidly coloured rings.

The cloud here referred to was the first operated upon in the manner described. It may, however, be greatly improved upon by the choice of proper substances, and by the application in proper quantities of the substances chosen. Benzol, bisulphide of carbon, nitrite of amyl, nitrite of butyl, iodide of allyl, iodide of isopropyl, and many other substances may be employed. I will take the nitrite of butyl as illustrative of the means adopted to secure the best result with reference to the present question.

And here it may be mentioned that a vapour, which when alone, or mixed with air in the experimental tube, resists the action of light, or shows but a feeble result of this action, may, by placing it in proximity with an-

* I assume here that the plane of vibration is perpendicular to the plane of polarization. This is still an undecided point; but the probabilities are so much in its favour, and it is in my opinion so much preferable to have a physical image on which the mind can rest, that I do not hesitate to employ the phraseology in the text. Even should the assumption prove to be incorrect, no harm will be done by the provisional use of it.

other gas or vapour, be caused to exhibit under light vigorous, if not violent action. The case is similar to that of carbonic acid gas, which diffused in the atmosphere resists the decomposing action of solar light, but when placed in contiguity with the chlorophyl in the leaves of plants, has its molecules shaken asunder.

Dry air was permitted to bubble through the liquid nitrite of butyl until the experimental tube, which had been previously exhausted, was filled with the mixed air and vapour. The visible action of light upon the mixture after fifteen minutes' exposure was slight. The tube was afterwards filled with half an atmosphere of the mixed air and vapour, and another half atmosphere of air which had been permitted to bubble through fresh commercial hydrochloric acid. On sending the beam through this mixture, the action paused barely sufficiently long to show that at the moment of commencement the tube was optically empty. But the pause amounted only to a small fraction of a second, a dense cloud being immediately precipitated upon the beam which traversed the mixture.

This cloud began *blue*, but the advance to whiteness was so rapid as almost to justify the application of the term instantaneous. The dense cloud, looked at perpendicularly to its axis, showed scarcely any signs of polarization. Looked at obliquely the polarization was strong.

The experimental tube being again cleansed and exhausted, the mixed air and nitrite-of-butyl vapour was permitted to enter it until the associated mercury column was depressed $\frac{1}{10}$ of an inch. In other words, the air and vapour, united, exercised a pressure not exceeding $\frac{1}{3}\frac{1}{10}$ of an atmosphere. Air passed through a solution of hydrochloric acid was then added till the mercury column was depressed three inches. The condensed beam of the electric light passed for some time in darkness through this mixture. There was absolutely nothing within the tube competent to scatter the light. Soon, however, a superbly blue cloud was formed along the track of the beam, and it continued blue sufficiently long to permit of its thorough examination. The light discharged from the cloud at right angles to its own length was *perfectly polarized*. By degrees the cloud became of whitish blue, and for a time the selenite colours obtained by looking at it normally were exceedingly brilliant. The direction of maximum polarization was distinctly at right angles to the illuminating beam. This continued to be the case as long as the cloud maintained a decided blue colour, and even for some time after the pure blue had changed to whitish blue. But as the light continued to act the cloud became coarser and whiter, particularly at its centre, where it at length ceased to discharge polarized light in the direction of the perpendicular, while it continued to do so at both its ends.

But the cloud which had thus ceased to polarize the light emitted normally, showed vivid selenite colours when looked at *obliquely*. The direction of maximum polarization changed with the texture of the cloud. This point shall receive further illustration subsequently.

A blue, equally rich and more durable, was obtained by employing the

nitrite-of-butyl vapour in a still more attenuated condition. Now the instance here cited is *representative*. In all cases, and with all substances, the cloud formed at the commencement, when the precipitated particles are sufficiently fine, is *blue*, and it can be made to display a colour rivalling that of the purest Italian sky. In all cases, moreover, this fine blue cloud polarizes *perfectly* the beam which illuminates it, the direction of polarization enclosing an angle of 90° with the axis of the illuminating beam.

It is exceedingly interesting to observe both the perfection and the decay of this polarization. For ten or fifteen minutes after its first appearance the light from a vividly illuminated incipient cloud, looked at horizontally, is absolutely quenched by a Nicol's prism with its longer diagonal vertical. But as the sky-blue is gradually rendered impure by the introduction of particles of too large a size, in other words, as real clouds begin to be formed, the polarization begins to deteriorate, a portion of the light passing through the prism in all its positions. It is worthy of note that for some time after the cessation of perfect polarization the *residual* light which passes, when the Nicol is in its position of minimum transmission, is of a gorgeous blue, the whiter light of the cloud being extinguished*. When the cloud texture has become sufficiently coarse to approximate to that of ordinary clouds, the rotation of the Nicol ceases to have any sensible effect on the quality of the light discharged normally.

The perfection of the polarization in a direction perpendicular to the illuminating beam is also illustrated by the following experiment. A Nicol's prism large enough to embrace the entire beam of the electric lamp was placed between the lamp and the experimental tube. A few bubbles of air carried through the liquid nitrite of butyl were introduced into the tube, and they were followed by about 3 inches (measured by the mercurial gauge) of air which had been passed through aqueous hydrochloric acid. Sending the polarized beam through the tube, I placed myself in front of it, my eye being on a level with its axis, my assistant Mr. Cottrell occupying a similar position behind the tube. The short diagonal of the large Nicol was in the first instance vertical, the plane of vibration of the emergent beam being therefore also vertical. As the light continued to act, a superb blue cloud visible to both my assistant and myself was slowly formed. But this cloud, so deep and rich when looked at from the positions mentioned, *utterly disappeared when looked at vertically downwards, or vertically upwards*. Reflection from the cloud was not possible in these directions. When the large Nicol was slowly turned round its axis, the eye of the observer being on the level of the beam, and the line of vision perpendicular to it, entire extinction of the light emitted horizontally occurred where the longer diagonal of the large Nicol was vertical. But now a vivid blue cloud was seen when looked at downwards or upwards. This truly fine experiment was first definitely suggested by a remark addressed to me in a letter by Prof. Stokes.

* This seems to prove that particles too large to polarize the blue, polarize perfectly light of lower refrangibility.

Now, as regards the polarization of skylight, the greatest stumbling-block has hitherto been that, in accordance with the law of Brewster, which makes the index of refraction the tangent of the polarizing angle, the reflection which produces perfect polarization would require to be made *in air upon air*; and indeed this led many of our most eminent men, Brewster himself among the number, to entertain the idea of *molecular reflection*. I have, however, operated upon substances of widely different refractive indices, and therefore of very different polarizing angles as ordinarily defined, but the polarization of the beam by the incipient cloud has thus far proved itself to be *absolutely independent of the polarizing angle*. The law of Brewster does not apply to matter in this condition, and it rests with the undulatory theory to explain why. Whenever the precipitated particles are sufficiently fine, no matter what the substance forming the particles may be, the direction of maximum polarization is at right angles to the illuminating beam, the polarizing angle for matter in this condition being invariably 45° . This I consider to be a point of capital importance with reference to the present question*.

That *water-particles*, if they could be obtained in this exceedingly fine state of division, would produce the same effects, does not admit of reasonable doubt. And that they must exist in this condition in the higher regions of the atmosphere is, I think, certain. At all events, no other assumption than this is necessary to completely account for the firmamental blue and the polarization of the sky†.

Suppose our atmosphere surrounded by an envelope impervious to light, but with an aperture on the sunward side through which a parallel beam of solar light could enter and traverse the atmosphere. Surrounded on all sides by air not directly illuminated, the track of such a beam through the air would resemble that of the parallel beam of the electric lamp through an incipient cloud. The sunbeam would be *blue*, and it would discharge laterally light in precisely the same condition as that discharged by the in-

* The difficulty referred to above is thus expressed by Sir John Herschel:—"The cause of the polarization is evidently a reflection of the sun's light upon *something*. The question is on what? Were the angle of maximum polarization 76° , we should look to water or ice as the reflecting body, however inconceivable the existence in a cloudless atmosphere, and a hot summer's day of unevaporated molecules (particles?) of water. But though we were once of this opinion, careful observation has satisfied us that 90° , or thereabouts, is a correct angle, and that therefore whatever be the body on which the light has been reflected, *if polarized by a single reflection*, the polarizing angle must be 45° , and the index of refraction, which is the tangent of that angle, unity; in other words, the reflection would require to be made *in air upon air!*" ("Meteorology," par. 233).

† Any particles, if small enough, will produce both the colour and the polarization of the sky. But is the existence of small water-particles on a hot summer's day *in the higher regions of our atmosphere* inconceivable? It is to be remembered that the oxygen and nitrogen of the air behave as a vacuum to radiant heat, the exceedingly attenuated vapour of the higher atmosphere being therefore in practical contact with the cold of space.

cipient cloud. In fact the azure revealed by such a beam would be to all intents and purposes that which I have called a "blue cloud" *.

But, as regards the polarization of the sky, we know that not only is the direction of maximum polarization at right angles to the track of the solar beams, but that at certain angular distances, probably variable ones, from the sun, "neutral points," or points, of no polarization exist, on both sides of which the planes of atmospheric polarization are at right angles to each other.

I have made various observations upon this subject which I reserve for the present; but pending the more complete examination of the question the following facts and observations bearing upon it are submitted to the Royal Society.

The parallel beam employed in these experiments tracked its way through the laboratory air exactly as sun-beams are seen to do in the dusty air of London. I have reason to believe that a great portion of the matter thus floating in the laboratory air consists of organic germs, which are capable of imparting a perceptibly bluish tint to the air. This air showed, though far less vividly, all the effects of polarization obtained with the incipient clouds. The light discharged laterally from the track of the illuminating beam was polarized, though not perfectly, the direction of maximum polarization being at right angles to the beam.

The horizontal column of air thus illuminated was 18 feet long, and could therefore be looked at very obliquely without any disturbance from a solid envelope. At all points of the beam throughout its entire length the light emitted normally was in the same state of polarization. Keeping the positions of the Nicol and the selenite constant, the same colours were observed throughout the entire beam when the line of vision was perpendicular to its length.

I then placed myself near the end of the beam as it issued from the electric lamp, and looking through the Nicol and selenite more and more obliquely at the beam, observed the colours fading until they disappeared. Augmenting the obliquity the colours appeared once more, *but they were now complementary to the former ones.*

Hence this beam, like the sky, exhibited its neutral point, at opposite sides of which the light was polarized in planes at right angles to each other.

Thinking that the action observed in the laboratory might be caused in

* The opinion of Sir John Herschel, connecting the polarization and the blue colour of the sky is verified by the foregoing results. "The more the subject [the polarization of skylight] is considered," writes this eminent philosopher, "the more it will be found beset with difficulties, and its explanation when arrived at will probably be found to carry with it that of the blue colour of the sky itself and of the great quantity of light it actually does send down to us." "We may observe, too," he adds, "that it is only where the purity of the sky is most absolute that the polarization is developed in its highest degree, and that where there is the slightest perceptible tendency to cirrus it is materially impaired." This applies word for word to the "incipient clouds."

some way by the vaporous fumes diffused in its air, I had a battery and an electric lamp carried to a room at the top of the Royal Institution. The track of the beam was seen very finely in the air of this room, a length of 14 or 15 feet being attainable. This beam exhibited all the effects observed with the beam in the laboratory. Even the uncondensed electric light falling on the floating matter showed, though faintly, the effects of polarization*.

When the air was so sifted as to entirely remove the visible floating matter, it no longer exerted any sensible action upon the light, but behaved like a vacuum.

I had varied and confirmed in many ways those experiments on neutral points, operating upon the fumes of chloride of ammonium, the smoke of brown paper, and tobacco smoke, when my attention was drawn by Sir Charles Wheatstone to an important observation communicated to the Paris Academy in 1860 by Professor Govi, of Turin†. His observations on the light of comets had led M. Govi to examine a beam of light sent through a room in which was diffused the smoke of incense. He also operated on tobacco smoke. His first brief communication stated the fact of polarization by such smoke, but in his second communication he announced the discovery of a neutral point in the beam, at the opposite sides of which the light was polarized in planes at right angles to each other.

But unlike my observations on the laboratory air, and unlike the action of the sky, the direction of maximum polarization in M. Govi's experiment enclosed a very small angle with the axis of the illuminating beam. The question was left in this condition, and I am not aware that M. Govi or any other investigator has pursued it further.

I had noticed, as before stated, that as the clouds formed in the experimental tube became denser, the polarization of the light discharged at right angles to the beam became weaker, the direction of maximum polarization becoming oblique to the beam. Experiments on the fumes of chloride of ammonium gave me also reason to suspect that the position of the neutral point *was not constant*, but that it varied with the density of the illuminated fumes.

The examination of these questions led to the following new and remarkable results:—the laboratory being well filled with the fumes of incense, and sufficient time being allowed for their uniform diffusion, the electric beam was sent through the smoke. From the track of the beam polarized light was discharged, but the direction of maximum polarization, instead of being along the normal, now enclosed an angle of 12° or 13° with the axis of the beam.

A neutral point, with complementary effects at opposite sides of it, was also exhibited by the beam. The angle enclosed by the axis of the beam, and a line drawn from the neutral point to the observer's eye, measured in the first instance 66° .

* I hope to try Alpine air next summer.

† Comptes Rendus, tome li. pp. 360 & 669.

The windows of the laboratory were now opened for some minutes, a portion of the incense smoke being permitted to escape. On again darkening the room and turning on the beam, the line of vision to the neutral point was found to enclose with the axis of the beam an angle of 63° .

The windows were again opened for a few minutes, more of the smoke being permitted to escape. Measured as before the angle referred to was found to be 54° .

This process was repeated three additional times; the neutral point was found to recede lower and lower down the beam, the angle between a line drawn from the eye to the neutral point and the axis of the beam falling successively from 54° to 49° , 43° and 33° .

The distances, roughly measured, of the neutral point from the lamp, corresponding to the foregoing series of observations, were these:—

1st observation 2 feet 2 inches.					
2nd	,	2	,	6	,
3rd	,	2	,	10	,
4th	,	3	,	2	,
5th	,	3	,	7	,
6th	,	4	,	6	,

At the end of this series of experiments the direction of maximum polarization had again become normal to the beam.

The laboratory was next filled with the fumes of gunpowder. In five successive experiments, corresponding to five different densities of the gunpowder smoke, the angles enclosed between the line of vision to the neutral point and the axis of the beam were 63° , 50° , 47° , 42° , and 38° respectively.

After the clouds of gunpowder had cleared away the laboratory was filled with the fumes of common resin, rendered so dense as to be very irritating to my lungs. The direction of maximum polarization enclosed in this case an angle of 12° , or thereabouts, with the axis of the beam. Looked at, as in the former instances, from a position near the electric lamp *no neutral point* was observed throughout the entire extent of the beam.

When this beam was looked at normally through the selenite and Nicol, the ring system, though not brilliant, was distinct. Keeping the eye upon the plate of selenite and the line of vision normal, the windows were opened, the blinds remaining undrawn. The resinous fumes slowly diminished, and as they did so the ring system became paler. It finally disappeared. Continuing to look along the perpendicular, the rings revived, but now the colours were complementary to the former ones. *The neutral point had passed me in its motion down the beam consequent upon the attenuation of the fumes of resin.*

In the fumes of chloride of ammonium substantially the same results were obtained as those just described. Sufficient I think has been here stated to illustrate the variability of the position of the neutral point. The

explanation of the results will probably give new work to the undulatory theory*.

Before quitting the question of the reversal of the polarization by cloudy matter, I will make one or two additional observations. Some of the clouds formed in the experiments on the chemical action of light are astonishing as to form. The experimental tube is often divided into segments of dense cloud, separated from each other by nodes of finer matter. Looked at normally, as many as four reversals of the plane of polarization have been found in the tube in passing from node to segment, and from segment to node. With the fumes diffused in the laboratory, on the contrary, there was no change in the polarization along the normal, for here the necessary differences of cloud-texture did not exist.

Further. By a puff of tobacco smoke or of condensed steam blown into the illuminated beam, the brilliancy of the colours may be greatly augmented. But with different clouds two different effects are produced. For example, let the ring system observed in the common air be brought to its maximum strength, and then let an attenuated cloud of chloride of ammonium be thrown into the beam at the point looked at; the ring system flashes out with augmented brilliancy, and the character of the polarization remains unchanged. This is also the case when phosphorus or sulphur is burned underneath the beam, so as to cause the fine particles of phosphoric acid or of sulphur to rise into the light. With the sulphur-fumes the brilliancy of the colours is exceedingly intensified; but in none of these cases is there any change in the character of the polarization.

But when a puff of aqueous cloud, or of the fumes of hydrochloric acid, hydriodic acid, or nitric acid is thrown into the beam, there is a complete reversal of the selenite tints. Each of these clouds twists the plane of polarization 90° . On these and kindred points experiments are still in progress†.

The idea that the colour of the sky is due to the action of finely divided matter, rendering the atmosphere a turbid medium, through which we look at the darkness of space, dates as far back as Leonardo da Vinci. Newton conceived the colour to be due to exceedingly small water particles acting as thin plates. Goethe's experiments in connexion with this subject are well known and exceedingly instructive. One very striking observation of Goethe's referred to what is technically called "chill" by painters, which is due no doubt to extremely fine varnish particles interposed between the eye and a dark background. Clausius, in two very able memoirs,

* Brewster has proved the variability of the position of the neutral point for sky-light with the sun's altitude. Is not the proximate cause of this revealed by the foregoing experiments?

† Sir John Herschel has suggested to me that this change of the polarization from positive to negative may indicate a change from polarization by reflection to polarization by refraction. This thought repeatedly occurred to me while looking at the effects; but it will require much following up before it emerges into clearness.

endeavoured to connect the colours of the sky with suspended water-vesicles, and to show that the important observations of Forbes on condensing steam could also be thus accounted for. Bruecke's experiments on precipitated mastic were referred to in my last abstract. Helmholtz has ascribed the blueness of the eyes to the action of suspended particles. In an article written nearly nine years ago by myself, the colours of the peat smoke of the cabins of Killarney* and the colours of the sky were referred to one and the same cause, while a chapter of the "Glaciers of the Alps," published in 1860, is also devoted to this question. Roscoe, in connexion with his truly beautiful experiments on the photographic power of sky-light, has also given various instances of the production of colour by suspended particles. In the foregoing experiments the azure was produced in *air*, and exhibited a depth and purity far surpassing anything that I have ever seen in mote-filled liquids. Its polarization, moreover, was *perfect*.

In his experiments on fluorescence Professor Stokes had continually to separate the light reflected from the motes suspended in his liquids, the action of which he named "false dispersion," from the fluorescent light of the same liquids, which he ascribed to "true dispersion." In fact it is hardly possible to obtain a liquid without motes, which polarize by reflection the light falling upon them, truly dispersed light being unpolarized. At p. 530 of his celebrated memoir "On the Change of the Refrangibility of Light," Prof. Stokes adduces some significant facts, and makes some noteworthy remarks, which bear upon our present subject. He notices more particularly a specimen of plate glass which, seen by reflected light, exhibited a blue which was exceedingly like an effect of fluorescence, but which, when properly examined, was found to be an instance of false dispersion. "It often struck me," he writes, "while engaged in these observations, that when the beam had a continuous appearance, the polarization was more nearly perfect than when it was sparkling, so as to force on the mind the conviction that it arose merely from motes†. Indeed in the former case the polarization has often appeared perfect, or all but perfect. It is possible that this may in some measure have been due to the circumstance, that when a given quantity of light is diminished in a given ratio, the illumination is perceived with more difficulty when the light is diffused uniformly, than when it is spread over the same space, but collected into specks. Be this as it may, there was at least no tendency observed towards polarization in a plane perpendicular

* I have sometimes quenched almost completely, by a Nicol, the light discharged normally from burning leaves in Hyde Park. The blue smoke from the *ignited end* of a cigar polarizes also, but not perfectly.

† The azure may be produced in the midst of a field of motes. By turning the Nicol, the interstitial blue may be completely quenched, the shining, and apparently unaffected motes, remaining masters of the field. A blue cloud, moreover, may be precipitated in the midst of the azure. An aqueous cloud thus precipitated reverses the polarization; but on the melting away of the cloud the azure and its polarization remain behind.

to the plane of reflection, when the suspended particles became finer, and therefore the beam more nearly continuous."

Through the courtesy of its owner, I have been permitted to see and to experiment with the piece of plate glass above referred to. Placed in front of the electric lamp, whether edgeways or transversely, it discharges bluish polarized light laterally, the colour being by no means a bad imitation of the blue of the sky.

Prof. Stokes considers that this deportment may be invoked to decide the question of the direction of the vibrations of polarized light. On this point I would say, if it can be demonstrated that when the particles are small in comparison to the length of a wave of light, the vibrations of a ray reflected by such particles cannot be perpendicular to the vibrations of the incident light; then assuredly the experiments recorded in the foregoing communication decide the question in favour of Fresnel's assumption.

As stated above, almost all liquids have motes in them sufficiently numerous to polarize sensibly the light, and very beautiful effects may be obtained by simple artificial devices. When, for example, a cell of distilled water is placed in front of the electric lamp, and a slice of the beam permitted to pass through it, scarcely any polarized light is discharged, and scarcely any colour produced with a plate of selenite. But while the beam is passing through it, if a bit of soap be agitated in the water above the beam, the moment the infinitesimal particles reach the beam the liquid sends forth laterally almost perfectly polarized light; and if the selenite be employed, vivid colours flash into existence. A still more brilliant result is obtained with mastic dissolved in a great excess of alcohol.

The selenite rings constitute an extremely delicate test as to the quantity of motes in a liquid. Commencing with distilled water, for example, a thickish beam of light is necessary to make the polarization of its motes sensible. A much thinner beam suffices for common water; while with Brücke's precipitated mastic, a beam too thin to produce any sensible effect with most other liquids, suffices to bring out vividly the selenite colours.

January 21, 1869.

JOHN PETER GASSIOT, Esq., Vice-President, in the Chair.

The Chairman stated that Sir John Macneill and Mr. Edward Solly, who, by reason of non-payment of their annual contributions, ceased to be Fellows of the Society at the last Anniversary, had applied for readmission. Extracts from their letters, explaining the circumstances under which non-payment had occurred, were read, and notice was given that the question of their readmission would be put to the vote at the next Meeting.

The following communications were read :—