slight to be detected, but which are either too slight or too inconstant to require recognition. While theoretically it is possible to recognize 'varieties of varieties,' in practice this rarely occurs, and should never be countenanced; if a form is different enough to be recognized, it should stand as a variety of the common stock, not as a variety of a variety, although it may be more nearly related to some one of several varieties than to any of the others.* Again, the objection has been raised that the recognition of varieties is subject to the caprice of any dabbler who may feel disposed to set them up: theoretically this also is true, but in practice such work falls where it should — to experts, who occasionally err in judgment, or through inadequate material, but in the main are safe guides, and as such are followed, even by their peers when these have not themselves the same or a better opportunity to review the group in question. The recognition of a variety is a matter to be as carefully and conscientiously considered as the recognition of a species, or any higher group.

Hoping that our remarks may serve to throw a little further light upon the points at issue, we again take leave of the subject.—J. A. A.]

The Ornithological Report in the 'Cruise of the Corwin.'

To the Editors of The Auk:—

Sirs: I observe that in his notice of my ornithological paper in the 'Arctic Cruise of the Revenue Steamer Corwin,' Dr. Coues indulges in some severe strictures on the typographical errors and mechanical execution of the report.

It must be conceded that the number of these errors and their atrocity renders his critical remarks justifiable enough. Had, however, Dr. Coues

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* In this connection it seems not out of place to refer briefly to a point raised by Dr. Stejneger in his article in this number of 'The Auk' on the genus *Acanthis*. He alludes (p. 150) to Mr. Seebohm's practice of forming trinomials of the names of the conspecies most nearly related, as tending to better express their true affinities than does the method, adopted by American writers, of taking for the second term of the trinomial the name first given to the group of conspecies as a whole or to any of its forms; and adds: "This .... is a point which merits earnest consideration." We believe, however, that there are two unquestionably strong objections to Mr. Seebohm's method of constructing trinomials. First, it leaves the construction of conspecific names subject to individual opinion as to what two forms of a given group of intergrading forms are most nearly related — a point about which there must, in the nature of the case, be often a diversity of opinion. Second, and of far greater importance, it ignores the law of priority — the fundamental principle of our nomenclature — and therefore opens the way to instability of names and endless confusion. It seems to us perfecfly evident that the law of priority should be considered as equally imperative in relation to conspecific — or subspecific — names as to specific and generic names. In other words, the name first applied to any form of a group of conspecies should be the designation, in a specific sense, for the group as a whole, and should also form the second term of the trinomial for each of its conspecies, whatever may be their relationship *inter se;* and that the slight gain accruing in special cases by Mr. Seebohm's method is much more than offset by the ill results that must inevitably follow from disregarding the law of priority in constructing conspecific names.

noticed the statement that the author had no opportunity for proof-reading his paper he would scarcely, I think, have committed so grave an offence against the canons of just criticism, with which he may be presumed to be fairly well acquainted, as to employ the severe terms he does without an accompanying statement that the author's absence during the passage of his report through the press removes all blame from his shoulders. As I am compelled to believe he must have overlooked this note at the head of the errata slip, printed though it is in type of no inconspicuous size, it may chance that others may do so also; and I therefore take occasion to state—mainly for the benefit of those who may see Dr. Coues's strictures without having access to the report itself and the accompanying errata slip—that, while accepting full responsibility for all statements of fact contained in the paper, I cannot consent to be held accountable for errors of omission and commission in the way of proof-reading and typographical execution. My absence from Washington while this report was in press is regretted by no one so much as myself, but was unavoidable.

Very respectfully,

E. W. Nelson.

Tucson, Arizona.

[It was certainly not our intention to hold Mr. Nelson responsible for the typographical errors of his report; for we did notice his statement disclaiming responsibility therefor, and intended the general tenor of our 'strictures' to imply that the typographical eccentricities were no fault of his, although we failed to formally so state.—E. C.]

A Plea for the Metric System in Ornithology.

To the Editors of the Auk:

Dear Sirs: It seems to me extremely unfortunate that most of our ornithological writers persist in the employment of the confusing and irrational system of inches and hundredths, or, still worse, inches and lines, in the measurement of birds and their eggs.

The metric system is so simple, and its advantages so numerous, that it has already become the acknowledged standard in all departments of science. Certainly none will gainsay that its universal adoption is inevitable sooner or later. Then why defer the hour and thereby increase the already too great number of measurements that must eventually be reduced to the metric system? The labor of converting a series of measurements from one scale to another is not small, and life is too short for busy men to be obliged thus needlessly to waste valuable time.

If we were the only people who have occasion to measure birds the case would resolve itself into one of the relative convenience of the two systems (and even then the choice could but fall to the metric); but as a matter of fact there are ornithologists in all parts of the world, and the comparison of published measurements has become an every day neces-