LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

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The International Memorial Statue of Lamarck.

THE subscription list for the purpose of erecting a statue of the great French naturalist Lamarck in the Jardin des Plantes, Paris, where he did much of his work, will shortly be closed.

English men of science will, it is hoped, realise that it is now time to send subscriptions in order to show their regard for the memory of the great man whose name stands by the side of that of Darwin as a philosophical naturalist.

Subscriptions of any amount may be sent at once to me at the Natural History Museum, Cromwell Road, S.W.; their receipt will be acknowledged, and the subscriptions sent to the committee of French naturalists who are collecting funds, and will issue a list of subscribers; or subscriptions may be sent direct to Prof. Edmond Perrier, director of the museum, Jardin des Plantes, Paris.

E. RAY LANKESTER.

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Mulattos.

MAY I have a line to correct Sir William Thiselton-Dyer's impression (p. 126) that the tragic story of The Pure White Mother and the Coal-black Babe was accepted by me "as accurate and in perfect good faith"? I suppose I ought to have underlined the gentle sneer at a blackness transcending the natural blackness of a negro baby. At any rate, I told the anecdote simply to illustrate the nonsense people will talk under the influence of race mania, and I hope it will not be added too hastily to the accumulation of evidence on the Mendelian side.

H. G. WELLS.

Nest Eggs of Platypus.

MY attention has been directed to the review of Mr. le Souef's book on "Wild Life in Australia" (NATURE, October 24) and to the reviewer's subsequent note on the eggs of Platypus (NATURE, November 28). The reviewer states that there "appears to be no definite evidence that the eggs" of Platypus "are really laid entire." As I had the good fortune to find some in that condition a few years ago, I think it well to record the fact. I have already shown these eggs in Sydney and to the British Association (1899), the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and other scientific bodies, but, alas! I have not found time to write a full account of my material, and I have been putting off—perhaps too long—in the hope of getting sufficient leisure for the task.

In September, 1897, I visited Gayndah, in Queensland, in search of the eggs of Ceratodus and Platypus. I had at once abundant success as regards the Ceratodus material, and so was tempted to devote most of my time to it. I shot a few specimens of Platypus, however, and did a little digging for eggs, without finding any. I did, nevertheless, have success of a kind with Platypus. On the last day of my fortnight in the district (September 20) I managed to find a nest with an adult female Platypus and a young male $5\frac{1}{8}$ inches in extreme length. The mode of finding was both interesting and instructive. My two men and I, after trying several burrows in vain, came on the productive one. After following it for about 10 feet we reached the "breathing hole"; after another 7 feet we came to an apparent end of the burrow, and were greatly disappointed, as we had seen clearly the wet and inwardly directed footprints of a Platypus all the way from the external opening. One of the men groped about eagerly for any sign that the Platypus was working away from us, and finally we were able to track the burrow—filled though it was—through the hard surrounding soil. It soon appeared that the tube had only been blocked for a short distance by loose soil, which was doubtless of use in keeping out intruders. After a short distance we got beyond the plug, and came again to an open passage. Fully 21 feet from the bank we came upon the nest. It was just large enough to permit of the adult Platypus turning in it. The top was about 9 inches above the bottom, and was about a foot from the surface of the soil. The nest itself was made of bark, leaves, &c. The mother and her offspring were quite buried in the material of the nest.

In 1898 I was again able to spend a few days in Gayndah, and I secured several uterine eggs from Platypus and three entire nest eggs. On August 31 I got two nest eggs adhering together, each of them about 15 mm. in greatest diameter. The eggs were perfectly intact, and the shells firm. The embryos were far advanced, and measured about 1 cm. in length.

On September 1 I got another intact nest egg and a female adult at the end of a burrow. The embryo in this egg was even more advanced than in the others.

I secured about the same time several nest embryos, and I was inclined to think that my visit was rather late in the year for nest eggs.

I may add that, as a rule, in following a productive burrow I had to work through one or several "plugs." It would seem as if the mother Platypus, even when at home, adopts the same method of securing safety as rabbits make use of when leaving their young in a burrow.

Queen's College, Belfast. GREGG WILSON.

Sulphur as an Insulator.

THE gold-leaf electroscope, simple as it is, has proved itself to be an excellent instrument for showing the properties of statical electricity; but usually it has this drawback, namely, that it does not retain an electrical charge at a constant value for a conveniently long period of time. Recently an aluminium-leaf electroscope has been tested by me for insulation; the results, which speak for themselves, may be of interest to others who employ this electrical instrument. The electroscope was designed by Prof. J. S. Townsend, F.R.S. Its excellence depends on the metal leaves being supported by means of sulphur. The appended table shows how it behaved during ten days, on many of which rain fell, and from the air in the room where the experiment was made moisture was freely formed on bottles and metal instruments. Each division indicates a potential difference of 100 volts. The charge was positive; * indicates rain:—

	Date	Time	Divisions
*	Nov. 26	11 a.m.	8·0
*	,, 27	11 a.m.	7·0
*	,, 28	Noon	5·0
*	,, 28	6 p.m.	5·0
	,, 29	11 a.m.	4·75
	,, 30	11 a.m.	4·5
	,, 30	6 p.m.	4·25
	Dec. 1	Noon	4·0
	,, 1	6 p.m.	4·0
*	,, 2	Noon	3·5
*	,, 2	6 p.m.	3·5
	,, 3	10 a.m	3·0
*	,, 4	11 a.m.	2·75
	,, 4	3.30 p.m.	2·5
	,, 5	Noon	1·0
	,, 6	6 p.m.	0·0

I have also a quadrant electrometer having a long suspension of metal ribbon. All parts of this instrument are supported on pure sulphur; an experience lasting over many years has proved the excellence of sulphur as an insulator. Of course, an instrument so constructed requires careful handling, but when once erected in a suitable niche it will be found to give hardly any trouble and to keep its charge well. It seems somewhat strange that with some few and noteworthy exceptions, sulphur as an insulator should not be more frequently employed in the physical laboratory at the present day, as its excellent qualities were known and utilised in the early days of electrical science before 1797 by Wilcke, Œpinus, Henley, and others. I may add, in conclusion, that in the construction of the interesting little electrical dry pile apparatus, whereby a small bell has been constantly struck for forty-two years in the Clarendon Laboratory, Oxford, sulphur was employed as the insulator.

F. J JERVIS-SMITH.