extreme importance to societies interested in the distribution of their publications, and in the receipt of publications from kindred bodies. Although I am connected with a small society which has hitherto only enjoyed an ephemeral existence, I trust that a brief account of my experience in the distribution of publications may have a little value. Early in 1883 more than 250 copies of our publications were distributed amongst the leading societies and libraries throughout the world. On my exchange list I now have 271 names; I also send to about 100 members of the Society. A few copies of our publications have been sent to persons who have made seismology a specialty. With each volume there was inclosed a printed form to be filled up and returned, both as a receipt and as a statement of other volumes which might be required. The institutions to which volumes were sent were as far as possible selected as having an interest in scientific investigations. Especial care was taken to forward volumes to institutions established in earthquake-shaken or volcanic regions, as for instance to many parts of South America, New Zealand, Central Siberia, Iceland, &c.

In many cases our receipts were returned. In others societies returned their own special forms. A few societies sent us their publications in return. One society very kindly made a collection of earthquake literature for us. Several others made special applications for particular volumes to complete the series of our publications. *In about half the cases, however, I find that no notice whatever was taken of our gift.*

For example—

For 34 volumes sent to institutions in	England	17	receipts were received.			
,, 40	,,	,,	,,	Germany	22	,,	,,
,, 49	,,	,,	,,	the United States	31	,,	,,
				&c., &c., &c.			

One result has been that our distribution list has been reduced. In one or two instances, where I know that earthquake literature cannot fail to be acceptable, the omission to send acknowledgment has been overlooked, and I continue to post our publications.

No doubt many societies publish lists of presents. These may be useful to the members of such societies; but they are valueless to donors who are not favoured with such publications.

The fact which is most to be regretted is that these omissions have resulted in many libraries not being *au courant* with the latest information.

Now supposing that the publications in question have any value whatever, it is natural to seek a cause for this state of affairs.

In many instances the omissions may be due to negligence, whilst in others they may be due to institutions having failed to establish a system for their correspondence.

From my own communications with various societies it is evident that many of them neither possess forms for routine correspondence nor have they the means for facilitating reference to ordinary or extraordinary correspondence. Sheets of plain notepaper, envelopes, pens, ink, and a few postcards constitute the business equipment.

Those societies which possess forms for the acknowledgement of presents, &c., often sacrifice fivepence for the postage of an elaborate document where a wrapper or a three-halfpenny postcard, although wanting in formality, would attain the same result. Although learned societies are not institutions where business is a specialty, many of them might possibly derive benefit by the adoption of more business-like methods. At present it would appear that there are many institutions which are as equally indifferent to the circulation of their own publications as they are to receive those of others.

JOHN MILNE,
Hon. Sec. of the Seismological Society of Japan

Tokio, June 7

Suicide of Snakes

THE letter of Edward F. Hardman in NATURE (vol. xxix. p. 452), with reference to the suicide of black snakes, recalls an incident which I once witnessed; I was quite small, but my memory of the strange occurrence is very clear and distinct. It was in the State of Illinois, when at that early day a short, thick variety of rattlesnake was very numerous, so much so that the State acquired an unenviable reputation in the older parts of the Union. Farmers in "breaking prairie," as the first ploughing of the prairie sod was called, would kill them by dozens in the course of a single summer. They were very venomous, but owing to their sluggish nature and their rattle, which was always sounded before an attack, but few persons were bitten by them. Moreover, there was little danger of death if proper remedies were applied at once.

I was one day following one of the large breaking ploughs common at that time. It was drawn by five or six yoke of oxen, and there were two men to manage the plough and the team. As we were going along, one of the men discovered a rattlesnake, as I remember about twelve or fourteen inches in length. They rarely exceeded eighteen or twenty inches, so that this one was probably about two-thirds grown. The man who first saw it was about to kill it, when the other proposed to see if it could be made to bite itself, which it was commonly reported the rattlesnake would do if angered and prevented from escaping. Accordingly they poked the snake over into the ploughed ground, and then began teasing it with their long whips. Escape was impossible, and the snake soon became frantic at its ineffectual attempts either to injure its assailants or to get away from them. At last it turned upon itself and struck its fangs into its own body, about the middle.

The poison seemed to take effect instantly. The fangs were not withdrawn at all, and if not perfectly dead within less than five minutes, it at least showed no signs of life. That it should die so quickly will not seem strange if it is borne in mind that the same bite would have killed a full-grown man in a few hours' time.

The men watched it long enough to be sure that it would not be likely to move away, and then went on with their work. I trudged around with them for an hour or more, and every time we came where the snake was I stopped and looked at it, but it never moved again. In this case I do not remember that the snake had been injured at all. I have often heard of rattlesnakes biting themselves under such circumstances, but this was the only case that ever came under my observation.

Ongole, India, June 17 W. R. MANLEY

Sky Glows

As we appear to be having a return of the gorgeous sunset phenomena with which we were favoured towards the end of last year, a brief mention of two of the most brilliant displays that I have recently had the good fortune to observe may be of sufficient interest to place upon record in the pages of NATURE, The "after-glow," though very brilliant, has not of course attracted the attention it would have done, on account of the twilight; if it had not been for that circumstance, I think the recent displays of the phenomena would have been quite as gorgeous as those of last year. It would certainly have been so in the case of the "after-glow" on June 22; the "glow" on that evening at nine o'clock reached an altitude of 45°, and extended from the north to the west-north-west point of the horizon. For an altitude of about 20° the glow was of a beautiful crimson tint; above that altitude it was of a pale pink fading away gradually towards the edge to a pale orange. On that evening the reddish glow was not confined to that part of the horizon where the sun had gone down, but extended over the entire sky from the west to the east, the whole celestial vault, which was quite free from clouds, appearing to be slightly tinged with red. So conspicuous was this redness of the sky that a lady friend remarked—before her attention had been called to it—"How red all the sky is."

On the 7th inst. the "glow" equalled in brilliancy, though not in extent, the display above described. At 8h. 45m. p.m. it reached an altitude of about 30°, and extended from the west-south-west to the north-north-west point of the horizon. The redness of the whole sky, which was so noticeable on the former occasion, was wanting on this. On both occasions the "glow" was not visible for more than an hour and a quarter after sunset.

Dalston, E., July 12 B. J. HOPKINS

MANY of your correspondents have referred to the "remarkable appearances of the sky" at sunrise and sunset last year, but I have not observed any reference to the following:—On the morning of November 30 I was on my way from Basle to Calais by the St. Gothard mail train, and observed the whole eastern sky become lit up as though there were a splendid sunrise; the larger print of a newspaper was easily readable at the carriage window. On referring to our watches we found it was 5 o'clock by Basle time. During the next half-hour every trace of the phenomenon gradually vanished. FRANK PETRIE

July 11

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