LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

[*The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his correspondents. Neither can he undertake to return, or to correspond with the writers of, rejected manuscripts intended for this or any other part of* NATURE. *No notice is taken of anonymous communications.*]

The Chief of the American Nautical Almanac.

PAGE 542 of the issue of NATURE for April 6 contains an announcement that Dr. T. J. J. See has been nominated as Chief of the American Nautical Almanac Office; but as this is entirely erroneous, I venture to hope you will correct it. Prof. See has been assigned to a subordinate position in the Naval Observatory, and has nothing whatever to do with the Nautical Almanac Office. WM. HARKNESS.

Nautical Almanac Office,
U.S. Naval Observatory, Washington, April 18.

[The announcement referred to by Prof. Harkness was based upon information given in *Science*, and was corrected in the following number (p. 562) upon the authority of the same journal. —ED.].

Wehnelt Interrupter.

IN a previous communication to this journal (p. 438), I pointed out various methods of controlling the Wehnelt interrupter with a view to preventing the destruction of Crookes' tubes. Since then I have made a series of observations which confirm what was previously stated. The principle upon which the experiments were conducted was to keep all the factors constant with one exception, the amperage, voltage, results upon the fluorescent screen and photographic plate being carefully noted and registered by means of an X-ray meter. In one set of experiments the voltage was varied, in another the density of the solution, in the third the size of the platinum, in the fourth the self-induction of the primary coil. By varying any of these, or by a combination specially suited for different purposes, complete control of the Wehnelt was obtained in the way of greater or less fluorescence, actinic power, and steadiness of the screen. Briefly stated, it was found that all these effects decreased as we lowered the voltage, the self-induction of the primary, the density of the electrolyte, and the size of the platinum.

Early in these investigations, great differences between the readings across the Wehnelt and those across the terminals of the primary were observed, for the most part indicating increase in the former. An extended series of observations was made by means of Lord Kelvin's electrostatic voltmeters and ampere gauge, and a relationship between all the different factors was clearly demonstrated. Different induction coils were used, in one of which the self-induction could be altered by withdrawing the soft iron core. Briefly put, it may be said: (*a*) that there was a corresponding decrease in the readings across the Wehnelt as the voltage in the primary decreased; (*b*) different conditions, such as length of spark gap, or different vacuum in the Crookes' tube placed in the secondary circuit, affected the readings considerably; (*c*) the increased voltage across the Wehnelt seemed to depend upon the amount of self-induction in the primary. In this group of experiments, it was noted that, as the self-induction increased, the voltage increased, the amperage decreased, and the number of interruptions also decreased. A non-inductive resistance was made with a view of confirming the results, and it was used instead of the primary of the ordinary coil. In this there was, however, sufficient self-induction to work the Wehnelt under certain conditions. With this arrangement, not a single reading across the Wehnelt was higher than that of the voltage across the primary. J. MACINTYRE.

Glasgow, April 28.

Polarisation Experiment.

BY the following simple arrangement a single pile of glass plates may serve at once as polariser and analyser, and be used to study or to exhibit on a screen the interference colours with mica or crystal sections. It may not be new, but I have not seen it given anywhere. A beam of light is reflected down from a pile, polarised in the plane of reflection. Passing through a double-refracting crystal, it is resolved and then reflected by a common mirror under the crystal. On passing through the pile, which polarises by refraction in a plane at right angles to the plane of first polarisation, it shows the interference colours. Using sunlight and interposing a convex lens, we may by this simple means project the interference rings of crystal sections.

Central College, Bangalore, India. J. COOK.

Gecko Cannibalism.

A FEW days ago, on opening the stomach of a young female gecko (*Gecko monarchus*, a species which occurs fairly commonly in the compound outside our bungalow here), it was found to contain, in addition to a caterpillar and some other remains which I could not identify, a smaller gecko of the same species; this, judging from its position in the stomach, had evidently been eaten head foremost, and was quite entire.

The lengths of the two individuals were:

Larger individual	Tip of snout to cloaca, 57 mm. (tail broken off).
Smaller ditto ...	Tip of snout to cloaca, 32 mm.
	Tip of snout to tip of tail, 74 mm.

Günther, in his "Reptiles of British India," alludes to geckos as being known to destroy "the younger and weaker members of their own species," and he describes the individuals of *Gecko monarchus* as "pugnacious among themselves"; but the fact that an animal will prey upon another of its own species while living under completely natural conditions and with an abundant supply of its normal insect food seems worth recording. F. P. BEDFORD.

Singapore, March 23.

"Asia, the Land of Rice."

THROUGH the medium of your pages I would ask, Can any of the numerous readers of NATURE give information as to how or from what origin the name Asia came to be applied to a large portion of the earth's surface? Did it in olden times belong more especially to that district which we now term India? Was the name Asia used by any race of people to denote the land of spices and other valuables, whose products were brought by caravan across Persia and onward by way of the Red Sea?

In the last number of the *Journal* of the Polynesian Society (vol. vii. 185) an interesting paper, by Mr. S. Percy Smith, the Surveyor General for New Zealand, is published, "Hawa-iki: the whence of the Maori," in which he shows that Polynesian traditions tell that the Maori people of New Zealand originally started on their migrations through the isles of the Pacific from a large country which they name "Atia-te-varinga."

"In Madagascar, the name for rice is *vari* or *vare*; in Sunda (Java), Macassar, Kolo, Ende, rice is *pare*; in the Bima tongue it is *fare*; in Malay it is *padi* and *pari*. It is stated that the Arabs changed the original Malay *f* into *p*, so that originally the Malay name was *fari*."—"It is sufficiently clear from the above that *vari* means rice, and the Rarotongan tradition is correct, though not now understood by the people themselves."—"It would seem from this that Atia was a country in which the rice grew, and the name Atia-te-varinga may be translated Atia-the-be-riced, or where plenty of it grew."

In the word *varinga* the suffix *nga* is significant of the plural, and so we get "Atia the rice-growing land."

TAYLOR WHITE.

Wimbledon, Hawkes Bay, N.Z., February 9.

RECENT SCIENCE IN ITALY.

A BRIEF survey of recent numbers of the *Transactions* published by the Reale Accademia dei Lincei, or by the various other Italian Royal scientific academies, will amply show that the country to which we are indebted in the past for the telescope, the mariner's compass, the voltaic cell and other equally valuable inventions, is keeping well to the fore in all advancements of modern science.

In mathematics there have appeared, during the year 1898, papers by A. Brambilla on Steiner's surfaces, and on the surfaces of Veronese, also on the principal polygons of a gibbous quartic with a double point; while G. Gallucci has dealt with tetrahedra inscribed in a gibbous