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.]

Name for the Positive Nucleus.

A NAME is wanted for the fundamental unit of matter, which is also the unit of positive electricity as at present known. The name "electron" is best limited to the unit of negative electricity, about which a good deal is by this time known. Less is known about the positive unit, but it appears to be the brick of which all atoms are built up, electrons acting as cement. Nearly all the mass belongs to the positive unit, and the simplest atom—namely, hydrogen—appears to consist of one positive and one negative unit electric charge. The heaviest atom known has ninety-two such charges, and among the chemical elements are all intermediate grades. Prout's famous hypothesis that every element was a multiple of hydrogen is thus, with some modification, being confirmed, though the unnamed unit is not exactly an atom of hydrogen, but the nucleus, the main substance, of that atom.

At the Cardiff meeting of the British Association Sir Ernest Rutherford suggested, or tentatively approved the suggestion, that the name "proton" should be applied to this hydrogen nucleus or unit of positive charge. To call it a positive electron is undesirable—that name might be assuming too much—for it is just conceivable that the progress of discovery may detach from the proton a positive charge more closely akin to the negative electron—in fact an image of it. (It is not clear why a positive unit should differ so markedly, as at present it does, from the negative unit.) But, whatever the proton's relation to positive electricity, and whatever its constitution may be, it seems undeniable that it is the most essential and massive ingredient in every atom of matter.

From the scientific point of view the name "proton" is therefore good, for it signifies a fundamental substance and conveys a suggestion of Prout. But from the literary point of view there may be some objection, and a name for the foundation-stone of the material universe ought to be capable of being used in poetry, as the word "atom" has been used. It would seem well, therefore, to ask for suggestions before any name is adopted and allowed to get into general use.

Added Later.—Before sending in the above explanatory note I consulted some men of letters, who will, I hope, allow their names to be mentioned, and who have made some excellent suggestions:

AMBRON, as an English version of *electron*, suited to the unit of positive electricity.

MERRON, a conventional modification of *μέρον*.

UR-ON, or something based on the root *Ur*—; or even *UR* itself.

PRIME, as a primordial substance irresolvable into factors.

CENTRON, as a nucleus round which things revolve.

HYLON, as the fundamental unit of matter.

Of these I personally prefer *Hylon*; it serves to convey a fact with a minimum of hypothesis; it is itself a convenient word, and it surely need not be regarded

as too metaphysical. If its first syllable suggests a real, but painfully illegitimate, relationship to hydrogen, that may be for it or against it, according to taste. I find the word "proton" is not liked; it has been described as "used up and very dull." Wrong pronunciation may be hostile to "*Ur*," and, besides, it might be confused with the other end of the series (uranium), though otherwise it shares some of the advantages of the happily invented word "*gas*."

OLIVER LODGE.

The British Association.

THE correspondence in *NATURE* under this heading has been most instructive. The widely spread feeling that the Association fails as an organisation, to promote the growth of the scientific spirit could not well be more definitely brought to light, particularly as many who are known to hold strong views have refrained from expressing them; unfortunately, moral indecision is fast becoming a characteristic of our class. It is all very well for the late secretary and the present holders of the office to hint that the recommendations cancel out; maybe they are different; nevertheless, excepting our dear old member, Father Cortie, who has the sense of humour on all occasions, everyone agrees that the Association does not touch the public.

The most serious contribution to the discussion, that of greatest import, is the frank statement by the secretary of the Press and Publicity Subcommittee at Cardiff—for once a man who dares to give open expression to the views he has formed—that we were in no way worth what we cost the locality; he has voiced a whisper, not seldom heard at previous meetings, which has long weighed on the conscience of some members of the Association.

The least satisfactory letter is that of the two secretaries, who are merely apologetic, in no way constructive. The manner in which, in their opening paragraph, they quietly imply that they are "*It*" would be amusing were the issue not so serious. Majestically they tell us to send *them* our views and that *they* will consider them. No doubt—and consign them to the waste-paper basket, as of yore.

Even outsiders see that science is losing its influence. Dean Inge, in one of his recent outspoken addresses, pointed out that "a general revolt against the dictatorship of science had been the most remarkable tendency in modern thought. In politics the anti-scientific temper was rampant. The revolution which more than a hundred years ago guillotined Lavoisier, 'having no need of chemists,' was now proclaiming that it had no need of intellectuals of any kind. In Russia they had been tortured and massacred; in our own country they were ignored and despised."

Ephemeral writers such as Mr. G. K. Chesterton openly scoff at us and lead the public to believe that evolution is a theory of the past and eugenic doctrine moonshine. Their word is accepted, ours is not; the clown is ever popular, the comic actor always preferred to the tragic; if we will assume only the prophet's mantle we must expect to be stoned.

It is useless for Sir Ray Lankester to take such men across his knee and thwack them in his best grandfatherly style. The literary braggadocio is only to be silenced by showing him up as ridiculous; he is but playing a part—writing nonsense because it pays; it is his trade and we must not blame him but blame the school in which the class is bred and has its being. We are too conceitedly serious, hopelessly narrow in our outlook, too self-centred to be alive to public