

SCIENCE

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MSS. intended for publication and books, etc., intended for review should be sent to the responsible editor, Professor J. McKeen Cattell, Garrison-on-Hudson N. Y.

THE letters which we publish in this number from prominent American astronomers on the general subject of a national observatory may be regarded as a sequel to Professor Skinner's admirable history of the Naval Observatory found in our issue of January 6th. Justice to the latter institution demands that we should point out certain features of the case which have generally been overlooked. It has been too hastily assumed that the Naval Observatory should fill the requirements of a national astronomical observatory, and that, if it did not, some one must be at fault. To correct this view we have only to cite some authoritative statements on the subject. The matter was stated very forcibly and clearly by Commodore Belknap, Superintendent of the Observatory, as far back as 1885, when the building of the new observatory was about to begin, and when, in consequence, its purposes were the subjects of public discussion. He wrote:

It is first of all a *naval* institution, its astronomical work being, so far as the *naval service proper* is concerned of a purely secondary consideration. * * * * If the time has come when the purely scientific side of the institution has outgrown the needs of the naval service the converse is true, namely, that the navy