

clouds in the morning of January 30 (NATURE, xlv. p. 365), I may add that the same beautiful but as yet mysterious phenomenon was seen here January 30 and 31, both days in the south-west after sunset. Since the display of December 1885, mentioned by Mr. Backhouse, it has been seen here every year, except 1888, mostly for a day or two in January or February.

H. GEELMUYDEN.

University Observatory, Christiania, May 3.

Wave-Propagation of Magnetism.

IN an interesting article in last month's *Philosophical Magazine*, Mr. Trowbridge has given an account of some experiments made by him with the view of examining for any indication of a definite rate of propagation in the magnetization of iron. In these experiments no indication was observed.

It seems to me, however, that nothing of this sort is likely to be observed where the magnetizing force is as great as that used by Mr. Trowbridge, and that there are two classes of disturbances to be carefully distinguished. For example, in Prof. Ewing's well-known magnetic model, something which looks very like a definite rate is to be seen in the case of a disturbance not sufficiently large to cause toppling over of the "molecule magnets"; that is to say, to cause the little magnets to pass through their positions of unstable equilibrium. On the other hand, with a larger disturbance the phenomenon visibly partakes of a different character. Here, throughout the medium, there are to be seen at irregular moments what may be considered as cases of precipitation of energy, owing to the occurrence of these positions of unstable equilibrium.

These two stages should be carefully distinguished, for an essential in wave-propagation as opposed to a rate of precipitation of energy (such as a rate of ignition, &c.) is obviously that the medium should not be permanently altered.

In some experiments made by me, very much smaller alternating currents than those used by Mr. Trowbridge were employed. But the occurrence of spurious effects, simulating to a remarkable degree the interference nodes looked for, must have effectually obscured in my experiments the true phenomenon, supposing its existence. So that, considering the conditions of both our experiments, I still think the subject requires further investigation before coming to a decision in the matter. Indeed, when larger currents are used, no indication is to be found of even these spurious effects.

In Prof. Ewing's model, when the magnets point on the whole the same way (representing a high state of magnetization), the rate of propagation of a small disturbance affords a more definite problem. Tried experimentally, this latter case might afford more satisfactory results.

FRED. T. TROUTON.

Correction in "Island Life."

IN Dr. Merriam's recently published paper on "The Geographical Distribution of Life in North America," an important, and to me almost inexplicable error in my work "Island Life" is pointed out. It occurs at page 41 in the first edition, and is unfortunately repeated at the same page in the recently published new edition, and consists chiefly in stating that the moles (*Talpidae*) are almost confined to the Palearctic region. But a little further on in the same work (page 48 of first edition, and page 49 of second edition) it is correctly stated that there are three peculiar genera of moles in North America, and the same statement is made at page 115, and again at page 190 of vol. ii. of my "Geographical Distribution of Animals." At page 182 of vol. i. of the latter work, however, the error first appears, and it is this erroneous passage that has remained unnoticed till now, and was unfortunately repeated in "Island Life." In the same paragraph an error of a similar kind also occurs as to the distribution of the lynxes. To correct these errors pages 41 and 42 of the new edition of "Island Life" are being reprinted, and will be sent to all who possess the volume if they will forward a stamped and directed envelope to the publishers.

ALFRED R. WALLACE.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON CHEMICAL NOMENCLATURE.

AT the meeting of the International Chemical Congress, held in Paris in the summer of 1889, a special Section was appointed to consider the unification of

chemical nomenclature, and, after discussing a variety of propositions, some of which were adopted, it was decided to form an International Commission for the further study of the subject.¹

The members resident in Paris, having been constituted a permanent committee of the Commission, have devoted an immense amount of time and care to the preparation of a scheme, and it was to discuss their report² that we met at Geneva on Easter Monday last. The French Committee had issued invitations, not only to members of the Commission, but also to many other prominent chemists, so that the meeting was a thoroughly representative one. It is worth mentioning, as an illustration of the sympathetic treatment accorded by public bodies in France to men of science, that the Paris-Lyons-Marseilles Railway Company granted a reduction of one-half on the fare over their line to members of the Congress.

Very happily, the local committee had arranged that all might stay at the one hotel—the Métropole—and it was here that we first met in friendly union on the Monday evening.³ The next morning the Congress assembled at the Hôtel de Ville, M. Richard, the Cantonal Minister of Education, being in the chair. After an admirable address of welcome from this gentleman, who appeared to thoroughly appreciate the importance of the object in view, on the motion of Prof. Cannizzaro it was wisely decided not to follow the complimentary, but somewhat unbusinesslike, Continental practice so frequently adopted, of appointing a different chairman each day, but to have only one. M. Friedel, who had taken the chair at all the numerous meetings of the Paris Committee, having been chosen by acclamation President of the Conference, formal business was at once entered into, and, after the necessary interval for lunch, the sitting was resumed in the afternoon. We met in like manner on the two following days, and the final sitting took place on the Friday morning, but many had left before this. On Tuesday evening, by invitation of the local committee, we visited the theatre, a very beautiful building. On the Wednesday evening, we were entertained by them at a dinner at the Hôtel Métropole, on which occasion a very striking speech was delivered by Prof. von Baeyer, who, after point-

¹ The following chemists eventually consented to serve on the Commission:—MM. Béhal, Berthelot, Bouveault, Combes, Fauconnier, Friedel, Gautier, Grimaux, Jungfleisch, Schützenberger (all representing France), Graebe (Switzerland), Alexejeff and Beilstein (Russia), von Baeyer and Nörling (Germany), Lieben (Austria), Paterno (Italy), Franchimont (Holland), Armstrong (England), Istrati (Roumania), Calderon (Spain), Cleve (Sweden), Boukowski-Bey (Turkey), Ira Remsen (United States), and Mourguès (Chili).

² This report had been prepared by the following:—MM. Friedel (President), Béhal, Bouveault, Combes, Fauconnier, Gautier, and Grimaux.

³ The following is the official list of those who took part in the Conference:—MM. H. E. Armstrong, professeur à la Central Institution, Londres, secrétaire de la Chemical Society; A. Arnaud, professeur au Muséum, à Paris; Adolphe von Baeyer, professeur à l'Université de Munich; Barbier, professeur à la Faculté des sciences de Lyon; Aug. Béhal, professeur à l'École supérieure de pharmacie de Paris; Louis Bouveault, docteur ès sciences, Paris; Stanislas Cannizzaro, professeur à l'Université de Rome; Paul Cazeneuve, professeur à la Faculté de médecine de Lyon; Alphonse Combes, docteur ès sciences, Paris; Alphonse Cosso, directeur de la Station expérimentale d'agriculture, à Turin; Maurice De Lacre, professeur à l'Université de Gand; Michel Fileti, professeur à l'Université de Turin; Emile Fischer, professeur à l'Université de Würzburg; A.-P.-N. Franchimont, professeur à l'Université de Leide; Charles Friedel, membre de l'Institut, professeur à la Sorbonne, Paris; Dr. J. H. Gladstone, F.R.S., Londres; Carl Graebe, professeur à l'Université de Genève; Philippe-Auguste Guye, professeur à l'Université de Genève; Istrati, professeur à l'Université de Bucarest; Albert Haller, professeur à la Faculté des sciences de Nancy; Maurice Hanriot, professeur agrégé à la Faculté de médecine, Paris; A.-R. Hantsch, professeur à l'École polytechnique de Zurich; Achille Le Bel, docteur ès sciences, à Paris; A. Lieben, professeur à l'Université de Vienne; Léon Maquenne, docteur ès sciences, aide-naturaliste au Muséum, Paris; von Meyer, professeur à l'Université de Leipzig; Denis Monnier, professeur à l'Université de Genève; R. Nietzki, professeur à l'Université de Bâle; Emilio Noelting, directeur de l'École de chimie de Mulhouse; Emmanuel Paterno, professeur à l'Université de Palerme; Amé Pictet, privat-docent à l'Université de Genève; William Ramsay, F.R.S., professeur à l'Université de Londres; Zdenko-H. Skraup, professeur à l'Université de Graz; Ferdinand Tiemann, professeur à l'Université de Berlin.

Le Comité local d'organisation se composait de:—MM. Emile Ador, H.-W. de Blonay, Alex. Claparède, Professeur C. Graebe, Professeur Ph.-A. Guye, Alex. Le Royer, Professeur Denis Monnier, Amé Pictet, Fréd. Reverdin, Professeur Albert Rilliet, Edouard Sarasin.