

"indefinite wall," which is characterised by the fact that temperature differences in the parallel planes are exactly proportional to the distances of these planes. According to the experiment, they get the result that this proportionality does not exist, and that conductivity varies much according to temperature.

In my opinion, this absence of proportionality arrived at, proves rather that the experimental conditions were defective, and are in contradiction with the hypothesis of the "indefinite wall" case.

I admit, in principle, the employed method, but I think it should be modified until—for the same temperature of the bath, the said proportionality should be obtained; then, in a new experiment, the temperature of the bath being higher, it should be verified if the proportionality and the conductivity remain, or if the last increases or diminishes with the temperature.

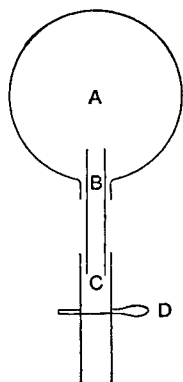
Neuchâtel, August.

ROBERT WEBER.

Experimental Mountain-building.

PROF. JOHANNES WALTHER, of Jena, requests me to communicate to you the following details regarding an interesting experiment which he has recently devised for teaching purposes: it is intended to explain mountain-formation.

He compares the system of folds on the surface of our slowly-ageing earth to the wrinkles which form on the skin of a drying apple, and points out that the height of our mountain-chains in relation to the mass of the globe is precisely comparable to the wrinkles on the skin of the apple. In order to demonstrate the formation of these folds, he takes an indiarubber balloon (A), and attaches to it a bit of glass tubing (B). On to this is stretched a piece of indiarubber tubing (C), which is pinched close by the stopcock (D). When the indiarubber balloon is blown out to its full capacity, it is spread over with a layer of flour-paste two millimetres thick, and is then dipped and



twirled round and round in dry wheaten flour until a perfectly smooth crust, three to four millimetres in thickness, covers the whole sphere. The balloon is then placed on a tripod, so that the indiarubber tubing (C) dips exactly into a glass of water standing below. Thereupon the stopcock is turned open, and the air is allowed to escape in single bubbles; the volume of the ball is lessened, and lateral pressure makes itself immediately felt in the paste-crust. Small folds gradually grow bigger, single folds unite to form systems of folds, flat areas of depression sink deeper and deeper, and the neighbouring folds twirl and cross over the depression. The features of the Cordilleras, of the Jura, and many other well-known tectonic relations are thus reproduced with striking accuracy. Whenever it is desired to repeat the experiment, one need simply blow the balloon out again, smooth out the folded surface by dipping and twirling in dry flour, and all is ready for another demonstration.

London, August 26.

L. BELINFANTE.

Joseph Thomson.

IN Mr. Gregory's sympathetic notice (NATURE, p. 440) of Joseph Thomson, he hardly does justice to the memory of the deceased traveller in relation to the scientific results of his expeditions; at least so far as botany is concerned. During his too short career Thomson presented three considerable collections of dried plants to Kew. The first, which appears to

have been made on his own initiative, chiefly between Lake Nyassa and Lake Tanganyika, was secured for Kew in 1880, through the instrumentality of the late Colonel J. A. Grant, F.R.S. This was not the subject of a special paper; yet it contained a number of interesting novelties, some of which have from time to time been published in Hooker's "Icones Plantarum" and elsewhere. Before going out again Thomson carefully studied the means by which his collecting opportunities might be turned to the greatest advantage. Armed with this knowledge he collected even more successfully in the Kilimanjaro and other mountains of Eastern Equatorial Africa. This second collection reached Kew in September 1884, and proved of the greatest scientific importance, being the first adequate illustration of the mountain flora of that region. It contained scarcely 150 species; but the specimens were selected with admirable judgment, and were sufficient for all purposes. It was worked out by Sir Joseph D. Hooker and Prof. D. Oliver, and the very important results recorded in the twenty-first volume of the *Journal* of the Linnean Society. This paper and Thomson's collection will always rank among the classical documents for the study of the phytogeography of Central Africa. Subsequently Mr. Thomson sent to Kew the botanical fruits of his journey to the Atlas Mountains, and although they contained very few previously unknown plants, they were none the less instructive as a sample of the flora of that comparatively little-known part of the world. Had he preserved his health Thomson might have taken his place in the first rank of botanical explorers. He had acquired the rare gift of selection in collecting; of knowing what to secure and what to neglect.

W. BOTTING HEMSLEY.

Late Nestlings.

TO-DAY I observed nests of the house-martin underneath the eaves of the clock-tower at Lamlash Pier, on the south and west sides. The parents were busy feeding their young, whose cries I heard. Surely this is a late date for a migratory bird. How are these nestlings to get across the ocean? JAS. SHAW.

Barrhead, September 7.

THE INSTITUTE OF FRANCE.

IN a few weeks, at the end of October, the Institut National de France is to celebrate its first centenary. Some words concerning its origin and organisation may be of interest at the present moment.

The Institute is the outcome of a previous scientific society, entirely due to individual initiative. During the first half of the seventeenth century, a few men, between whom love of science was a firm bond, agreed to meet at regular intervals at the house of one of their number, informally, in order to exchange views, to keep each other posted up on their various researches, and to make up an unconventional assembly of congenial spirits. It was more of a temporary or intermittent club than a real society, as we understand the latter now. These men were mostly mathematicians and physicists—for at that time natural science was more in the *werden* than in the *sein* state—and Mersenne, Descartes, Blaise Pascal, Gassendi, are some of them. Their meetings soon attracted public attention, and the great Colbert, anxious for the development of the arts of peace after the Pyrenees treaty had put an end to the war, considered them as being of sufficient importance and utility to take an interest in them, and to support the incipient society officially.

Colbert even made out a full plan of what was to be realised 200 years later; what he organised was a body of scientific men who were to meet at regular intervals, and were divided into three classes—historical scholars, literary men, and, finally, scientific men. The private society of mathematicians and physicists grew into the Académie des Sciences, and each of the three academies met separately in the Bibliothèque du Roi, at Colbert's own residence. The king, as a sign of his approval, gave some money for experiments, and some pensions.