

tween the stimulating cause and the height of folly to which the inflation of credit and prices may be carried. A mania is, in short, a kind of explosion of commercial folly followed by the natural collapse. The difficulty is to explain why this collapse so often comes at intervals of ten or eleven years, and I feel sure the explanation will be found in the cessation of demand from India and China occasioned by the failure of harvests there, ultimately due to changes of solar activity. Certainly the events of the last few years, as too well known to many sufferers, entirely coincide with this view, which is, nevertheless, made the subject of inconsiderate ridicule.

Hampstead, April 23

W. STANLEY JEVONS

#### JAMES NICOL, F.R.S.E., F.G.S.

ANOTHER of the links connecting us with the early days of geology has been severed by the death of the Professor of Natural History in the University of Aberdeen. For some years past Prof. Nicol's failing health prevented him from undertaking more work than his college duties required, so that he had somewhat fallen behind the crowd of younger aspirants to scientific reputation. It is a pleasant duty to recall his early services to geology. As far back as the year 1843 we find him contributing to the series of prize essays of the Highland Society a memoir on the geology of his native county, Peebleshire. Devoting himself with energy to the prosecution of his favourite pursuits, he prepared a useful little Guide to the Geology of Scotland, illustrated with maps and sections, and giving, from his own observations and the researches of previous writers, a compendious account of Scottish geognosy, so far as then known. Many years afterwards he published another compilation of Scottish geology in the form of a Geological Map of that country. He specially took up the mineralogical and petrographical department of geology, and showed his capacity for these subjects by publishing a text-book of mineralogy, which has kept its place as a work of reference. Appointed Assistant Secretary of the Geological Society, he in that capacity edited the Society's Journal, and had an opportunity of coming personally in contact with the foremost geologists of his time. Among those whose friendship he formed, one of the kindest and most serviceable was Murchison. Through the assistance of that active and powerful friend Nicol was appointed to the Chair of Geology at Cork, and a few years afterwards to the more lucrative post at Aberdeen, which he resigned only last year. During these years of official work he found time for a number of original papers chiefly on the geology of different parts of Scotland. Thus he returned once more to the study of the rocks of his own Tweed Valley to which he had been the first definitely to apply the term *Silurian*. In company with his friend and benefactor Murchison, he extended these observations into Ayrshire and the west of Scotland. With the same companion he visited the north-west of Scotland, and after a long journey through these regions produced an independent memoir, in which he suggested that much of the metamorphic rocks of the north-west Highlands consisted of altered Carboniferous formations. When the fossils found in the Assynt limestones proved to be unquestionably Lower Silurian he was of course compelled to retract his published suggestion. He then adopted a completely opposite view and endeavoured to prove that the rocks which he had thought might be altered Carboniferous were really the most ancient or fundamental masses of the west coast brought up everywhere to the surface again by a vast dislocation and inversion. In this view, no less than in that for which it was substituted, he was opposed by Murchison, who proved by many sections that the rocks in question really lay upon the fossiliferous limestones

and could not therefore be older than the Lower Silurian period. From the time of this dispute the late professor devoted himself chiefly to his duties at Mareschal College, where his capacity for business made him a most useful colleague. From summer to summer, however, he could resume the hammer and renew his acquaintance with old haunts or make himself familiar with new ones. In these excursions he was sometimes accompanied by an old geological friend to whom he could communicate the views he no longer cared to publish. With a kindly nature he united a certain timidity which made him shrink from publicity and led to his being less widely known than his personal qualities deserved that he should be.

#### NOTES

THE International Meteorological Congress was opened at Rome on Tuesday last week, nearly all the Countries of Europe being represented, as well as the United States. Prof. H. P. S. Smith and Mr. Scott represented this country. Prof. Cantoni was elected president, M. Wild, of St. Petersburg, vice-president, Dr. Hoffmeyer, of Copenhagen, and Mr. Scott, secretaries. The introductory address was given by M. Depretis, who spoke of the great influence exercised by the physical sciences on the progress of the other sciences, and consequently on the moral and economical development of nations. He referred to the important place of meteorology among the physical sciences, and concluded by welcoming the strangers to Italy. Dr. Buys Ballot was unable to be present, but Prof. Mascart read an address sent by him, full of scientific data and statistics, passing in review all the discoveries recently made in America and Europe in meteorological science. The report on the work of the permanent committee was read by the secretary of the committee, Mr. Scott. The congress then divided into sections for work.

THE annual meeting of the French Sociétés Savantes commenced on April 16 at the Sorbonne. The general sessions of the Section of Sciences were held under the presidency of M. Milne Edwards, on April 16, 17, and 18. MM. Faye and Wurtz were vice-presidents, and M. Blanchard the secretary. M. Faye delivered a lecture on the 18th in the large hall, on the Great Movements of the Atmosphere. General Nansouty, the Director of the Pic du Midi Observatory, gave an address, in which he complained of the interruptions in the telegraphic communications with Toulouse, caused by the snows during winter, and insisted upon the necessity of placing the wire under ground. M. Ferry, the Minister of Public Instruction, who is president, said that he should take the measures which were asked for by the gallant observer, whose devotion to science was so widely admired in France and abroad. M. Alluard, Director of Puy de Dôme Observatory, presented a series of maps tabulating the readings taken at Clermont Ferrand and on the top of the mountain. An intermediate station has been established. The final meeting of the Congress took place in the large hall of the Sorbonne, under the presidency of M. Ferry, who was assisted by a large number of officials. Five reports were read on the works of the Sociétés Savantes. The Minister, as usual, delivered a speech stating the projects of his administration. The number of learned societies in France is now 360. He stated that the Government spent 11,000,000 frs. in 1870 for the Faculties; the sum was now 30,000,000 frs. The list of rewards granted was then read over. The four gold medalists in science are M. Combercure, of Montpellier, for mathematical disquisitions, M. Dieulafait, of Marseilles, for geology, M. Coquillon, for determining the quantity of inflammable gas contained in the air of coal-mines, and M. Schrader, for explorations in the Pyrenees.