countries to consent to such material passing by sample post." The circular, on the contrary, stated that this Academy had "resolved to address the various scientific bodies, with which it is in communication *in those countries whose governments have voted against the proposition*," and it is these societies only which the Academy has addressed on the subject. PHILIP P. CALVERT.

Philadelphia, Jan. 13, 1894.

The Climbing Habits of the Soft Shell Turtle (Aspidonectes spinifer).

WHILE making observations on Mud Creek at Ravenna, Nebraska, in the interests of the U. S. Fish Commission last August, I chanced upon an interesting sight. A dam extended across the creek which had been constructed of two-inch plank placed side by side, but instead of placing the edges all in the same vertical line the plank above had been drawn back a little each time, so that the dam presented a series of very narrow steps leading up stream. The slope was gradual, except the last two planks at the top, whose edges were placed in the same vertical line, thus making here a step of four inches instead of two, and, more than that, this four-inch step was allowed to extend out over the one just beneath it for a short distance. The dam was about twelve feet high, and the angle was enough to place the top of the dam two feet farther up the stream than the base. As I approached from below my attention was called to a soft-shelled turtle that was protruding his head from the water at the base of the dam. I did not think that such a clumsy animal would attempt a climb of twelve feet on a very poor road, but presently he ventured out, and by careful feeling was soon up two feet, but at the next step he tumbled back into the water. He was no more down when he started again, only to receive another tumble. Several times this occured, but the last time he had reached the last step, when he met the projecting four-inch step. It was too bad to see him tumble after so much hard work, but the last projection was too much for him, and down he fell twelve feet into the water. He seemed discouraged and not inclined to try it again, although I watched for some time to see what he would do. In addition to the steepness of the steps there were little streams of water flowing over here and there, some of which struck the turtle as it was climbing up.

I saw a common snapping turtle (*Chelydia serpentina*) at the foot of the dam, and while it would thrust out its head and look longingly above it did not attempt to climb.

ULYSSES O. COX.

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A Rope of Insects.

IN response to the letter of Mr. Lynds Jones in *Science*, Dec. 29, I quote the following, concerning the family *Mycetophilidae* from the Standard Natural History, II., 408 : "The larvae of one genus, at least (*Sciara*), have long been known for their gregarious habits. They are often found in dense patches under the bark of trees and, what is more interesting, when about to change to the pupa state, will congregate in immense numbers, forming processions that have been observed four or five inches wide and ten or twelve feet long. They travel in a solid column from four to six deep, over each other, advancing about an inch a minute. From this peculiar habit, they have been called the army-worm in Europe. Similar habits have been observed in this country among our species. One species of this genus (*S. mali*) is known to feed in numbers in the interior of apples in this country." This peculiar habit will be found commented upon in many other popular works on insects. JOHN B. SMITH.

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Note on the Shoulder-Girdle of the Man-o'-War Bird.

FOR publication in another connection, I have recently written out a complete account of the skeleton of the man-o'-war bird (*Fregata aquila*), and have been interested in what my friend Professor Alfred Newton, F.R.S., says of its shoulder-girdle in the "Dictionary of Birds," now passing through the press. In the work named, Professor Newton remarks : "In one very remarkable way the osteology of *Fregata* differs from that of all other birds known. The furcula coalesces firmly at its symphysis with the carina of the sternum, and also with the coracoids at the upper extremity of each of its rami, the anterior end of each coracoid coalescing also with the proximal end of the scapula. Thus the only articulations in the whole sternal apparatus are where the coracoids meet the sternum, and the consequence is a bony framework which would be perfectly rigid did not the flexibility of the rami of the furcula permit a limited amount of motion." (Part I., pp. 293, 294.)

At this writing I have at hand a very perfect skeleton of *Fregata*, kindly loaned me by the United States National Museum, and in it the scapulæ are perfectly free and articulate, as usual with the coracoids, and it is only the furcula that fuses with the coracoids above and with the sternal keel below. Knowing what an accurate observer and describer Professor Newton is, I repaired to the National Museum, and through the kindness of Mr. Lucas, the curator of the Department of Comparative Anatomy in that institution, I was shown the shoulder-girdles and sterna of a number of specimens of *Fregata*, but in each and all of them the scapulæ freely articulated with the coracoids in a manner common to the class Aves. We must believe then that when Professor Newton wrote out his description of that part of the skeleton of the species in question, he must have had before him an abnormal example of the bones to which we refer. My work when published will give a very full and accurate description of all the bones in the skeleton of this very remarkable species, comparing them with the corresponding bones represented by an unusually fine series of the skeletons of other *Stegarcopodes*. R. W. SHUFELDT.

Takoma, D. C., Jan. 19, 1894.

Volcanic Rocks of the Huronian.

IN Mr. U. S. Grant's interesting note on volcanic rocks in the Keewatin of Minnesota, which appeared in *Science* of Jan. 12, he writes : "That the Keewatin rocks northwest of Lake Superior are to a considerable extent composed of volcanic (effusive) material has been stated already by G. M. Dawson, A. C. Lawson and N. H. Winchell." It will be found, however, on referring to the descriptions above cited, that a large part of the formation as it occurs in the vicinity of the Lake of the Woods is actually composed of volcanic breccias and volcanic ash rocks, though materials of effusive origin are also abundant.

The breccias or agglomerates are often very coarse, and the circumstances are such as to indicate that there must have been several volcanic vents even in this region. See "Geology and Resources of the Region in the Vicinity of the Forty-ninth Parallel" (1875) pp. 51–52 ; *Geological Magazine*, Dec. 11, Vol. IV. (1877), p. 316 ; "Annual Report of the Geological Survey of Canada" (1885), pp. 49CC. *et seq.* GEORGE M. DAWSON.

Geological Survey of Canada, Jan. 24, 1894.

Secret Language of Children.

A CURIOUS instance of child language, different from any mentioned by Mr. Chrisman in a recent issue of *Science*, has come under my own observation. It was