

and the remainder of the letter, though translated by Colenso to throw ridicule on the people's religion, has evidently no bearing on the calamities and portents of A.D. 458-60, but refers to an earlier event.)—*Epistles of Sidonius Apollinaris*. Book vii. Ep. 1. (From Migne's *Patrologia*, tom. 57, p. 563.)

"There pervades, indeed, the vital way (or faith) not through the lands of Gaul only, but almost the whole world, the fertilising stream of these Rogation Day observances, and cleanses the earth infected with vices by the wholesome flux of an annual expiation. More special reason, however, have we in this same institution for service and rejoicing, because from hence in a manner it flowed for the benefit of all. From our source at the first it spread; and perhaps even (we may say) it pertains to some dignity or privilege, the first beginning of such an institution. At any rate, when an ineffable distress (*necessitas*) tamed down the proud hearts of our Viennese to this manner of humiliation, our Church, perceiving the cause of her chastisement (*agritudinis*), caught to herself not as chiefly before all others, but as alone among all, feeling the need there was for the present observance to be instituted, far more eagerly a remedy than a primacy (or precedence). And, indeed, the causes of the terrors of that time, I know that many of us recollect well (*recolere*). For truly the repeated fires, the frequent earthquakes, the mighty noises, threatened to add to such a cremation (*cuidam funere*) of a whole world some equally prodigious entombment (*bustuale*). For in the populous haunts of men the tame appearance of the beasts of the forests was observed; God knows whether deluding our eyes or driven there by the portents. But whichever of these two it might be, it was perceived to be alike monstrous, whether thus in reality the wild natures of the beasts were tamed, or whether so frightfully in the views of the spectators phantoms of false visions could be formed. Amid these things various were the notions of the populace, and divers the opinions of different classes. Some, concealing what they felt, ascribed to chance what they would not allow to (be matter of) weeping. Others, of healthier mind, discovered truly the new iniquities (*abominabilia*) aptly agreeing to the natures and significance of the ills. For who, in the oft-seen fires, would not dread Sodomitic showers? Who, in the shaking elements, would not believe either falls of roofs (*culminum*) or openings of the earth to be at hand? Who, when seeing, or certainly thinking he saw, the naturally timid deer advancing through the straits of doorways, even to the sides (colonnades) of the forum (*ad fori latera*), would not presage an impending doom of desolation?" (He then recurs, like Sidonius, to the story of the earlier conflagration of a palace or town hall, arrested by Mamertus, which leads to the confusion of these two calamities by all later chroniclers, and loss of memory of the eruptions, and showers of faville.)—*Homily of Avitus concerning Rogations*. "How the Custom of the Rogations arose." (*Migne Patrologia*, tom. 59. p. 289.)

SOME years ago my attention was especially directed to the date of the latest eruptions in Auvergne, as usually supposed to be indicated by the appointment of the Rogation Days, A.D. 469, by Mamertus (rather than Mamerus), Bishop of Vienne. A reference to original authorities convinced me that there is no satisfactory evidence of anything beyond long-continued earthquakes of such severity as to drive the wealthier part of the population out of the city, and, as it would seem, the wild beasts into it. Much is said about fire, but the rhetorical and inflated expressions of those living nearest to the event may be applied to either volcanic or domestic conflagration; and there is great reason to believe that the latter only was intended, in the apparent absence of volcanic foci in the neighbourhood. These, according to Scrope's map, all lie at a considerable distance (if I recollect aright, twenty or thirty miles); and though it is of course possible that the site of some nearer outburst may have been hitherto unnoticed, the expressions used hardly warrant the trouble of any laborious search for it. Should any of the residents in the neighbourhood of Vienne be conversant with geology, they would be able to furnish decisive evidence on the subject. The original story is a curious one, but it has not lost in the telling.

Hardwick Vicarage, May 25

T. W. WEBB

#### The Approaching Transit of Venus

IN NATURE of the 4th of January last Mr. J. Carpenter gives an interesting sketch of the arrangements in progress for observing

the forthcoming Transit of Venus. He states that French and German astronomers have decided on establishing a station of observation at Muscat (Mascate) or at some place between that nasty little port and Teheran. Now, as a point along this line is considered so favourable by Continental astronomers, will you allow me through your pages to call Mr. Airy's attention to the peculiar advantages of Jask in this respect. Cape Jask, on the Mekran Coast, is situated, roughly, in lat.  $25\frac{1}{2}$ ° N. and long.  $57\frac{1}{2}$ ° E. We have here a large and intelligent English telegraph staff, and work a double line of telegraphs to Europe. We have three large stone-built bungalows (houses) with strong, flat, cement-covered roofs, which are approached by spacious staircases. The large bungalow, forming the clerks' quarters, is about 250 feet long, 20 high, and 40 broad. It is divided in the centre by a sort of tower, in which are situated the stairs leading to the roof. The latter would be a most convenient place for erecting the astronomical instruments, &c. There is no telegraphic communication with Muscat, and it is about two days' sail, with a fair wind, from Jask, which is the nearest telegraph station. Should the Astronomer Royal decide on sending out a couple of observers here, I promise them a hospitable reception and every assistance. The fortnightly mail steamers between Bombay and Bussorah, pass within fifteen or twenty miles of this place, and could be easily induced by Government to call in and land the party.

Mr. Latimer Clark, who visited this station towards the end of 1869, will, I daresay, if called upon, be able to give some further particulars, and can vouch for the accuracy of my statements.

J. J. FAHIE

Persian Gulf Telegraph Dept., Jask Station

#### Recent Climatic Changes

MR. HOWORTH'S letter on "Recent Climatic Changes" in NATURE of the 9th May, is most instructive and interesting, more especially to those who have visited the Arctic Sea; but on one point I must venture to differ from him, that is, when he expresses his belief that the Esquimaux migrated from the northward in consequence of the increasing rigour of the climate in high northern latitudes.

I have seen the Esquimaux at the mouths of the MacKenzie and Coppermine Rivers and at Repulse Bay in longitudes  $135^{\circ}$ ,  $115^{\circ}$ , and  $87^{\circ}$  West, respectively. At all these places I found their traditional belief to be, that they came originally from the west, across a narrow sea (probably Behring Strait), followed the coast line eastward, then southward along the west side of Hudson's Bay; some of them making their way to the east coast of that great bay and to Labrador by crossing the comparatively narrow channels separating these places from Southampton, Mansfield, and other islands, at the entrance of Hudson's Bay.

As Victoria and Wollaston lands, and other places still farther north, were probably at that time (as some of them are at present) well stocked with game, part of these people in their eastward drifting would naturally turn to the northeastward, until they reached North Lincoln and Ellesmere lands in lat.  $77^{\circ}$  or  $78^{\circ}$  North, from which they probably crossed Smith Sound to Greenland, along the west shore of which they would then have gradually spread southward.

Thus the Skrellings who destroyed the Norse colonists of South Greenland, came, as Mr. Howorth says, from the north. Indeed, they could not have come from any other direction, except by making a long sea voyage, for which their frail craft (if they had any canoes at that time) were by no means well fitted.

That the "Saga" writers knew that Esquimaux were to be found in Labrador before they were seen in Greenland, goes far, I think, to support the view I have expressed; because, if coming from the west, they could much more easily and speedily reach Labrador than the southern parts of Greenland; whereas had they come originally from the north, the facilities for arriving at these places would have been reversed.

I have been told by one of the greatest authorities, perhaps the very highest, on such subjects, that it is not likely that the Esquimaux originally came from Asia, as the form of their heads differs most materially from that of the heads of those Asiatics whom in other respects they most resemble.

This seems almost an unanswerable fact or argument against the correctness of the tradition of the Esquimaux, and the theory I have advanced, which very likely may have no novelty in it.

In opposition to this very strong fact, may I suggest the possi-