

A PARAGRAPH recently went the round of English and foreign papers and geographical journals, purporting to give the population of Japan according to a census taken in 1878. We have the best authority for stating that no census has been taken in Japan since 1875, and that the numbers given as for 1878 were really those of 1875.

NORDENSKJÖLD'S ARCTIC EXPEDITION

LETTERS have just come to hand from the Swedish North-east Passage Expedition in the neighbourhood of Behring Straits. The latest date is February 20, when all was as well as possible. We take the following details from Prof. Nordenskjöld's report, addressed to Mr. Oscar Dickson, of Gothenburg. The *Vega* and the *Lena* parted company on August 27 at the mouth of the River Lena, the former shaping her course for the New Siberian Islands. The air was calm, but for the most part overcast; the temperature as high as 4° C., and the sea free from ice. On the 28th Semenovskij or Stolbovoj, the most western of the New Siberian Islands, was sighted, and on the 30th Liakhoff's Island, but a landing was not effected on account of the shallowness of the water in its vicinity. On the 31st Svjatoi Nos was passed without difficulty, the weather being fine, and the land in the neighbourhood free of snow. The water was slightly salt, and had a temperature rising to 4° C. The weather continued fine until September 1, the wind being southerly, and the temperature of the air in the shade 5° C. On the night before the second the wind became northerly, and the temperature fell to -1° C. The following night there was a large fall of snow. Next day the Bear Islands were reached. Tschau Bay was passed on the night before September 6, and Cape Schelagskoj reached by 4 A.M. The nights now began to be so dark, and the sea so filled with ice, that the *Vega* had to lie-to at night, generally anchored to a large ground ice. Two boats resembling the *umiaks* of the Eskimo were now seen filled with natives, the first that had been encountered since the expedition left Chabarova at Jugor Schar. They were received in a friendly way, but none of them could speak Russian or any other language intelligible to the Swedes. A boy could, however, count ten in English, showing that the intercourse with American whalers was greater than with Russian merchants. On September 6 and 7 the *Vega* steamed slowly along in a narrow open and ice-free channel along the coast. On the 8th a landing was effected near a Tchuktch encampment, where the Swedes were received in a very hospitable manner. They found in one tent reindeer flesh boiling in a large pot of cast iron. Another start was made on September 6, but a fog compelled the Swedes to lie-to till the 10th. Many excursions were made on land. The strand was formed of sand which, immediately above high water-mark, was covered with luxuriant turf. Farther inland, a range of very high hills was visible, and beyond that, at a considerable distance from the coast, snow-covered mountain-tops. The low land consists of sand and clay beds, evidently raised above the level of the sea very recently. No erratic blocks were to be seen, from the absence of which Nordenskjöld concludes that there is not at present to the north of this any such glacial land as Greenland. The rocks here were non-fossiliferous. Few land plants could be collected on account of the advanced season of the year, and in the sea Dr. Kjellman dredged for algæ in vain. On land many graves with burned bones were found. On the night before September 10 the sea was covered with a very thick crust of newly-frozen ice, but the *Vega* continued her course. On the 12th, after passing Irkaipi, or the North Cape, the vessel had to be anchored to a block of ice, where she lay till the 18th, when another advance was made. After lying-to from September 24 to 26, the *Vega* reached Cape Onman, and on the 27th Koljutschin

Bay. The following day the cape to the east of this bay was passed, and the *Vega* lay-to, anchored to a ground ice, waiting for a favourable change, but no such change took place. Northerly winds heaped greater and greater masses of drift ice along the coast, and soon extinguished all hope of getting free before the summer of this year.

SIR THOMAS MACLEAR, F.R.S.

THE last Cape mail brought intelligence of the death of Sir Thomas Maclear, which took place at his residence, Mowbray, near Capetown, on July 14.

Sir Thomas Maclear was a son of the late Mr. James Maclear, of the County of Tyrone, and was educated at Winchester. He was originally destined for the medical profession, but, after settling at Biggleswade, we find him occupying himself in astronomical pursuits. He joined the Astronomical Society in 1828, and erected a small observatory at Biggleswade, which contained the Wollaston telescope, lent by the Society, with which he observed many occultations and other phenomena. He also engaged upon astronomical calculations, chiefly for the prediction of occultations. In conjunction with Henderson he computed the circumstances of the occultations of Aldebaran for ten European observatories in 1829-31, and himself calculated such of the occultations in 1833, about 100 in number, as were visible at Greenwich, for the supplement to the *Nautical Almanac* of that year. On Henderson's retirement from the direction of the Royal Observatory at the Cape of Good Hope, Maclear was appointed his successor, and entered upon the office in January 1834. Of the great number of observations made during his superintendence a portion only have as yet been published. He entered upon an undertaking of the importance of which there cannot be two opinions—the verification of Lacaille's arc of the meridian, but it was allowed to disorganise the regular work of the observatory to a serious extent. The observations by Maclear and his assistant in 1834 were speedily reduced and published, and various series of observations of comets when beyond reach at the northern observatories, have appeared in the *Memoirs* of the Royal Astronomical Society, where also have been published his determinations of the parallax of α and β Centauri, the latter of which had not been previously investigated, and there are memoirs on other subjects. The field work for the re-measurement of Lacaille's arc was completed in 1847, but from various delays the results were not published until 1866, when they appeared in two quarto volumes, under the editorship of Sir George Airy. The time occupied upon this work prevented the reduction and publication of the meridian observations; so that on Mr. Stone's arrival at the Cape in 1870 (as successor to Maclear on his retirement) he states he found himself "confronted with the results of thirty-six years of miscellaneous observing, in all stages of reduction."

Acting upon his official instructions Mr. Stone completed the reductions and published in several volumes the results of the observations with the new transit-circle from 1856 to 1860 inclusive; there remain still unpublished the observations from 1834 to 1855 with the old instruments, and those from 1861 to 1869 with the new one. Of the large number accumulated in the former period, the places of southern stars will still be of value for proper motions, but Mr. Stone has expressed a doubt whether "the immense number of observations of well-known stars" made with the old instruments would now repay the labour of reduction.

Maclear was knighted in 1860. He had been a Fellow of the Royal Society since 1831, and was elected a Correspondent of the Institute of France in 1863 in place of the American astronomer Bond; in 1867 the Lalande medal was awarded him by the Academy of Sciences, and in 1869 he received one of the Royal medals annually adjudged by the Royal Society.