

In fact I can hardly give a stronger confirmation of the rarity, and both the general character and universality of the phenomenon on that occasion, for all parts of Great Britain than by concluding with the following extract from a letter by Prof. A. S. Herschel of Newcastle-on-Tyne, dated December 25:—

"I saw," he writes "(and photographed from a window, but lost by over-exposing the plate, unfortunately), the iridescent clouds of Thursday's sunset you describe in NATURE, and nothing more beautiful than the diamond-beetle *dytra*, or *Papilio-pario* wing-scales, which glittered in the western sky could, as you wrote, be possibly *imagined*! They were seen also in the south of England (Kent) between 2 and 3 o'clock on the same afternoon.

"Mr. N. here says, in resumption of what they were probably, that he often sees such coloured fringes and colour-bows, in circles too, on clouds near and round the sun, by looking at the sun's reflection and that of the clouds just round him, in the plate-glass window of his drawing-room.

"So no doubt it was a good instance only of a common sight, but an instance yet, I should say, not to be seen much oftener than once or twice in a century!"

To that opinion I do not presume to add one word.

C. PIAZZI SMYTH

15, Royal Terrace, Edinburgh, January 28

### Manx Cats

WITH reference to Mr. Francis Galton's remarks in NATURE on Manx cats, I should like to ask whether any of your readers can assist me. Some little time ago I imported a few Manx cats with a view of trying experiments with them in crossing. But, as Mr. Galton says, it is difficult to get cats to breed in confinement, and of course it is of no use for the purpose of my experiment to allow the animals to roam at large among ordinary cats. Acting upon Mr. Galton's suggestion, therefore, I write to ask whether any of your readers happen to know of any island within a reasonable distance from town where a breed of Manx cats could be established. It is not necessary that the island should be a marine one. Any piece of ground insulated by fresh water would do equally well, provided it were of moderate size and not already tenanted by cats. If any of your readers should know of such a place I should be greatly obliged to them for a reference to its locality.

I may take this opportunity of further inquiring whether any of your readers would care to lend me, or tell me where to procure, a really good talking parrot for the purposes of systematic observation.

GEORGE J. ROMANES

### Cross-breeding Potatoes

IT is well that your correspondent, Mr. James Melvin, has called attention to the dubious and erroneous ideas which now largely prevail on this subject. There is no reason to suppose that hybrids arising from *Solanum Maglia* will be disease-proof, for *S. Maglia*, like *S. tuberosum*, is one of the known hosts of the potato fungus, *Peronospora infestans*.

The errors appear to have arisen from the unfortunate conclusions,—“Economic Suggestions,” given by Mr. J. G. Baker in his otherwise admirable paper laid before the Linnean Society, April 1884, p. 505.

Mr. Baker thinks that, because *S. Maglia* comes from humid positions in America, it will succeed in Britain better than *S. tuberosum*, a plant of the dry hills. The correctness of this idea I should very much question, the great strongholds of fungi being humid places. The fact of the habitat is an important one, but the deduction made from it is questionable.

Mr. Baker says the potato plant in its present tuber-bearing state is in a “disorganised and unhealthy condition.” This view also is very much open to question: there is no evidence of disorganisation and unhealthiness in cultivated potatoes. Cultivated potato plants are no more disorganised and unhealthy than are any of our other cultivated kitchen garden plants, fruits, flowers, or domestic animals, including man himself. The notion that disorganised and unhealthy plants are “fitting subjects for the attacks of fungi and aphides” is a mistake, for fungi (*i.e.* parasitic fungi,—the fungi Mr. Baker has in view) do not grow upon “disorganised and unhealthy plants;” they require healthy plants on which to grow. Of course vegetable parasites require for their sustenance the vigorous elaborated juices of healthy plants, not the vitiated juices of “disorganised and unhealthy” ones.

Leaving theory for fact, I may point out that in the published results of experiments made by Dr. Hogg last autumn, both *S. Maglia* and *S. Jamesii* were badly diseased with parasitic fungi, and in Mr. Thomas Laxton's published experiments nearly the whole of the plants of *S. Maglia* and *S. Commersoni* (the two species specially recommended by Mr. Baker), as well as *S. Jamesii*, “disappeared from disease.”

A year or two ago Mr. John King, British Vice-Consul, Carrizal, Bajo, Chili, sent to this country twenty stones of potatoes from positions in Chili where, during an experience of more than twenty years, the disease of potatoes had never been seen. It was perfectly unknown to the growers there.

These twenty stones of potatoes were planted in different parts of Great Britain and were a failure. They fell before *Peronospora infestans* quite as readily as did our own common potatoes.

No doubt good will arise from the experiments now being carried out, but not in the way generally assumed. The only theme for regret is the publication at the outset of (as I think) curiously mistaken deductions. These deductions, coming from such an excellent botanist as Mr. Baker, have led potato growers very much astray.

WORTHINGTON G. SMITH

### Earthquake

THE annexed copy extracts from letter dated Kingston, Jamaica, January 8, from Capt. Spray, of our s.s. *Maroon*, will no doubt interest you. Are we right in thinking that the shock he felt was probably connected with the Spanish earthquakes?

J. G. S. ANDERSON

5, Fenchurch Avenue, London, E.C., January 27

### Extract of Letter from Capt. Spray

Kingston, January 8

On the morning of December 22, 1884, in lat. 36° 48', long. 19° 25' W., we felt a shock as if the ship was grinding over a reef, although there was no difference in speed of engines; stopped and made every examination, but found no cause. My opinion it was a shock of earthquake, as some years before, nearly in the same place, I felt one more severe than the last.

### An Instance of “Protective Resemblance”

IN Mr. Johnston's interesting account of the ascent of Mount Kilimanjaro, in Equatorial Africa, which appears from time to time in the *Daily Telegraph*, occurs a passage which seems deserving of being rescued from the comparative oblivion of the pages of a daily newspaper. It will be found in the number of the 16th inst., and is as follows:—“Other noticeable features in the scene were the tall red ant hills and, strange imitation, the tall red antelopes, a species of hartebeest, resembling faintly in shape the form of a giraffe with sloping hind-quarters, high shoulders, and long neck. Being a deep red-brown in colour, and standing one by one stock-still at the approach of the caravan, they deceived even the sharp eyes of my men, and again and again a hartebeest would start up at twenty yards distance and gallop off, while I was patiently stalking an ant-hill, and crawling on my stomach through thorns and aloes, only to find the supposed antelope an irregular mass of red clay.”

New University Club, January 20

J. C. G.

### Hibernation

WILL you allow me to invite attention of anthropologists and zoologists to the very remarkable (and to me surprising) statement contained in the article “Hibernation” (W. F. Kirby), last edition of the “*Encyclopædia Britannica*.” Reference is there made to a work by Mr. Baird, entitled “*Human Hybernation*” (1850), giving examples on “unimpeachable authority” of the powers of religious ascetics in India of throwing themselves into a state closely resembling hibernation for an indefinite period; and quoting a case of a Fakir who was actually buried alive at Lahore in 1837 in presence of Runjeet Sing and Sir Charles Wade, and was dug up and restored to consciousness several months afterwards! Now, it is ascertained that hares can exist for weeks together buried in the snow, and if this power of hibernation can be developed at will, might it not also be so on necessity, and explain the former existence of the Siberian mammoth, through the winter months: these animals might, as winter approached, have withdrawn to sheltered hollows, where