

From Paris to Peking over Siberian Snows. By Victor Meignan. Edited from the French, by William Conn. (London: W. Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1885.)

THE mode in which this volume has been produced is rather curious. In 1873 M. Meignan, who had already travelled in the regions around the Levant for pleasure, took it into his head that, by way of contrast to these lands of the sun, he would like to see a land where snow and ice were predominant, and accordingly he undertook to travel from France to China through Siberia. He appears to have had no object in the journey but the pleasure of motion and of seeing new and strange objects. It was undertaken in the winter, and the traveller naturally saw, and was interested in, Moscow, Nijni-Novgorod, the Urals, and so travelled through Siberia by Omsk to Irkutsk. After a short stay in the latter place he pursued his journey through Kiachta, Urga, and Kalgan to Peking. Many travellers have done the journey before and since; it is a long and tedious one, and perhaps that is as much as can be said for it. Mr. Conn talks of crossing "the trackless Desert of Gobi" on the way, but this is an abuse of language. The only part of the Gobi passed is that between Urga and Kalgan, two considerable trading cities, between which caravans, couriers, and travellers go daily along a high road which is a very good one as roads go in Asia. But M. Meignan, having done the journey, and being of a lively and amusing turn, wrote an account of it some time after his arrival in France. This account of a journey in 1873 Mr. Conn has "edited" in 1885; he has, he says, produced a modified version rather than a translation, the modifications consisting in correcting the slipshod style of the original, in producing "a more just co-ordination of parts and subordination of minor details," and also in expanding the original here and there. The volume, notwithstanding this dual authorship, is pleasant reading, much as a tolerably written account of a journey in Wales or Scotland would be pleasant. There are not a few errors, especially as the traveller gets farther east, but these cannot seriously interfere with such enjoyment as may be derived from a perusal of the volume. As Mr. Conn has a taste for this species of literary work—having published another volume, an adaptation or translation of a Japanese tale by a French writer, during the year—we would suggest to him that he should select his originals more carefully. A sterling popular work in French or German might very easily prove a sterling popular work in English; there can be little real use in reproducing trumpy French books in English, except to add to the already enormous mass of similar indigenous literature in England.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his correspondents. Neither can he undertake to return, or to correspond with the writers of, rejected manuscripts. No notice is taken of anonymous communications.]

[The Editor urgently requests correspondents to keep their letters as short as possible. The pressure on his space is so great that it is impossible otherwise to insure the appearance even of communications containing interesting and novel facts.]

Iridescent Clouds

ON December 29 just passed, at 3.40 p.m., or shortly after sunset, and during the late frosty storm, there was a brilliant repetition of the iridescent clouds concerning which I wrote to NATURE about a year ago. The tendency of many of these little clouds, or cloudlets, to rectilinear rhomboidal forms was remarkable; also their confinement in point of colour to blue, violet, rose-pink, and green—eschewing yellow, orange, and vermilion reds; while the sunset sky below them was, on the contrary, a gorgeous panorama of all those yellow-cum-red partaking colours.

That so good an example of these iridescent cloudlets is not very frequent may be concluded from the number of letters which this occasion has already produced in the *Scotsman* newspaper here, and of which I send you six.

C. PIAZZI-SMYTH

15, Royal Terrace, Edinburgh, January 1

Peculiar Meteorological Phenomenon.—A somewhat rare phenomenon was observed at Burntisland, Falkirk, Laurencekirk, and many other parts of Scotland yesterday. A large number of miniature rainbows presented themselves in the sky, with the red, orange, yellow, and green colours distinctly discernible. They were not larger than the ordinary sun as it appears to the naked eye, and, after remaining visible for a considerable time, gradually faded away.

Fraserburgh, December 28, 1885

SIR,—To-day, at 3 p.m., a heavy snowstorm from the west-north-west was just clearing off here. Along the horizon, from west to south-west, lay a heavy bank of storm-cloud, hiding the sun. Above this, in same general direction, was a belt of clear sky. Above that, as the rack drifted off to south-east, there was disclosed a belt of light cirro-stratus cloud, in same general direction, about 30° from the sun, and evidently at very great height, for it kept the same general position nearly an hour, though with considerable variation of form. When first visible it was fringed on the side next the sun with bands of the most vivid and delicate prismatic colours—in series, blue end outside and red (prolonged into a splendid band of violet) inside. Detached portions, however, had the bands all round. The appearance continued in its first splendour only a few minutes, but less vividly for some time longer. It would be interesting to know whether the same appearance was seen at other places; and, if so, at what hour, and at what angle from the sun?

W. MACGILL, B.A.

Edinburgh, December 29, 1885

SIR,—I write to ask if any of your readers can give an explanation of a remarkable phenomenon which was visible in the western sky this afternoon. Just after sunset a few thin patches of cirrus clouds not far west of the zenith assumed a rich opal hue, while in others all the colours of the spectrum were beautifully displayed. The appearance of one of these clouds was exactly similar, in fact, to a completed, though, of course, miniature rainbow. This phenomenon continued for some time after the sun had set, and at times the colours could be seen to change rapidly. A cold frosty wind from the north-west was blowing at the time.

C. M.

Maxton, December 30, 1885

SIR,—With reference to the two letters on this subject in to-day's *Scotsman*, it may interest you to know that the cloud phenomenon in question was witnessed here twice yesterday. About 8 a.m. the sky was perfectly clear, and the crescent moon was shining in the south-west. As the radiance of the sun, as yet beneath the horizon, began to appear, several detached clouds, of a semi-transparent, filmy nature, suddenly came into view in the south-eastern sky, which had, a moment or two before, been without a single speck to dim it. These clouds, at first of an indefinable colour, quickly heightened in tone, and the prismatic colours became visible with gorgeous distinctness, increasing in intensity as the sun neared the horizon. The top band was of a peculiar blue, obviously different from the sky field. Beneath was a wave of rich rose-pink, next a cloudy-orange, with light streaks or "watermarks," then a rich mass of deep violet, fading lower into white. There were three large clouds, the upper and lower lines of which were quite level and perfectly parallel, though the edges to the east and west were sharp and ruggedly cut. In the case of one of these clouds the denser part was apparently rhomboidal, but on its eastern side, and connected with it, was an opalescent vapour filling up the space between what I may term the base and the hypothenuse of an angle of about 15°. The base of this incomplete triangle was equal in length to the base of the incomplete rhomboid. The lines were most clearly defined. There were a number of minute cloudlets, some the merest specks, but all showing the same colours that I have mentioned. They did not remain very long in this distinct state. As the sun rose above the horizon they became beautifully opalescent, and