

WALLACE'S AUSTRALASIA.*

MR. WALLACE, for the purposes of this new volume of Stanford's "Compendium of Geography and Travel," has expanded Hellwald's geographical description of Australasia into an encyclopædic account, physical, political, and social, of one of the six great divisions of the globe. The original German work has supplied only a tenth of the volume. For the majority of the rest it is indebted to Mr. Wallace. Mr. A. H. Keane, has, however, supplied a valuable ethnological appendix, noting the various types of race and language to be found in the several island groups. Mr. Wallace has proceeded on the theory that geography is, or can be made into, a central department of learning, round which all other branches of education may be grouped. The result, at all events in the present instance, is very successful.

Geography, in the old form it assumed when Butler was its chief authority, was as far removed from human passion and sorrow as Conic Sections or the gods of Epicurus. In the present volume there is a suggestion throughout of a dirge over dying races and types. The first of the illustrations, which are many and good, shows the burial of a native in the Australian steppes, with the dogs and the birds of prey scenting the corpse from afar, and thronging about the scaffold on which the body is elevated. This is the keystone to the whole book. Everywhere, from the Australian Aborigines to the New Zealand Maoris, the native races are depicted as fading away before the white man, like the native rat and even the native grasses. Formerly all was strange and isolated in that island world. Europe entered it and is fast subjugating it to a likeness of itself. A time may be foreseen when Mr. Wallace's geographical survey of the archipelagos which extend from the south-eastern extremity of Asia more than half-way across the Pacific will be read in Dunedin, and Hobart Town, and Sydney, as a record of a period which can be traced chiefly in museums and anatomical collections. Every division of this curious portion of the earth's surface has its exceptional characteristics and peculiarities. The continent of Australia has its salt basins, and its broad plains covered with thickets either of dwarf eucalyptus which completely intercepts the explorer's view, or of prickly acacias which tear his flesh. The rains are apt to fail for years together, and thereupon the country becomes a desert. Then the clouds come down in torrents, the rivers are in flood, and the land is an impassable swamp. The foliage is of a dull olive green, and there are few fruit-bearing trees; but the forest trees burst at times into innumerable flowers. There are few butterflies; but the beetles are many and brilliant. In mammalia the continent is the poorest of all continents. On the other hand, a multitude of strange birds are to be seen sucking the blossoms, as do the humming-birds of America. It possesses 830 distinct species of birds against Europe's 500 and North America's 721. Java has its explosive mud and brine springs. It has, too, its poison valley, in which accumulations of carbonic acid gas kill every form of life which penetrates into it. But it possesses in compensation six different botanical zones, each extraordinarily fertile after its own fashion. In Sumatra, on one side

is a plain over which a fell scorching wind blows for months together; on another, valleys of the most exuberant fertility, and in which "nowhere does the landscape weary." The Moluccas have their spices, their magnificently feathered birds, and gorgeous butterflies which fly about the very streets of the towns. The sea about Amboyna, tragically famed in English history, is paved with "a varied growth of corals, sponges, actinias, and other marine productions. They form a water-garden of exquisite beauty, amid which are to be seen fishes blue, red, and yellow, spotted, banded, and striped in the most eccentric patterns, and taking the place of butterflies in these marine gardens." Flores has its thickets where a branch cannot be broken without "severe wounds and fever, or even blindness, if the juice touches the eye." New Guinea has its snow-covered mountains seventeen thousand feet high, its gold, and its abounding birds of paradise; the Solomon Islands have their sandal-wood and ebony. The Samoan Islands are so productive that "the means of subsistence are perhaps obtained there more easily than in any other part of the world." In Tahiti the wayfarer is everywhere "soothed by the fragrance of sweet-smelling flowers, while his ears are ravished by the music of various songsters arrayed in the brilliant plumage of the tropics." Easter Island has its mystic paintings and carved sea-cliffs, and its platforms peopled with "colossal statues of disdainful man." The Sandwich group is "an earthly paradise" where the people have "a holiday look, never appearing oppressed by overwork." There is "Kilauea, the most remarkable burning mountain in the world," with its fathomless oval lake of glowing lava. Eight out of its eleven genera of birds are peculiar to it. Of shells every hill possesses peculiar kinds, found nowhere else. In Ponapé, or Ascension Island, are ruins of stone buildings hardly inferior in mystery to the colossal statues of Easter Island. The Isle of Tinian possesses other inexplicable memorials of former occupants. New Zealand has its geysers and its glaciers, bordered in some places by "a magnificent vegetation of metrosideros, tree-ferns, and fuchsias." Its flora shows only half as many plants as the British flora; but then the New Zealand flora "is wonderfully peculiar, about two-thirds of the species being entirely confined to the group, and even twenty-six of the genera being found nowhere else." Once it had a whole race of wingless birds, represented now only by the apteryx. That, too, is on the high road to extinction. So is a very undesirable bird, the owl-parrot, which "has lately exhibited a singular taste for flesh, picking holes in the backs of sheep and lambs." There are no snakes. The land, though it possesses some gigantic trees, is extraordinarily poor in fruits and flowers; but it is ready to welcome all that are brought it. Everything grows and multiplies in a climate enjoying the variety which comes of an extension through fourteen degrees of latitude. When first discovered, New Zealand possessed of mammalia only dogs and rats, and they had probably been imported.

The human inhabitants of these enchanted lands are to the full as exceptional as the flora and the fauna. The Australian aborigines have imitative dexterity. They moreover understand their country, and will live for months where Europeans would die of thirst. They are affectionate and generous to their male offspring, except when too hard pressed with hunger, in which case they kill and eat them. In preference, however, they would always butcher the female members of their family. Women are slaves, and are speared for the slightest offence—even for the husband's disappointment in the chase. A girl who has left her husband, even involuntarily, is cruelly disfigured. Consequently, as abduction is a common crime, "rarely does a girl possess unusual grace and elegance but she is soon marked and scarred by the furrows of repeated wounds." On the ravisher the penalty is that he must hold out his leg while each male of the tribe sticks his spear into it. "But so hardy are these savages that, with no remedy but a little fine dust, the wounds, however severe, heal quickly." These curious people have no other form of government than that of the family, and no religion, except the dread of ghosts and demons. White men they suppose to be spirits of the natives come to life again. They believe that after death they will themselves undergo the same change. Though without religion, they are not without rites. Circumcision is performed at fourteen, and at twenty the youth is gashed over the back and chest. On the Murray River girls have the whole back cut with flints in horizontal bands of gashes. The screams of the patient are a subject of merriment to all around. "In most cases, however, the girls voluntarily submit to it, because the scarred back is greatly admired." The only people with whom the Australian aborigines can be held to be connected are some of the hill tribes of Central India, whom they partly resemble in features and in language. When Australia was first settled there must have been about 150,000 natives. Now there are from 70,000 to 80,000. But Mr. Wallace thinks the country over which they roam is so little tempting to Englishmen that the race, degraded as it is, may long survive the much higher Maori and Tahitian. The Tasmanian natives were superior to the Australians in capacity. After a time they became neat and orderly in their habits, made roads, delighted in cricket and marbles, and sewed mat dresses. Unfortunately rough settlers and escaped convicts persecuted and degraded them. A race which might have developed the better qualities of civilization gradually shrank from 7,000 to one old woman, who died in 1876. Even humanity was hurtful to them. The Government gave them clothing, which they bartered away or lost when they had grown accustomed to its use. The change rendered them susceptible to lung diseases, of which a large proportion of them perished. In Sumatra,

* *Australasia*. Based on Hellwald's "Die Erde." Edited by Alfred Wallace. London: Stanford. 1879.

which, as well as Borneo, is considered by Mr. Wallace, though not by Hellward, to belong to Australasia, the Malays of Achin are Mahometans, but tolerant. Their neighbours have a proverb, "The Achinese will curse a Christian, and then invite him to eat bread and salt." The Dyaks of Borneo are the kindest and most pleasing of savages; but, except when the fear of Europeans restrains them, they have the same inconvenient custom as that upheld by King Cetewayo of refusing leave to marry till the young bachelor can exhibit a head as his credentials of competence for housekeeping. Even in the British colony of Labuan the custom has not been absolutely put down. In Sarawak it is practically unknown, owing to the good judgment and untiring patience of Sir James Brooke and his successor. Mr. Wallace regards the government of Sarawak as a standing proof that the art of ruling half-civilized races is not so complex as has been supposed. "The great thing is not to be in a hurry; to avoid over-legislation, law forms, and legal subtleties; to aim first at making the people contented and happy in their own way, even if that way should be quite opposed to European theories of how they ought to be happy." Perhaps Mr. Wallace is thinking of India.

The Papuans of New Guinea are still only a half-known race. The editor of the present volume, who visited the island in quest of its birds of paradise, was one of the first to investigate their characteristics. Intellectually, Mr. Wallace places them above the Malays, though the Malays have acquired more actual civilization by contact with superior races. The Papuans have a taste for personal embellishment, but it takes such eccentric forms as the attaching of two boars' tusks joined together to the nose, with the tips turned upwards. They eat many kinds of large insects. What they consider music is their ordinary substitute at festivals for intoxicating liquors. They are totally ignorant of metals, and the coast-dwellers are even unable to procure fire for themselves. When they accidentally let their fires go out, they have to ask a spark of the hill tribesmen who produce it by friction. Yet they divide the year into lunar months, and have names for the constellations. One of the tribes, the Ilemas, counts up to a million. In the New Britain group, the Papuans of New Zealand have a remarkable custom, which even the East cannot match. Girls of six or eight years old are shut up for some five years in cages like huge extinguishers made of palm-leaves, out of which they are never allowed to come till they are to be married. The cages are placed inside large houses, with old women to watch them. The girls are taken out once a day to wash; but they never leave the house. Mr. Wallace says that the young ladies do not seem to suffer in health.

The natives of the Solomon Islands are dwarfish, and have cannibal propensities. But they build canoes which are "perfect gems of beauty," and they have a fine sense of vocal harmony. The New Hebrideans have a yet more inveterate love than these vocalists for human flesh. It is, as Mr. Wallace remarks, with intelligible self-contradiction, "an insatiable craving that must be satisfied." In one of the islands, Aneiteum, the natives have been cured of the bad habit by the missionaries; but then, after all the pains which have been taken with them, they very perversely die. The population, which was twelve thousand, is now but a sixth part of that total. Epidemic diseases and a sudden change from barbarism to civilization are the causes. Mr. Wallace complains that "there must surely be something wrong in the method of civilization which has this one invariable effect." An occasional dispensation to partake of what the Fijians call euphemistically "long pig" might perhaps operate as a remedy; but a missionary could scarcely be empowered by either of the great London Societies to make the experiment. The Fijians themselves at present appear to have secured immunity from the usual fatal consequences of European connexion, though nowhere was the passion for human flesh more violent. At great feasts twenty bodies would be served up at once. The love of slaughter is not always, however, connected with the table. No solemnity was perfect in the times before British domination without human sacrifices. When a chief died, wives and slaves were buried with him. When a chief's house was built, a slave was buried under each pole which held it up. How far even the cannibalism was not a mere phase of religion or superstition it might be hard to say. The Fijian had, or has, a firm belief in a future state in which the actual condition of the dying person is perpetuated. Thus a young man, being unable to eat, was buried alive by his father at his own request lest he should grow thin and weak. Somewhat luxuriously he asked to be strangled first; but "he was scolded and told to be quiet, and be buried like other people and give no more trouble; and he was buried accordingly."

If the Fijians, apart from the bad habits engendered by superstition, manifest excellent natural qualities, the Polynesians have been always described by those who have had to do with them as "one of the very finest races in the world." That they have advanced far beyond the savage state is shown by their treatment of women, who are "carefully protected from severe labour or anything that might impair their grace or beauty." They are religious, yet do not make their religion an excuse for butchery. They are warlike without cruelty, infinitely hospitable, always cheerful and courteous, and, by the testimony of Captain Cook, "liberal, brave, open, and candid, without suspicion of treachery, cruelty, or revenge." When Cook explored the Society Islands, they possessed 1,700 war canoes manned by 68,000 men. "Now the total population of the group is said to be only 9,000! Such has been the effect of contact with European civilization." The

Samoans are distinguished even among Polynesians for their good qualities. Captain Erskine declares that "they carry their habits of cleanliness and decency to a higher point than the most fastidious of civilized nations." Their public meetings and discussions are carried on with "a dignity and forbearance which Europeans never equal." The German merchants who monopolize much of the Samoan trade have aided the missionaries in developing the better qualities of the race without annihilating the race itself. In the little Savage Island, situated between the Tonga and Samoa groups, the missionaries have worked alone, and with yet greater success. There even the population is increasing in number. Mr. Wallace regards the fact as proof that "Polynesians may be civilized without being exterminated, if they are only protected from the rude competition, the vices, and the diseases which free intercourse with the ordinary class of Europeans invariably brings upon them." Tahiti unhappily has not enjoyed that protection. The result is that the population is fast dwindling. Misguided missionary zeal is charged by Mr. Wallace with having contributed to this result, by forbidding the idyllic festivities of former ages. The consequence is that the fermented juice of the orange has taken the place of the indigenous dances of the past. As Tahiti is French, so the Sandwich Islands are Americanized. According to Mr. Wallace, the effects of the new civilization have been equally dubious in both. Here again, too, he charges part of the result on the missionaries—in this instance, the Congregational denomination of the United States—for having represented Christianity as "a severe legal Jewish religion, deprived of its dignity, beauty, tenderness, and amiability." A climate and soil only too willing to maintain life without toil may perhaps be equally responsible. The population of the Gilbert Archipelago, where constant labour and skill are required to procure subsistence, numbers from 330 to 400 persons to the square mile, "a density unequalled in the world in any area where the people depend for food solely on their own exertions." It is more wholesome for a population to have to extort scanty food from sea and rock than to enjoy the leisure of the Pelew islanders, who employ it in inventing an order of knighthood, which has for its insignia the first cervical vertebra of the sea-calf. Investiture is effected by thrusting the hand through the narrow ring of the fishbone to the imminent peril of losing a finger. Another polite fashion of the Pelews is that a man must never be seen abroad with his legitimate wife. The Pelew gentlemen might be supposed to have studied in Paris or Florence. Maoris also are polite and courteous; but their courtesy does not assume the same sophisticated form as in the Pelew islands. To a certain extent, the beneficial effects of the necessity of toil may be observed in the Maoris as in the Gilbert islanders. The absence of tropical vegetation in New Zealand and the paucity of animal life called forth physical and moral dexterity. The Maoris became skilful hunters and fishermen, and good agriculturists. The faculties which the ordinary necessities of life had cultivated were applied to the adornment of existence. They learned to carve, to weave, and to tan. They became, after their manner, astronomers. They built up an elaborate mythology. Their very cannibalism was associated with, if not derived from, a belief that the better qualities of the victim were transferred to his devourer. Could they have known European civilization afar off, the Maori nationality might have been sufficiently sturdy to resist its enervating effects. But the natives could not resist actual competition side by side in the same islands. In 1840 their number was 100,000; in 1856, 65,000; in 1874, 45,740. At the present rate of decrease, which it is feared may be accelerated, in a hundred and fifty years the whole race seems likely to be extinct. The Maoris themselves scent their approaching fate:—"As the white man's rat has extirpated our rat, as the European fly is driving out our fly, as the foreign clover is killing our ferns, so the Maori himself will disappear before the white man."

We have dwelt chiefly on the picturesque exceptions to the European order of nature and psychology which Mr. Wallace's volume describes. Our readers are probably not anxious to be put by us through a course of geography. But they may be assured that the work embodies a rich treasury of geographical details. In addition it contains many graphic particulars, but students of geography need not be alarmed by the fact. It has not the less abundance of facts for the student's behoof arranged on a scientific system. We can point to no better exemplification in English literature of the tendency which geography has long been showing to make itself a connecting link of modern studies, to hold out a hand to history on the one side and to natural science on the other.