

JUNE, 1889.

The monthly evening meeting was held on June 11th. The President, His Excellency Sir Robt. G. C. Hamilton, K.C.B., in the chair.

NEW MEMBERS.

The following gentlemen were balloted for, and declared elected as Fellows:—Messrs. H. Herbert Oakley, Chas. E. Walch, Howard Wright, John Mitchell, and Geo. Lightly.

LARGE AUSTRALIAN TREES.

The Secretary (Mr. A. Morton) read the following letter, under date 26th ult., received from the Hon. F. Stanley Dobson, Melbourne:—

My Dear Sir,—Instigated by Oliver Wendell Holmes, I have been trying to get ascertained the actual height of our tallest gum trees. Baron von Müller in his "Botanic Teachings" speaks of 500ft. ! In our recent Exhibition was the photo of the butt of a tree called "The Baron," which was stated, as per note thereto annexed, to be 464ft. measured. I gravely doubted this, and I arranged with the Hon. Jas. Munro, who was appointed with myself to control and appropriate the expenditure of £100 from the trustees of the Public Library; £100 from the Commissioners of the recent Exhibition, and any further sum up to £800 that might be necessary from our Lands department—to have this specially-named tree measured and photoed. Mr. Munro advertised a reward of £100 from his own pocket for any one who would point out to a licensed Government Surveyor a tree reaching 400ft. Mr. Munro and I obtained through the Hon. Mr. Dow, Minister of Lands, reports from the surveyors in his department as to any exceptionally large trees within their knowledge. The highest turned out to be a tree near Ueerim, in Gippsland, which reached (I am speaking from memory) 325ft., at any rate it was the largest that our surveyors and photographers could get at. "The Baron" was known only to a Mr. Boyle, and to a photographer, Mr. Carie, the gentleman whose photo of the butt appeared in our Exhibition. Mr. Carie would not say where it was, so I wrote to Mr. Boyle, and he consented to guide anyone whom I choose to send to the tree. I saw Mr. Perrin and Mr. Dow, and it was arranged that Mr. Perrin and Mr. Fuller, a Government surveyor, should arrange to go with Mr. Boyle to the spot. They went, and when Mr. Perrin saw that the trees on the Sassafra Valley were very tall, he set four men to work to clear the scrub and undergrowth away, so as to allow both a theodolite and a camera to work on "The Baron," and to other trees in the neighbourhood. Allowing time for the clearing, he returned with surveyor and photographer, and we now find that the "Baron" instead of being 464ft. is only 219ft. 9in. No tree in the neighbourhood reached 300ft. Now, I believe that your Tasmanian trees beat ours, and as I am most anxious to set the matter finally at rest, I am writing to you and through you to the members of the Royal Society to get, if I can, verified statements of the height of Tasmanian trees. I remember that Sir William Denison measured some trees near the Huon, and in one of the Tasmanian Exhibitions the printed catalogue, unless my memory fails me sadly, was contained his measurement of the tree, and a further statement of the number of 8ft. and 6ft. palings, the number of shingles and laths cut out of it, and the price which this timber realised in the Melbourne market—something like £250, as our first goldfield rush was then at its height, say,

1853 or 1854. Sir William's tree reached, I think dimly, 290ft. before a branch was given off and then ran up some 50ft. or 60ft. more. Now, I want to ask you to turn up this record and to let me know the results. You must have other records of big trees—some which were cut down by the convicts near Port Arthur must, I believe, have exceeded any record I have seen, and probably none remains. This is a matter of Australian interest, and I feel sure that your Society will aid us now that we are trying—with sufficient funds at our back—to find out the height of the tallest gum-tree in Victoria. It is humiliating to have to give up the idea of the 500ft. tree of which the Baron V. Müller wrote, but the close investigation now going on will serve to give us data from actual measurement, and not from the excited fancy of bush explorers. If you can assist me in this matter I shall be very grateful.

Mr. SWAN stated that the late Anthony Trollope had expressed the opinion that the Victorian trees equalled in height those of America. His own personal observations had, however, been only in regard to girth measurement.

Colonel LEGGE, R.A., expressed the opinion that it would be well if the Government would assist in the matter of obtaining reliable information as to the height of their forest trees. Doubtless great misapprehension existed on this subject. Personally he had never seen any trees which exceeded 250ft. in height.

Mr. C. H. GRANT expressed the opinion that the Maraposa and Calaveras trees were larger than those of these colonies.

Mr. MAULT explained the method in which the height of trees might be easily ascertained. He thought the maximum height brought under his notice was about 283ft.

PAPERS.

ANGORA GOAT FARMING.

Mr. JAMES ANDREW read a paper on this subject which had not come under the notice of the Society since 1874, when an effort was made to stimulate popular interest in favour of a trial in this colony of a description of stock-farming, elsewhere found so profitable. This, however, has proved ineffectual, and it was a regrettable matter that mohair (the fleece of the Angora goat) was absent from the list of our exports. In Asia Minor, the natural habitat of the Angora goat, the present value of hair exported from the province amounted to £200,000 per annum. Col. Henderson was the first introducer of the goat in the Cape Colony, and from an export of 1,036lbs. in 1862 up to 1887 the trade had grown to 7,154,000, of a value of £268,500, a fall of 1d. per lb. on the preceding year's clip. An additional item of export was the skins, valued at £100,000, and even these figures failed to represent the total value of the products of this useful animal, for the flesh of the wether had been proved to be an excellent article of food. Latest returns from the Cape showed the number of Angora goats in the colony to be two and a-half millions. Mr. Scott, Minister to Turkey in 1848, was the introducer of the goat into America, but the industry had not equalled the South African. As an evidence of the market which existed for the fleeces he quoted from the Tariff Commission of the United States, in which it was stated that—"The supply produced in the States, if multiplied threefold, would not be sufficient to furnish material for the plushes now used in the railway cars of that country alone." The history of the endeavour to establish the industry in Victoria had not been very satisfactory. It was feasible to cross with the common goat the fleece of the fourth generation, pure sires being used being equal for market purposes to that of the pure-bred; 5lbs. might be taken as a fair average of a well-kept grade flock shorn

once a year. Any staple of over 4in. in length would suffice for manufacturing purposes. Shearing in South Africa was usually conducted in a somewhat slovenly manner, and sorting but inefficiently carried out. Some trouble arose at kidding time, owing to the helplessness of the young, and the want of strong maternal instinct on the part of the dams. The trouble and expense of managing the flock would be less than in the case of sheep, goats being the more intelligent, and less liable to destruction by dogs. Their attachment to home enabled dependence to be placed on their return at night. Their introduction would not encroach on the pasturage available for sheep; indeed, the reverse, for Angoras had been found to be excellent pioneers in clearing up new country for sheep and cattle, and were positively a benefit to other stock, especially sheep. An immense amount of land now valueless could be utilised for good farming, and an important fact was that they did not appear subject to dietetic influences such as were sheep, and appeared to suffer no inconvenience from being depastured on country where plants abound which, when eaten by sheep, prove fatal. The climate of Tasmania and Australia had been proved to be peculiarly suitable for goat farming. Islands were specially adapted for farming goats, and one he could recommend for tentative occupation was West Hunter Island, to the north-west of Tasmania, in Bass Straits, obtainable on a 14 years' lease from the Crown for £20 per annum, and which was unsuitable for sheep-farming, as the poisonous tare—*lobelia*—of King's Island abounded, and invariably proved fatal. If it was found that the goat enjoyed immunity from the evil effects of the plant an illimitable scope for goat-farming was opened up on the unstocked islands of the Straits. The stock regulations at present in force prevented the importation of goats from any place outside Australasia, but prize-bred Angoras could be obtained in neighbouring colonies where small flocks are maintained. He had made enquiries to ascertain particulars of the Angora goats still remaining in the colony, but these had proved unsuccessful. Possibly the non-success of previous attempts at goat-farming here might be attributed to the fact that the goats had been kept on an open grass country, clearly a mistaken policy: rough, mountainous, and scrubby country being far more suitable.

Mr. JUSTICE ADAMS pointed out that between Latrobe and Ulverstone there was a considerable flock of Angora goats in existence. He could not say if they were pure bred. He estimated the flock to number between 50 and 60 animals. He had also seen another flock of these goats, but could not call to mind the exact locality.

Mr. JAMES BARNARD confirmed what had been mentioned by Mr. Justice Adams. The flock was owned by Mr. James Smith, of Westwood.

Mr. A. J. TAYLOR suggested that the secretary should communicate with Mr. Smith for the purpose of obtaining information on the subject.

CHILD POISONING BY EATING THE TRUMPET LILY.

Dr. HARDY read a paper describing a recent case of poisoning occasioned by a child eating a portion of the common trumpet flower—*Brugmansia sp.* The plant he pointed out was allied to the Solanacia family, known to be poisonous. He treated the case in question with success, but concluded the paper by directing attention to the desirableness of an investigation of the qualities of Australasian flora from a medicinal point of view, respecting which at the present moment but little is known. He had little doubt that if this was done the result would be the discovery of remedies for diseases which might be classified as having become peculiarly localised—as for instance typhoid fever and cancer.

Mr. WARD supported the suggestion contained in the concluding portion of the paper. He purposed making an examination of the plant which had been eaten by the child treated by Dr. Hardy.

THE IRON BLOW: LINDA GOLDFIELD.

Mr. WARD, in continuation of the discussion already opened, in which he maintained that the composition of the Iron Blow completely showed that they were not of volcanic origin, as such materials were seldom found in masses such as in the present instance. This, with the exception of specular iron which is occasionally of volcanic origin. He laid particular stress upon the presence in all of them of peroxide of iron and pyrites, from which, he asserted, was derived the large proportion of sulphate of Barium. He also contended that Mr. Thureau was incorrect in contending that the presence of gold in small quantities was to be taken as evidence of volcanic origin.

Mr. A. J. TAYLOR produced specimens obtained from the Iron Blow, and pointed out that he considered the papers read by Messrs. Ward and Johnston had fully established the nature of the present case. He believed the plain inconsistencies in Mr. Thureau's paper were attributable to that gentleman's mistaken estimation of the value of various equivalents of the English language.

DISCOVERY OF FOSSIL FISH.

The SECRETARY stated that at the next meeting, in conjunction with Mr. Johnston, he would lay before the Society a paper on the discovery by an enthusiastic collector—Mr. Nicholls—near Hobart, of a fossil fish. The specimen, which he placed on the table, and which had been secured for the Tasmanian Museum, was, he believed, the first discovery of its nature in the colony.

AUSTRALIAN TURQUOISE.

Mr. A. J. TAYLOR exhibited a beautiful specimen of turquoise, the latest found in Australia of a mineral suitable for jewellery purposes, obtained at Wangaratta.

COMPLIMENTARY.

In moving the customary vote of thanks to the authors of papers, His EXCELLENCY mentioned that Mrs. Meredith had added her experience to the effect that the Angora goat could be successfully farmed in this colony, and would thrive where no other animal would. He referred in complimentary terms to the other papers, and the vote having been passed the meeting terminated.