

MAY, 1893.

There was a large attendance of ladies and gentlemen at the monthly meeting of the Royal Society held on Tuesday, May 13, at the Museum. Sir Lambert Dobson presided.

TASMANIAN LICHENS AND AUSTRALIAN MOSSES.

The SECRETARY (Mr. A. Morton) asked that, with the exception of the first paragraph in "Notes on Tasmanian Lichens," by Mr. John Shirley, B.Sc., Inspector of Schools, Queensland, the two papers left over from the previous meeting might be taken as read. The other paper was one on "Australian Mosses," by Mr. R. A. Bastow, F.L.S., Melbourne. Both writers are corresponding members of the Tasmanian Royal Society.

A RECENT VISIT TO NORFOLK ISLAND.

The BISHOP OF TASMANIA read an interesting paper entitled "Notes on a Recent Visit to Norfolk Island." He stated that his visit in August, 1892, was but a hurried one, and his engagements were numerous, but I seized every opportunity that presented itself to me to discover all I could of the characteristics of this little spot so unique in its history from many points of view. My chief informant was Dr. P. H. Metcalfe, the medical officer of the island, indefatigable alike in the discharge of his professional duties and in the promotion of many branches of science. The first view obtained from the deck of a vessel reveals a larger island with two satellites. The largest of the latter is Phillip Island, a precipitous mass of red basalt set in the bluest of seas, and forming a striking feature in the landscape. Close to the shore of Norfolk Island is the little Nepean Island. The basalt of Phillip Island is remarkable for the brilliance of its colouring. A close examination shows that the rock, where disintegrated, has taken numberless delicate and vivid hues. As my informant defined it, "it is like mottled soap." There was a time when Phillip Island was covered in many places with grass and herbage, and the pines were numerous. Sad havoc has been caused amongst the vegetation by the introduction of rabbits. These little pests ate up every green thing, the grass died, and then the heavy rains washed the soil away. The rabbits themselves are now perishing, but a few are still to be found—thin and diminutive, the mere wrecks of their species. Dr. Metcalfe states that it is a source of wonder to him how the pines that are still standing exist at all. Their roots are exposed to the air, and seem to have scarcely any foot-hold on the bare and stony ground. He states also a remarkable fact—that here the mutton birds lay their eggs under the roots of the trees, and under boulders, as there is no soil. To those who know the ordinary habits of the mutton bird this is a surprising fact, and argues at least an extreme affection on the part of these petrels for this island, since it has induced them to change their modes to suit the circumstances. Nepean Island is merely a mass of low, flat rock. There are, I think, two pines still standing on it, and doubtless these will soon perish. This spot is a rich hunting ground for the collector of eggs. I come now to the main subject of my paper. From the sea the view discloses cliffs of about 100ft. high, broken here and there by gullies which form rocky bays, where, however, boats could only land in very calm weather, and from the landing stage there would most likely be no path upward except for a goat or a Melanesian, who seems as sure-footed and as free from fear as the aforementioned quadruped. Above the cliffs there are visible masses of pines, interspersed with stretches of grass, so green and thick that it recalled memories of an English landscape. Whether you land at the old township or at the Cascades you are at once amongst these grassy valleys, dotted here and there with pines, forming an enchanting prospect. Guavas grow wild in the gullies, bananas—a sort of wild

Solomon—arum lilies, and lemons in countless thousands meet the gaze of the delighted tourist. The lemons and guavas are the property of any who choose to pick them, and the former trees are covered with fruit at all times of the year. Seen at such a season as that during which I visited this spot, it is impossible to deny it the title of a little earthly Paradise. The pine indigenous here should be seen on its native soil in order to be appreciated. Specimens 200ft. high, and of great girth, are not infrequent. One of these still existing measures 35ft. 4ft. from the ground. A grand avenue of these pines, planted by the convicts, extends for a mile and a-half in a straight line, and leads from the old township, with its long cleared valley and watermill, to the property of the Melanesian Mission. Specimens of the rocks of this island have been forwarded to Mr. Stephens for his inspection, and that he may favour the Society with his views upon them. Dr. Metcalfe informs us that there are scarcely any wild flowers. Great injury is being done to the original vegetation by the introduction of sheep and cattle, which are allowed to roam at will over great portions of the island. Even the young pines are unable to grow, though the grass everywhere is covered with little sprouts an inch or two in height. Palms and tree ferns are sharing a like fate. No young plants now grow to maturity. Dr. Metcalfe has chiefly turned his attention to the birds of the island and to ferns. He has given me a list of 10 species of sea birds which regularly visit this group, 16 land birds, and a further list of 13 species, some land and some sea birds, which are visitors and do not breed here. In the name of the Royal Society I ventured to make a request that he would present to the Museum specimens of the eggs which he had collected, and the request was at once granted. I beg to present them in Dr. Metcalfe's name to the Hobart Museum. (Applause.) In addition to the birds mentioned in the lists which I subjoin, the Rev. J. Palmer, of the Melanesian Mission, has introduced the pheasant, Virginian quail, and rock pigeon. These are all increasing in numbers, and do no injury to the island in any way. I think I am right in saying that there were no quadrupeds indigenous to the island. Those which exist at the present time have been imported. There has been a steady deterioration in the breed of cattle and sheep during the last 10 years. I fear that little trouble is taken by the Norfolk Islanders in matters such as these which require foresight. The present by Lord Carrington of two good bulls has aided in restoring to some degree the breed of cattle during the last three years, but the horses are poor looking objects, and perhaps, as regards the sheep, it will sufficiently describe their present condition if I state that a common weight for a sheep in Norfolk Island is from 18lb. to 20lb. The remedy for this is, of course, the exercise of energy in importing fresh blood, and in the formation and fencing of proper paddocks of good grass. At present there is no method in the feeding of stock, and the land cannot carry the number of poorly-bred animals which wander everywhere, destroying much that is of interest to the scientific observer. As is well known, the community at Pitcairn Island were removed to Norfolk Island in 1856. Their representatives at the present day claim that the whole island was made over to them to the exclusion of all others, and that permission must be received from them before any new-comer has a right to settle. I am not competent to decide what can best be proved by documentary evidence. But the question affects the condition of the old convict buildings. They are rapidly going to ruin. The central prison—the Octagon—is roofless, the partition walls of the cells are crumbling away, but the outer wall is, upon the whole, still in good preservation. The whole mass of the various structures is grouped in what is rather flat land, and bare of trees; the situation is not nearly so beautiful as that of the analogous Port Arthur. There is no esplanade at the water's-edge—nothing but a stone pier of no great dimensions. But for this there is a good reason, in the absence of any harbour. The landing had as often as not to be effected at the Cascades, upon the other side of the island. The

Governor's house stands well upon an eminence commanding the whole extent of the penal establishment (14a). There is one point, however, from which the Norfolk Island establishment cannot compare with Port Arthur. There was no picturesque church such as we are acquainted with in Tasman Peninsula. By the courtesy of the present chaplain who resides in Government House, I was permitted to inspect the rooms. He showed me that the structure was deliberately planned, so that in case of an attack made by convicts upon the premises, a sturdy defence could be made at seven distinct points within the building, and if the besieged were beaten off from every one of these one after the other, the last rallying point was so arranged that an exit could be effected through the cellar into the open air. Two distinct nationalities, it may be said, inhabit Norfolk Island at the present time: the Norfolk Islanders, or ex-Pitcairners, and the Melanesian mission. Anyone who knows anything of half-caste races can easily draw up a fairly correct list of virtues and vices inherent in a race of such mixed blood as this, and it is not incumbent upon me to attempt the task here. It is sufficient to say that it would be difficult to find anywhere a more pleasant, laughter-loving, hospitable people than the Norfolk Islanders of this day. There can be no doubt, however, and I think the thoughtful among them realise it, that the effect of constant intermarriage within so small a community has had a serious effect already in deterioration of the race, physically and mentally. It is a matter which calls for immediate attention in a sympathetic and liberal minded spirit. The community is ruled by a Governor, who is also Governor of New South Wales. The Governor has a seal, appoints judges, and can sell or allocate waste lands. The laws are framed as far as possible on the model of those which were in force in Pitcairn Island. The actual government is in the hands of a Chief Magistrate and two councillors, elected annually. The Chief Magistrate must be a landed proprietor, and over 28 years of age. The councillors must be, at least, 25. The annual election is on December 26. The chaplain presides, and the proceedings open with prayer. All can vote who have resided six months on the island, are 20 years of age, and can read and write. The chaplain has a casting vote, but he cannot be either magistrate or councillor. The officers can summon to their aid in case of necessity any one in the island on penalty of a fine for non-attendance. The Chief Magistrate is expressly ordered to attempt to settle all quarrels out of court. If this is impossible he may fine up to 50s. without appeal. The highest fine he can inflict is £10. If the parties are unwilling to abide by his decision a jury of seven is empanelled, and their decision is final. Offences of a more serious nature are sent for trial to Sydney. It is interesting to note that the jury is entitled to payment, and that one hour is computed at one-eighth of a day's work. As a rule fines are worked out in labour on the roads or elsewhere. A list of all males over 25 is kept, and these are called elders. When a jury is needed the names are put into a bag, and the first seven drawn out compose the jury for the occasion. The rules regarding education are strict. The children must attend school from the age of 6 to 14. If any child is absent for more than two days on account of sickness the chaplain must certify the fact. The fine for non-attendance at school is 6d. per day. Each child pays a school fee of 10s. per annum. This and the fines for non-attendance go to the schoolmaster. (From which it would appear that if only the master could induce all his charges to absent themselves, his post would be a distinctly lucrative one). The school is under the care of the chaplain. No intoxicating liquors are permitted, not even (there is a touch of irony in this), not even to the chaplain. This rule in its breadth is, I believe, rigidly enforced. There is a fine for using profane language varying from 5s. to 40s. No furious riding or driving is permitted on the roads. No person may sell land to any one who has not obtained the consent of the Governor previously. All are aware that the coloured element in the Norfolk Islander is derived from Tahiti.

The population now consists of 650 on Norfolk Island, and there are 125 more who are still at Pitcairn Island, they or their parents having returned of their own accord to their old home. At the present time there are some 20 (not more) who may be called pure half-castes. Of this number is, of course, the aged Mrs. Hobbs, who still lives, the wife of the well-known clergyman. His Lordship made some remarks on the language of the islanders, and recorded the derivations of some extraordinary words, with a number of highly amusing illustrations. He continued: "The other community living on this island is, as is well known, the Melanesian Mission. In 1858 permission to settle on Norfolk Island was refused, at the earnest request of the Norfolk Islanders themselves, by Sir W. Denison, then Governor of New South Wales, on the score that the morals of the Pitcairners could be corrupted by being brought into contact with savage Melanesians. In 1866 Bishop Patteson was more fortunate than the first Bishop Selwyn had been, and 1,000 acres were bought at a cost of £3,000, the money being funded for the benefit of the Pitcairners. Since then the Mission School has grown, until a large sum of money has been invested in buildings. The school usually numbers about 170; these are scattered in houses under the charge of the clergy, the houses being embowered among trees and gardens, whilst the sound of the chapel bell, and the meeting in the hall for meals, recalls a true type of college life. To a keen observer perhaps the most remarkable sight at the chapel services, twice daily, is the Melanesian with frizzled pate and bare feet who plays the organ, making full use of the pedals, and reproducing the music of all our great composers. A relay of organists is kept up, and one of the bitterest of regrets to these musicians on leaving Norfolk Island as teachers to their own people is their severance from musical instruments. No harmonium has yet been made which can resist the damp and the insect pest of these tropical islands. Of the farm of 1,000 acres, some 200 are cultivated, the rest being used for pasture. It is calculated that two-thirds of the food needed by the mission people is raised on the farm. Of course far more could be obtained were skilled farmers employed. But as it is part of the system that the scholars should learn the best methods of farming which are appropriate for their future homes, the farm work is done by the clergy and their scholars entirely, working side by side, the only external assistance being that of a bailiff. The Mission also takes its share of the roads of the island, and one is somewhat proud of the order in which their part is kept. It is difficult to see how the Norfolk Islanders could dispose of their produce were it not for the Mission people, who are their best—I was almost about to add their only—customers. The sale of produce to the Mission, and the proceeds of whaling, are the chief sources of profit to these people. As whalers they have long had a high reputation, and are noted as bold and excellent boatmen. It is a great pity that the difficulty of transport should prevent a trade in oranges. The Norfolk Island orange seems to me to surpass in flavour any I have ever eaten. Indeed, the day may come when in this mild and equable climate many fruits may be grown to perfection, which are now neglected here. What is needed is more energy and greater foresight among the present inhabitants. But I feel unwilling to conclude this paper with any adverse criticism of these people, however mildly put. There is a feeling abroad among them that all who live on their island come for the purpose of giving good advice. As one who was more than kindly received—welcomed indeed with open arms—I trust a happy and useful career is in prospect for a community which has a history both romantic and unique. Transported now to a region which cannot be surpassed for quiet beauty, their lot should be as happy as it is highly favoured by nature." (Applause.)

Appended to the paper were lists of birds breeding upon the island and some adjacent rocks, and a list of ferns on Norfolk Island, furnished by Dr. Metcalfe. The paper was illustrated by lantern views by Mr. Nat Oldham. Pictures of the township, the pier, the famous avenue of pines,

Government House, etc., were thrown on the screen, and served to elucidate the observations on the topography of the island. Many of these scenes were from photographs by the Rev. C. Bice, of the Melanesian Mission, who also pointed out various spots of interest.

THE FIRST SETTLEMENT AT NORFOLK ISLAND.

Mr. J. B. WALKER, F.R.G.S., read a paper under this title, dealing very interestingly with the story of the solitary islet set in the summer sea, so curiously interwoven with the history of our own colony, which was for a quarter of a century a dependency of Tasmania—and thus the penal settlement—until in times within the memory of many present it was abandoned, chiefly through the philanthropic exertions of Bishop Willson. A fact not so generally known, however, he mentioned was that immediately after the planting of our colony, only a year or two after Governor Collins founded Hobart, the Norfolk Island settlers were deported in a body to Tasmania, at which time half the population of this colony, and nearly all its free settlers were Norfolk Islanders. He sketched the discovery of the island by Cook, October 10, 1774, the administration of Philip Gidley King, the first commandant, and the early struggles of the settlement, leaving its gradual decline, and the final deportation of its settlers to Tasmania, to be dealt with at a future time.

Mr. C. T. BELSTEAD, a resident of Norfolk Island for many years, and whose information related chiefly to the period intermediate between that dealt with by the two papers, questioned the erection of Government House as a sort of fortress, and could not see why any difficulty should be experienced in getting geological specimens from Phillip Island, seeing that he had been there on a camping expedition. He regarded Bishop Montgomery's paper as interesting and valuable.

Mr. F. BELSTEAD strongly deprecated the exaggeration of novelists in their description of past events on Norfolk Island, and said that having lived there during a portion of the period covered by Marcus Clarke's "For the Term of His Natural Life," he could testify that many of the writer's statements were largely overdrawn.

Sir LAMBERT DOBSON proposed a vote of thanks to those who had contributed to the evening's discussion by papers and information. Regarding the charge of exaggeration, he thought there were horrors to be raked up in the history of the British Navy that would surpass in inhumanity those recorded at Norfolk Island, but it were better that the curtain of oblivion should be drawn over such matters.

The vote of thanks was unanimously accorded, after which Mr. E. P. Jones gave a phonographic entertainment with Edison's latest machine, which was very instructive and highly appreciated.

Mr. A. Mault's paper on "The Disposal of the Sewage of Hobart" was postponed till the next meeting.