

JUNE, 1898.

There was a large attendance at the monthly meeting of the Royal Society of Tasmania on Monday evening, June 13, the Hon. C. H. Grant, M.E.C., C.E., presiding.

## MR. W. C. PIGUENIT'S SUCCESS.

The SECRETARY (Mr. A. Morton) referred to Mr. Pignenit's great success with the pictures he had been exhibiting at the Grafton Art Gallery in London. On Saturday news came of all his pictures having been sold for higher prices than he (Mr. Pignenit) had expected; that his works were most highly appreciated; and he had been able to establish a good agency in London for the sale of his works, which would include many Tasmanian views.

Mr. R. M. JOHNSTON spoke with much gratification of the success of Tasmania's brilliant son in the world of art.

The CHAIRMAN was sure they all heartily congratulated Mr. Pignenit on his success in the old country, which abounded with artists of the highest order.

## A VISITOR.

Mr. Sadler, of the Great Boulder mine, Kalgoorlie, was introduced to the meeting as a visitor.

## NEW MEMBERS.

Rev. C. R. Pollock, F.R.G.S., Mr. W. H. Wallace (Secretary of Mines), Mr. W. J. Watchorn, and Mr. R. C. Patterson, were balloted for, and elected members of the Society.

## PAPERS.

"A LIST OF THE TASMANIAN MOLLUSCA."

By Miss M. Lodder.

The Secretary tabled a re-classification of Tasmanian marine mollusca, which, he said, was a very valuable list, by Miss M. Lodder. Miss Lodder had also rearranged the collection in the Museum, and had also filled many gaps.

Mr. R. M. JOHNSTON assured the meeting that Miss Lodder's work was a very important one. She had, more than any other person, during late years made a very intimate study of Tasmanian mollusca, as well as many other Tasmanian natural history subjects. She had, with that energy, care, and ability that distinguished her, done a good work for the Museum by amending the list of names and identifying some varieties with the original names and types by the aid of specimens in Sydney and elsewhere, and so had been able to correct a large number of mistakes.

"ON THE OCCURRENCE OF A SEA SNAKE IN TASMANIAN WATERS."

By Alex. Morton.

The SECRETARY read the following notes on the occurrence of a sea snake in Tasmanian waters:—For the few notes I have to make to-night on the finding of a sea snake in Tasmanian waters I am indebted to Mr. A. Mault. During a recent visit to St. Mary's, Mr. Mault's attention was drawn to a specimen of a snake that had been preserved by Mr. J. Coombe, a resident of St. Mary's. On examination Mr. Mault found the specimen to be a true sea snake, and on his return to Hobart very kindly supplied me with the information he had been able to obtain; also suggesting that I should write to Mr. Coombé, which I did, and on the 10th inst. that gentleman furnished me with the following interesting account:—"St. Mary's, June 8, 1898. Dear Sir,—I must apologise for not having answered yours dated May 25, in which you ask for any particulars *re* the capture of the snake which was effected in our district a few weeks ago. I wished to ascertain from the man who secured the reptile first how he managed it, and he informs me he had set some night lines at the mouth of a small stream which flows into the sea at Picaninni Point, and on dragging the lines ashore in the morning he found this snake hooked. He thought it was some new kind of eel at first, never having seen anything of the kind before. The man procured a large billy, thinking he might be able to keep the creature alive, but it did not live more than a couple of hours, and never appeared very lively. I showed the specimen to Colonel Legge, who at once pronounced it to be a sea snake, but very uncommon in Tasmanian waters, being a habitant of tropical seas. Colonel Legge informed me that he has seen the species on the rocks on the coast of Ceylon. I do not care to part with the specimen at present, but expect it will eventually find its way to a place amongst your collection. Yours, etc., J. COOMBE." This is the first occasion that I have heard of a sea snake being found in Tasmanian waters. The late Dr. Gerard Krefft, at one time curator of the Australian Museum, Sydney, New South Wales, in his work, entitled "The snakes of Australia," gives a list of 13 sea snakes; no mention is made of any being found in the Tasmanian seas. As a rule the sea snakes are inhabitants of the tropical parts of the

Indian and Pacific Oceans, extending, as Dr. Günther, of the British Museum, says, from the coast of Madagascar to the Isthmus of Panama. They pass their whole life in the water (with the exception, perhaps, of *Platurus*), and soon die when brought on shore. They have very capacious lungs, extending backwards to the anus, and consequently all their ribs are employed in performing the respiratory functions. By retaining a portion of the air in these extensive lungs they are enabled to float on the surface of the water without the slightest effort. Cantor says that when the snake is out of the water and blinded by the light it freely makes use of its tongue as a feeler. The food of the sea-snakes consists entirely of small fish, among them species with very strong spines (*Apogon siliuroids*). As all these animals are killed by the poison of the snake before they are swallowed, and as their muscles are perfectly relaxed their armature is harmless to the snake, which commences to swallow its prey from the head and depresses the spines as deglutition proceeds. There cannot be, says Dr. Gunther, the slightest doubt that the sea snakes belong to the most poisonous species of the whole order. Russell and Cantor, in the transactions of the Zoological Society, ii., p. 303, have ascertained it by direct observation. Tortoises, other snakes, and fish died from their bite in less than an hour, and a man succumbed after four hours. Accidents are rarely caused by them, because they are extremely shy, and swim away on the least alarm; but when surprised in the submarine cavities forming their natural retreats, they attempt to bite every object near them, even turning round to wound their own bodies. I hope Mr. Coombe will be able to present the specimen to the Tasmanian Museum; if so means will be afforded me to give a more detailed description of the specimen.

“NOTES ON A VISIT TO WEST AUSTRALIA.” By Alex. Morton.

The SECRETARY then gave an account of his recent visit to Western Australia, notably in the Upper Murchison district, 600 miles from Perth. The paper was illustrated with numerous lantern slides prepared by Mr. Beattie from photographs taken by Mr. Morton whilst on his tour, the lantern being manipulated by Mr. Nat Oldham. In describing his journey to Western Australia, Mr. Morton remarked that it was stated by

some writers that the harbour of Albany was one of the finest on the Australasian coasts; but he was of opinion that the harbour of Hobart was in more ways than one far ahead of that of Albany. If he were asked to place the harbours of certain centres of Australasia in order of accommodation, from a shipping point of view, he would do so as follows:—Hobart, Sydney, Albany, Auckland, Wellington. Having given a description of Perth he took his audience straight away into the strange, far-off inland districts of the great western colony, with its varied scenes of luxuriant vegetation, and arid, monotonous plains, deserts, scrub, rock, and sheep and cattle stations. Only a comparatively few years ago it was a *terra incognita*. His description of the natives was of an interesting and vivid character. Some of them, he said, were very finely grown men. The features of many of them were of a Jewish type. Professor Baldwin Spencer had noticed the same thing in the central parts of the Australian continent. He described their corroborees. There was no limit to the wives a man might have, and a child might be married to a man old enough to be her grandfather. The weird funeral and burial customs were described, also the medicine men or wizards, the native camps, cannibals, and so on. He said they were marvellously dexterous and clever trackers. The ground was an open book to them. A native would know the different tracks of every horse on a station, and could follow them. They were well fed and treated on the stations as a general thing. They fared very differently in their native camps and in the deserts. It was when they got to the mining districts that they became demoralised. The natives show an absence of malice after punishment. Cannibalism was not at all uncommon among them. He produced a number of native weapons, etc., and explained them. Some of the natives had learned to speak English very fluently, and made very good servants. The numerous slides served to illustrate all these points exceedingly well. Also several of the mining townships and mines, a good impression being vividly conveyed of the hard, rough life endured in these places, whilst the mortality among young men from typhoid was great. The scarcity of water and the droughts give rise to endless troubles, deprivations, and suffering. Still, with it all, the indomitable Britisher overcomes obstacles and flourishes in every district.

A hearty vote of thanks was passed to Mr. Morton for his interesting and instructive discourse. The CHAIRMAN remarked that they would all go away with a better idea of the parts of Western Australia

which had been mentioned than they had possessed before.

A vote of thanks was also passed to Miss M. Lodder for her paper<sup>4</sup>