

AUGUST, 1899.

HISTORICAL SECTION.

The second meeting of the Historical and Geographical Section in connection with the Royal Society of Tasmania took place on Tuesday evening, August 1, 1899, the President (the Right Rev. H. H. Montgomery, D.D.), presiding.

There were present a large number of members.

The HON. SECRETARY read apologies from Professor W. Jethro Brown, M.A., and Mr. A. Mault, regretting that, owing to prior engagements, they were unable to be present.

EXHIBITS.

The PRESIDENT drew attention to an interesting exhibit that he had received from Khartoum. The collection consisted of a complete outfit of a Baggara horseman, sent by Colonel Broadwood, commanding the Egyptian cavalry at Omdurman—the dress, cap, sword, and a large lance 12ft. in length.

The Secretary laid on the table some very interesting documents relating to the early days of Tasmania that the President had secured for the section.

PAPERS.

Mr. J. B. WALKER, F.R.G.S., vice-president of the section, read a most interesting paper entitled "The Cartography of the Terra Australis and New Holland." Mr. Walker said:—Homer represents the earth as a flat surface, somewhat of the form of an oval shield, surrounded by the great flowing salt river Oceanus, called by Milton "Ocean Stream." (See map to Gladstone's "Juventus Mundi.") The knowledge of the Ancients was almost wholly limited to the Mediterranean and its shores, with some vague information as to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf. Any ideas they had respecting the outer world were probably derived from the Phœnicians, the most adventurous mariners of those early ages. That they suspected the existence of a world beyond the great encircling river is shown by Plato's description in the "Timæus" of the island of Atlantis, beyond the Pillars of Hercules, and exceeding in size the whole of Africa and Asia. I quote from Jowett's translation: "In those days the Atlantic was navigable; and there was an island situated in front of the straits which you call the Columns of Hercules; the island was larger than Libya and Asia put together, and was the way to other islands, and from the islands you might pass to the whole of the opposite continent which surrounded the true ocean. . . . Afterwards there occurred violent earthquakes and floods, and in a single day and night

of rain, the island of Atlantis disappeared and was sunk beneath the sea. And that is the reason why the sea in those parts is impassable and impenetrable, because there is such a quantity of shallow mud in the way, and this was caused by the subsidence of the island."—Jowett's Plato. ii. 521. Of more interest with respect to the Southern Continent is a curious fragment from an old Greek writer of about the same period, c. 350 B.C., which has been preserved for us by Ælian, and which is quoted by Major in his "Early Voyages to Terra Australis," p. iii. This writer, one Theopompus, narrates a conversation between the god Silenus and King Midas of Phrygia. "Silenus told Midas of certain islands, named Europe, Asia, and Libya, which the Ocean Sea circumscribeth and compasseth round about, and that without this world there is a continent or parcel of dry land, which in greatness was infinite and unmeasurable; that it nourished and maintained, by the benefit of the green meadows and pasture plots, sundry big and mighty beasts; that the men which inhabit the same climate exceed the stature of us twice, and yet the length of their life is not equal to ours; that there be many and divers great cities, manifold orders and trades of living; that their laws statutes and ordinances are different, or rather clean contrary to ours." It must not be supposed that the Greek philosophers of the age of Plato and Theopompus still held Homer's opinion that the earth was a flat surface. The Greek intellect had early arrived at a true conception of the earth's form. Says Aristotle—"As to the figure of the earth it must necessarily be a sphere." He estimated its circumference at 400,000 stadia. He further remarks: "We may judge that those persons who connect the region in the neighbourhood of the Pillars of Hercules with that towards India, and who assert in this way that the sea is ONE, do not assert things very improbable." (Whewell, Hist. Ind. Sci. i., 161.) We have the works of several Greek geographers before the Christian era, of whom the best known is Strabo, who in 17 books gives a description of the whole known world. With the growth of the Roman dominion knowledge of the earth's surface was necessarily largely extended. We have the result in the celebrated geography of Ptolemy (130 A.D.) containing a very careful typographical account of the various countries. His work was illustrated by very tolerable maps, said to have been executed by Agathodemon. It is perhaps to be regretted that Ptolemy did not confine himself to known facts about the

earth's surface. Unfortunately where knowledge was wanting he filled up with theory. Thus he abandoned the ancient idea of the all encircling ocean-stream, and ventured on an assumption making the Indian Ocean an inland sea like the Mediterranean, and extending Africa on the south and Asia on the east, as continents of immeasurable extent. Ptolemy was the last of the ancient geographers, and for more than a thousand years he and his theories held supreme sway in geographical matters. Some of these theories respecting the unknown parts of the world had a distinctly retarding effect on exploration, and were not disposed of until the great era of maritime discovery in the 14th century. During the Dark Middle Ages even Ptolemy was forgotten, and men's ideas of geography grew chaotic. The flame of learning was kept feebly alive in the great monasteries, but the monks despised science, and devoted their care wholly to theological works. They some times illustrated these works with a *mappamundi* (*mappa*, a towel; *mundi*, of the world, as their maps were usually drawn on linen). Such *mappae mundi* have been preserved in MSS. of Beatus' Commentary on the Apocalypse (776 A.D.). A facsimile of one of these, the original of which was drawn about the time of the Norman Conquest, will show what a fantastic jumble was made by these monkish cartographers, who grouped all the countries of the world haphazard round Jerusalem as a centre. The first advance in geographical knowledge came from the great religious movement which poured the hosts of Europe into the East during the period of the Crusades—1095 to 1270—in the time of Wm. Rufus and Coeur de Lion down to Edward I. Immediately following the Crusades came the era of land travel, when Marco Polo the Venetian, that prince of medieval travellers, made his way (1277, temp., Edward I.) to the Court of Kublai Khan in Peking, and brought back to Europe marvellous tales of far Cathay (China), Zipangu (Japan), India, of distant Java, and the countries of the far East. Nearly a century later, in the reign of our Edward III., say 1350, when the mariner's compass came into use, and made distant voyages possible, the era of ocean discovery began. In this the Genoese captains led the way. These Genoese, disregarding the theories of geographers, began to construct sea-charts—or as they called them “portolani”—from their own observations, and solely with a view to practical use in their voyages. It was then that cartography first began to make substantial advances. From 1410 to 1460—in the time of King Henry V. down to the Wars of the Roses—the Portuguese, under Prince Henry the Navigator, courageously pushed their

caravels out into the mysterious Atlantic called by the Arabian geographers the “Green Sea of Darkness,” in which the voyager was believed to be swallowed up in impenetrable fogs. They dared to pass through the tropic seas which, in the popular imagination, were always boiling under the fierce rays of the vertical sun. So they crept down the coast of Africa, and made the first step to the discovery of the outer world. By the time of Prince Henry's death (1460, contemporary with the Wars of the Roses) a cartographer, like the Italian Fra Mauro, could construct a map (1457-59) containing a fairly recognisable representation of Europe, Asia, and Africa, surrounded by the ocean. Beyond this nothing was known. It remained for Columbus, in the closing years of the century—1492, temp Henry VII.—to lift the veil from the unknown and realise the ancient dream of a mythical Atlantis, by his discovery of America. In the earlier maps after Columbus we find the persistent influence of traditional ideas. America is represented as an island closely approaching China and India; whence the name West Indies. Magellan's voyage across the Pacific in 1521 (temp Henry VIII.), revolutionised men's ideas, and from that time we find the cartographers depicting the world more or less in accordance with our modern notions. Columbus had given to the world a real America for the fabled Atlantis. The problem of the Great Southland was longer in being solved. The ancient myth died hard, in fact we find traces of it lingering for 300 years more, down to near the close of last century. I do not propose to enter on the thorny paths of the controversy respecting the earliest indications of Australia, or to decide on the rival claims of different nations. The subject has been fully discussed by Major, Delmar Morgan, Collingridge, and others, and in their works full information can be found. Suffice it to say, that somewhere between 1514-42 (temp Henry VIII. and Luther's Reformation) the Portuguese, who had just discovered New Guinea, almost certainly, while cruising in the Eastern Archipelago, sighted some parts of the N.W. and possibly of the N.E. coasts of Australia, and we find vague and inaccurate indications of their discovery in maps about 1540. (The Royal Society has a fine reproduction of these maps). If to the Portuguese belongs the honour of having first sighted Australian shores, it is to the Dutch, and to the Dutch alone, that the credit is due of its actual discovery, *i.e.*, if by discovery we mean a definite knowledge of its position. The Dutch claims have been much debated, and it has been sometimes asserted that their maps were, for the most part, copied from the charts or descriptions of Portuguese and

Spanish navigators who had preceded them. Even Tasman's right to the discovery of Tasmania has been doubted, and he has been accused of appropriating Portuguese discoveries. But of late years the Dutch claims have been abundantly vindicated by the publication, not only of old maps, but of original journals of discovery ships, which have been carefully treasured up in the archives of the Dutch East India Co. It will, therefore, be sufficient for our purpose, disregarding all other maps, to take the works of the Dutch cartographers in order to show how the mythical *Terra Australis Incognita* was displaced, and the actual Southland—New Holland or Australia—was gradually evolved in its place. It was during the 70 years war with Spain, and on the eve of the rise of the Dutch Republic, the period so graphically described in the pages of Motley, that the Dutch first appeared as explorers of unknown countries. It was in "the spacious times of great Elizabeth," when Cecil and Walsingham seconded the efforts of Raleigh, Drake, Frobisher, and other great seamen to establish England's sea-power and lay the foundations of her empire. But Holland was first in the field, and at the first was more successful. Her ships were the most numerous and the best, her seamen more skilful, her scientific geographers more accomplished. At that time Holland was not only the commercial, but also the intellectual, centre of Europe. As a natural result of the extraordinary development of Dutch commercial enterprise there arose in Flanders, and also in Holland, a great school of cartographers, of which Antwerp and Amsterdam were successively the centres. The most celebrated of these map makers, indeed the only one whose name is at all familiar to English people, was the Flemish Gerhard Kremer, better known by his Latinised name of Gerald Mercator. In 1541 Mercator produced his great globe, and in 1569 his great world map. It is to Mercator and his friend Abraham Oertel (or Ortelius) that we owe the first modern Atlas, both the thing itself and the name. In 1570 (18 years before the Spanish Armada) Ortelius brought out, at Amsterdam, his first Atlas. It was called "*Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, or "Spectacle of the countries of the globe," and contained 53 maps. It was not until near the end of the century, 1598, after the death of Mercator, that the latter's Atlas was published at Amsterdam by his son in conjunction with Hondius. The work of Ortelius (increased in later editions to 100 maps), and that of Mercator and Hondius, were the first examples of the modern atlas. The name was derived from the figure on the title-page of the giant Atlas supporting on his shoulders a

celestial globe. The construction of a world map was by no means an easy task for these early cartographers to accomplish to their satisfaction. (1.) The countries that had been actually observed by competent navigators and travellers they could lay down with a fair approach to accuracy (2), but in the delineation of the more distant and less known countries they were confronted by the difficulty due to uncertainty of longitude, which there was no means of ascertaining with even approximate accuracy. (3.) Then the regions vaguely indicated by the inaccurate and often misleading descriptions of old travellers such as Marco Polo had to be fitted in somewhere and somehow. (4.) They were all more or less dominated by the fear of deserting the traditional ideas about what was absolutely unknown. (5.) And, finally, they had a horror of blank spaces, and liked to fill up the map, if only with something conjectural, or if that was not practicable, with strange figures of land monsters, sea beasts, or (more innocently) of ships. The result is often a strange jumble of fact and fancy. The Ortelius world map of 1570, in the first edition of the atlas already mentioned, is a fair example of this blending of knowledge and wild conjecture. The unscientific character of the map is evident at a glance. There is no attempt to distinguish by dotted lines or otherwise, as is the practice of modern times, between the purely conjectural and the known. The Arctic and Antarctic regions, the N.W. Coast of North America (not explored until two centuries later), the interior of Africa, are all laid down in as absolute and definite lines as the shores of the Mediterranean. In the delineation of the *Terra Australis Incognita* we have a fine example of the method of the map-maker of the period. The one point of actual knowledge is the Strait of Magellan, and that side of the supposed Southland is, therefore, called "Magellanica Regio." New Guinea is shown as a large, round island, some 15deg. too far to the East, with a note that it is uncertain whether it is an island or part of the Southern Continent, which is accordingly extended so as nearly to touch it. The reported discovery by the Portuguese of this Southern Continent in another longitude is shown by a prolongation to the south of Java to about the latitude of the Cambridge Gulf, but some 15deg. too far to the west, separated from Java by a strait called Lantch idol Mare (a mis-spelling of the Malay Laut Kidol, meaning "South Sea.") This northern promontory bears the name "Beach" (on many maps called "Regio Aurifera"), and also the words "Luach" and "Maletur," with a statement that these extensive regions are known from the writings of Marco Polo and others. The actual fact

being that the placing of the names is due to a misreading of M. Polo, who describes under somewhat similar names parts of Cambodia and the Malay Peninsula. Then we have the remainder of the Southern Ocean up to nearly lat. 40deg. S. filled up with a wholly imaginary continent called "Terra Australis Nondum Cognita," with imaginary capes and promontories, such as "Regio Psittacorum," the Land of Parrots, and so forth; while figures of strange and fearful monsters occupy the blank spaces of the ocean. Mr. Walker said that he had so far dealt with the mythical period of the cartography, but he hoped in a future paper to deal with the scientific period and show the gradual development of the coast line of New Holland.

Mr. T. STEPHENS, M.A., F.G.S., read the following interesting extract from a Port Phillip newspaper, the *Albion*, December 23, 1847:—"That justice, which Australia Felix has year after year petitioned for and demanded, has at length been conceded to her. On the 1st day of January, 1849, a day which will ever be commemorated by a jubilee, the chains which have long bound her in slavery to a tyrannical Government will be snapped asunder by an edict of the British Parliament. . . . A Bill declaring the erection of this province into a free and independent colony was prepared and ready for introduction on the assembling of Parliament in August last. . . . The Colonial Minister, as if to sweeten the cup of

liberty which he has prepared for us, and efface as much as possible all recollection of our bondage, has, by the Bill which provides for our manumission, bestowed upon this land the name of VICTORIA."

Mr. R. M. JOHNSTON, F.L.S., gave a very interesting account of Macquarie Harbour meteorology and tides, 1825-6, being a summary of meteorological observations taken at Macquarie Harbour settlement, and of observations of the tides at Macquarie Harbour Heads during 12 months ending on January 31, 1826. Mr. Johnston said that these records were obtained from London by Mr. J. W. Beattie, being the original MS. records carefully prepared by Jas. Spence, Col. Assist. Surgeon.

Mr. ALEX. MORTON drew attention to an old interesting copper medallion that had been presented by the great navigator, Captain Cook, to one of the chiefs at the Society Islands. On the obverse side was the head of George III.; on the reverse are the two ships Adventure and Resolution, with the following inscription:—"Sailed from England March, 1772." This medal had been presented to the society by the Hon. Thos. Reibey, M.E.C. October 27, 1875, who stated that it had been obtained by his (Mr. Reibey's) grandfather, who commanded the brig Mercury, and traded through the islands in the early part of the present century.

The members at the close of the papers inspected the several interesting exhibits.