

III.

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON EASTER ISLAND, ON THE DISCOVERY OF CARVED PLANKS OF *TORO-MIRO* WOOD. BY LIEUT. COLIN M. DUNDAS, R.N. COMMUNICATED BY ARTHUR MITCHELL, M.D., SEC. S.A. SCOT.

Early in the present year the Chilian Government sent a vessel of war, under the command of Captain Don Ignacio L. Garra, to examine the island, and to report upon it. The main features of his report correspond well with what we observed in the *Topaze* in 1868, except that he reports the population to be only 450 males and 150 females, a most lamentable decrease.

After describing the large stone statues, however, he says—"Besides these works which so clearly denote an era of advanced civilisation, we have other proofs well worthy the attention of antiquarians. We have discovered three planks of *toro-miro* wood, covered with magnificent hieroglyphics. Two of these have gone to enrich our Museum at Santiago in Chili, and the other was given to the Bishop of Tahiti to be sent to France. This is the only island among the Polynesian group in which such precious documents have been found,—documents which once deciphered would throw a light upon the origin of the original inhabitants of Oceania and America. The natives know nothing of their contents, nor have they the least idea of their use."

Captain Garra describes in his report the character of the hieroglyphics;

but I have heard that they were probably to be photographed, in order to send copies to England and elsewhere.

Dr Arthur Mitchell said—I think that the Society should express its indebtedness to Lieut. Dundas for this further communication regarding the very remarkable antiquities which exist on this little lonely island, and which in some respects are the most remarkable in the world. When I remind you that in an island only thirty miles in circumference, and about 2000 miles on every side from inhabited land, there should be found hundreds of gigantic statues, varying from 8 to 39 feet in height, the truth of this remark will be felt. Thanks to Lieut. Dundas, our Proceedings contain the best existing account of them.

There has been no speculation yet as to their origin. It is improbable that they are the work of the present people, who are in appearance, as well as in language and such customs as tattooing, closely allied to the Marquesans and Tahitians. Can it be that they are the work of a preceding people, now extinct, who came from the East and not from the West?—I mean from Peru or Central America. We have some knowledge which makes it fair to ask this question, but beyond the asking of it we do not go. Stephens and Squier describe rude gigantic statues, not at all unlike those in Easter Island, as existing in Central America, which there is no reason for believing were made by a people preceding, and altogether different from, those who constitute the present so-called aboriginal population. In Peru, again, Tschudi describes rude gigantic statues, which still more strongly resemble those of Easter Island, and which he thinks were cut by men who preceded the Incas.

We do not know much of the flora and fauna of Easter Island. They have no four-footed animals except the rat; but we do know that the flora and fauna of the Galapagos Islands are closely related to that of the South American Continent, and have not come from the Oceanic or Polynesian Islands.

There is one remark in Captain Garra's report which deserves notice. He says that these monuments denote an era of advanced civilisation, but this is not, I think, a fair view of the matter. They are gigantic but extremely rude, and they rather reveal to us that they were made by a people capable of civilisation than by a people actually civilised—not

a cultured people, but a people capable of culture—potentiality rather than possession.

It is curious how differently prehistoric remains like these are interpreted when looked at as marks of civilisation. I do not know what civilisation exactly is; but I am sure that if these very rude gigantic stone statues, made without metal tools, had been found in our midst, that is, in the midst of a people who are understood to be in the front of civilisation, the interpretation would have been exactly the reverse of that adopted by Captain Garra, and they would be held to be evidence of a non-civilised, and not of a civilised era. As regards our cairns, and brochs, and hill-forts, this is exactly what is done, and the argument has been often improperly used in enquiries into the state of primitive man.