Remarks on the Geographical Distribution of Games.

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MARCH 11TH, 1879.

E. B. TYLOR, Esq., F.R.S., *President, in the Chair.*

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

The following presents were announced, and thanks were ordered to be returned to the respective donors for the same:—

FOR THE LIBRARY.

From the SOCIETY.—Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, Vol. I, No. 3.

From the ASSOCIATION.—Proceedings of the Geologists' Association, Vol. V, Nos. 7 and 8.

From the AUTHOR.—"Turtle-back" Celts in the Districts of Columbia. By Dr. W. J. Hoffman.

From the EDITOR.—*Revue Scientifique*, Nos. 35 and 36, 1879.

From the EDITOR.—"Nature" (to date).

The President read the following paper.

REMARKS *on the* GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION *of* GAMES.

By EDWARD B. TYLOR, Esq., F.R.S., President.

IN a paper read last year on the Asiatic origin of the game of patolli, played among the Aztecs before the Spanish Conquest (*see* "Journal of the Anthropological Institute," November, 1878), I pointed out that the occurrence in Mexico of this game, closely allied to the Hindu pachisi, added a new proof to those long since brought forward by Humboldt, of the old Mexican civilisation having been more or less derived from Asia. In preparing a lecture on the History of Games,* I have since come upon other facts as to the geographical distribution of games, which seem to open a new line of argument as to the spread of civilisation from South-East Asia over the vast Malayo-Polynesian district as far as New Zealand, in times of some antiquity, at any rate long before the South Sea Islands became known to Europeans.

Before entering on this special argument, as games have

* Delivered at the Royal Institution, March 14, 1879; *see* "Fortnightly Review," May, 1879.

hitherto been scarcely used for the anthropological evidence they afford, it may be well to give a clear idea of the working of such a line of proof. Of course no stress can be safely laid on the appearance in different districts of games likely to arise independently, as of those which are child's play imitating serious arts like archery or building huts, or those which might naturally suggest themselves again and again, such as wrestling, or catching balls thrown from one to another. The games which have a value as proofs of connection or intercourse between the districts they are found in, must be peculiar or complex enough to bar the supposition of their having sprung up independently. On close examination, the number of radically distinct games known among mankind proves to be much smaller than might have been expected. Their examination may be much simplified by arranging in groups those which appear to be variants of one game, like the backgammon-group, described in the paper in this Journal just referred to, or the chess group, or the polo-hockey group. Between these groups again, deeper-lying connections may be made out, as where it appears that the backgammon-group is related on the one hand to all games of dice or lots, and on the other hand to the family of draught-games, in which pieces or men are moved or drawn (whence the name *draughts*) by rule on a diagram or board. It is clear that new varieties of games grow up freely from the older forms. But also it appears that when a game is once worked into perfect fitness for its place in the life of boys or men, it may last on with remarkable permanence, as when we see represented in the ancient Egyptian tombs the counting game well known to us by its Italian name *morra*, as well as the childish sport called in English "hot-cockles," where the blind-man on all fours has to guess which of the others struck him on the back. These simple amusements have held their own from thus early in the historical period, through changes which have superseded languages, dynasties, and religions. Thus, there is always a fair chance of finding in existence in modern times any of the popular games of the ancients. I have lately found that the classic Greek and Latin game of draughts, the principle of which was that of taking a man by getting him between two enemies (*see* Pollux, *Onomasticon*, ix, 98; Ovid. *Ars Amat.* iii, 358, *Trist.* ii, 478), has not disappeared from the world. It is still in vogue in Egypt, much as it may have come with Alexander to Alexandria, and is known elsewhere in places where the Arabs have carried it (Lane, "Modern Egyptians," vol. ii, p. 59; Burton "First Footsteps in East Africa," p. 41). This ancient classic game, which may be conveniently called by the term *latrunculi*, seems distantly related to the Chinese

wei-chi, or game of circumvention, in which the principle is to take a man by surrounding him with four enemies. It may be here pointed out, for a reason which will be seen presently, that the game we now call draughts is quite different from these ancient games. It seems to be a modern and simplified form of chess, in which the pieces are all pawns, becoming queens when they reach the enemy's line, while their mode of taking by jumping over is that of the older game of fox-and-geese.

Let us proceed to examine the history and geography of the sport of kite-flying. Though now so thoroughly naturalized in Europe, it seems not to have been known beyond three centuries, but to have come over within that time from Asia, where it has long been popular as a sport of men as well as children. European travellers in China are amused to see grown-up people walking out in the evening, string in hand, leading their kites about like pet animals, and in some parts one day in the year (the 9th of the 9th month) has been given up from ancient times to a great kite-flying festival on the hills, when the sky is full of paper birds and monsters. The Chinese skill in kite-making may be judged of, by trying the similar Japanese bird-kites, now to be bought for a few pence in London shops. The kite-flying in India, Siam, and the Malay region has been often described, and among the peculiar forms may be mentioned musical kites, lantern kites, and kites arranged to be fought by making them cut one another's strings. Somewhere in South-Eastern Asia, we may assume as the geographical centre from which the toy spread. Now it appears that before the European exploring voyages during the past century, the sport of kite-flying was already known over Polynesia, even down to New Zealand. The Rev. W. W. Gill in his "Myths and Songs from the South Pacific," p. 122, figures the Hervey Island kites of reed with bunches of leaves and feathers on the tails. They were, he says, egg-shaped, club-shaped, or bird-shaped, and as the latter were more difficult to make, they were scarce, and greatly admired by the childish old men who delighted to fly them on the hill-tops of Mangaia. The native myth was that in the shades below, the god Tane once challenged the god Rongo to a game of kite-flying, but Rongo, who had secretly provided himself with an enormous quantity of string, won the match. From this first kite-flying, mortals learnt the pastime, and the rule is that in each game the first kite that mounts the sky is sacred to Rongo and bears his name. The Society Islanders made their kites of native cloth (Ellis, "Polynesian Researches," vol. i, p. 228). The New Zealand kites of sedge and flax leaves have often been described, and a very artistic one is figured by the Rev. R. Taylor in his "New Zealand,"

p. 346; it is in bird-form and called *kahu* or hawk, from its hovering, as we call ours a kite. It is a recognised sign of peace when kites are seen flying near a village (Dieffenbach, "Travels in New Zealand," vol. ii, p. 31). We may fairly suppose that the sport had found its way from the Malay corner of Asia; and its wide diffusion among the islands, with the habit of singing mythical chants during the flying, seem to point to some considerable antiquity. It is worth notice that the Fijians, who are not mainly Polynesian either in race or language, seem to have been out of the line of intercourse. Dr. Seemann ("Viti," p. 45) says they had heard of kites by their Polynesian name of *manumanu*, or bird, but had never seen one.

Next, as to a game which we consider still more childish. Mr. A. R. Wallace ("Malay Archipelago," p. 88) being one wet day in a Dyak house in Borneo, to amuse the lads took a piece of string and showed them "cat's cradle," when to his surprise he found that they knew more about it than he did, a native boy taking it off his hand and making several new figures which quite puzzled him. In New Guinea the Motu, who are Polynesians, are also proficient at cat's cradle ("Journal of the Anthropological Institute," vol. vii. p. 483), and the position which the little art holds in New Zealand is most remarkable. The Maoris make the string into many more patterns than one, these representing to them canoes, houses, &c., and in this way they commemorate scenes in their mythology, such as Hine-nui-te-po, the goddess Night, bringing forth her progeny, and Maui fishing up the North Island from the bottom of the sea. It is said that Maui, the national hero-deity, invented cat's cradle, which is called *maui* after him (Taylor, pp. 130, 347; Dieffenbach, vol. ii, p. 32). Among the Australians Eyre ("Central Australia," vol. ii, p. 229) remarks, "string puzzles are another species of amusement with them. In these a European would be surprised to see the ingenuity they display, and the varied and singular figures which they produce. Our juvenile attempts in this way are very meagre and uninteresting compared to them." Now as to the origin of the string games among these Malays (Dayaks) and Polynesians, it is evident that they did not learn them from Europeans. And though cat's cradle is now known over all Western Europe, I find no record of it at all ancient in our part of the world. It is known in South-East Asia, and the most plausible explanation seems to be that this is its centre of origin, whence it migrated westward into Europe, and eastward and southward through Polynesia and into Australia.

It further appears from the account of Captain Cook's "Third

Voyage," vol. iii, p. 144, that the Sandwich Islanders had a game like (English) draughts, but more intricate, to judge from the number of squares; the board was 2 feet long, divided into 238 squares 14 in a row, *i.e.*, 14×17 , and it was played by moving black and white pebbles from square to square. Unfortunately, the explorers did not spend an hour in learning the game, nor did Ellis the missionary ("Polynesian Researches," vol. iv, p. 213) though he gives its name *konane*, and remarks that it is a favourite amusement with the old men, and that he has known a game begun early in the morning and hardly finished in the day. The game still exists, as is shown by a passage in Mrs. Brassey's "Voyage of the 'Sunbeam,'" chap. 16, so that by next year it may be possible to get a set of rules sent over. My own impression is that the Hawaiian game will prove to be related to the already mentioned Chinese game of circumvention. But it is to the present purpose to point out that, not being European draughts, it is almost certainly one of the Asiatic games, and had found its way from Asia before the time of the European explorers. The Maoris are now addicted to English draughts, which they play with great skill, but there is reason to believe that they had a native game of their own; the native term is *e'mu* (*see* Dieffenbach, vol. ii, p. 58; Shortland, "Traditions of New Zealanders," p. 158). It is worth while to give this evidence in an incomplete state, as it may call the attention of anthropologists in Polynesia to the desirableness of looking for traces of Asiatic draught games as likely to afford interesting clues to the sources of South Sea Island culture.

Whether these games were carried from Asia over the Pacific by a drift of population or a drift of civilisation, that is, if either the Polynesians themselves brought them on their migration from the Malay region, or they were conveyed by mariners in later times, when the South Sea Islands were already colonized by the present Polynesians, on either supposition it would be likely that other distinctly Asiatic ideas would have travelled over by the same routes. In fact, we may look to tracing more or less of the Polynesian culture to ideas borrowed from Asia. I will give an example of this, which has for years seemed to me of much ethnological interest. The Asiatic conception of the earth being arched over by a number of concentric heavens is found in Polynesian mythology. Now the mere idea of a flat circular earth domed over by the sky is one which arises naturally from the evidence of the senses, so that its being found as it is in all regions of the world proves nothing as to intercourse between their inhabitants. But the doctrine of successive heavenly spheres or strata is not thus suggested by the appearance of the sky, nor would it be likely even to occur to the mind of a savage

or barbarian. It was a scientific hypothesis of the ancient astronomers to account for the independent motions of the sun, moon, and five other planets, by considering them as carried round each on a transparent crystal sphere. Not to go here into the question of the connection of this theory with the early Chaldean system as seen in their seven planetary temple stages, the doctrine of the heaven-spheres comes very distinctly into view in the Pythagorean scheme of seven crystal spheres of the planets, through which we see to the eighth and outermost dark sphere carrying the fixed stars. The Sabeans reckoned nine spheres and a sphere of spheres, ten altogether. For an early stage of astronomy this theory of concentric planetary spheres is thoroughly rational, but when it passed into the speculations of astrology, and became popularised among nations ignorant of its scientific meaning, it seems to have sunk into mere mythic cosmology. Thus, when in our own time and country we hear people talk of being in the seventh heaven, without having the least idea of the original real meaning of the phrase, we may understand how the seven heavens and seven hells, and other conceptions of the same class, found their way into the religions of Asia. For my present purpose it is enough to mention that the broken-down Hinduism of the Indian Archipelago recognises both the seven heavens which are the abodes of the gods, in the highest of which dwells Diebata (Sanskrit *Devata*) and the seven hells (*sapta patala*). This seems to indicate the line along which the idea of successive domes or storeys of heaven and the underworld may have reached the Polynesians. The best account of them is given by Gill (pp. 2, 21, 153), whose drawings show ten overarching domes of blue stone, corresponding with the lands in the nether world, the innermost circle being that of the sun and moon, which come up and go down through openings, so that the sun may be up above while the moon is in the world below, and *vice versa*. In the Society Islands, Ellis (vol. iii., p. 169) describes the nine heavens or strata of clouds or light inhabited by the different orders of inferior deities, the tenth being the heaven of utter darkness, inhabited by the highest gods. Elsewhere the number of these heavens is reckoned to be seven (Waitz "Anthropologie der Naturvölker," vol. vi. p. 299). In New Zealand (Taylor, p. 114) there are ten heavens, the lowest separated from the earth by a solid transparent substance of ice or crystal, along the under side of which glide the sun and moon, while above this firmament are the reservoir of the rain, the abode of wind, of spirits, and of light, the highest and most glorious of all being the habitation of Rehua. It seems quite unlikely that such notions of successive vaults or storeys above and below the earth should have sprung up as

spontaneous fancies among the Polynesians, whereas they are quite explicable as borrowed from Asia, where ignorant priests had degraded them from astronomy to introduce them into religion. The way in which this evidence of the transmission of mythology fits with that from the transmission of games, strengthens both as proofs of the drifting of Asiatic culture into Polynesia.

DISCUSSION.

Mr. HYDE CLARKE observed that he accepted the paper of the President as a most valuable contribution to the knowledge of the epoch of proto-historic culture. He had himself been making further investigations on that subject, beyond those he had communicated to the Institute. That the illustrations of the President should be common to the Old and New World was a necessary consequence of the facts. In language a great Turano-African class must be constituted, including of dead languages the Iberian of Spain, the Etruscan, Prisco-Latin, &c., of Italy, the pre-Hellenic, Dacian, Thracian, Phrygian, Lydian, Carian, Canaanite, languages of Caucasia, Akkad of Babylonian, Paleo-Indian, Egyptian; and of modern languages Basque, Ugro-Altaic, Georgian, Ude, Kolarian, Naga, and many others of India, Japanese, &c., Coptic, many African languages; the Pomo (mound-builders) and others of North America, Mexico and Peru. The mythology and culture were common to the whole class, and are not Aryan, but the Aryan mythology was based on the Turano-African. As facts were built up by such researches as those of the President, we should obtain a clearer view of the proto-historic epoch, and thereby of the pre-historic and of the historic.

Mr. MONCURE CONWAY said he wished to mention, with regard to what the President had said concerning the highly artificial kite-flying of the East, that a similar elaboration appears among the Chinese of California in the matter of card-playing. The oldest American gamblers do not appear to be so devoted to the game, and it is a stipulation in contracts for service made with Chinese in San Francisco that they shall pass every evening at their card-house; any remonstrance is as vain as against a religious custom. He wished also to remark that Professor Lesley, of the University of Pennsylvania, in his work, "Man's Origin and Destiny," published by Trübner, advanced the curious theory that the game of hopscotch is a survival from an ancient representation of initiation. The diagram would be the ground plan of the temple, and the shell is carried from point to point up to the holy of holies.

Lieut.-Col. H. GODWIN AUSTEN: With regard to the toy models of horses made at Troy and alluded to by the last speaker, I may mention that similar toys are sold in every bazaar in India, generally made of burnt clay and painted white, and represent a horse in a curious stiff attitude, with the legs stuck straight out in front and behind. There are two other games, I may mention,

which I have noticed in India. 1st, Polo at one time was a favourite general game throughout Persia and India, but curious to say, it is now confined to only two spots wide apart; Baltistan, on the Indus, in the north-west and Manipur on the south-east, eastward of the Brahmaputra. But it was curious to find that this game, no longer played on horseback, is still retained and played like our hockey, on foot in Kistwar, a district south-east of Kashmir, where the villages turn out and play, one against the other, on a certain day of the week.* 2nd, In the Naga hills I was much struck by finding that the children played with a peg-top, spun with a string, made out of a very hard kind of wood pointed below, and one of these I still possess, I obtained at the Lahupa village of Shipvomeh.

Mr. HILTON PRICE mentioned the great antiquity of the various games of ball, and the fact that balls covered with leather, cut into four and eight pieces, sewed together with string, have been found in Egypt. Ancient Egyptians playing at ball are depicted upon the monuments of Beni-Hassan.

MARCH 25TH, 1879.

E. BURNETT TYLOR, Esq., F.R.S., *President, in the Chair.*

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

The following presents were announced, and thanks were ordered to be returned to the respective donors for the same:—

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From the SOCIETY.—Proceedings of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Liverpool, Vol. XXXII, 1877–8.

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From the SOCIETY.—Transactions of the Anthropological Society of Russia, Vol. XXI.

From the EDITOR.—Archiv für Anthropologie, Jan., 1879.

From the INSTITUTION.—61st Annual Report of the Royal Institution of Cornwall, 1878.

* Polo was first revived in India, in the district of Cachar, which lies west of Manipur, and where many people from that valley are settled, the tea-planters taking it up and playing with them; thence it spread to Dacca and to Calcutta, where it is played several evenings in the week on the Maidan. It was then taken up by officers of cavalry and other regiments in India, and has thus reached this country.