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Review: The Greenland Eskimo

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Thikinovu ("the centipede"), which bites without warning; the usurpers called him Na Mbi ("the turtle-pond"), in allusion to the number of people who were killed and eaten by him; but the name by which he was generally known was Thakombau ("destruction to Mbau," or "Mbau is undone"), signifying the success of his *coup d'état*. The further history of Thakombau makes interesting reading, as the coming of the white man greatly complicated that remarkable man's career. Mr. Thomson's intimate and sympathetic knowledge of the people enables him to give us much precise information that is of the utmost value to the ethnologist and sociologist, and the contents of the book range through most of their family life, sociology, and government. One feature is the amount of space devoted to endemic diseases, leprosy, yaws, and tuberculosis, all of which are of anthropogeographical interest. The great value of the book, however, is in the clear and impartial manner in which the author traces the effects of the contact of the white man upon the Fijian. The Government official with the best intention, and the missionary from the highest motives, have made many blunders through ignorance. Any transition from barbarism to civilization is a troublesome period, which is fraught with grave danger to social and private morality. In most parts of Eurasia the evolution was very slow, and was usually effected by the contact of peoples of similar race, or, at all events, the disparity between the civilizing element and the more backward population was not very great. In the Pacific the reverse has occurred. An overweening and energetic people, obsessed with the desire of supplementing native methods of action and thought, has forced itself on the autochthones, who were in a state of low barbarism. The white man was in a hurry to effect changes, his knowledge of the local conditions was often very imperfect, and in some cases it was considered preferable to sweep away the old, rather than to let the natives gradually work out their own salvation with the aid of the new example and precept. The results in some cases were not at all what were expected. Those who have to govern native races, and those who seek to proselitize, should read this illuminating account of the conflict of the new with the old. It strongly supports the view that Government officials and missionaries should have instruction in sociology and ethnology before engaging in their several vocations.

A. C. H.

POLAR REGIONS.

THE GREENLAND ESKIMO.

'The People of the Polar North: a Record.' By Knud Rasmussen. Compiled from the Danish originals and edited by G. Herring; illustrations by Count Harald Moltke. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co. 1908. Price 21s. net.

Knud Rasmussen, 'Under Nordenvindens Svøbe.' Copenhagen: Glydendalske Boghandel. 1906.

Knud Rasmussen has described to us in popular language his experiences among "the most northerly dwelling people in the world, an unnamed group of Greenland Eskimo" who wander from settlement to settlement between Cape York, north of Melville bay, and Cape Alexander—approximately, therefore, between 76° and 78° N. lat. There appears to be a tribe of "inland dwellers" who possess neither kayaks nor dogs; indeed, they are terribly afraid of the latter. It would be most interesting if more information could be obtained concerning this mysterious folk, who may wrest the honour of "the farthest north" from the kayak hunters described by the author. The book is a delightful "regional study" of conditions of existence that appear particularly unattractive to those who prefer warmer latitudes and a life of less strenuousness and privation. In picturesque language Rasmussen describes the grandeur and beauty of a desolate land, and even the

howling gale and driving snow offer the joy of struggle; while the haven of the camp brings peace, there blubber supplies light, and external and internal heat, meat is eaten ravenously, and, lolling in semi-nakedness, the Eskimo tell tales and rest. The worst experiences were those when, weatherbound, with soaked musty clothes and drenched sleeping-bags, they sat under an uninviting dripping from blubber under an extemporized shelter. "Our feet are white and swollen from the damp, and we are cold. Our spirits are on the verge of a breakdown. . . . 'Talk, Knud, talk! There will be no standing if we are both silent. Tell us something, no matter what!'" cried his companion. One Eskimo thrusts his head out and shouts to the spirits to "Stop the rain." Another reproaches the author with avarice. "You are so strange, you white men! You collect things you will never require, and you cannot leave even the graves alone. All this calamity is the revenge of the dead." With rare sympathy we are told of the hardships that are overcome by the cheery disposition of these happy and contented people. Life would be impossible for our individualists, the exigencies of the environment necessitating friendliness and collectivism; these manifest themselves on all occasions, and even wives are lent to one another for varying periods. With care, the student can piece together a fairly complete picture of the everyday life of the people, and the short chapters on death, religious beliefs, retribution, magic, and magicians give further insight into their psychology, customs, and beliefs; but one would have liked definite information concerning their systems of kinship and inheritance, structure and regulation of society, and many other matters of ethnological importance. A considerable number of folk-tales are given, which incidentally throw a good deal of light on the customs and ideas of the people. "They are told in the houses [during the Polar night] when the Eskimo, after great banquets of raw frozen meat late in the evening, are digesting their food, and are heavy and tired. Then it is the task of the story-teller to talk his hearers to sleep. The best story-tellers boast of never having told a story to the end." Fortunately for the reader, they here appear in an abbreviated form. Some details are also given of the West Greenlanders and the more sophisticated East Greenlanders. There is a lavish supply of most admirable illustrations by Count Harald Moltke, the majority of which are excellent portraits of Eskimo, and thus furnish abundant material for the student of racial types. There are also a dozen capital coloured plates, from three or four of which we can judge of the variation in skin colour that appears to occur among the Eskimo. The editor likewise deserves much praise for his share in this valuable book. He informs us that Mr. Ramussen is intending to make "a six-years' tour along the whole of the north coast of North America as far as Alaska, with merely the slender Eskimo equipment of kayak and dog-sledge, for the purpose of studying at first hand the still-surviving remnants of a once numerous race." Memorable results should result from this hazardous enterprise, but the editor is scarcely correct in describing the Eskimo as "an unexplored people." He seems to be unaware of the great amount of excellent work already accomplished by our American colleagues.

A. C. HADDON.

GENERAL.

FRANCIS GALTON'S 'MEMORIES.'

'Memories of my Life.' By Francis Galton, F.R.S. London: Methuen & Co. 1908. Pp. 339. Price 10s. 6d. net.

This volume is the highly condensed record of a long, busy, and multifarious life, and of a curious, ingenious, and, above all, statistical intellect. We must here confine ourselves in the main to geography and travel. But these have formed only two out of the many preoccupations, recorded in 183 books, memoirs, and