

Books of Special Interest

A Primitive People

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SYSTEMS OF CENTRAL POLYNESIA. By ROBERT W. WILLIAMSON. Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press (Macmillan). 1926.

Reviewed by MARGARET MEAD

THERE are few fields of ethnological interest so greatly in need of a systematized treatment as Polynesia. The likenesses in material culture of the Polynesian groups to Indonesia on the west and the Americas on the east have been subjects for much heated controversy. Hypotheses of diffusion have been all the easier to construct because of the sketchy and inexact nature of the evidence. Students of particular ethnic phenomena as well as those scholars of specifically Polynesian problems have been continually misled and baffled by this lack of reliable material. For what information we have is tucked away in memoirs packed with irrelevant observations, sandwiched in between comments on the Captain's health and the Mate's last drinking bout, or carefully concealed in some little known volume of missionary letters. Checking data so inconveniently hidden away was often a matter of months, requiring far more time than the student of other than strictly Polynesian problems could afford to give. For these reasons the announcement of a three-volume work on the "Social and Political System of Central Polynesia" was eagerly welcomed.

To have been useful such a work must have either contributed new information, or if a compilation, presented a summary of the source material in carefully evaluated, well indexed, strictly ordered fashion. If Mr. Williamson had performed either of these tasks, the scientific world would have owed him a debt of real gratitude. But he has not.

True, the work is a compilation. It contains no new data but depends entirely upon earlier published sources. To ransack this great mass of literature was no light task. Mr. Williamson has shown great industry, but little discrimination. It seems almost as if the methodological sections had been written by one person, the illustrations laboriously hunted out by a second, and the conclusions light heartedly drawn up by still a third contributor. For after a most penetrating analysis of the various sources of error inherent in the genealogies which form part of the native tradition, Mr. Williamson proceeds to reconstruct the early history of Polynesia from just such sources. In his retrospects dealing with the past history of the different groups it is impossible to separate fact from myth. The painstaking record of Captain Cook and a chance line in a native song are weighted equally as permissible evidence. Such promiscuous use of every sort of data is not only worthless; it is dangerously misleading. No one, unversed in the bibliography of the area, can hope to evaluate the sources. All the carefully listed footnotes look alike, heavily reliable. And the paraphernalia of cross reference, long lists of points, and meticulously labeled inference completes the picture of a scholarly and dependable work.

Not only is the material presented of such unequal value, but it is not even set forth simply as a series of reports for which some authority, however shady, may be said to vouch. Instead every fact is made evidence, in a special pleading for an involved theory of Polynesian migrations. Migration theories in an area where many groups are entirely unknown, and in which Mr. Williamson excludes two known cultures, the Hawaiian and Maori, from consideration, are manifestly premature and absurd. And when a large array of badly needed facts is skewed and twisted for illustration, such theorizing becomes actually vicious. For example, Mr. Williamson is very much impressed with the traces of a dual organization which he believes he finds in many of the island groups. In the discussion of Tonga (W. Mariner: "The Tonga or Friendly Islands"), although the only reliable published authority specifically lists three noble families, one of these is omitted in Mr. Williamson's account.

There is fortunately available another method of indirectly checking the adequacy of these reconstructions. Since Mr. Williamson's researches were completed the Bishop Museum has published two monographs on the Marquesas, the recent work of two trained ethnographers. As Mr. Williamson used for his sections on the Marquesas the same type of source material, and pre-

sumably used the same methods of evaluating his evidence as he used in the case of the other groups, it is interesting to see how this discussion of the Marquesan culture checks with these later researches. When such comparison is made, his discussion shows up as an insufficiently digested mass of data, perverted by *a priori* theoretical approaches; as, for example, in his discussion of totemism.

For the lay reader who desires to get a brief picture of the social structure of the Polynesian Islands, Fraser's "The Belief in Immortality and the Worship of the Dead, Volume II: The Belief among the Polynesians," gives a far more accurate and readable account. For the ethnographical scholar in other areas, the book is involved, verbose, and painfully misleading. For the Polynesian scholar it is a little useful, as it sometimes quotes exactly rare books which are difficult to consult. The bibliography is the first extensive bibliography of the subject which has ever been published, but it is not annotated and fails in consequence to deal with one of the most pressing problems of Polynesian bibliography, i. e., to indicate which particular islands are dealt with in books bearing such ambiguous titles as "Notes of a Cruise in H. M. S. 'Fawn' in the Western Pacific in the year 1862," or "Voyage in search of La Perouse." For such information it is necessary to hunt through the footnotes in particular sections of the work, a laborious exercise.

For those who are interested in methods of scientific research, these ponderous volumes offer illuminating illustration of the folly of applying methods of textual analysis suitable to the Higher Criticism to the unwritten tradition of primitive peoples. The complete inanity of balancing evidence contained in orally transmitted record, altered generation by generation to suit a changing native taste in cadence, is delightfully pointed by the following paragraph which is a marvel of inconclusiveness (the italics are mine):

In Fakaofa (Tokelau Islands) one of the children apparently succeeded the father; and it seems that this was so in the Ellice Islands of Funafuti. In Easter Island the succession to the Miru head chief appears to have gone to a son, but we do not know who was the presumed successor for other people. In Tikopia it went primarily to a son. In Ontong Java it seems generally to have gone to collateral relatives.

Westcott as Poet

NATIVES OF ROCK: TWENTY POEMS (1921-22). By GLENWAY WESCOTT. Decorations by PAMELA BIANCO. New York: F. Bianco. 1926. \$7.50.

Reviewed by LLOYD MORRIS

MODESTLY, Mr. Wescott explains that he was persuaded to republish these poems by the prospect of seeing them, among Miss Bianco's decorations, in a beautiful book. The poems were composed some five years ago. Since then, Mr. Wescott has come to regard himself as a narrator, and his verse as "worthy of respect, but not remarkably moving." Every one of these poems, he suggests, probably represents "an intense moment in an unwritten narrative."

Mr. Wescott's candor is at once disarming and provocative. The poetic merit of his verse is greater than he has been willing to concede. A number of these poems are notably moving; none is destitute of magic; all are commendable achievements in expression. Austere and exacting in design, they compel by resistance not surrender. They are compact, precise, and firm. Concentration has produced consistent lucidity, occasional incandescence. A characteristic fastidiousness is more than formal, implying authenticity of conception. The best of these poems reconstitute their substance absolutely, and require no collaboration by the reader. There is glamour, but no illusion, in a land of "rose-pink rock harder than light" where "all that is not stone imitates and is above stone." In the best of Mr. Wescott's poems verbal expression, a mediation between reality and the perception of it, effaces itself; this is accomplishment, for transparency not obtrusiveness is the condition of faultless rhetoric.

Mr. Wescott's avowal of narrative and abdication of verse impel one to consider his poems, perhaps unjustly, as prophecy rather than as fulfillment. They illustrate the distinctive qualities of his prose. They reveal a sensibility of exceptional range and subtlety. One is convinced that, were he to exploit indiscriminately the fund of his immediate perceptions, he might produce a baroque art remarkable for its apparent ex-

travagance. Obviously, this is remote from his intention; he deliberately rejects many incidental beauties for one that is significant. At his best, when expression has the attribute of inevitability, the image and its verbal symbol are the product of natural opulence modified by rigorous exclusion. It is because of some hyperaesthesia of the mind, endowing him with perceptions uncommonly numerous and intense, that his art moves so expertly in the process of selection. This endowment exempts him from the usual hazards of exhausted resources and that artificial emphasis which indicates bankruptcy. It imposes, as perhaps his most relevant hazard, an exuberant fertility. He has evaded this hazard by an ascetic discipline in technique. Although capable without effort of an ornate, involute art, his verses indicate that he will accomplish a prose poetic in substance, sensuous and reticent in character. Apart from their intrinsic merit, they are not without value as early hostages to a creative aesthetic.

Miss Bianco's charming designs perform the function of decoration; they are evocations, in another medium, of what they accompany. This slender volume is an admirable example of bookmaking in which every detail of format contributes expediently to an intended effect.

Aerial Photography

BY AIRPLANE TOWARDS THE NORTH POLE. By WALTER MITTELHOLZER. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1926.

Reviewed by EDWARD P. WARNER

BOTH in title and in name of the author this little work, recently translated from the German, proves somewhat misleading. The title would seem to suggest an account of such an expedition as that on which Captain Wilkins, Lieutenant Byrd, Lieutenant Wade, and others are now bent, but as a matter of fact the story is one of the more prosaic but no less important works of a series of aerial observations and aerial photographic expeditions over Spitzbergen, and Lieutenant Mittelholzer contributes a little less than half of the total amount of text, the remainder coming from other members of the expedition and being largely of a somewhat technical and specialized nature.

Like many another Arctic expedition of the last few years, that for which Lieutenant Mittelholzer was the chief pilot and which took its departure from Hamburg in June, 1923, was terribly hurried in some of its preparations. The haste was a consequence of the original intention of using the facilities of the expedition for a relief party for Amundsen in case he should set out to fly from Alaska to Spitzbergen during that summer and meet with disaster *en route*. Many of the staff had no experience of Arctic travel or of the Arctic climate and no knowledge of the use of skis or snowshoes, and it was as an expert in such matters that Lieutenant Mittelholzer was invited to join the party almost literally at the last minute. In Berlin on other business, he heard of the matter only seven hours before the time when the start would be necessary, and within that brief period had to secure not only his personal equipment, but all the photographic supplies for the expedition as well.

Informed while *en route* to Spitzbergen of Amundsen's abandonment of his plans for a Polar flight, the expedition to which Lieutenant Mittelholzer was attached promptly changed its own program and undertook to devote its energies to surveying the coast and inlet of the still incompletely mapped island to which they were bound.

The photographic work met with admirable success, as proven by the numerous examples given in the book. Unfortunately, it was impossible to do more than make a start, for but three flights were carried out. At the close of the third one an irreparable defect appeared in a magneto, and as no spare ignition apparatus had been brought (in itself a sufficient index of the haste in organization) the expedition terminated then and there, after a total time of only twelve days in Spitzbergen. All of the flying was accomplished within sixty hours' elapsed time.

It is as a story of the development and trial of a method under unusual conditions, rather than for any specifically notable results obtained, that the record of the Spitzbergen expedition of 1923 is important to the average reader. Those who are interested in the technical details of Arctic geography and economics or of aerial survey will profit also by the detailed discussion of the characteristics of Spitzbergen and its history and its people given by Dr. Wegener, and by Professor Miehke's and Captain Boykow's treatments of the problems of the making and interpretation of aerial photographs.



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Literature Abroad

By ERNEST BOYD

IN the days of our relative innocence, before the war, it was customary to link together the names of Luigi Pirandello and Luciano Zúccoli as the most important of the "modern" Italian novelists. Since then Pirandello has become widely known, both at home and abroad, not as a novelist, but as a dramatist; Zúccoli, on the other hand, has not added one cubit to his stature, as measured in terms of international publicity. The publishers of "Le Cose Più Grandi di Lui"—"Things Greater than He" (Holt)—announce this novel as the first of his works to appear in English. Alas, it is sixteen years since the enterprising Heinemann tried to enlist English interest in Zúccoli by means of a translation of "La Compagnia della Leggera," under the title of "Light-fingered Gentry." May Messrs. Henry Holt and Company be more tangibly rewarded for their enterprise!

Zúccoli, who was born in 1868, is the author of some twenty-odd volumes of fiction, novels, and short stories, of which the earlier, such as "I Lussuriosi," show the inevitable influence of d'Annunzio. "L'Amore di Loredana" and "Farfui," however, the two novels that made him famous before the war, showed that he had shaken off that influence, even to the point of omitting from the former all the customary poetic descriptions of Venice, although that city is the setting for a passionate story of free love. "Farfui" is a unique study of adultery.

The latest book of Zúccoli's is "Il Peccato e le Tentazioni," an entertaining series of dissertations on the seven deadly sins, which might well serve as a general description for the many volumes of graceful, diverting, short stories which make the author a rival of Panzini's in this field of light, ironical fiction, dealing chiefly with the weaknesses of women and the stupidities of men. "Things Greater than He," however, is an exception both to the short stories, in general, and the novels, in particular, which preceded it. "Donne e Fanciulle" is the characteristic title of one of Zúccoli's collections of stories, for the psychology of "women and children" has always attracted him, and the autobiographical notes of "L'Occhio del Fanciullo" were a preparation for the study of adolescence which he has now given us. Giorgio Astori, who is crushed by "things greater than he," is a hypersensitive, imaginative boy, searching in vain for sympathy and understanding, for some fixed point in a chaotic world. His dreams clash with the realities of the bourgeois life about him and he dies of grief when his deepest illusion is destroyed.

Luciano Zúccoli has that Latin realism which, if it is not always a blessing, does, at least, save such studies as these from that dreadful "wistfulness" inseparable from most evocations of childhood at the hands of the more sentimental Northern European races. To tell in outline the main incidents of this story would be to suggest at once to our Anglo-Teutonic sentimentality all the mawkishness which is the penalty we pay in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred for the possession of an imaginative quality, vaguely known as "romantic," peculiar to our literatures. "Things Greater than He" is not the work of an Italian J. M. Barrie, for which reason I recommend it to anyone who cared for "L'Aube" of Romain Rolland or "Les Thibault" of Roger Martin du Gard. It is a story of adolescence which intelligent adults can read without loss of self-respect.

So far as I know, we have not heard anything over here yet of the author whom James Joyce and Valery Larbaud, supported by Benjamin Crémieux, have been trying to present to a reluctant Italian public. The writer in question is known by the pseudonym of Italo Svevo; he is a native of Trieste, and a business man of sixty-four years of age. In 1893 he published a novel called "Una Vita," and in 1898 another, entitled "Senilità," which were ignored completely in Italy, but "Una Vita" was praised by the German novelist, Paul Heyse. Twenty-five years later the author published at his own expense a third novel, "La Coscienza di Zeno," which is the only book of his in print to satisfy the curiosity aroused by James Joyce's discovery of a writer whom he regards as a neglected genius. Before coming to that book, I will let M. Crémieux be heard on the subject of its predecessors.

"Written in the middle of the period of Naturalism, 'Una Vita' might, strictly

speaking, be called a Naturalistic novel. It is, in fact, the simple story of a young countryman who leaves his village to become a bank clerk in Trieste, falls in love with his chief's daughter, and ends by committing suicide. But it would be more correct to say that it is a Flaubertian novel. The tragedy of this insignificant little clerk, eager for knowledge, for glory, for love, lies half way between the subject of 'L'Education Sentimentale' and that of 'Madame Bovary.' Svevo has put into his first book a 'Monsieur Bovary.'

"The first great merit of Svevo is precisely that of creating a type which is not without a certain affinity to Charlie Chaplin. The Trieste Charlie whom Svevo introduces under the name of Alfonso or Zeno, has the same inexhaustible good will, the same aspiration after wisdom and heroism as the Charlie of the films, and, like him, he displays endless ingenuity and intelligence in overcoming the smallest obstacles, and with the same naïveté he fails in everything he undertakes. How Alfonso in 'Una Vita' exerts himself to impress the daughter of Maller, the banker, to arouse her sympathy, and how calmly destiny mocks him, and reduces him to despair! The hero of 'Senilità,' a rich bachelor, who lives with his sister and dreams of love, is similarly buffeted by the irony of life. A young adventuress uses him as a play-

thing, but not as a play-fellow."

In both these novels, obviously, the subject is slight and commonplace, in accordance with the old Naturalistic formula. What rejoices MM. Larbaud, Crémieux, and Joyce is that in each case the protagonists "analyze their successive states of mind with a precision and a wealth of detail previously unknown in Italian fiction. . . . The analysis plunges into life and is merged in it. We do not see the spectacle of the hero's life as he sees it, but in connection with the slightest actions we are shown his entire psychological existence." It is, however, in "La Coscienza di Zeno," according to Benjamin Crémieux, that "Svevo achieves perfection as an analyst and a humorist. In this work Svevo sometimes reminds one of Proust in the inexhaustible density of his analysis."

With Proust the book assuredly has one obvious point in common: it consists of over five hundred closely printed pages, in which analysis takes the place of action and conversation. It is the autobiography of a wealthy hypochondriac, who writes the story of his own life at the request of a doctor, who is trying to cure him by psychoanalysis. Thus a whole chapter is given over to an account of Zeno's attempts to stop smoking cigarettes. In another, Zeno deceives his wife, without prejudice to his affection for her, and is thereby inspired to love her. There is even a chapter of analysis of psycho-analysis. Svevo is undoubtedly one of the Proustian elect, and the Italians are exhorted to admire him and to congratulate themselves on "the first analytical

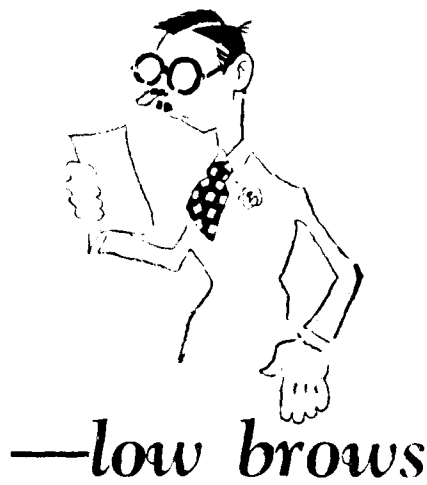
novelist in modern Italy." As Valery Larbaud said in writing of James Joyce's obscure Dublin types, so Benjamin Crémieux says of Svevo's obscure citizens of Trieste, that "they fit into European literature" as naturally as Hardy's Wessex peasants and "Dostoevsky's Muscovites."

In "La Fiera Letteraria" there is a comment upon M. Crémieux and his friends which interests me because it follows exactly the line of Irish criticism when it was announced in the same quarter that James Joyce had put Ireland on the literary map of Europe. It is also a comment of general application when these discoveries are exaggerated into a downright distortion of perspective in literary history.

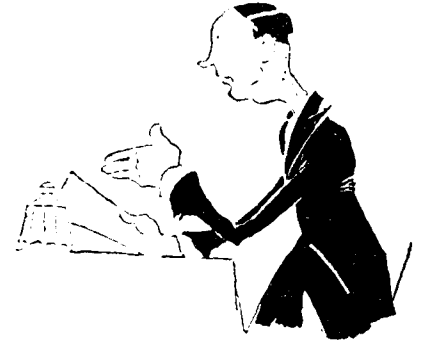
"We do not envy him the discovery of which he and his distinguished friends boast. . . . In the first place, because we do not contest anybody's right to make similar literary discoveries, which at best can be entered in the ledger by way of compensation for the many, long, and tenacious silences which foreigners maintain on the subject of whole continents, and islands, great and small, long since discovered in our literature by ourselves or others. No Italian reader or critic could have discovered in Italo Svevo the great merits and that extraordinary originality which Crémieux and his friends recognized from afar. For us the definition of 'analyst' has neither the significance nor the importance which it may possibly have in France, where criticism had to invent it to fit Marcel Proust, his disciples and imitators."

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