ADV. 24-8-29

CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

UNIVERSITY EXPEDITION RETURNS

MUCH VALUABLE DATA SECURED

The University expedition which left for Alice Springs on August 4, returned to Adelaide by the East-West express on Friday evening.

The members of the party were Professors J. B. Cleland (Professor of Pathology at the University of Adelaide), T. Harvey Johnston (Professor of Zoology), Drs. E. Harold Davies (Director of the Elder Conservatorium), T. D. Campbell (organiser of the expedition and secretary of the Board of Anthropological Research), and H. Kenneth Fry, and Messrs. B. G. Maegraith (of St. Mark's College), H. M. Hale (curator of the Adelaide Museum), and Norman B. Tindale (ethnologist). The scope of investigation among the natives included blood-grouping, physical anthropometry, and descriptions, physiological and psychological estimations, aboriginal songs and musical susceptibilities, general pathology, ethnological, and photographic records. The South Australian Museum members also devoted time to observations upon the fauna and flora.

Nearly a fortnight was spent at Hermannsburg Mission Station, where between 300 and 400 natives are now congregated. Great courtesy was shown, and every facility given to the party by Pastor Albrecht and Mr. H. A. Heinrich, whose wide experience of native language and life was of the utmost assistance. In all branches of investigation a great mass of scientific information has been secured by the expedition, and it will require a considerable amount of further work to analyse and finally estimate the value of the observations. Almost 100 natives were examined, and of these an appreciable number were subjected to the comprehensive survey which the various aspects of research produced. Blood-grouping tests were made on 70 natives, the results corresponding exactly with those previously obtained in other parts of Southern Australia. The natives were found all to belong to the two blood groups which were dominant in the make-up of the white race. Physical anthropometry and descriptive observations entailed about 60 measurements and other records on the body features of each individual; and as almost 100 natives were subjected to such detailed examinations, this branch of the research alone involved some thousands of observations.

Native Intelligence

About 40 natives were given various tests in order to attempt an estimation of intelligence. These tests were necessarily of a practical nature. An unexpected degree of forethought and concentration was discovered in a number of cases, though some could not be induced into forming the simplest mental judgment. Some measurements of visual acuity by standard methods gave evidence of an extraordinary keenness of vision, surpassing from seven to ten times the normally accepted standard. In control experiments by a new method this figure was reduced to the more reasonable ratio of three to four times the normal standard. Detailed accounts were also secured of the various pathological conditions met with, and many features of medical interest were noted by members of the expedition.

Music Among the Aborigines

Phonographic records were made of over 50 different songs on a great variety of subjects. These included for the first time a number of Ilputja, or love songs, of a primitive character. Many tests were made of the musical susceptibilities of the natives, and it was found that, with very few exceptions, they made an instant response to varying degrees of pitch. In some cases there was shown a degree of aural discernment corresponding to the remarkable evidence of visual acuity. In addition to the songs records were taken of a number of standard words spoken by natives in Arunta and Luritya, together with their English equivalents. These permanent records of actual speech will probably be extended on future expeditions, and should prove a valuable source of information.

Native Totems and Symbols

A detailed genealogical record was made of each individual examined; it having been found that the correlation of personal genealogy with physical characteristics raised many points of interest. Two-view photographic records were also made on each individual, so that another means of comparison has been made available. A great deal of general ethnological data was obtained. For this branch of investigation a serie sof over 100 Tjuringas or native symbols of stone, were taken from the Museum to Hermannsburg, and interesting confirmatory data were obtained by exhibiting these to old Arunta and Luritya men. In most cases the information obtained agreed in all essentiols with that collected with the specimens, many of which were obtained by Winnecke, Maurice, Gillen, and others over 30 years ago. A series of motion pictures was taken, illustrating phases of ceremonial and domestic life. This method of record was especially valuable in studying native string games (usually called "cat's cradles"). A remarkable series of games was recorded, and over 50 different string figures were preserved for further study. During the visit one member made an interesting evening study by securing star maps of the heavens visible at the time. Native names for the stars were given, and many legends concerning the various constellations from the aboriginals' viewpoint.

Stock Suffer as Result of Drought

The party enjoyed the unique distinction of travelling on the first through train to Alice Springs, the arrival of which was a red-letter day in the history of Central Australia. It was regretted that the prolonged drought, which has lasted through the far north for five years, has robbed the country of a great deal of that scenic attraction which it possesses under more normal conditions. Members of the expedition expressed the opinion, however, that this emphasised the splendid courage and faith of the inlanders who still endured under such discouragement and loss. At Hermannsburg practically nothing remained of the 3,000 head of cattle which the station carried in more prosperous times, and, with the exception of a few favored districts, east and north of the McDonnell Ranges, the same woe-Nevertheless, many beauty spots were to be seen, and the ranges were full of striking views. West and south of Hermannsburg there were the wonderful Palm Valley and Glen Helen, which would be hard to equal in any part of the world. Members stated that the perennial problem of Central Australia was that of the natives, and, even more, that of the half-castes. Obviously public conscience had never been sufficiently aroused on that most pressing question, but sooner or later it must be faced and solved.

The success of the expedition was largely due to the careful organisation of Dr. T. D. Campbell, who has already been responsible for several other such research enterprises during the last three years.

ADV. 26-8-29

ABORIGINAL MUSIC

DR. HAROLD DAVIES'S RESEARCHES

Why the Native Sings

Dr. Harold Davies, Director of the Elder Conservatorium, referring on Saturday to the researches into aboriginal music during the visit from which he returned on Friday, said that there were two fascinating interests in that study. First came the psychological. Here was a universal practice. Singing was associated with every phase of the blackfellow's life—ceremonial, "playabout" corroboree, or even walking out bush. The question arose as to why the primitive man sang, and why he had been singing for many thousands of years. He sang for the same reason that he spoke. Any kind of utterance along either line was due to a desire to communicate feeling or thought. In later stages those lines of communication became specialised. Language tended more to convey idea, and music to express feeling. In their elementary aspects the trend of both as media for self-expression must be of vital interest to the scientist.

Prime Instinct, Based on Human Need

From the musical evolutionist's point of view, there was a restricted but compelling attraction in the study of the stone age man's song. As an utter believer in the greatness of music, he was strengthened in the conviction that it was a prime instinct, based upon a general human need. In realising song to be a natural habit, as universal as it was ancient, we inevitably reached the conclusion that music was one of the most real of life's experiences. It might suffer infinite perversions, even the dehumanising and degrading influences of "jazz;" it might be sophisticated in all those strange ways that passing tastes could crave; but the study of primitive song, and the later, more highly developed folk-song, brought us down to bedrock.

Study of Phonograph Records

During the various expeditions he had been associated with in the last three years, Dr. Davies remarked, he had collected nearly 100 phonograph records. Their closer study revealed much of vital importance to musicians—not in the superficial hearing of the songs, so much as in their rhythmic and melodic content. The outstanding discovery was that the Australian blackfellow had evolved for himself the main structure of our own scale systems. There was no possible doubt of his sense of perfect octave, fifths, fourths, as well as major and minor thirds. Several records in his possession showed a true pentatonic scale. None of these pitch relations had been derived as Pythagoras derived them, mathematically, and with the aid of a measured string. They were intuitive. That was the wonder of it, and, incidentally, the sheer logic of the tonal system on which our own music rested. We must not forget that the Australian aboriginal had no musical instrument, except the rude horn, which he made out of a hollow tree bough, and blew merely to make a joyful noise. This, having only one sound, was useless for determining pitch relations.

Aborigine Naturally Musical

Dr. Davies said that he had reached the conclusion that the blackfellow was naturally musical. His language alone would prove this. It was awash with lovely vocal sounds, and devoid of unmusical elements such as sibilant "s" and "z." In many tests of musical susceptibility, he had found an extraordinary acuteness of perception. If he were young enough, he added, nothing would give him greater pleasure than to take and train an aboriginal choir. They could be made to do anything that was musically instructive and beautiful. Fancy a chorus of stone age men and women! It might even help to solve the aboriginal problem. We needed to develop a conscience as well as a sympathy for our poor, misused blackfellows.

REG. 26-8-29

LAKE EYRE DRY FOR YEARS

"Flat As Billiard Table," Says Mr. Madigan

AIR SURVEY RETURNS

THAT Lake Eyre, Central Australia, is not only completely dry but bears unmistakable evidence of not having contained water for many years was one of the chief discoveries made by the Central Australian Aerial Survey Party which returned to Adelaide on Saturday.

The party flew in two Wapiti planes, and was led by Mr. C. T. Madigan, lecturer in geology of Adelaide University, and consisted of Flying-Officers A. G. Gerrand and F. J. B. Wright, Sgt. Stewart (mechanic), and Aircraftsmen Bain (wireless operator) and Thomas (photographer).

Mr. Madigan

They were met at Parafield by Dr. Charles Fenner, President of the Royal Society, and Mr. F. L. Parker, of the Royal Geological Society, who congratulated them on the success of the expedition.

The flight had three main objectives, said Mr. Madigan. They were an aerial reconnaissance of the country between the Oodnadatta-Alice Springs railway and the Queensland border, an examination of the lakes of Northern South Australia, particularly Lake Eyre, and a geological investigation in the MacDonnell Ranges.

NO SIGNS OF WATER

An area of more than 3,000 square miles of very bad country was flown over and examined for the first time. Nobody had ever seen it before, although prospectors had tried to enter it but had been turned back by its waterless condition. Even from the air, it was desolate and forbidding.

Three trips revealed nothing but interminable rows of small sandhills running parallel. Physiographically, however, the area was very interesting, despite its monotonous uniformity.

No signs of water were visible anywhere, and the possibilities of stockraising were entirely negative.

LAKE MYTHS EXPLODED

Four hours were spent flying over Lake Eyre, which was photographed in detail. Its bottom, the whole of which was bone-dry, was as flat as the top of a billiard table.

"There have been many myths concerning this lake," said Mr. Madigan, "and stories have been told about islands in its centre.

Continued

But I believe that it is many years since it last contained water, in spite of a report made by Mr. Halligan, the Tasmanian Government Geologist, after a flight over it in 1922, that it was then full and that in places the water was 40 feet deep. This, I am sure, was a mistake.

"Another exploded belief about Lake Eyre is that in it there were watercourses. We made tests for the presence of these by dropping flanged iron spears with long streamers attached, but were unable to find any signs of the watercourses.

"It was a surprise to find Lake Eyre so completely dry, as we had expected it to be at least half full."

Many excellent photographs, illustrating contours and structures of the MacDonnell Ranges were obtained.

A detailed account of the expedition's flight, and the conclusions drawn from the data obtained, will be published shortly. Before its appearance, however, Mr. Madigan will lecture at the University on the trip.

REG. 27-8-29

OUR EXAMINATION SYSTEM

For "Dons And Donlettes"

NOW that school examinations are drawing near once more, both parents and teachers are concerning themselves with the vexed question of examinations. The old-fashioned idea of "payment by results" is gone for ever, and educationists everywhere are trying to evolve a fairer system of testing knowledge.

"It is not given to every child to be successful in academic studies, but this is no reason why his abilities in other directions should lie dormant," said Mr. W. J. Adey last week. "Unfortunately, some people still confine any form of secondary education to those children who are naturally adapted for the examination type of education, and leave the great mass undeveloped."

After pulling the present system of examinations to pieces, Sir Michael Sadler, Master of University College, Oxford, in a recent address, built it up again with a practical suggestion that is causing widespread interest among teachers.

"I cannot divine what the educational movement of our age portends," he said. "To what deep change in human intercourse it points we cannot predict. But we are thankful to have felt its power. And we now see stealing across its bright surface the great cold shadow of examinations.

"The effects of examinations on education as an art are devastating. Suppose we had trained Mozart, Beethoven, or Shelley by an examination system, would they have been any better for the process? Would they have been the favourites of examining boards?

Many headmistresses point out that a girl who is clever at some practical or artistic work, and will probably make a good citizen, a capable wife, and a diligent mother, is alleged to be incapable of doing a pass paper in elementary mathematics, or of learning a foreign language.

Don's Test Not the Best

"There is something real behind the figure of the 'practical girl or boy for whom a don's test, designed for dons and donlettes, is not the best test," said Sir Michael.

"Now that we are trying to sweep all English children into the net of secondary education, it has become necessary to protect the interests of both sorts. The time is near when every little child who comes into the world alive will, if it grows up, pass under the harrow of examinations. At present the harrow is blunt. But the spikes will get sharper."

Sir Michael suggested that one certificate should be demanded from headmistresses, but with different avenues leading up to it.

"These avenues," he explained, "should be boldly incongruous because the two types of mind for which they are designed are dissimilar. But the different avenues should converge on one certificate, and boys as well as girls should be allowed to follow them."

"I propose," he concluded, "that a commissioner be appointed to enquire into the working of the examination system, the technique of question setting and marking, and the psychological effects of examinations on the candidates. The cost would be about £18,000 a year. The cost at present of the examination system in England is at least £1,500,000 per annum.

Sir Michael's proposals are looked on as a big step towards abolishing what is defective in the examination system, and should go far to do away with what Professor Cyril Burt described as "Not so much the round peg in the square hole, as the round peg in a round hole too big for it."—E. A.