

condition and its aim: the condition, an audience of weary working-men, with little time to give, and who reject all instruction which is not easily grasped and enlivened by amusing spectacles: the aim, to communicate entertaining knowledge in a utilitarian spirit, to open a glimpse of intellectual enjoyment such as may at the same time bear practically on the comfort and happiness of daily life. In the experience necessary for such a taste Mr. Twining probably stands alone, and in reviewing the forms his efforts have taken we may fairly bow to the judgment which shaped them.

But the main objection to this curious and novel system will occur to everyone. Is it possible that any man uttering the knowledge and the thoughts of others on a subject with which he is quite unfamiliar can import into his task the enthusiasm necessary to kindle and inform an audience? A purchased sermon read from a pulpit never yet edified anyone; will it be more inspiring to receive scientific truth from the lips of a man who articulates by rote instead of teaching from that lofty standpoint of superior knowledge which converts hearers into disciples? Mr. Twining speaks gratefully of the admirable readers he has been fortunate enough to find in London. They were probably not mere elocutionists, but possessed of dramatic minds, and able to generate at will enthusiasm in a noble though unfamiliar subject, and their like will not be met with every day. Mr. Twining shows his uneasiness on this point by his strong injunctions to careful practice on the part both of reader and demonstrator, and whoever attempts to carry out the scheme will have to lay special stress on this. Nor can we omit to mention the subject of expense. The apparatus necessary only for the six lectures before us costs, exclusive of plans and diagrams, from 44*l.* to 48*l.* 10*s.* A club, society, or institute, including dexterous workmen amongst its members, could probably obtain all that is wanted at half this price, but in many places the difficulty of meeting the expense might turn the scale against the introduction of the lectures.

These difficulties have, no doubt, been well considered by the author of the scheme, and are thought by him to be not insurmountable. We most sincerely hope that it may be found so. His enterprise will be watched with no slight interest by all who feel that the spread of scientific knowledge among the operative classes is a pressing national necessity, and that one who devotes to it, as Mr. Twining has done, experience, thought, and toil, deserves the gratitude and the help of his countrymen.

W. T.

OUR BOOK SHELF

Life with the Hamran Arabs. An account of a Sporting Tour of some Officers of the Guards in the Soudan during the winter of 1874-5. By Arthur R. Myers, Surgeon, Coldstream Guards. With Photographs. (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1876.)

THE sporting tour of which Mr. Myers gives the narrative in this volume was made at the same time as that described by the Earl of Mayo in the work which we recently noticed. Indeed the two parties started together, and their work lay in regions not far distant from each other. Mr. Myers and his party were much more fortunate than the Earl's party. They did not meet with so many hindrances, and were much more fortunate in the number

and variety of animals that came in the way of their rifles. The region to which Mr. Myers's work refers is on the borders of Abyssinia and Egypt, and has been already made familiar to English readers by Sir Samuel Baker in his "Nile Tributaries." Mr. Myers simply pretends to tell of his sporting adventures, and therefore we have no reason to complain if he adds little to our knowledge of the country of the Hamran Arabs. He writes in an unpretentious style, and his work will be found interesting by the general reader, and specially so by those who love sport. It contains photographs of some of the trophies brought home, arranged by Ward and Co.; they give a good idea of the variety of animal life to be met with in this part of the Soudan.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his correspondents. Neither can he undertake to return, or to correspond with the writers of, rejected manuscripts. No notice is taken of anonymous communications.]

The Decrease of the Polynesians¹

I BELIEVE there are some errors popularly received respecting the rapidity with which the inhabitants of Polynesia, as a whole, are disappearing before an advancing civilisation. I wish to make a few statements on this subject in connection with a review of Miss Bird's book on "The Hawaiian Archipelago," which appeared in NATURE, vol. xi. p. 322.

The primary source of error is the excessively high estimates as to the population of different islands in Polynesia made by early visitors and residents. In most of the islands the people live chiefly, or entirely on the coasts; whereas, in the estimates, allowance is made for a proportionate population in the interior.

Another error, I believe, is the supposition that the decrease of the people is entirely (or almost entirely) owing to their contact with foreigners. From personal knowledge of Polynesia I feel convinced that the people were rapidly decreasing before their intercourse with civilised races commenced.

It is also a mistake to suppose that decrease is by any means universal at the present time. While in some islands the decrease of the natives has been accelerated since they have come into contact with modern civilisation and its attendant evils, in other islands the previous decrease has been greatly retarded, or even changed into an increase, by the beneficial influences of a Christian civilisation. This change has been brought about by such causes as the following:—The partial or complete cessation of wars; the discontinuance of human sacrifices (in some islands the cessation of cannibalism may be added); the cessation of infanticide; the greater respect paid to women, which leads to their release from some of the hard work which, in heathen times (in some portions of the Pacific) fell almost entirely to their share, and the consequent increase of living and healthy progeny; the increased care taken of infants and aged people, and the general progress of industry resulting from more settled habits, which leads to a more regular supply of food.

As an example, in proof of the correctness of my statements I will cite the Samoan Islands. In the "Encyclopædia Britannica" (eighth edition) we read:—"The population of Samoa

¹ I wrote this paper some months ago, intending to send it for publication in NATURE, but I afterwards determined on withholding it for the present, hoping at some future time to discuss in a more systematic and thorough manner this subject, together with some other questions bearing on the ethnology and anthropology of Polynesia. I am now, however, induced, by the reference in Prof. Rolleston's address before the British Association at Bristol, to publish it as it was first written, hoping it may prove a small contribution towards a correct understanding of this subject.

I take this opportunity to thank Dr. Rolleston for putting in its true light the relation which the work of missionaries bears to the decrease of Aboriginal populations. It is high time that the ignorance, prejudice, and narrowness manifested by many literary and scientific men gave place to a broad, common-sense, and enlightened view of the matter. Missionaries are sometimes represented as if they were the actual destroyers of the weaker races; a view somewhat smartly set forth in one of Mr. Bernard Quaritch's scientific book catalogues (No. 294, Jan. 1875) in the following words:—"The missionary is a grand and striking figure in the history of the world. Robed in black, and bearing the Word of Life, he moves among the weaker races of mankind; around his path they sicken and perish, and countless nations of men are swept away." In Polynesia, the agents of the London Missionary Society, at least, usually dress in white, and not in black, and I imagine most sensible missionaries who live in the tropics, do as we do in this respect. But whether we wear the ominous black, or adopt the more hopeful (or comfortable) white, I fancy Mr. Quaritch is guilty of what the logicians call an *ignoratio elenchii*.

Samoa, Dec. 30, 1875

S. J. W.