

ditions of city or village life. The matter must rest here until further statistics are available.

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THE RELATION OF THE METER AND THE YARD

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: It is a matter of astonishment to me that so many men, authors of scientific books, are ignorant of the fact that the relation between the meter and the yard is in the United States fixed by law, viz., 1 meter = 39.37 inches. In England the established relation is 1 meter = 39.370113 inches. As examples, see "Fortie's Electrical Engineers' Handbook," 5th Ed., 1908, p. 1500, and "Eggleston's Tables of Weights and Measures," 4th Ed., 1900, p. viii, in both of which the archaic, inherited necessary relation, 1 meter = 39.37079 inches is adopted. In trade catalogues an error of this sort is not so serious and is occasionally made; but in a scientific publication it is unpardonable.

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SCIENTIFIC BOOKS

Primitive Secret Societies. A Study in Early Politics and Religion. By HUTTON WEBSTER, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology and Anthropology in the University of Nebraska. New York, The Macmillan Co. 1908. Pp. xiii + 227.

This book, which has served in its original form as a thesis for the doctorate in political science at Harvard University, treats, in eleven chapters, of the men's house, the puberty institution, the secret rites, the training of the novice, the power of the elders, development of tribal societies, functions of tribal societies, decline of tribal societies, the clan ceremonies, magical fraternities, diffusion of initiation ceremonies. The author's studies were concluded before he became acquainted with the late Dr. Heinrich Schurtz's "Altersklassen und Männerbünde" (Berlin, 1902), of which, however, he was able to make some use in the present monograph. The book of Schurtz, rather *tendenziös* in places and somewhat marred by a philological appendix, but, nevertheless, an interesting and valuable

summary of facts, was preceded by Boas's (1895-7) investigations of the social organization and secret societies of the Indian tribes of the North Pacific coast (particularly the Kwakiutl), which still remain the best source of information for that region, as yet not adequately used by any authority. For the Plains tribes we have recent investigations by Wissler, Dorsey, Fletcher, Kroeber, and for the Pueblos Indians, those of Fewkes, etc. The material in Dr. Webster's book, as is the case with all others dealing generally with the topic of secret societies and ceremonies, is preponderatingly Australasian, Indonesian and African, though at pages 15-19 ("men's house"), 131-134 (age-societies), 147-159 (clan-ceremonies) and 176-190 (magical fraternities), the aborigines of the new world receive particular attention.

The author begins with the "men's house," described as follows:

The men's house is usually the largest building in a tribal settlement. It belongs in common to the villagers; it serves as council-chamber and town hall, as a guest-house for strangers, and as the sleeping resort of the men. Frequently seats in the house are assigned to elders and other leading individuals according to their dignity and importance. Here the more precious belongings of the community, such as trophies taken in war or in the chase, and religious emblems of various sorts, are preserved. Within its precincts, women and children, and men not fully initiated members of the tribe, seldom or never enter. When marriage and exclusive possession of a woman do not follow immediately upon initiation into the tribe, the institution of the men's house becomes an effective restraint upon the sexual proclivities of the unmarried youth. It then serves as a club-house for the bachelors, whose residence within it may be regarded as a perpetuation of that formal seclusion of the lads from women, which it is the purpose of the initiation ceremonies in the first place to accomplish. Such communal living on the part of the young men is a visible token of their separation from the narrow circle of the family, and of their introduction to the duties and responsibilities of tribal life. The existence of such an institution emphasizes the fact that a settled family life with a private abode is the privilege of the older men, who alone have marital rights over the women of the tribe. For promiscuity,

either before or after marriage, is the exception among primitive peoples, who attempt not only to regulate by complicated and rigorous marriage systems the sexual desires of those who are competent to marry, but actually to prevent any intercourse at all of those who are not fully initiated members of the community (p. 1).

As men's houses, or as survivals thereof are cited the *eramo* of New Guinea, the Dyak *pangah*, the Formosan *palangkan*, the Dravidian (Oraon) *dhumkuria*, the Naga *morang*, the Polynesian *marae*, the Bechuana *khotla*, the Unyamwezi *iwanza*, the Bororó (Brazil) *baito*, the Pueblo *kiva*, the Hupa *taikyuw*, the Eskimo *kashim*, etc., but the unitary origin and service of all these is by no means demonstrated. According to Dr. Webster, "the presence in a primitive community of the men's house in any one of its numerous forms points strongly to the existence, now, or in the past, of secret initiation ceremonies." With some tribes the men's house "is used as the center of the puberty initiation ceremonies," and, "with the development of secret societies, replacing the earlier tribal puberty institutions, the men's house frequently becomes the seat of these organizations and forms the secret 'lodge.'" The men's house thus "serves a general purpose as the center of the civil, religious and social life of the tribe, and a special purpose as the abode of unmarried males." The first secret society is thus a "clan," which excludes women and boys. Next comes, apparently, the "puberty institution" with other subdivisions based on age and the recognition of its value to the community. Here the elders are in control and secret rites for the initiation of young men, their subjection to ordeals, and instruction in tribal wisdom and obedience (often in long periods of seclusion) appear to be "the characteristically social feature of primitive life," and "these mysteries, as the most conservative of primitive customs, provide an effective means of social control." These initiation ceremonies are tribal and communal machinery organized and conducted by the elders which can no longer operate when obedience to the tribes is replaced by obedience to the chief, and

"initiation ceremonies, such as have been studied, retain their democratic and tribal aspects only in societies which have not yet emerged from that primitive stage in which all social control is in the hands of the tribal elders" (p. 75). And, "with increasing social progress, the powers of control are gradually shifted from the elders to the chiefs, and tribal societies charged with important political and judicial functions arise on the basis of the original puberty organizations." The new order of things brings with it limited membership, "degrees," "lodges," elaborate paraphernalia of mystery, etc. Secret societies may now "represent the most primitive movement towards the establishment of law and order," or may "embody the inner religious life of the tribe" and gather strength "from the pretended association of their members with the spirits and ghosts of the dead." Tribal secret societies arising through "a process of gradual shrinkage of the original puberty institution, in which, after initiation, all men of the tribe are members," often survive as "organizations of priests and shamans, in whose charge are the various dramatic and magical rites of the tribe" (p. 135). In connection with his argument at this point Professor Webster holds that "among the northwest tribes (of American Indians) the clan organization is in decay and secret fraternities in initial stages of development," and "among the tribes of the southwest the totemic clans have broken down to be replaced by numerous and well-developed magical fraternities," both statements open to serious objections, as to fact and also as to theory. In the rites of these magical fraternities too many "survivals of primitive puberty rites" are seen by the author; and the diffusion of such rites is perhaps not so extensive as he believes. The list of tribes possessing no puberty rites and, consequently, none of the social paraphernalia held to be developed from them would be of interest here. It is quite evident that even in primitive society there is something more than sex. It would be worth while knowing, as a contrast to the "men's house," how widespread and how "primitive," *e. g.*, is the

maloca, a characteristic house of the Indians of northwestern Brazil, recently described by Dr. Koch-Grünberg.¹ The *maloca's* inhabitants are mostly one family, often an old couple with their grown-up sons and their families, etc. They number from 10 to 100 individuals, all under the same roof, and the author testifies to the good-behavior and morality of them all. Owing to the practise of extra-tribal marriage it frequently happens that women speaking absolutely distinct languages live in the same *maloca*. In it also are celebrated some of the great dance-festivals. The sick are cared for within its walls and the dead interred beneath the floor. The *maloca* is thus as far removed from the "men's house," as can well be imagined, and it exists among very primitive folk. This serves to illustrate the relativity of some of the ideas and institutions involved in the discussion of "primitive politics and religion." The esoteric element, though often notable and significant, has probably been overestimated in the history of human evolution.

In the opinion of the reviewer, the author will add to the value of his interesting book if, in a second edition, he makes an index and presents the bibliography in alphabetical order at the close and not as now in rather distracting though instructive footnotes.

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Unsere Ahnenreihe. (Progonotaxis hominis.) Kritische Studien über phyletische Anthropologie. By ERNST HAECKEL. Jena, Gustav Fischer. 1908.

This quarto memoir of fifty-seven pages is, as its title-page indicates, a Festschrift in honor of the 350th anniversary of the Thuringian University at Jena, the celebration of which was made the occasion for the transference to the university of the "Phyletic Museum" founded by Professor Haeckel, "das erste Museum für Entwicklungslehre." The occasion was naturally propitious for a

¹ "Das Haus bei den Indianern Nordwestbrasilien," *Archiv für Anthropologie*, 1908, N. F., VII., 37-50.

consideration of that most interesting of all phyletic problems, the descent of man, and in the memoir before us Professor Haeckel has traced the various steps, as he conceives them, through which the line of ascent has passed from the moners to man. What is presented is, however, almost entirely a repetition of the material to be found in chapters XIX.-XXIII. of the "Evolution of Man," a work that has already been noticed in these columns,¹ and it is not until toward the close of the memoir that any new contribution to the question is to be found. Here, after some notice of *Pithecanthropus* as the "missing link" and a paragraph devoted to *Homo primigenius*, under which term are included the Neander, Spy and Krapina men, one finds a description of the most striking peculiarities of a skull of an Australian aborigine from Queensland, which Professor Haeckel regards as "the most remarkable human skull of the many thousand with which anthropology has concerned itself." He considers it as representing a reversion to the ancestral *Homo primigenius*, and for this reason creates for its original possessor the species *Homo palinander* (= *Homo primigenius recens! -atavus?*).

Five plates, giving views of the norma frontalis, occipitalis, verticalis, basalis and lateralis of this skull, together with those of *Homo sapiens (germanus)*, *Anthropithecus niger*, *Hylobates mulleri* and *Cynocephalus mormon*, complete the memoir and are beautiful examples of photographic reproduction. A sixth plate, the series of mammalian embryos familiar to all readers of Haeckel's works, hardly requires comment.

It may be remarked, however, that the author's predilection for the coinage of new terms in order to give definiteness to his concepts, finds expression in the memoir, but hardly with as happy results as usual. For the terms *Homo neander*, *H. spyander* and *H. krapinander*, consistent as they are orthographically, are certainly most inconsistent etymologically.

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¹ SCIENCE, N. S., Vol. XXII., 1905.