

SOME MYSTERIES OF THE PACIFIC.



THE Caroline Islands, which are now recognised as belonging to Spain, though the Germans tried to annex them a few years ago, form one of the largest archipelagoes of the Pacific, covering a sea area of more than two thousand miles, and comprising over five hundred separate fragments of land. Some of these islets are mere rocks, many are uninhabited, and a few are very populous. Excepting those at the eastern end of the chain, and the large island of Jap at the western end, they have been rarely, some of them never, visited by white men, unless in the dubious form of "beach-combers." With the Mariannes, the Gilbert, and the Marshall Islands, the Carolines make up that section of the Pacific which is known to geographers as Micronesia.

The problem which we have to present to our readers concerning these islands, however, refers neither to the present nor to the future, but to the dim and distant past. And it is one which has as yet received scant attention from either geographers or ethnologists. It concerns, also, two of the groups only, for it is only on the islands of Kusaie and Ascension that the evidences of it have been observed, although as so many of these five hundred islands are absolutely unknown, it is hard to believe that other evidences do not exist in some of them.

Kusaie, sometimes called Strong Island, is about fifty miles in circumference; is of basaltic formation; has a large extent of high ground, and boasts of two excellent harbours. The people are reputedly industrious and peaceable—for South Sea Islanders—and they have a king of their own. They belong, to all appearance, to the Polynesian race; but travellers have declared that they seem capable of a higher civilisation than the average Polynesian. It is remarkable that the chiefs communicate by signs and speech not understood by the common people.

This island is covered by massive ruins of very ancient date. Early voyagers used to suppose that these were the work of the old Spanish buccaneers; but this has been shown to be impossible, apart from the signs of much greater age. The ruins bear, in many cases, the outlines of fortifications. They are composed of stones, measuring eight and ten feet in length, squared upon six sides. These stones are of a different geological character from any other stone found on the island. Therefore, they must have been imported, and some of the blocks are even double the

size above stated. Stones of such dimensions were beyond the powers of the Spanish buccaneers, either to convey by their vessels, or to erect into buildings, with the manual labour they possessed. The transporting and erecting of these massive blocks required mechanical appliances of extraordinary strength and ingenuity, and such appliances the Spaniards had not. The general plan of the buildings which can still be traced reveals a design of great intelligence.

Ascension Island, now usually called Ponape, is larger than Kusaie, and is not so hilly, although geologically of the same formation. It has a considerable area of level ground reputed the most fertile in the



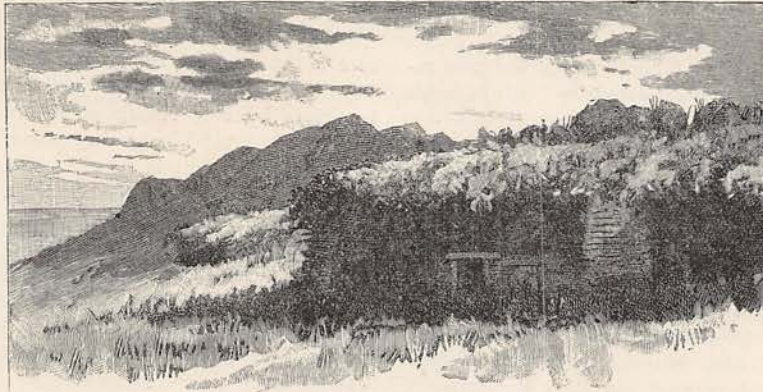
COLOSSAL FIGURES FROM EASTER ISLAND, AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

whole group, and it has numerous fine streams, as well as three good harbours. The inhabitants cluster round the shores, having a superstitious dread of the interior, and they are said to number about seven thousand. Unlike Kusaie, instead of being under one king, the people are divided under the rule of five independent chiefs.

On this island exist similar ruins to those on Kusaie, but much larger. On the shore of one creek, for

instance, there still remains a massive wall, three hundred feet long and thirty-five feet high. It is built of huge basaltic blocks in the form of prisms, and has a gateway opening on to the creek, supported on enormous basaltic columns. Passing through this gateway, a large court is reached, enclosed by walls thirty feet in height; and all round the inner wall of this court there is a raised terrace, eight feet high and

island there are to be found the ruins of nearly a hundred stone houses, built in regular lines and facing the sea. The walls of these houses are five feet thick and over five feet high, built of layers of flat stones and lined inside with flat slabs. Internally the houses measure about forty feet long by thirteen feet wide, and they are roofed over with slabs overlapping like tiles. The inside walls are painted in three colours



ANCIENT STONE BUILDING ON EASTER ISLAND, IN WHICH ONE OF THE COLOSSAL FIGURES WAS FOUND.

twelve feet wide. In shape the court is square, and has been evidently subdivided into three parts by low walls running north and south. In the centre of each of these divisions there is a closed chamber fourteen feet square, built of basaltic columns and roofed over. The outer walls are twenty feet thick at the base and eight feet at the top, and some of the stones used in its composition are twenty-five feet in length and eight feet in circumference.

All the concentrated intelligence of all the Caroline Islanders of to-day could not devise a method for moving and raising such enormous masses; and all the machinery at the command of the early Spanish navigators could not have managed one of them.

So much for the Carolines; and now, if we traverse some few thousand miles of ocean to the very eastern outskirts of Polynesia, we shall find something even more mysterious. It is the little island called Easter Island, which is barely ten miles long by four miles broad; which has no trees, no running water, and very little about it to attract settlers. It is of volcanic origin, and one of the extinct craters is over a thousand feet high.

Yet this physically uninteresting island, peopled by Polynesians of the fair type, such as are found in the Society Islands, is the greatest mystery of the Pacific. It is covered with remains of some prehistoric people of whom every record but that preserved in stone seems to have vanished.

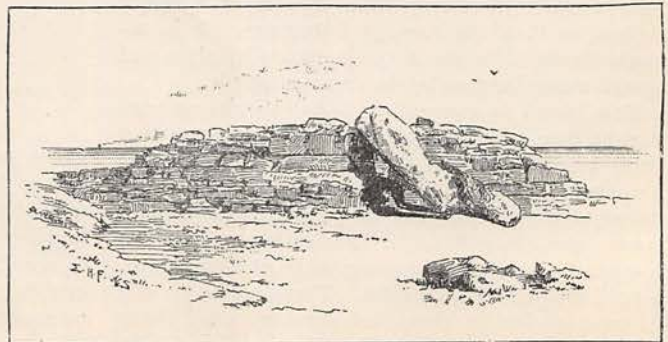
At the south-west end of this little

—red, black, and white—with figures of birds and mystic beasts and faces, and geometrical figures. In one of these houses was found a curious stone statue, eight feet high, and weighing about four tons, which is now in the British Museum.

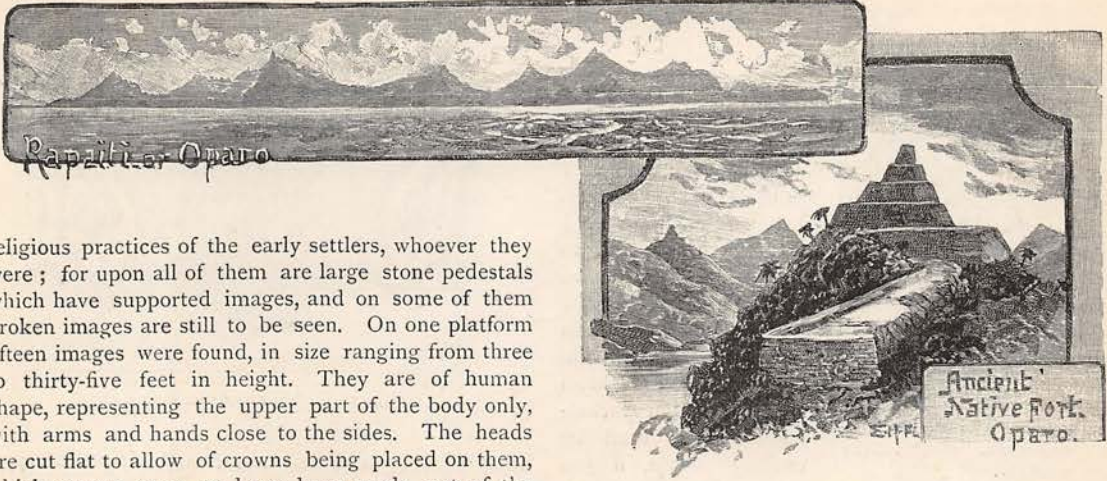
The sea-cliffs near this ancient settlement are carved into grotesque shapes not unlike the paintings on the walls, and the coast is marked with hundreds of these strange sculptures.

Again, on each headland of the island there is an enormous stone platform, built of hewn blocks of great size fitted together without cement. They are built on sloping ground, presenting on the seaward side a wall-face twenty or thirty feet high, and two or three hundred feet long, and on the landward side a wall of about three feet in height rising from a levelled terrace.

These platforms have evidently had to do with the



REMAINS OF TERRACE, EASTER ISLAND.



religious practices of the early settlers, whoever they were; for upon all of them are large stone pedestals which have supported images, and on some of them broken images are still to be seen. On one platform fifteen images were found, in size ranging from three to thirty-five feet in height. They are of human shape, representing the upper part of the body only, with arms and hands close to the sides. The heads are cut flat to allow of crowns being placed on them, which crowns seem to have been made, not of the same material as the statues, but of red tufa. This has been traced to an extinct crater within a few miles of the houses, and on the brink of this crater a large number of crowns were found, finished and ready for removal before some strange fate depeopled the island of these ancient worshippers.

The images themselves are made of grey lava, which is only found at quite another crater at the other end of the island. At this crater—called Otouli—there are several finished and partly finished images, just as they were left by the workmen. The head of one of these measures twenty feet from the nape of the neck to the crown. The faces of the images have well-defined features, with thin lips, broad noses, expanded nostrils, and a general disdainful expression. It is believed, from the appearance of the eye-sockets, that obsidian eyeballs were intended to be inserted. The ears are very carefully carved, and are prominent.

There are also, in different parts of the island, wooden tablets covered with curious carvings and strange hieroglyphics, which no one can explain.

It is remarkable that the present natives have small wooden images carved out of a hard, dark wood; but these images are hideous, and differ altogether from the dignified statues of the platforms.

The present inhabitants are simply tattooed savages who are more than suspected to have a taste for cannibalism. They live in long, low houses, in shape like an upturned canoe, with only a single opening about two feet square, wholly unlike the massive stone village we have described. There may have been wood on the island at one time, for the natives are well provided with clubs and spears, and they also use a double-headed paddle which has not been observed elsewhere in the Pacific. But, on the other hand, they may have brought these implements with them, for they have a tradition that their great-great-grandfathers emigrated from the island of Rapaiti, about two thousand miles away, and just south of the Austral group. Be this as it may, they call their

present abode Rapa-hui, or 'Great Rapa, to distinguish it from what they call their former home.

At Oparo, or Rapaiti, Captain Vine Hall found a temple, or castle, in five stages, surrounded by walls which enclose stone houses; and also square platforms of stone on the sides of one of the hills, similar to those on Easter Island. The traditions of the natives of Oparo—which is an island of only some twenty miles in circumference—are full of warlike struggles, and there is reason to suppose that these struggles were with strangers who may have been entrenched in this castle. If these strangers were compelled by the natives to fly to their boats, after some fight, they would certainly have drifted to Easter Island. But who were these strangers?

The reputed origin of the Easter Islanders throws no light upon the stone houses and statues and sculptures. The present islanders know nothing about these remains, and clearly have no sort of connection with them. They are the relics of an ancient people with intelligence far beyond anything now found in the Pacific; with notions of architecture and sculpture and painting and engineering, and with some distinct and elaborate form of paganism.

Who were they? That is the great mystery of the Pacific. But looking first at the ruins in the Caroline group, and then at those on the small, remote Easter Island, it is possible to imagine that these islands were the sacred and reserved spots of some ancient civilised race which once overran a portion of the South Seas. The position of Easter Island would lend support to the supposition that this ancient civilisation may have had its origin on the American continent, and we know that in Central America there are evidences of a civilisation of a vast antiquity.

The problem of the Pacific, still to be solved, however, is:—Who built the forts of Kusaie and Ponape, the stone houses and platforms of Easter Island, and who worshipped these sphinx-like gigantic images?