

— Science Notes. —

VANISHED CONTINENTS.

ACCORDING to Plato, there was, at the time when he wrote, a tradition of the former existence of a vast island called Atlantis, westward from Spain, which had been swallowed up by the Atlantic ocean. This tradition is still regarded by some as probably founded on fact; it has been suggested, on the one hand, that it refers to a discovery of the New World in very ancient times, and on the other, it is believed that a submarine plateau, lying between Spain and the West Indies, is the actual lost Atlantis. Regarding the latter hypothesis, a writer remarks that no other fact appears to him so suggestive as the migratory instinct of the lemming (a species of rat found in Norway). These animals, every ten years or so, develop an instinct which impels them to swim southwards in the rivers until they reach the sea, where they continue their course until they drown. It is the teaching of evolution that no animal possesses either organ or instinct that is not, or has not been, useful to it; so that it is difficult to believe that the migratory instinct of the lemming was always suicidal. If this instinct, however, points to the existence of land when none is now apparent, that land must have reached very far north of Spain.

Although everyone has heard of the lost Atlantis, no one seems very sure about its actual existence; but, according to the researches of zoologists, much more substantial proofs appear to be forthcoming of a vanished continent in the Southern Hemisphere. In the current number of the *Fortnightly Review*, Mr. Henry Forbes sets forth the various facts, which appear to render it probable that South America, South Africa and Australia once formed parts of one vast continent.

It is obviously impossible to give an adequate epitome even, in this small space, of an article of twenty pages, but two or three examples of these zoological facts may prove interesting. Among the birds of what we may call the ostrich group, all the continents of the Southern Hemisphere have either living or fossil representatives, whereas no bird of the kind is found north of Africa. A comparison of the skeletons of these birds—the living ostriches, the gigantic moa, *Æpyornis*, and others—points to the conclusion that they all spring from a common stock, and as no similar remains are known in the Northern Hemisphere, it is difficult to believe that their ancestors lived there, and that the Southern forms migrated from the North.

The African ostrich of the present day differs from the Australian and South American, and from the fossil remains found in New Zealand, in possessing only two toes on each foot instead of three. This fact appears to suggest that Africa became separated from Australia earlier than did South America and New Zealand.

Mr. Forbes gives another instance of a bird as interesting in itself as in its geographical distribution. This is the *huia* of New Zealand, which is the only representative of its genus. The nearest known relative of the *huia* was a very peculiar starling with a long curved bill, also the only representative of its genus,

which has recently become extinct in the island of Bourbon, east of Madagascar. The other point of interest about the *huia* is that the shape of the beak differs in the two sexes. The male has a straight, sharp, and powerful beak, with which he chips off the bark and wood of trees in quest of the tunnels made by grubs and insects. The attendant female has a slender, curved beak, well adapted to extract each morsel of food as it is discovered. The above peculiarities of geographical distribution, and many others quoted by Mr. Forbes, appear to be more satisfactorily explained by the supposition of a vanished continent than by any other theory yet suggested.

Notes on Art.

THE EARLY ITALIAN ART AT THE NEW GALLERY.

(Second Notice.)

WE will pass from the West Gallery (in which we were considering last week the pictures of Bollicelli, Lorenzo di Credi, Ghirlandaio, and Masaccio) to the North Gallery. Here, the familiar names in the catalogue of great masters leads us to hope for a much artistic enjoyment; but, unfortunately, the pictures themselves are somewhat disappointing, being, for the most part, either early or imperfect work. For instance, one turns with delight to the name of Perugino, who lived 1446-1523, to find only a slender work which it seems impossible to attribute to that great Master of tender colour and simple beauty. We are disappointed again, with the pictures ascribed to Filippo Lippi, Da Vinci, Fra Angelico, and even Luini; but, in the centre of the end wall, it is a joy to find a perfectly exquisite picture, *The Virgin and Child and St John the Baptist* (No. 214) by "the faultless painter," Andrea del Sarto. Sit down before it, and look at the tender smile of the Virgin and the sweet, warm tone of pinkish brown, touched with red. There are two other pictures by Del Sarto in this room, notably the Portrait of the *Contessina Mattei* (No. 249), lent by the Duke of Westminster. It is, in my opinion, the most wonderful portrait shown in the whole exhibition. There is also No. 266, *St. Mary Magdalen*, the catalogue says diffidently "perhaps a portrait of the artist's wife"; but this can hardly be the case, as it is not the face we know so well as that of his wife, the same lovely face, for instance, of the *Madona del Appie* in the Uffizzi Gallery at Florence; but it is impossible to think of Del Sarto without remembering Browning's wonderful tribute to him and to Andrea's wife's face. We have quoted the poem before in these series of papers, and cannot resist doing so once again:—

"Had you—oh, with the same perfect brow,
 "And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
 "And the low voice my soul hears as a bird
 "The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare—
 "Had you, with these same, but brought a mind!
 "Some women do so.

* * * * *
 "You smile? Why there's my
 "Picture ready made; there's what we painters
 "Call our harmony."

And truly the harmony is perfect in all three examples of Del Sarto's work here. In the West Gallery there is also an interesting collection of

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