

in the blood of numerous species of small mammals the extinction of which would be impossible. Those who wish to read the full story of this rapidly increasing march of destruction would do well to read Mr. Kirkman's admirable summary.

With the issue of the fourth volume of "The Animal Year Book", the editorship passes into

the efficient hands of Dr. Helene E. Bargmann. As is inevitable with a change of editorship of such a publication, this issue is largely occupied by the effort to clear up arrears of accepted matter. The new editor is to be congratulated upon having executed this difficult task with patience and discretion.

W. P. P.

Polynesia through Many Eyes

Religion and Social Organization in Central Polynesia

By Robert W. Williamson. Edited by Dr. Ralph Piddington. Pp. xxx + 340. (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1937.) 25s. net.

THE curiosity which Polynesia excited in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was not of the scientific kind which searches for facts on which to base generalizations; it was the curiosity of dilettantes. Explorers, sailors and missionaries did not pursue their inquiries to the point at which they would begin to demonstrate but cease to amuse, nor were they prepared to subject the blossoms of imagination to the icy blasts of scientific criticism. To entertain they had to be intelligible, and to be intelligible they had to transpose Polynesian customs into a European mode. The European mind was imbued from childhood with Greek mythology, so Williams arranged the Fijian gods into a pantheon on the Greek model, an arrangement more convenient than true.

Deification was familiar from the history of Rome, so Polynesian theology was reduced to deification. The Polynesian gods were supposed to be deified chiefs, and they were stated to be so as a fact. Now deification is a ceremony, and no such ceremony has ever been recorded in Polynesia, nor is there any word in the language which could by stretching its meaning be translated deification. The facts are that every deceased has power and so may become the object of a cult, which may or may not persist according as he proves effective or not. A dead chief has more power than a dead commoner, and so has a better chance of surviving in the memory of the people.

The distortion of the facts was still further increased when the naturalism of Greek mythologists was combined with misunderstandings of Roman religion. The French missionaries believed that in Mangareva "all the principal phenomena of nature were deified as good or evil spirits, according as they inspired hope or fear" (p. 26). That statement contains at least four theories: of deification, of emotion as the cause of deification,

of a theological dualism, of a hierarchy of phenomena. Every one of these theories requires to be supported with the evidence of facts, the facts being the actions and words of the Mangarevans; but the good missionaries were there to convert heathens, not to prove theories; and they cannot be blamed for not even distinguishing between facts and theories. The anthropologist should know better, because it is his business to make a distinction, without which science is impossible.

Mr. Williamson, however, was far too modest to distinguish when his masters had not done so. He was far too diffident and too kind to reject any of his witnesses. Equal weight is given to all, and if X asserts the opposite of Y, the contradiction does not seem to impair his faith (for example, p. 123). Mr. Williamson is more than impartial; he is neutral. The only witnesses that do not benefit by this neutrality are the natives. Wilkes, a passer-by, is allowed to depone as to the meaning of the Samoan word *atua*, but not the Samoans, though their evidence was recorded verbatim in *Man* in 1915 (p. 12).

This neutrality had been a tradition too long for Mr. Williamson to break away from it. He had patience, honesty, thoroughness and industry, and a preference for safety. It was not safe to introduce into anthropology the distinction between the observed facts and the interpretation of those facts. It would have meant scrapping ruthlessly, as unfit for scientific consumption, masses of travellers' tales, amateurish speculations, careless observations, misunderstandings and mis-translations and faults of memory which had been passed by generations of anthropologists. Mr. Williamson is not the only one who quailed at this sacrilege. Rivers is almost the only one who did not.

What Mr. Williamson had not the courage to do the reader will have to do for himself; he will have to sift the material. To do so he will probably find himself compelled to go to the originals. Mr. Williamson has provided him with an exhaustive catalogue and a conscientious guide.

A. M. HOCART.