The Daily News,

WEDNESDAY EVENING, DEC. 16.

☞ SEE FIRST PAGE.

THE EXTINCT WINGLESS BIRDS OF NEW ZEALAND.

To the question about the causes of the dying out of those gigantic birds, we must necessarily connect the question about the causes of the final extermination of other large animals of the present period. It is in the "struggle of life" that we are to seek the clue to the solution of this problem. There are many facts showing that in the struggle for existence, man acts the main part; that man was already swept quite a number of species from the surface of the earth, and that it is chiefly the largest animals that first succumb. We may even say that all the larger animals are gradually being exterminated, excepting those which as domestic animals save their existence by their absolute dependence on man. The reasons for this are quite obvious. The animal is either useful or noxious to man. If it be a large animal, its useful or noxious qualities are the greater; and in both cases man will strive to kill the beast, either in order to secure to himself the benefits of it, or to avert the great damage. The struggle of extermination will last a longer or shorter time, according to the number of individuals engaged, or, since in the case of large animals, it can be only comparatively small up on a given space, in proportion to the greater or smaller area of distribution of the animals in question. * * Nor is it to be doubted, that the extermination of the gigantic birds of New Zealand was chiefly accomplished by the hand of man. In briefly retracing the past to the times when New Zealand was not yet trodden by the foot of man, we must assume that at that time the large Dinornis and Apteryx species, whose bones we find to-day, lived in great number upon open fern-land, subsisting on the roots of *Pteris esculenta*. Dr. J. Haast notices also the occurrence of bones of the Dinornis in the moraines of the glaciers of South Island, and observes that the present Alpine Flora furnished a large quantity of nutritious food quite capable of sustaining the life even of so large a creature; and as the fruits of these plants seem at present to serve no evident purpose in the economy of nature, he argued the former existence of an adequate amount of animal life, to prevent an excessive development of vegetation. This part was played by the Dinornis. Those huge birds were then the only large animal beings that populated New Zealand; for of indigenous mammalia, except a little rat, there is nothing known. The first immigrants, who throughout the whole length and breadth of the extensive forests found nothing for man to subsist on, except the native rat and some small birds, obtained from the giant-birds the necessary supplies of meat, enabling them to increase in course of time to a whole nation numbering hundreds of thousands. But for those colossal birds, it would be indeed utterly impossible to comprehend how 200,000 or 300,000 human beings could have lived in New Zealand, a country which even in its vegetable world offered nothing for subsistence except fern-roots. That such was really the case is sufficiently proved in the traditions of the natives. Ngahue, one of the discoverers of New Zealand,—so tradition says,—describes the land as the haunt of colossal birds. There are yet some Maori poems extant, in which the father gives his son instructions how to behave in the contests with the Moas, how to hunt and kill them. The feasts are described, which were wont to be instituted after a successful chase. Mr Cormack as well as Mr Mantell have found the bones on both the North and South Islands in great numbers in the vicinity of camping-grounds and fire-places of the natives. Mounds are found full of such bones, in which after great feasts the remnants of the meals were promiscuously interred. The flesh and eggs were eaten; the feathers were employed as ornaments for the hair; the skulls were used for holding tattooing powder; the bones were converted into fish-hooks, and the colossal eggs were buried with the dead as provisions during their long journey to the lower regions. Consequently those huge birds were in former times the principal game of the natives, and were probably altogether exterminated in the course of a few centuries. They succumbed—the larger of the species the sooner—to the same fate that is gradually sweeping the Kiwi, the Kakapo, and the rat Kiore in a similar manner, and before our eyes, from the face of the land. But what next? The Maoris had increased to a very numerous people, the Moas were exterminated; whence were the natives thenceforth to get their animal food? This question leads us to the cause and the origin of the terrible cannibalism that held its sway of terror over New Zealand, when towards the close of the last century the first Europeans landed on its coast. What else is there that could induce a human being to devour his own kindred but want and starvation? There is no other reasonable way of explanation for an act which is so abhorrent to nature that it occurs even with animals only in exceptional cases when want compels them to take to it as a last resource. It was not barbarity, not savage cruelty, not monstrous heathenism, that drove the uncivilized man of the South Sea so far as to drink his fellow's blood, and eat his flesh; the cannibalism of the South Sea Islanders is to be accounted for in no other way than the cannibalism of the civilized European, when, shipwrecked and on the point of starvation, he lays hold of his ill-fated fellow. Cannibalism also is but one of the manifold forms of the struggle of life. It is thus alone that we are able to explain why the history of the past century of New Zealand is but a terrible tale of war and carnage and horrid cannibalism, and why this unnatural state was put an end to within less than twenty years, when by the importation of swine and potatoes on the part of Europeans new means of subsistence had been placed within the natives' reach. Cannibalism has ceased as it began; but not so the struggle of existence. This has again assumed a new form. From the struggle with the animal world the native, as the stronger, had come out triumphant. But now the tawny South Sea Islander has to wrestle for his existence with 'the pale faces,' and there is no doubt for whom the dooming die is cast in this contest. I am speaking here not only of the open, bloody war between the natives and the English, but the struggle for existence as it is carried out between men and men in all those innumerable circumstances which are adduced as reasons why in all parts of the world, in America, in Australia, upon Tasmania, and at the Cape of Good Hope, as well as in New Zealand, the natives are continually growing fewer and gradually dying out."—*New Zealand: Its Physical Geography, Geology, and Natural History.*

Mr Gemmell, publisher of the Chatham *Banner*, was prosecuted for libel in the Kent County Court last week. The jury brought in a verdict for defendant. The action was brought by Dr. McCully for the publication of a letter charging him with incapacity in his position as Coroner.

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BARRISTERS, &c., Princess Street, Kingston (opposite Daily News Office).
ALEXANDER CAMPBELL, Q.C.,
GEORGE LEVACH MOWAT,
GEORGE MILNES MACDONNELL.
March 15, 67.

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BARRISTERS, ATTORNEYS-at-LAW Solicitors in Chancery—Chambers Nos. 7, 8, & 9, Anchor Buildings, Kingston, C. W.
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SOLICITOR IN CHANCERY. Office—Clarence Street, Kingston, C.W.
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Offices—18 Clarence St., opposite the Post Office, Kingston, C. W.
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JOHN M. MACHAR.
Kingston, July 16.

W. R. Mingaye,
ATTORNEY-AT-LAW, Conveyancer, &c. Kingston, C. W. Dec. 1.

Wm. B. Thibodo,
BARRISTER AND ATTORNEY-AT-LAW, Solicitor in Chancery, Conveyancer, &c., Anchor Buildings.

Wilkison & Reeve,
BARRISTERS AND ATTORNEYS-at-LAW, Solicitors, Conveyancers, &c. Napanee, C. W.
OFFICE—South West corner of Dundas and East Streets.
WM. H. WILKISON. W. A. REEVE, M. A.
County Crown Attorney.

James Agnew,
BARRISTER and ATTORNEY-at-LAW, Conveyancer, &c. Office Sagot Street, second door south of the *British Whig* Office, upstairs.
August 1.

John Mudie,
BARRISTER, Attorney-at-Law, Conveyancer, &c. Office opposite Post Office, Clarence Street, Kingston.
August 6

OFFICE REMOVED TO KING STREET NEARLY OPPOSITE THE CITY BOOK STORE.

Joseph Bawden,
ATTORNEY AT LAW, Solicitor in Chancery, Notary Public, &c., 33 King street, Kingston.

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PHYSICIAN, SURGEON, &c., PORTLAND, Residence Harrowsmith.

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April 23

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J. C. BUTLER, M. D., Waterloo.
JOHN ERSKINE, M.D., Waterloo.
NORMAN CLEVELAND, M. D., Barnston.
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C. W. COWLES, M. D. Stanstead.
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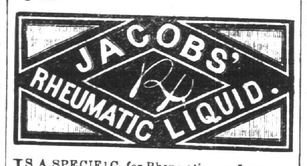

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1866. Marine Insurance. 1866.

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Senior Physician to Guy's Hospital.

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