

NEW GUINEA

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RISING sheer out of the Pacific, six times the size of England, New Guinea—westernmost of the Netherlands East Indies, and second largest island in the world—stretches ten miles from the equator to 12 degrees south-east. It was named *Ila del Ora*, appropriately enough as this was to turn out in recent years, by its sixteenth century Spanish and Portuguese discoverers. Later it was called *Papua*, and one of its districts is still so called, because *Papua* in Malayan parlance describes the "frizzy hair" of the aborigines. The permanent designation came through sailors recognizing the coast-line's similarity to that of Guinea in Africa. Divided by a long central mountain chain into hill country and alluvial plains formed by rivers swollen from the torrents of the tropics, this vast shadowy jungle interior is the last stronghold of stone-age natives and wild head-hunters.

Realizing its strategic position across Torres Strait and Arapura Sea from Australia, Sir Thomas MacIlwraith (Premier of Queensland) waged a spirited campaign whose result was the hoisting of the Union Jack at Port Moresby, Papua's capital, on April 4, 1883. The following year Germany claimed a protectorate over the north-eastern part of New Guinea (*Kaiser Wilhelm's Land*) now its richest section, and also the Bismarek Archipelago comprising New Britain, New Ireland, and Admiralty Islands, as well as two of the Solomon group. German activities were devoted chiefly to coastal agricultural development in New Britain because of its fine harbours, though eight German Lutheran missionary societies worked among hordes of Melanesian natives.

Dutch New Guinea, comprising about half the entire island and peopled by 200,000 wild men with only 237 Europeans, was practically undeveloped and imperfectly charted until the military and scientific expedition of Captain Colijn, Prime Minister of Holland, in 1906 surveyed the country. Snow-capped peaks of the great Show Mountains, rising four degrees south of the equator to an estimated height of 17,000 feet above sea level, add particular fascination to one of the largest unexplored areas on the face of the globe. No roads exist, except in the immediate neighborhood of Mereuka, officially established in 1902 with a small Dutch garrison, hospital, wireless station, and a few Chinese trading in copra and Paradise plumes.

The territory of Papua, populated by 275,000, was granted its own Lieut.-Governor and Executive Council in 1906 under the administration of Australia. Forces of this Dominion, after a sharp fight on the outbreak of the first Great War, occupied Rabaul, New Britain. On Sept. 12, 1914, a proclamation in "pidgin" English was read to thousands of assembled natives in gala attire, and to warriors wearing marvellously fashioned feather regalia, besides military and naval detachments. The formal annexation of Germany's protectorate, after a salute to the Union Jack, ended thus:

Now you give three cheers belong a new fella better master.
No more "Um Kaiser", now "God Save the King".

In 1920 the League of Nations granted a mandate of this vast strategic area (235,000 square miles) to the Australian Commonwealth Government. Under its guardianship a system of indirect rule—through native chiefs and efficient police patrol—over hundreds of thousands of primitive people has been continued in ten distinct stations with official headquarters at Rabaul. Neither slavery nor forced labour is permitted; land may be leased, but not sold; firearms, ammunition, alcoholic liquor, opium or its derivatives are prohibited to aborigines. In portions of the interior and upper reaches of the Fly River (navigable for 500 miles) the chiefs have little control, so that frequent skirmishes—due to long existing enmity—occur among scrubland, coast and mountain people speaking different dialects, and armed with bows and arrows, stone axes or daggers fashioned from the thigh-bones of the cassowary or crocodile jaws. These arrogant semi-nomads invariably build villages on precipitous ridges, whose steep paths are guarded by giant fig-tree roots trained into fences eight to ten feet high, and entered only through a two-foot tunnel.

Shy little pigmies—like the dreaded Kukukukas—who flit like bark-clad phantoms through the jungle carrying the heads of their slain in fibre bags round the neck, live in tree-houses into which provisions, spears, stones, etc., can be carried up rope-ladders ready for enemy sieges. Mountaineers garbed in a girdle of twisted cane, augmented by a light cape of tappa cloth bark for the chill night air, have noses pulled down to their lips by heavy bone screw ornaments. The usual "friz" is obtained by binding the hair in an erect bundle with palm leaves for three days, and after using a long pronged bamboo comb,

greasy pig-tails are plaited with bark or reeds, leaving a forehead fringe of dangling colored seed-pods. The staple savage diet is sago-pith of the spiky wild marsh "Sak-Sak" palm, from whose trunks, felled by stone axes, is extracted a fibre washed by women in a contrivance made from a hollow front supported by sticks over a pool. After the dry sago has boiled five hours in a special carved bowl, the grey, gluey mass is eaten with taro, yam, sweet potatoes, papaws, bananas, cabbage, dried fish or meat. Their only lucrative employment is collecting copra and "mace", from wild nutmeg, or hunting small kangaroos and cassowary. The latter cousin of the emu is a crested, spiteful, bird inhabiting dense jungles, since it hates sunshine and dust.

New Guinea dancers step to the thud of musical wooden drums covered with lizard skin; the eerie moan of the bull-roarer—a thin lath whirled on a string; bamboo panpipes or castanets of various seeds also form an accompaniment. Most fantastic ceremonial head-dresses are worn; the one I examined had been made by successive generations from tree bark, ingeniously ornamented with clipped cassowary and Bird of Paradise feathers, pig tusks and six long carved bird bills tipped with dog's teeth rosettes to signify the enemy's clawlike hands in death. In Northern British New Guinea the slayer of an enemy in battle is regarded as "Hotcho" or sacred, and to him is formally presented by his uncle the most coveted homicidal emblem of a head-dress, made by his father, adorned with tufts of cubus fur to denote an old man; eagle feathers for a woman, and part of a wild boar's tail for a strong combatant. Warriors wear terrifying masks of pig's tusks; victims' skulls are preserved as evidence of prowess in special shrines. Ceremonial platforms erected on four magnificently carved posts serve for official feasts and religious rites—being regarded as spirit homes of dead relatives. Many tribes are cannibals, and the final decision on head-hunting rests with girls who give preference to suitors producing a victim's finger, which when smoked-dried can be proudly worn in a necklace of human bones.

Papuans often inhabit lagoon house-boats, from which they catch hundreds of fish in wicker traps or bamboo nets. The happy, unspoiled, upstanding "Kanaka" along the coast build huge war canoes without nails or metals, and having intricate fish and bird designs inlaid with shells. They are also expert weavers of native fibres. Acquiring many articles from missionaries, they often live in communal houses 300 feet long,

and regard white men as fools because they work. Life in New Guinea encounters many risks, since death lurks in malarial mosquitoes or black-water, pythons, night-arrows in the back, crocodiles and sharks in still waters; while jungle trees have silken webs stretching from branch to branch harbouring numerous giant, biting, hairy spiders, brilliantly speckled in green and scarlet.

Papua has been most effectively developed, being valuable for its gold, coal, copper, and osmeridium mines; pearls; fisheries; rubber and cocoanut plantations. Its extended sea-board affords good shipping facilities. The cocoanut kernel is dried in the sun or specially-constructed hot-air sheds or "smoke-houses" into copra—the most important product of Oceania. It is sent to Australia to be distilled, and its oil is used for soap, candles, cattle-oil-cakes, and such by-products as glycerine, now much in demand for explosives. The fruit supplies meat and drink, and its fibrous husk is utilized in mats, rugs and armour for Gilbert Islanders. The Great Barrier Reef abounds in cutters and schooners manned by natives gathering, without trouble, unlimited "Beche-de-Mer" varying in size, colour, and value from 30 pounds a ton for the worst grades up to 200 pounds. These hideous sea-slugs, living in shallow waters along the thousand mile coral stretches, are cleaned, boiled and smoked for 24 hours and then profitably sold to large, exporting traders; for gourmets consider the taste of cooked "Beche-de-Mer" for superior to turtle soup.

Papua's hilly capital, Port Moresby, had about 400 European residents, chiefly comprising the administrative staff in control of native patrol officials. Their galleried houses are perched on 8-9 foot wooden, tarred poles capped by shining tin or zinc as protection against white ants, snakes or iguanas. A twenty-minute walk will cover the tiny island of Samarai—gem of Papua—but it is equipped with wireless, electricity and a hospital; and its densely-wooded hills reveal fire and dragon-flies, or orchids; butterflies as big as birds and bright as jewels; bell-birds sounding a clarion call; gay cockatoos and parakeets.

New Guinea's roadless interior was served three times a week from Sydney by a 51-hour aerial transportation of passengers, mails and provisions, calling at the Australian towns of Rockhampton, Townsville, Cairns, Cooktown, Port Moresby, Salamau and Rabaul. The success of Guinea Airways Ltd. as one of the world's largest aviation carriers, rendered possible

the profitable establishment of Morobi's Goldfields. In one month of 1931 no less than 581 tons of freight was flown 20,000 feet high over mountains and jungles, including sections of mining and dredging machinery, building materials, light motor cars, complete with wheels, tires and hood; steel girdles and plates equipped with protective pads to absorb shock when the plane landed and taxied. Canadian, Australian and American prospectors were thus enabled to reap an enormous harvest from investments in Edie Creek, Bulolo and many other modern goldfields. Once when a plane penetrated a backward district of unknown country, the tribesmen, realizing its noise was not from a bird, consulted a medicine man who said it was a devil coming from the south. The villagers accordingly, "to play safe", marched off and slit forty odd throats in that community!

In 1938 the capital of the Mandated Territory was transferred from Rabaul to Salamaua—400 miles distant, at the extreme north-east point of New Britain. This seaport is not only linked by bush road with the important goldfield centre of Wau, but is also on the direct air route to Lae at the north of Markham River. Since the whole region is subject to seismological disturbances, the Hon. W. Hughes described the change as "the difference between being boiled slowly and fried suddenly," due to Rabaul's serious peril from volcanic eruptions.

After passing the Bee-Hives—two rocks at the entrance of Rabaul Harbour—we sailed through Blanche Bay, backed by the stately wooded heights of Mounts Mother and Daughters North and South opposite Mounts Father and Sons. Next came the unusual experience of steaming between two active volcanoes, since Mount Matupi's eruption in 1937, accompanied by an immense tidal wave, devastated the city, and in a couple of days caused Vulcan Island to emerge from the harbour's depths. Its highest peak reaches an elevation of 750 feet, and the still-smoking crater—approximately half-a-mile in diameter—is estimated by experts to contain over 60,000,000 tons of volcanic lava and scalding water that actually hisses and bubbles, while emitting a strong smell of sulphur. After medical inspection we landed in Rabaul's fine, dusty, pumice soil—very trying when wind-blown; and a short walk through the business district, continued between a double row of mango trees, planted by a former German administrator, led to pile-supported bungalows of white residents having mosquito-proof sleeping sections and two central rooms off wide verandahs, with adjust-

able latticed shutters instead of glass. Surrounding gardens glowed with purple, red, pink, and apricot bougainvillea; six inch hibiscus blooms; fragrant white and pink frangipani; and indescribably exquisite Bird of Paradise Tree blossoms complete with plumes—all bordered by flowering shrubs and croton hedges. House-holders usually employ four "boys" for gardening, odd jobs, chauffeur and laundry; since white is universally worn in this unvarying tropical temperature, with average rainfall of 80 inches. This, combined with a similar degree of humidity, means that clothes unwatched soon mildew, and stockings are generally discarded. With flowers tucked above their ears, fierce bushy-haired, chocolate-coloured house-boys, wearing gayly-striped or floral "lap-lap" skirts stamped with their master's initials in 5-6 inch coloured letters, follow their mistresses with baskets to procure papaws, pineapples, small thin-skinned sugar bananas, sweet potatoes, rice, tomatoes, sugar-cane, beans, and custard-apples, brought miles to market in woven palm-leaf bags suspended from a forehead band across the backs of native women, often having a baby also along in front. Much canned goods is consumed; but natives are naturally good cooks, and when taught become excellent, never needing to be told twice recipes given in their own "pidgin" English. Though Australian and New Guinea coins, with central holes for stringing together, are available, commodities like beads, tobacco, tomahawks, knives, shells and betel-nuts—eternally chewed by natives—are bartered in mining districts for carriers.

Reaching the small Museum, I found interesting wooden war canoes, shields, spears and arrows; ceremonial head-dresses and masks; turtle shell and teeth necklaces; feather ornaments, bangles of boar tusks and bone anklets; cloth sarongs, tree coral and cases of marvellous "Alexandra" butterflies, and the green bird-like winged "Victorian" species. The Honorary Curator—curiously enough a graduate of Dalhousie University—drove me to his home where, while imbibing a delicious iced drink made from the five-cornered fruit, I examined his Japanese curios, carved Papuan table, Siamese brass trays, Buddhas, lacquer and ebony ware, and Burmese ivory elephants. As Director of Agriculture, he imparted expert information on the drive through the Botanical Gardens regarding Avocada, Royal Malayan and sealing-wax palms; teak (for ship-building), bamboo, banyan, wonderful casuarinas, brown and yellow lantana, kapok, South-African red-blossomed tulips, besides the

avenue of gigantic rain-trees whose loose foliage lets moisture through to the thirsty ground. Having, as a member, to attend a meeting of the Legislature—aptly called by the natives "House Talk-Talk"—he directed his chauffeur to show me Chinatown's schools and shops; and that many residents had narrow escapes in the recent eruption was evident from the uncleared heaps of pumice-stone and branches of sago and pandanus palms broken by lava.

New Guinea's fauna and birds—including fine parrots and lovely guara pigeons—number over 500 species, of which fifty genera at least are peculiar to the island. Birds of prey, hovering over the steppe, catch fifty indigenous kinds of rats, mice, and a few squirrels; but while many peculiar lizards abound, there are, outside the vivid green python and tiger serpent—comparatively few snakes. In the great forests flourish the far-famed Birds of Paradise—absent from all other eastern islands except the Bismarck—which possess 74 special species in addition to those found in New Guinea. Those native to the Papuan region have British protection in a sanctuary with other rare types. Most closely allied to the crow family, different varieties abound in certain districts; they are omnivorous, and passibly polygamous.

The Sydney Taronga (Sea-View) Zoo had several excellent specimens collected through the courtesy of Lutheran missionaries in the Wared Mountains of New Guinea, where natives, during the breeding season, easily captured the birds at night with snares after dazzling them by flashing electric torches into their eyes. Gorgeous beyond words were the thirty stuffed birds out of fifty known varieties I saw in cases at the Sydney State Museum—including the "German Emperor"; "Empress of Germany", with exquisite gold head and black throat, long brown wings tipped with red-tinged feathers; and "Prince Rudolph", resplendent in blue shades. The Aru Islands alone possess the largest type—Great Bird of Paradise—whose adult males have yellow heads, green velvet throat and superb golden plumes springing, as in most "Paradisei" from beneath the wings. "The Magnificent" and "Blue Bird of Paradise" frequent mountain ranges averaging 5,000 feet; while the "King Bird" has the distinction of two middle-tail feathers coiled into a spiral, webbed only at the ends, and the "12-wired" won its name because its plumes are transformed into long bristles. These gloriously-hued and very expensive birds clear spaces beneath certain high jungle trees for dancing-grounds, where in parties

of a dozen or more at dawn or about four p.m. males congregate to display their unequalled splendour and grace in elaborate evolutions of stepping and springing before the admiring females whom they far surpass in brilliance and beauty. A special species are called "Rifle-Birds"—probably because their magnificent plumage, such as adorns "Queen Victoria", resembles the green and black full-dress uniform of the British Rifle Regiment. New Guinea birds chatter, laugh, mimic the ringing of bells, sawing wood, and all other noises except song, while Birds of Paradise simply squawk!
