

Interesting Discoveries About the South Sea Island Natives

AUSTRALIA



TYPICAL SOM-
OAN WOMAN



NATIVE POLICE AT
SUVA, FIJI



TONGA SOUTH SEA ISLAND
NATIVE BABY



TYPICAL PAPUAN
GIRL

By Wilton Pember

If you take a world-map and study it carefully you will find that about one hundred miles to the north of Cape York, Northern Queensland, lies the island of New Guinea, probably the largest island in the world. Originally owned by fierce head-hunting cannibals. Many still rove through the interior, but it is now ruled over by the Dutch and the British, who divide the island equally between them. The north-eastern part was originally German New Guinea, but at the beginning of the Great War, was taken by the Australian forces and is now the Mandated Territory.

The southeastern part of the island, originally called British New Guinea, is what I am about to tell you of in this chapter. The name was altered to Papua, which means fuzzy-headed, some years ago in order to avoid confusion with the north-eastern part. It is about 90,000 square miles in extent, and has a population of about 250,000 natives.

"Razor-Back"

The country is rough and rugged, much of it being known as "razor-back" formation. Some of the mountains are very high, their peaks rising to 10,000 feet, which have perpetually upon them though they

are quite close to the equator. These mountains in general are stern and savage-looking. The sides are so steep that no soil is found on them. Only "the bare rock glowers in the sun." In the valleys the vegetation is luxurious and varied; wonderfully colored crotons and coleus, sago and coconut palms, areca palms and pepper vines, and beautiful lilies flourish in rich profusion.

Georgous butterflies flit about, and the beautiful Bird of Paradise adds its luster to the scene. Papua is a land of great rivers; the Fly River is one of the largest in the world, and is navigable for about five hundred miles, and it has been said that "enough water comes down the river to provide everybody on this earth with one hundred and twenty gallons each day."

Queer Life

The people live in small villages. About fifteen to twenty houses generally form a village, and as very little order is preserved, the houses are built without any idea of town-planning. Sometimes they are built on hills for protection, or near a good beach, or even out above the sea. All the houses are built upon high piles as a protection against white ants, rats, and other vermin, which are numerous. These village houses are often covered with decorations and carved figures, some of which are grotesque in the extreme. Although it is a rude form of art, still it shows a striving for beautiful things inherent in all people.

Eat Bees and Ants

Their main food is the yam (somewhat like a potato), bread-fruit, taro (which is the root of a lily), bananas, sugarcane, pineapple and nuts. Sometimes they have pig, or fish, or fowl, and with every prepared food the coconut. They are not over-particular, for they often eat frogs, lizards, snakes, lizards, bees, ants, stingaree (stinging fish), opossum, and even rats. Their clothing consists of very little, as befits a hot country; grass skirts are worn by the womenfolk, who are quite as keen on fashions as our own people, while men and boys

wear a broad leaf, fastened with a string around the waist, leaving the limbs free.

Primitive Customs

The Papuans still cling to their customs, rites and rituals, many of which are both strange and unique. The chief of them relate to birth, marriage, death and harvest. When a child is born the mother is the recipient of numerous presents, often from a pig down to nose-ring for the youngster; while when the baby is but a few hours old it is taken to the sea and bathed in the waves. Then comes the next process, for a few days later some black resinous mixture, much like glue, is rubbed on its head to harden the skull.

The next process is to pierce holes in the child's ears, and, in some cases the nose, into which are thrust spigots of wood or grass. These holes are made bigger as the child grows older, until it reaches a stage when a large plug of wood can be thrust into the stretched lobes. One never sees a birthday feast or celebration in Papua, for as birthdays are counted as unlucky events, they are forgotten all about.

Mutilation

At the death of a relative the natives paint themselves with a mixture of charcoal and coconut oil, and this must not be washed off for a month or so, but must be renewed should it wear off before that time. Then again, if the relative is a near one a joint is taken off a finger as a remembrance of the death. Like most other islanders they go in for tattooing extensively, and this is done in youth with a thorn or other sharp point, which has been dipped into a strong blue dye, made from certain wild berries.

"Keeps"

Even from quite an early age the hair of the Papuan gets quite a lot of attention, for children are taught by their parents to comb their hair with long wooden home-made combs. Thus the fuzzy mop becomes as good as a pocket, and is more often than not the receptacle of a strange assort-

ment of bits of string, fish-hooks, pieces of coconut, and in fact, anything and everything that appeals to them as "keeps."

It must not be misunderstood by readers that the Papuans are dissipated or derelict people.

If one lives with these natives for any length of time one will find them a happy, virile race, and if treated properly, will respond in a way that will be beneficial to themselves and the world in general. It must be remembered that all races have a place in the world. The highly civilized races should help those not so blessed to realize the highest within them without imposing their civilization upon people with disastrous results, as is frequently the case.

Papuans Educated

Much is being done for the Papuan of late years, by the federal government of Australia. The natives are being educated and looked after from a welfare standpoint, in quite an admirable way by the Australian authorities. The children, in most cases, are not only eager, but quick to learn, and the white teachers are high in their praise for their general advancement, both from an educational and civilized standpoint—this, of course, is in the Mandated Territory, which, as has already been stated, has been under Australian administration since the opening of the Great War.

New Hebrides Situation

As for the various groups of islands that stud the Pacific, there is an ever-increasing attention being paid by the authorities to education. But the New Hebrides Condominium, unique in many things, is unique also in this, that alone among South Sea Island Governments it does nothing for the promotion of education. The teaching and training of the natives are left entirely to the missions.

The question of education in the islands is complex and beset with difficulties. Children whose parents are emerging from the Stone Age cannot be taught on quite the same lines as

boys and girls who are the product of a highly-developed civilization. The islander by nature is a tiller of the soil, and does not take kindly to any form of work other than agriculture. The trades and industries of the islands are largely in the hands of Europeans and Japanese, and are likely to remain there. The whole future of the native is bound up with the use he makes of his land.

Witchcraft

In bygone days the prevalence of witchcraft debarred any possibility of progress, and made a native content with his dugout canoe, his ancient implements, and backward conditions. His ideas in agriculture are still extremely primitive. For the most part the natives of today till the soil in the same fashion as their forefathers did in Captain Cook's day, merely scratching the surface with their old-fashioned hoes. Under such conditions, education of an island child can never be complete until he is taught to farm his own land and become an able and intelligent cultivator.

Only within recent years have the benefits of education been understood and appreciated by the natives. In the early days of missionary enterprise schools were regarded as an unaccountable whim of the mission-

(Continued on page four)

IMPORTANT NOTICE!

There are some very interesting opportunities offered to our readers among the classified ad advertisements which appear on page 7 of the Illustrated Feature Section in this issue. Why not look them over?