

**Royal
Geographical
Society**
with IBG

Advancing geography
and geographical learning

WILEY

The Islands of the New Britain Group

Author(s): H. H. Romilly

Source: *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*,
New Monthly Series, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Jan., 1887), pp. 1-18

Published by: [Wiley](#) on behalf of [The Royal Geographical Society \(with the Institute of British Geographers\)](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1801261>

Accessed: 17/06/2014 04:24

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) and Wiley are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography.

<http://www.jstor.org>

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY
AND MONTHLY RECORD OF GEOGRAPHY.

The Islands of the New Britain Group.

By H. H. ROMILLY.*

(Read at the Evening Meeting, November 22nd, 1836.)

A FEW years ago this group, in common with many other South Sea Island groups, was almost unknown, and even at the present time not very much is really known of it. The Germans, by whom it is principally settled, seem to keep their information very much to themselves. They have changed the names of the islands from New Britain and New Ireland, to New Mecklenburg and New Pomerania (Neu Pommern), but it is simpler for our purposes to retain the names by which they were first known. It is unnecessary to discuss their first discovery.

The records of the early navigators are very meagre, and many of them have been lost. It is always uncertain who the discoverers of these groups were, nor does it really much matter. We flatter ourselves that Captain Cook was the first to land in Australia, but it is certain that the Spaniards landed on its western coast and hoisted their flag there more than a hundred years before Cook's visit.

Dampier gives some slight account of New Britain, but he only remained a few days there. He visited the magnificent harbour now called Blanche Bay and hoisted the British flag there. His intercourse with the natives, however, does not seem to have been at all intimate.

I propose in this paper to speak of the New Britain group as it was when I knew it in 1881 and 1883. At that time the white population was very small and very scattered. It was composed of men of all nationalities and conditions of society. We had there a mixture of French, English, German and Italian roughs, runaway sailors, a few survivors of the ill-fated Marquis de Ray's colonising expedition, well-educated gentleman-like missionaries, and one or two men who had evidently once been English gentlemen, but who had, doubtless for very

* For map see 'Proceedings,' 1836, p. 608.

sufficient reasons, had to leave their homes and bury themselves in the most out-of-the-way spot they could find.

There were two little communities: one at Matupi, a small island in Blanche Bay, and the other in the Duke of York Island, situated in the channel between New Britain and New Ireland. The former was German, and was the headquarters of the great trading firm of Robertson and Hensheim, of Hamburg, and the other was the abode of the English Wesleyan Mission, at the head of which was the Rev. George Brown. As I have observed in many other places, the tendency of the idle settlers was to live as near as possible to the Mission quarters. No doubt they felt a sense of protection in so doing, and in this opinion they were justified, as on more than one occasion the missionaries interposed successfully between the whites and blacks. There were also isolated traders living by themselves at points on the New Britain coast, but at the date of my first visit no one had resided in New Ireland. At that time the natives of that island were too hostile and treacherous to make that advisable. A small trade in coco-nuts was, however, carried on with them, and on several occasions the island was visited by Mr. Brown, and I believe he once performed the feat of walking nearly across it, and sighting the sea on the east coast.

Before describing any of the habits of the native and foreign inhabitants of this group I will give a short description of the islands themselves, their appearance, and geological formation. On approaching New Britain from the southward the first land sighted is probably the high mountain called Mount Beautemps Beaupré. This is a tall conical-shaped hill, some 4000 feet in height, generally covered with clouds. It is usually free from them in the early morning and just before sunset, and is at that time an excellent landmark, as it can be seen on clear days at a distance of some 40 miles. In a country where the natural landmarks of the coast are incorrectly or vaguely described in the Admiralty charts the value of so conspicuous an object cannot be over-estimated.

After sighting this mountain, and thereby having ascertained his position correctly, the navigator shapes his course along the New Britain coast, and as close to it as is consistent with safety, in order to avoid the tremendous currents of the mid-channel between the two islands. These currents are very capricious, and he may have the bad luck, as I once had, to be beating about in the channel for a week or ten days without making any progress. It is fairly free from the great danger to sailors in those seas, coral reefs, but it is shaped like a funnel, and is open to the full force of the south-east trade wind, which blows as fiercely in New Britain as it does anywhere.

The sea is one of the most dangerous to small sailing craft that I know anywhere, very short and untrue, with almost conical-shaped waves. Something like it can occasionally be seen on our own coasts

when a strong south-westerly gale blows up the Bristol Channel. The tides have been a puzzle to sailors since they first navigated those waters. On one occasion I was beating down the channel on my way from Matupi to New Guinea in a small schooner. We had a south-east trade wind blowing nearly a gale in our teeth. For a week we made precisely the same points of land on each tack, and as far as we could see we neither lost nor made a yard. One night, just as we were beginning to despair of ever getting out of the channel, and were discussing the advisability of returning to Matupi till the weather should moderate, the current, without any change of wind, suddenly altered its direction from up the channel to down the channel, and in a few hours we were out at sea.

But to resume our cruise. Having made Mount Beauteemps-Beaupré, the sailor would hug the New Britain coast till he sighted the next conspicuous landmark, a tall extinct volcano named the Mother. This mountain is situated on a narrow arm of the mainland, which, curving to the southward, helps to protect the harbour of Blanche Bay from the south-east trade winds. To north and south of it are two other extinct volcanoes, the North and South Daughters. Immediately to the eastward of it is a small partially active one, and which for three days in 1878 was in full eruption, while still further to the northward of it are no less than three small craters, evidently extinct for many years, as the vegetation on their sides proves. Blanche Bay evidently has been, and still is, a very active volcanic centre. The small cone, which still has an appearance as if it might any day burst into violent eruption, smokes incessantly. The natives are much afraid of it, though I believe they have no particular superstition concerning it, and on one occasion when I made its ascent in company with a naval officer, we had to go alone, as no native would accompany us. That there is still plenty of latent energy in it, is evident from the fact that at its base the sea-water is so hot for several hundred yards from it, that it is impossible to hold the hand in it. In another part of the bay, not a mile from the mountain's base, is a boiling river of strong sulphurous water, up which a boat can be pulled for several hundred yards. In many places the water is actually boiling. It seems strange that in a country like New Britain, where some thirty or forty per cent. of the natives are afflicted with skin diseases, that they should not have recognised the curative powers of this boiling river. But they are content to continue in their disgusting condition, even with the natural cure at hand.

During the eruption in 1878, a small island of about three hundred yards in length by one hundred yards wide, made its appearance in a night. The natives say it was upheaved, but it appears to be more probable that it was caused by falling mud and debris. The natives all fled in their terror, so that they were hardly fair judges. The whole

surface of St. George's Channel was so thickly covered with pumice-stone, that a German friend of mine who was trying to enter it immediately after the occurrence, could not conceive what had happened, as from a distance it appeared as if St. George's Channel had altogether disappeared and an impenetrable barrier of land taken its place.

For weeks afterwards many parts of the bay were uninhabitable to whites on account of the millions of fish which had been killed by the boiling water in the narrow shallow parts of it. When I lived in Matupi, five years after this event, we had slight earthquake shocks nearly every day, and sometimes such severe ones, lasting for so long, that we fled out of the house for safety. On one occasion, a severe shock of earthquake was the cause of some amusement to us. I had been out shooting one terribly hot day with a naval officer. He had had a severe attack of sunstroke some years previously on the west coast of Africa, and he was very nervous about himself on this account in hot weather. At the conclusion of our day's sport, as we were walking home, we were both, apparently without any cause, precipitated violently on to our faces, and for the next second or two the ground was shaking and heaving, and we did not know clearly what had happened. I very soon recovered myself, as I recognised at once what was the matter, but my naval friend, who had only been one day in the country, and was not accustomed to its eccentricities, in a tone of intense anguish said, "I knew it would happen sooner or later, and now it has come." He made no effort to get up for a few minutes, but by degrees he began to realise that there was nothing the matter with him, and that his supposed attack of sunstroke was due to underground, and not to overhead influences.

The climate of the group varies, as it must do in all the large Pacific islands. On the coast, where the healthful influences of the sea breezes can be felt, there is not much to complain of. During the day-time for seven or eight months of the year, the trade winds blow, but during the night-time the sea breeze usually falls, and its place is taken by the land breeze, which blows from the interior down to the coast and a few miles out to sea. It brings with it malarial poisoning from the swamps inland. I believe, however, the simple precaution of putting on extra clothing after sunset every night would prevent much fever. Matupi, where the head German stations are, is an extraordinarily health place and fever is unknown there. The natives themselves appear to suffer from it quite as much as the whites, and the proportion of deaths from this cause must be very large. They do not, however, consider it a natural death. The only two forms of death they recognise as being natural are old age, not very common, and a death from violence. When a native has fever he accuses some friend or enemy of his of bewitching him, and his family invariably adopt his view of the case.

The vegetation is in many places as luxuriant and varied as tropical vegetation can be. In the interior, especially in protected valleys and ravines where the atmosphere is from year's end to year's end of the nature of a vapour bath, it must be seen to be appreciated. Gigantic forest trees, covered with ferns, orchids, *lycopodia*, and parasites of all sorts seem united to each other and to the earth they spring from, by a beautiful impenetrable mass of foliage. Birds innumerable can be heard, but are only visible to the practised eye of the savage. Insects of every varied size and hue flit about and add a lustre to the scene, and to sum up briefly, the vegetation in the New Britain bush, and the richness of the volcanic soil, can be surpassed in no part of the globe.

There should be no form of tropical agriculture practised among white men which would not be successful in this country. The natives themselves are great agriculturists, and with the smallest possible amount of labour produce crops of the richest possible description. On the occasion of a long walk of mine from the coast to the base of Mount Beautemps-Beaupré, I was amazed to observe the closeness of the cultivation, and the skill with which the native labourers had selected the sites of their gardens, with a view to combining the richest possible soil with the most inaccessible positions as a protection against their neighbours. In what appeared to be impossible places to get at, fissures in rocks on the sides of steep precipices, one would constantly see small patches of sugar-cane and beds of yam and sweet potato. Even the taro, a root which requires artificial irrigation, could occasionally be seen growing. The native gardeners had taken advantage of every little trickle of water down the hill-sides, and had constructed, by means of dams and artificial channels, little damp patches of soil in which the taro could be grown. The women were the actual labourers in the gardens, but all the little engineering difficulties in making such gardens as these were overcome by the men. Doubtless the great difficulty they have to contend with is the distrust and suspicion with which each man apparently treats his neighbour. One constantly sees large tracts of very fertile land uncleared because of the ease with which any cultivation there could be destroyed by hostile neighbours. They are, therefore, driven to select inaccessible situations for their gardens, and, as a rule, in the interior, each man builds his house in some commanding situation near it.

Now, to leave the interior and return to the coast. To the north of New Britain the sea is an intricate network of coral reefs and small rocky islands. But very few ships have visited New Britain from that side, as the danger for sailing vessels is extreme. New Britain seems to act as a barrier to the trade wind, for while it blows with great violence on its south coast, to the northward of it is usually a region of calms and strong currents. It was my bad fate once to be endeavouring to go from Astrolabe Bay on the New Guinea coast

to the Duke of York Island. For a week we tried to beat through Dampier Strait in vain, and at last we decided to go along the north coast of New Britain and arrive at our destination by that route. For a day all went well, as our previously foul wind, by our alteration of course, became a fair one. But when we had run some hundred miles from the coast of New Guinea the wind gradually died away, and we found ourselves drifting helplessly among reefs and islands innumerable. Many of them were not marked at all on the chart, and all of them that were, were more or less out of position. For four days we had to tow the ship—luckily a small schooner—with our two whale-boats, and very glad indeed we were when a faint northerly breeze, just sufficient to fill our sails, gave us steerage-way in the direction in which we wished to go.

The observations of the few people who have sailed those seas—whalers for the most part, and captains of small schooners fitted out on speculative trading expeditions—have been very incorrect, and more harm is done by placing a shoal or reef incorrectly on the chart than by omitting to place it there at all. As far as my observations of the north coast of New Britain went, I should say it was very thinly inhabited. I personally saw no signs of life anywhere, but it is too much to suppose that a seaboard of some two hundred miles in length should be absolutely uninhabited. How far the natives on the south coast may be relied on I cannot say, but I have been told by them that the north coast is only occasionally visited by wandering tribes. As far as I know, there are not sufficient data in our possession to enable us to form any estimate of the population of New Britain. Roughly speaking, the population might be placed at 100,000 souls, while the New Ireland communities might perhaps muster half that number. There seems to be no doubt that in the little-known districts in the western half of the island the population is more numerous than in the eastern end.

I have coasted, contrary to my inclinations, and by force of circumstances, a great part of its south coast, and the evidences of abundant population were everywhere visible. Smoke could be seen rising in every direction, villages could be occasionally seen, and the coast is abundantly lined with coco-nut palms, a sure sign of dense population. In these island communities there is no better rule to be guided by, for the purpose of ascertaining the denseness of the coast population than by carefully noting the approximate number of coco-nut trees. I believe, if it could be proved, that roughly about twenty coco-nut trees to every head of population would give a fairly accurate result. In New Ireland, the north-western half of the island is abundantly lined with coco-nuts, and it is certainly in that part of the island that four-fifths of the population is to be found.

Before I proceed to give a slight account of the natives of this group, a few words about the appearance of New Ireland may be of interest.

New Ireland presents many distinct features from New Britain. In New Ireland there is presumably as heavy a rainfall as in New Britain, but while there are numerous small rivers in the latter island, in the former, as far as I could discover, there are none worthy of that name. A few small creeks and watercourses there may be on the mountain sides, but there is no visible escape for the enormous amount of rain which falls in the course of the year. It seems unlikely that there can be lakes of any great size, as the configuration of the country renders any such idea improbable.

The island is long and very narrow, that is to say, its extreme width in any place is not more than 30 miles, while its average width is from 10 to 15. A chain of mountains runs directly up its centre which varies from two to six thousand feet in height, so that it will be seen that the ground must everywhere rise very steeply from the sea.

In heavy rains there must be mountain torrents, but I have coasted the whole island round, in fair and foul weather, and never seen anything like a river discharging itself into the sea. On the north coast, it will be seen in the map, that there are several islands placed. At the time of my last visit, as far as I know, they had never been visited. It is most unlikely, however, that that is the case now. The island marked as Fischer Island, I ascertained, was in reality three distinct islands, while Gerrit Denys is certainly two, and perhaps more.

It was supposed on the occasion of my first visit, that New Ireland was entirely deficient in good harbours. Since that time some excellent harbours, protected from all quarters, and large enough to accommodate a fleet of ships, have been discovered at the north-western end, between New Ireland and New Hanover. As I said before, that end of the island is also the richest, and the Germans have taken advantage of their new discovery to station traders there. Their relations with the natives are not always friendly. Some have been killed, and many have been driven away barely saving their lives.

I believe that at the present time no traders have been established in New Hanover, the large island to the north-west of New Ireland. While I was in New Ireland the natives of New Hanover showed themselves most uncompromisingly hostile to me, and though I tried often to land there, I never succeeded in doing so.

The channel between the two islands is a network of reefs, and in spite of all my efforts I never succeeded in penetrating them. There were plenty of canoe and no doubt boat passages from one island to the other, for constantly while my schooner was anchored at Neusa, the name of the northern harbour in New Ireland, canoes would come across from New Hanover, and keeping at a respectful distance from the ship, insult us with awful threats of what they would do if they ever got us in their power. In appearance, New Hanover is far more inviting than New Ireland. The mountains are high in the interior, but the land

slopes gradually to them, and there are evidently many rivers, fertile valleys, and wide-spreading plains covered with the wild sugar-cane which always denotes the richest soil. Doubtless from the north it is more easy of access, but I never had the opportunity of visiting it from that quarter.

Having now touched lightly on some of the more noticeable geographical peculiarities of the New Britain group, it may be of interest to touch equally lightly on some of the peculiar habits of its inhabitants. The ethnologist would find abundant material there for observation and reflection, but it would be out of place in this paper to indulge in an ethnological dissertation on the races which inhabit these three large islands. Of the largest of them, New Britain, we know a good deal, of New Ireland and its people we know a little, while of New Hanover—possibly the most interesting of all, on the principle of “*Omne ignotum pro magnifico*”—we know next to nothing at all. To begin with New Britain. There are three subjects which appear to interest the students of savage races more than any others. Firstly, their laws and ceremonies of marriage, rights of succession to property on account of such marriages, and degrees of relationship resulting from them, and the manner in which their relations by marriage should be treated or ignored. Secondly, their superstitions and the ceremonies which attend them; and, thirdly, the social laws by which they are governed and which control them as to their determination to go to war with their neighbours. Under this last heading also would come the rights of property and the manner in which it is held, a very comprehensive subject, which the limits of this paper will only permit me to touch on lightly. It is obvious that these are subjects which cannot be completely mastered by any one whose residence in the country has not been of considerable duration. The native, as a rule, does not like to be questioned. He credits the white man with possessing universal knowledge, and often imagines he is being made a fool of, and will return evasive or untrue answers. In questioning them about their superstitions they usually show the greatest reluctance to answer.

In New Britain there are some customs they are absolutely forbidden to talk of, and some words they dare not name. It is evident, therefore, that the investigator has to rely principally on his own powers of observation, as he cannot get much reliable information on many points from the natives by word of mouth.

To begin with the marriage laws. The parents of a child betroth him or her usually at a very early age. If it is a boy he has got to work for and pay for his wife before he can marry her, and the sum to be paid is agreed on, having due consideration for the means of the betrothed. The sum is never fixed at too low a price, and it constantly happens that the intended husband is middle-aged before he can marry. Sometimes he gets impatient and persuades his betrothed to elope with

him, but he dare not return to his tribe if he takes so extreme a step as this. Usually when the price stipulated on is nearly paid, the husband builds a small house in the bush at some distance from his village. He then persuades his fiancée to elope with him, but this time with the knowledge of her parents. A complete farce is then acted. When they have had time to get well away, the girl's father discovers that she has been abducted, the bridegroom's father pretends to sympathise with him and vows vengeance against his son for disgracing him. They waste more time in assembling the relatives on either side and preparing a big feast together. The whole conversation consists of threats against their unnatural offspring. When they have finished their feast they arm and paint themselves as if for war, and off they sally into the bush in search of the absconding couple. They know exactly where to go, however, which simplifies matters a good deal, as they have had precise information as to where the little house in the bush has been built. When they arrive there they find the couple gone. They would probably be very much at a loss what to do if they had not gone. They burn the house, however, and return home where they consume more food. In the morning the young couple are back in the village as if nothing had happened, and no further notice is taken of them. The price originally fixed as the price of the girl has, however, to be eventually paid.

It is the habit as far as possible to betroth children to other children belonging to the same tribe, and as many of the tribes are very small, it is not a habit which tends to improve the race. As far as I have been able to ascertain, they do not recognise the relationship of first cousins. In fact in a small tribe nearly all the members of it must be cousins to each other.

I have observed in parts of New Britain, perhaps it is universal, that brothers seem to have common interests. One brother often helps to pay for his brother's wife, and if he died or was killed would probably take her into his house to live with his other wife or wives. She would in every sense belong to him, and her social position would be as secure as formerly.

There is one curious bond of sympathy between these people and their civilised brethren. It is doubtless a prejudice in civilisation, and admits of exceptions. Among the New Britons it admits of no exceptions, and is as stern a law as those of the Medes and Persians. A man must not speak to his mother-in-law. He not only must not speak to her, he must avoid her if he possibly can; he must walk miles out of his way to avoid her path; if he meets her suddenly he must hide, or if he has no time to hide his body he must hide his face. What calamities would result from a man accidentally speaking to his mother-in-law, no native imagination has yet been found equal to conceive. Suicide of one or both would probably be the only course. There is no reason

that the woman should not speak to her father-in-law, but for the mother-in-law there is no mercy. She must, in the ordinary course of events, in native communities, eventually become a mother-in-law, but she is powerless to struggle against fate, and I for one have never seen her make any effort to do so. It would take too long to discuss the subject of succession of property. It is enough to say that the mother's property, if she have any, may descend according to circumstances to her daughter or her son, or go to neither, and the father's may be disposed of in the same impartial way. There are tribal rights, family, and individual rights to be considered, and therefore the question becomes a somewhat complicated one.

One curious feature in the New Britain marriages, and one I should think most galling to the husband, is that occasionally, after he has worked for years to pay for his wife, and is finally in a position to take her to his house, she refuses to go. Human nature, I suppose, is the same all over the world, but engagements are longer in New Britain than in more civilised countries, and the disappointment is proportionately greater. Oddly enough, he is not supposed to have a grievance, nor can he claim back from her parents the vast sums he has paid them in yams, coco-nuts, and sugar-canes. He certainly would have the right of killing any one who presumed to elope with the woman he had worked for so long; but she seldom plays her cards so badly as to compromise herself in a public manner. He has to submit, and no one pities him. It is the custom of the country, and no doubt he submits to it with the best grace he can.

It is difficult to say whether they have any actual religion. Superstitions they have in plenty, and they believe in malignant spirits, but not in beneficent ones. The malignant spirit has, on many occasions, to be propitiated with gifts. There are men who are sorcerers by trade, and they exert an immense influence in their tribes, and not unfrequently amass considerable fortunes. The devices they employ for imposing on their neighbours bear a strange similarity to some of those used by the witches of old in our own country. Figures of chalk or stalactite, or even stone, could be bought and buried in the bush, and the man in whose likeness they had been carved, was pretty sure to die very soon afterwards. The natives have often pointed out to me spots in the jungle where some of these images had been buried, but they would never help me to look for them. I found three or four with great difficulty, and the natives would run shrieking from me if they saw me carrying them home. It was impossible for me to keep them in my house, as no native would work for me while they were in my possession. I therefore pretended to destroy them, and had them buried behind my house till I could take them safely out of the country. The native is very careful to destroy the remnants of his meals. Things like banana skins, fish-bones, &c., are burnt, as he

imagines that if an enemy of his were to steal and bury them, he would shortly sicken and die. Numerous other superstitions they have, but the most remarkable one of all I will describe briefly.

Visitors to New Britain, who have seen the ceremony of the duk-duk as it is called, have not always agreed as to its exact significance. It is a very difficult matter to get natives to speak of it at all, as they imagine that by doing so to a man who is not duk-duk, that is to say, initiated into the mysteries of this superstitious rite, they will forfeit the good will of the restless spirit they fear so much. I will describe how I first saw a duk-duk in New Britain, and give my idea as to the meaning of the performances it went through. It is supposed to be a spirit which makes its appearance at daybreak of the day on which the new moon appears. It invariably comes from the sea, and as soon as there is sufficient daylight for the purpose, two or three canoes lashed together, and having a square platform built over them, are seen slowly advancing towards the beach. The whole community is drawn up to receive them, and they sit in solemn silence, waiting for the moment when the canoes shall touch the beach. On the platform of the canoe are two figures leaping and gesticulating violently, and uttering short shrill cries. They are covered with a loosely made robe or tunic made of the leaves of the hibiscus woven together. On their heads they wear a conical-shaped hat some six feet in height which completely conceals the features. On it is painted a most grotesque human face. Nothing can be seen of the man inside this dress but the legs from the knee downwards.

The dress is supposed to be an imitation of a cassowary with a human head. When the two figures land they execute a little dance together, and run about the beach with a short hopping step, still keeping up the imitations of the cassowary. Not a native stirs or utters a sound, they appear to be very much frightened and there is a very nervous look on their faces. The duk-duk is to stay with them nearly a fortnight, and during that period he is absolutely at liberty to do whatever he pleases. No woman is allowed to look on him, in fact the women have long ago disappeared and are all hidden in the bush. After a time the duk-duk dances off into the jungle, and the natives get up and move off slowly to the village. The same evening an immense quantity of food is brought in, and piled in the centre of the square in the village. As each man brings his contribution the duk-duk dances round him; if he is satisfied he utters his shrill yelp, and if he is displeased he deals the wretched man a tremendous blow with a club. However, nearly everyone brought sufficient food when I saw the ceremony, and very few received the blow with the club. This done, the men all squatted in a circle in the square, and then began what could have been nothing but a ceremony of initiation. A large bundle of stout canes was brought, each one being six feet long, and as thick as a man's little finger. No sooner

was this done, than five or six young men jumped up, and holding their arms high above their heads, received a tremendous blow apiece from the duk-duk. The cane curled round their bodies with a loud crack, and drew blood at every stroke. But in no case did I see a sign of flinching or pain. Immediately their places were taken by other young men, and at the end of the performance, each man standing up in succession had received six or seven tremendous blows. For about ten days the same thing was repeated, and the young men who were qualifying themselves to be admitted into the mysteries of the duk-duk must have been truly glad when those spirits left them in peace. The performance was varied occasionally by the duk-duk taking a club and giving the unfortunate neophyte a tremendous blow in the back. It was considered the right thing to throw something down in the path of the duk-duk, if one met him accidentally, so I invariably carried a supply of tobacco in my pockets while we entertained these visitors, as they had a most disagreeable habit of popping out suddenly upon you from the bush and dancing round you.

I believe the origin and meaning of the whole performance to be this. It is intended to be a power held over the young men by the old ones. The duk-duk is always said to belong to some old man who has summoned it from the sea. In a country where the chiefs of tribes have little or no authority the young men want a great deal of keeping in order. They are carefully kept in ignorance of all the mysteries of the duk-duk. They do not know who is actually dancing in the dress, but they do know that they may be killed by him if the old men have ordered it so, and no one would interfere to prevent it. Again, the old men to whom the spirit belongs get an immense quantity of food contributed to them, and this is a matter of importance, as when they become too old to work in their gardens they are likely to fare badly.

In New Guinea there exists a similar custom, different only in a few unimportant details. I often had considerable difficulty in getting a boat's crew to go up and down the coast with me, as it was always necessary for me to get men who knew the proprietors of duk-duks at the different places we were to visit. In New Britain and New Ireland the people are warlike, but they are fonder of killing their enemies by cunning and treachery than of meeting them in the open field. For this reason it is imprudent to allow natives to walk behind you, unless you are in a place where you know them well, and can trust them.

I did, however, on one occasion see a very big native battle, in which the attacking force must have numbered nearly one thousand men. The tribe with whom I was then staying was also in unusually strong force, or else I am afraid they would have fared badly. They had sent for all their friends to meet me, and the result was that they outnumbered the attacking force, and inflicted on them a crushing defeat.

All, or nearly all the canoes in which they had come were seized,

the enemy was driven along the beach for 15 or 20 miles, and many of them were killed and subsequently eaten. It would take too long to describe the battle. As in the case formerly of the Fijian battles the combatants had to work themselves up to the requisite amount of fury by insulting each other, dancing in front of their ranks and boasting of the deeds they were prepared to accomplish. The women and children accompanied their fighting men into battle, and took up a position in the rear of their army. Whenever one of the enemy was killed, his body was passed back to the women and was by them conveyed to some village to await the return of their lords and masters. I was, I imagine, exceptionally fortunate in being a witness of this battle. The enemy had evidently been preparing for it for years, their canoes were new, and no doubt they supposed that they would inflict on my friends a crushing defeat. They could not have known that I and my little party were staying where we were, or that they would find the tribe in such strong force. Of course I did not allow my boat's crew of Solomon Islanders who accompanied me, and were armed with rifles, to take any part in the fight.

As I have alluded to the fact of the men who were killed being eaten afterwards, I may as well say here a few words on the subject of cannibalism, both in New Britain and New Ireland.

Cannibalism is at the present day a far more common thing than it is generally supposed to be. On the other hand, people talk very loosely about it, and many tribes, especially in New Guinea, are supposed to practise it who have never done so. I cannot absolutely say from my own knowledge that the natives of New Britain are cannibals, though I have every reason to suppose they are. If you ask a man point-blank, as I have often done, if he has ever helped to eat any one, he will deny it for himself, but say that so-and-so did.

They usually appear to be very much ashamed of the practice. That this is not always the case, however, I will presently show. Some eight years ago in Fiji, the Governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, was paying a visit to a mountain chief, who had recently been reconciled to the British occupation and government. The conversation turned on cannibalism, and the impression that he tried to give us was, that he had heard of such a custom, but that none of his people had ever been guilty of it.

A missionary had some time previous to our visit been murdered in the very district in which we were, and had undoubtedly been eaten, and parts of his body had been sent by our host to friends of his belonging to other tribes. He admitted that he had been eaten, by whom he said he did not know; for his part, he said, the idea of eating white man was extremely repulsive to him, as they smoked strong tobacco and drank whisky. On this an old man in the crowd, forgetting his manners and duty to his chief, sprang up and said, "It is a lie; he was as good as any one else, and you know it." His feelings had

carried him away to such an extent that he at all events admitted having helped to eat white man.

In New Ireland, where immediately after the fight I have alluded to I saw them eat the men who had fallen, there appeared to be no shame and no pretence of concealment. They did it, they said, because they liked it, and they had no objection whatever to my being a witness of their proceedings. I am aware that to most people it must be an unpleasant subject, but I think I may venture to describe some of the incidents which occurred on the occasion to which I refer.

The bodies having been hung up by the necks till the return of the warriors, are scalded with boiling water and scraped with the sharp bamboo knife of the country. During this operation, which is performed by the old women, the former merits and accomplishments of each one are discussed with jokes and roars of laughter. This finished, they are taken down and laid on mats. In the village in which I was watching the proceedings, there were six bodies to be operated on. They were cut up by a very old man who kept up an incessant chatter while he performed his duty. Certain parts were kept, the thigh and shin bones for instance, and were no doubt intended to serve as spear-handles at a later date. Each portion was wrapped in many envelopes of stout leaves by the women, and when all the bodies had been cut up they were placed in the ovens which had been previously prepared for their reception. The process of cooking took nearly four days, and during that time the wildest dances and feasting imaginable went on. The heads, however, were reserved for a special purpose. The natives of New Ireland eat a preparation of sago and coco-nut called sak-sak. The brains of these unfortunate men were to be added as a third ingredient. I used to buy sak-sak daily for my Solomon Island crew, but it is needless to say that for the remainder of my stay in New Ireland I did not do so. I have no doubt in my mind, however, that my boat's crew possessed themselves of some of this disgusting mixture and ate it. It is impossible to describe more than the most noticeable features of this banquet. The details were intensely horrid and disgusting, and the women seemed to me to be more brutal and savage than the men. Though I did not remain with them absolutely to the end of the business, I was told that for many days afterwards the natives do not wash at all, as they try to imagine that some trace of their disgusting meal will cling to them.

The trade of these islands is principally carried on between the coast natives and those who live in the interior. The coast natives exchange salt for the food which the bush natives cultivate. There are certain well-known market-places where they constantly meet, and their negotiations with each other not unfrequently end in a fight. The trade with the whites is principally in coco-nuts. When I was there twenty coco-nuts could be bought for one stick of tobacco.

One stick of tobacco represented the twentieth part of a shilling, therefore four hundred coco-nuts could be bought for a shilling. The kernel of the nut cut up and dried in the sun makes a very valuable article of commerce called copra. It is used for making candles, and the refuse makes excellent cake for cattle. It takes about 7000 ordinary nuts to supply one ton of copra. In those days a ton would have cost on the spot about 3*l.*, and as its market value in Europe was from 16*l.* to 20*l.*, the trade was a profitable one. These prices, of course, do not exist now, but I have no doubt the trade still continues to pay. Tortoise-shell is bought in considerable quantities from the natives, also pearl-shell of an inferior quality, and *bêche-de-mer*. *Bêche-de-mer* is a large salt-water slug which inhabits the coral reefs. It is split open, boiled, and smoked, and when thus prepared is worth from 50*l.* to 120*l.* a ton in the Chinese market.

Between white men and natives, tobacco is the only money employed. Between the natives themselves a shell money is used, called by them *de-warra*. The *de-warra* is a very diminutive cowry, and the money is supposed to come from the northern end of New Britain. Hundreds of these little shells are threaded on immensely long strips of split cane. A fathom of *de-warra* may possibly be taken as the legitimate tender, that is to say, a piece of *de-warra* is broken off of the length of the extreme stretch of a man's arms extended. Seven fathoms would formerly purchase a good pig, and I have heard of cases where a man's death could be compassed for the same amount. Such is the value of human life in New Britain.

In conclusion, I will say that I consider the country to be one suited to white colonisation. It presents the richest soil, a climate no worse than that of other groups, and not so bad as that of New Guinea, and the people, though undoubtedly savage and suspicious, can easily be managed by firmness, and consideration for their habits and traditions. They make fairly good labourers when not taken away from their own homes, and I see no reason why the extremes of savage and civilised life should not meet on amicable terms in this young country. The Germans, to whom it now belongs, have a most responsible duty before them, and the success or failure of this young colony of theirs depends entirely on the view they take of their obligations to its natural owners.

Before the paper,

The CHAIRMAN (Sir HENRY RAWLINSON) said that Mr. Romilly had been for six or seven years in the Pacific as a Commissioner on behalf of the British Government, and had visited most of the principal islands. He had also written a book which was a model for the travellers of the present day, being both amusing and instructive. After Mr. Romilly had read his paper on New Britain, the meeting would be favoured with additional remarks by a gentleman who knew probably more of the geography of the Western Pacific than any other living man, the Rev. George Brown, who had published a dictionary and grammar of the language, and who would answer any questions on the subject.

After the paper,

The Rev. GEORGE BROWN said that his experience of New Britain and New Ireland dated from the year 1875, when he landed there in company with a party of Fijians and Samoans. He had previously spent between fourteen and fifteen years in Samoa. At the date of his landing there was not a single white man in the group. A few white men had previously called at Port Hunter, but there was no one resident there at the time. He landed on Duke of York Island, and had explored in open boats from a point near Cape Orford on the south-east coast, round Cape Lambert and along the north-west coast to the "Father and Sons" volcanoes opposite to the Duportail Islands. He had also explored the whole of the west coast of New Ireland, and had landed at New Hanover and had communication with the natives. There were not many places in the South Seas of which so little was known as New Britain. Speaking of the early discoveries Mr. Brown said that the Solomon Group was discovered by the Spaniards, under Mendana, in 1567. Mendana made his second voyage to Santa Cruz in 1595 and died there. The earliest distinct notice of the discovery of any of the New Britain islands was in the account of Le Maire and Schouten's voyages in 1616, when they sighted and named St. John's Island and Fischer's Island, and so must of course have also seen the mainland of New Ireland. In 1643, Tasman saw St. John's Island, Cape St. Maria, and discovered Anthony Kaans and Gerritt Denys Islands. All these navigators thought at this time that New Ireland and New Britain formed part of the mainland of New Guinea. This was first disproved by Dampier in 1700, who sailed through what is now known as Dampier's Straits. In 1767, Captain Carteret was drifted by strong currents up Dampier's Wide Bay, so called, and found it to be a wide open channel. This he called St. George's Channel, and named the land on the east side New Ireland. He had landed at Port Carteret and had taken possession of the island in the name of H.M. George III. Bougainville visited the same place in 1768. Captain Hunter visited and named Port Hunter, Duke of York Island, in 1791. After this there was the voyage of the *Coguille* in 1823, and that of the *Astrolabe* in 1827, H.M.S. *Sulphur* in 1840, and H.M.S. *Blanche* about 1872. On a small island in Blanche Bay, called Matupit, or Matupi, some months before he (Mr. Brown) landed there in 1875, two German traders had landed, but after remaining a few weeks they were burnt out by the natives, and shot five of them in escaping to their boats. That was the last attempt to settle in New Britain previous to his landing. He (Mr. Brown) crossed the New Ireland range at an altitude of 3000 feet, and went down to the opposite coast. One of his experiences was a very suggestive one. He had immense difficulty in getting any natives to accompany him across the range. By bribery he got them past two villages, and then they wanted to go back. He told them they could go if they liked. They replied, "You must go back with us," but this he refused to do, and they dared not return alone as they were afraid of being killed to make a meal for the other villagers if they did so, and so ultimately they went on. One of the houses had a ridge pole some ten feet high with the roof coming down to the ground. The ridge pole was covered with alligator and other bones, while the battens were covered with jaw bones of pigs. On one particular batten he counted thirty-five jaw bones of people who had been eaten in that house, some black with smoke, some brown, and some not long picked, and he felt thankful that his own was so far safe, and in its proper position and place. He was in the neighbourhood at the time of the great volcanic eruption, and might say that he had landed on a very new island indeed. A London correspondent of the Melbourne *Argus*, wishing to be funny, wrote that he had been accustomed to subscribe to a library of fiction, but he should discontinue to do so, because he had read in a scientific paper called *Nature*, that the water in a certain bay in New

Britain became so hot that the fish came up already cooked. The fact was, that though the bay was five or six miles across, and no bottom was found up the centre with a thirty-fathom line until a cable's length off the shore was reached, no man could bear his feet in the water for ten days after the eruption, and the fish came up overcooked. Tortoiseshell was obtained from the Hawksbill turtle by burning the fish (which accounted for the marks on the shell), but many turtle had been so much cooked that the shells had floated away from them. He had many times sailed over the very spot where that little island now was. When he first landed on it the soil was so hot that no native could stand on it. There was an immense crater of boiling water, and he wished to find out if it communicated with the sea. The whole island was hissing at every pore, and he managed to ascertain that the centre did communicate with the sea. It certainly was thrown up from the bottom of the sea at a place where there was a shallow reef at the time. Mr. Romilly had mentioned the superstition about mothers-in-law, but he ought to have stated that the mother-in-law was quite as much frightened at the son-in-law. When he (Mr. Brown) was translating the Gospel of St. Mark, he, of course, had to translate the passage about Herod swearing to give the damsel what she asked, even to the half of his kingdom, and he had to investigate the question of the natives' idea of an oath, and he found that the most solemn oath a man could take was, "Sir, if I am not telling the truth I hope I may shake hands with (or touch the hand of) my mother-in-law." He did not know whether Mr. Romilly had travelled up the west coast of New Ireland, but there were some very large rivers there. He had seen some large rivers, such as the Topaia, which gave its name to a district, and indeed New Ireland, on its west side, was one of the best watered islands in the world. The rivers partook more or less of the nature of mountain torrents, and were very soon dried up. Mr. Romilly was quite correct in stating that six feet of strung shells might be taken as the standard of value. The New Ireland money was measured from breast to breast, and the singular thing among such a people was that they had words for "buy" and "sell," and "borrow" and "lend," and "redeeming" a pledge. They also lent out money at ten per cent. interest, and had a word which could only be translated as "selling off at a sacrifice," or "selling under cost price." The marriage customs differed, but as a general rule a man had to pay for his wife. In New Britain when a man proposed he ran away, and there was a lot of crying when they were betrothed, as though they were ashamed of what they had done. He had been told that the concluding ceremony in one district was this. The young couple were brought together in the square, and presents were made by the married women to the girl, consisting of little baskets, digging sticks, &c. Then the chief would come with a great spear and point in one direction, and spear the stem of a banana, and then do the same thing in another direction, and so on, to represent the number of men he had killed. It was a symbolical way of narrating his deeds of valour. If he had killed a man with a tomahawk, he would strike with his tomahawk at an unfortunate banana; if he had killed him with a spear he would spear the banana. Of course he was paid for the performance. The last presents were made by the brother or father to the young man. The first present was a spear, to signify that the young lady was committed to his charge, and that he was her natural protector. Next, they gave him a broom to give to his wife, as a symbol of her domestic duties, and to indicate that she must keep the house clean. Outside, the villages were all remarkably clean. The third present to the bridegroom was a small sapling, with which he was to beat his wife if she did not attend to her duties. With regard to the *duk-duk*, he asked what was the meaning of the tremendous blows that were given, and he was told that those who were struck were supposed to be killed. Their religion was that of all primitive peoples—that the dead were round

No. I.—JAN. 1887.]

c

and about them. With regard to cannibalism, he had known many instances of it, and was once at a place where the natives were cooking part of a human body within a few yards of him, but he did not know it at the time. There were, however, many who never tasted human flesh, and in most cases the eating of human flesh was a religious rite.

Sir GEORGE BOWEN congratulated Mr. Romilly on the very able and interesting paper which he had read. He himself had been connected with Australasia for 20 years, as Governor successively of Queensland, New Zealand, and Victoria, and of course he took the most lively interest in that quarter of the globe. Mr. Romilly had done good work in the islands which he had visited, and it was well known that he could also write good descriptions of what he had seen. But one point had not been alluded to in the paper, and that was the political relations of the Pacific islands with France and Germany, as well as with Great Britain. He was convinced that a time would soon come when it would be considered desirable to have a formal federation of the Australian colonies. The colonists had strong views respecting the Pacific islands, but those views often differed. There should be an Australasian Dominion, like the Dominion of Canada, which would speak with a single voice of authority for all the British colonies in the Pacific. That voice would command respect both in England and on the continent of Europe. Moreover, an Australasian federation would be a great step towards the desired federation of the entire British empire. Such a federation would probably form a friendly alliance with the great English-speaking federation in America; and the world would thus see a *Pax Britannica*, far transcending what Pliny called the *Immensa Romanæ pacis majestas*.

Mr. DELMAR MORGAN said the allusion to the *duk-duk* reminded him of what he had seen among the natives of the Congo, who had a practice called *Inkimpî*, which appeared to be a kind of novitiate through which the young men passed for a certain time, during which they removed themselves from all intercourse with their friends, and painted their bodies white. At the end of this probationary period there was a grand ceremony admitting them to a kind of Freemasonry.

The CHAIRMAN, in concluding the meeting, said that they were indebted to both the author of the paper and to Mr. Brown for the instruction and entertainment they had afforded. Mr. Romilly had already written one book, and it was to be hoped that he would write many more. Mr. Brown had copious manuscript notes, and had devoted himself to other subjects besides the mere keeping of a diary, a proof of which he had given in his admirable Dictionary and Grammar of the native language, a MS. copy of which he had liberally presented to the Society. He would recommend all travellers in those seas to make a really serious attempt to classify and affiliate the Papuan and Melanesian languages. Until vocabularies were issued, which could be compared, it would not be possible to understand how those islands were originally settled and populated. It was a very interesting branch of linguistic ethnology. Mr. Brown had made a great step in advance in a book which was still in manuscript, and he hoped it would be extended so as to point out the analogies between the New Britain languages and others further afield. In conclusion he proposed a vote of thanks to both Mr. Romilly and Mr. Brown.