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NOTES ON THE BUGILAI, BRITISH NEW GUINEA.¹

BY THE LATE REV. JAMES CHALMERS.

WHEN, having sailed about sixteen miles from Dauan, we entered a small creek and landed there, I was told the people had to be looked for, as they have no really fixed abode, being sometimes far away back in the bush, and, at others, nearer to the coast. Where we were was all deep mud, and I was informed that it was not so bad as just inside of the mangroves where "plenty water, plenty mud he stop." So I decided to remain in the boat, and await the return of those who were going in quest of the natives. We had a long wait, but eventually four men appeared on the bank, one of them with innumerable curls about a foot long, and all of them with skin-disease. One was the chief, and so getting him on board of the boat, I rigged him out as a chief ought to be. Soon we were all friends, and they begged for a teacher, and asked me to stay the night. "No, I cannot stay, but will return soon. You (the chief) had better come and see Dauan," where none of them had ever been before. The furthest excursion by sea ever made by any of them was one to Boigu, made by the chief and a few others many years ago.

Hullo! here they come, men all armed, women carrying baskets of food and children, and other children, led by the hand. The men, who went in for them, had been busy teaching them how to shake hands, but only a few had learned the lesson so as to do it at all. They had bows and arrows, hair head-dresses, and baskets for sale, but wanted cloth for them; eventually, they took tobacco. Would not we wait until the morning? No, we understand it too well. It meant getting everything we had, and then we should leave ruined, every bit of trade gone, and only a few things in return. For the first visit, trade a little, cause no excitement, and get away after a very short stay.

We got them all crouching on the mud, or on branches of mangrove, and had a short service in which they were told that the Great Spirit, God, loved them, and us, and all, and I hoped they would soon know more about Him. Up gets the chief, "Tamate, give us a missionary, we are hungry for one" (they are not cannibals and never have been). "If you give us a missionary we shall all leave this bad country, and go to Mai Kasa, and there live." I asked him who the *all*

¹ Mr. Chalmers (Tamate) was the first white man to visit these people, so the accompanying account of his visit is of especial importance. This paper was received some time ago, but was held back, as it was hoped that Mr. Chalmers would be able to enlarge it. Alas! this is now impossible, and so it is printed as it stands. The Bugilai country is about long. 142° 30' E.—[Ed.]

were, and he said, "The Bugilai, the Tebatalai, and the Wasi, and these live all in this country, Beralag, Gaimalag, Uibalag." He also gave me a redivision again, the Tabatala, Bera, Buzi, Drapa, Mat, Wasi, Wiba. I hope to be able to give them a teacher, and soon.

They live in small humpies. Saplings are stuck into the ground, bent over, and the other end also stuck into the ground. The bark is stripped from the tree, and placed on as thatch; a small opening is left, and in there all crawl on cold or wet nights, and there also all their valuables are kept. They travel about a good deal, but I should suppose not so much as the Australians, as they make plantations which will keep them nearly a year at one place.

They call all the country opposite to Dauan, Dipa, and I think that will apply to all the country known by them in New Guinea.

There is one Great Spirit that they call Kaka, but where he lives, and what he does, the chief could not tell me, saying, "I am a young man" (about thirty) "and you must get some of the old men to tell you." When the sun sets, he goes down under the earth, and then travels along a great tunnel, which takes him all night, and then comes up in the morning.

They have plenty of sorcerers, men and women, and there are ghosts everywhere. I think it would be a good place for "Will-o'-the-wisps," as there is plenty of swamp for gases. At the initiation of young men, they practise sodomy, but not bestiality as some other tribes do.

They wear charms round the neck, and others they keep in baskets in their houses. When any one dies, the spirit (*Yedo*) goes right away to Bëmor in the west, where there is continual feasting and dancing. They have many gods.¹ One family will make the crocodile its god, and they will on no account eat any part of it. When they can secure a small one alive, it is carried to where they are living, and presents of food and things are laid down beside it. It is the same with the kangaroo. The family whose god it is, will not touch it; and so with other animals and birds.

All their food is cooked in native ovens, or on the fire, just laid on. They have no cooking utensils whatever, and so are like the natives on Kiwai (p. 117), and all around the mouth of the Fly River. In some places, they cook in shells. They have a good variety of food, such as yams, banana, sugar-cane, sweet potato, taro, and others, also coconuts, but not in abundance.

The men were passable. I saw two very short ones, and a few really fine specimens. The women were not up to much, and all the children had skin-disease. Some of them were very bright looking. The men had no covering, but I was told they wore the pubic shell at times. The women wore petticoats, the same as those about the Fly River, only the outer one hung down to the ankles, whereas on the Fly River, they tuck them in between their legs, and fasten them to the girdle, back and front.

¹ By "gods" Mr. Chalmers evidently means totems.—[Ed.]

All dreams are real occurrences. When one sleeps, the spirit goes off on its travels, and returns just when awakening.

The people were delighted with the visit, and on leaving, called after us to be sure and return soon. The chief would not risk the boat, saying, "I never saw a boat before, but I have a canoe" (they have none), "and I will go in the canoe."

The chief is now on Dauan, and I have been able to make a very fair vocabulary. I fancy these are the New Guinea aboriginals, and the progenitors of the Boigu, Dauan, Mabuiag, Badu, Moa, Prince of Wales islanders, and, it may be, the northern tribes of Queensland. They are the nearest New Guinea tribes that I have yet met, similar to those in the Straits and North Australia.¹ As we become acquainted with them, we shall be better able to discuss the question as to whence they are, and whither gone. True they have got the short tufty hair, and not the long hair, of the Australian. They live better, having gardens with all kinds of good food, and that may account for many differences. Judging from the few Australians I have seen, I do not consider these natives much superior to them in physique. Like the Australian they live much by the chase, *dakaliran*, especially during the south-east monsoon.

Their language² has no resemblance to any Polynesian one I know, but is similar to that of Boigu, Dauan, and Saibai.

¹ We leave this as it stands in Mr. Chalmers' MS. The northern tribes of Queensland are the Australians.—[Ed.]

² Mr. Chalmers' short Bugilai Vocabulary has already been printed with notes by Mr. Sidney H. Ray, cf. *Journ. Anthropol. Inst.*, xxvii, 1897, p. 139.—[Ed.]